Dis/Inheritance: love, grief, and genealogy in Faulkner

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Dis/Inheritance: Love, Grief, and Genealogy in Faulkner

By

Daisuke Kiriyama

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Abstract

This dissertation is devoted to the close examination of two novels of William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*. I find in them the repression and return of prohibited emotions and a consistent pattern of “the race between the pursuing white man and the fleeing black man.” I explore how these are related to the Faulknerian conception of time and the establishment and disruption of the conventional Southern notions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The white man’s pursuit, performed in various forms, ultimately aims to prove his mastery and masculinity, racial superiority, or everything that whiteness means to him, by catching and pinning down evasive blackness. It then leads to the perfection of pure whiteness.

Yet white men repeatedly, and almost on purpose, fail to consummate the pursuit. This is because prohibited and repressed emotions which, if acknowledged and pronounced, will destroy the racial divide and the whole social system of the South erupt when the pursuit comes to an end. In *Absalom*, this pattern is played out with love as its key emotion, and almost all the characters including Thomas Sutpen engage in the repression or dissimulation of prohibited love, perpetuating the pursuit. In Faulkner, because the attainment of the purity of whiteness is equivalent to the regaining of the lost ideal past, the end of pursuit is also the end of history, which is perceived as a genealogy of failures to overcome the temporal gap. In *Go Down, Moses*, then, it is grief that must be repressed; for, grief is an acknowledgement and reminder of absolute impossibility to regain the past, and therefore it invalidates the dream of pure whiteness and the white male version of history. In both novels, the pursuit is eventually consummated, and characters are forced to confront repressed emotions. Since the white male concepts of time,
history, and genealogy are founded on the unending race, its end opens up a possibility for an alternative way to grasp them and a way to inherit the past differently. Faulkner’s thorough examinations of whiteness also entail explorations into femininity and blackness. Thus, I also argue how women contribute to the subversive ending of the race, and how, particularly in Go Down, Moses, the fleeing black man can be instrumental to it only by being caught and becoming a dead body, which shows the sincerity and limitations of Faulkner’s imagination.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... ii

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. v

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1
Ineffable Love and Melancholic Repetitions ................................................................... 9

Chapter 2
The Southern Father’s Family Trauma, or Why Sutpen Is Unable to Face Bon ............... 29

Chapter 3
Quentin’s Achievement and Destruction of the Ideology’s Ideal .................................. 78

Chapter 4
The Incorrigible Body of Rosa and the Perishable Body of Judith ................................. 114
Chapter 5
Grief, Grievance, and Dis/Inheritance .................................................................152

Chapter 6
The “Constant and Grieving Rain” on the Wilderness:
The Return of Grief and Ike’s Dis/Inheritance of History ........................................172

Chapter 7
Exile and Homecoming:
The Circulation of the Black Body in “Pantaloons in Black” and “Go Down, Moses” ..........231

Chapter 8
The Black Home and Black Confinement in “Was” and “The Fire and the Hearth” ...........287

Works Cited ..................................................................................................................327
A focus of this dissertation is on the unspeakable emotions in William Faulkner’s two “genealogical novels” (Bleikasten, “For” 46), Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses. Another is on the notions of race and history in Faulkner which intersect with, and eventually exceed, the conventional ones of the South. All of these converge on the theme of genealogy. Genealogy in these novels is a technology to control and regulate race, and in so doing, it also serves as the basis, the archetype, to grasp history, the continuity and sequence of time. In the chapters that follow, I will elucidate how, in Faulkner, history is understood, especially for white men, as a diachronic procession of continuous efforts or rather repetitive failures to regain the ideal past, to resurrect and identify with the pure and powerful white father. The purity and power of whiteness is somehow undermined in the present, and it must be regained through overcoming the temporal gap between the past and the present—thus the ideal goal of white genealogy is ultimately imagined as fraternal identification without any temporal gap, and in this society, this is the supreme form of love to which every love must contribute in the final analysis. Genealogy then implies both continuity and distance between the past and the present, father and son. It means the imperfection of whiteness, and yet it enables people to retain the dream of perfection and acquire a certain amount of white identity. Then, white genealogy must be preserved until someday father-son identification qua fraternal identification is achieved, which is synonymous with the end of history. For this, it is mandatory to make certain forms of love impossible, unimaginable, or ineffable. In Faulkner, to control and regulate race through genealogy is to
control and regulate emotion—this is the first point that I aim to make through this dissertation.

As I will argue in Chapter 1 by referring to Judith Butler’s argument on “theories in subjection,” one’s identity and subjecthood depends on who can love whom. In Faulkner, white genealogy is above all preserved by excluding blackness from white kinship. That exclusion, however, is not a matter of continence; Faulkner’s novels abound with instances which show that miscegenation itself does not pose a threat to whiteness. It is rather the prohibition of white people’s familial attachment to black people that founds white genealogy. There must be no possibility for a black person to be loved as if he or she (but particularly he, since what matters most is father-son relationship) could be a family member—this is the ground for genealogy to demarcate black and white, the crucial decree for the Southern whiteness.

Then, what if a person whom a white person loves turns out to be black belatedly? The emotion must be kept hidden, unspoken, and repressed, or dissimulated and presented as something else. To dig up that repressed or dissimulated unspeakable love is central to my reading of Absalom in Chapters 1 to 4. Even Thomas Sutpen, I would argue, has and represses love toward his black son Charles Bon, though readers of this novel have not thought of “love in connection with Sutpen” as the townspeople of Jefferson did not (AA 32). The episodes and speeches of such characters as Henry, Sutpen, Quentin and Shreve, and Rosa, which I will examine in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively, show how the Southern notion of race and attendant notions of gender, sexuality, class, and so on are sustained by the repression or dissimulation of illicit love.

Another important structure that Absalom demonstrates is that the attainment of the ideal
goal is at the same time the destruction of that very ideal which founds the society’s system. In Absalom, while Henry’s murder of Bon, Quentin and Shreve’s fraternal identification, and their discovery of Bon’s secret and completion of the Sutpen’s story, which occur at once across the temporal gap, seem to be the realization of the purity and power of the ideal white father, they destroy whiteness itself by signaling the return of the repressed unspeakable love, revealing that the object of love and identification can be black, which means that the white father and son to identify with each other can be black, and that the ideal object of desire has been the prohibited object. In order to conceal this, the attainment of the ideal must be postponed forever.

Faulkner develops this structure in Go Down, Moses with the motif of “the race between the fleeing black man and the pursuing white man.” The pursuit played out in Absalom is the prototype of this race though the identity of the object of pursuit, Bon, is not revealed until it ends. In Go Down, Moses, too, the true identity of the object of pursuit is often not clear at first. Indeed, the object is not necessarily an actual black man as in the annual hunting of the totemic animal Old Ben, and yet it ultimately stands for evasive blackness, which must be caught and pinned down in order for white men to demonstrate their mastery and masculinity, which amount to their whiteness. Thus, at stake here is again nothing but race—the racial divide between black and white. And white men try to perpetuate the race to retain the Southern notion of race by repeatedly failing to catch the object of pursuit, and again history is imagined as a genealogy of repetitive failures to regain the ideal past or pure whiteness, while the potential blackness of that whiteness is concealed by the very failures.

Whereas Absalom puts more emphasis on family and kinship, ideal whiteness and
fraternal identification by focusing on love, I will read variations of the perpetuated race in *Go Down, Moses* with grief as its key emotion in Chapters 5 to 8. Although grief has been a major theme in criticism of this novel, what concerns me is the unspeakability or repression of it which facilitates the sustainment of history and the imperfect demarcation between black and white. Grief is a kind of expression of attachment, but it is also related to how to sever oneself from the lost through mourning. Since white history and genealogy sustains itself by not giving up the possibility to regain the past, grief has no place in it—in this view, history as well as white men whose identity and subjecthood is based on it is melancholic by definition. Grief therefore becomes unspeakable in white male imagination, expelled to the domain of blackness and femininity.

Attention to grief then allows Faulkner to explore blackness and femininity, not just whiteness. As for femininity, *Absalom* already shows women’s positions in the white-male-centered society and history and their subversive possibility mainly through the figures of Rosa and Judith, which I will argue in Chapter 4. Whereas white men are mostly content with failures and imperfection, women, and especially those who remain unmarried and therefore cannot have a stable position in the society, become the driving force that urges white men to attain the ideal and conclude the race, pursuit, or history, which puts to an end to the Southern notion of race and disrupts the foundation not only for white masculinity but also for the white ladyhood they want. In *Absalom*, it is Rosa who plays this role, and Judith’s speech hints at an alternative way to grasp time, history, and genealogy after the end of the white-male-centered history, a perspective in which to see history not with a hope for the regaining of the past, the resurrection of the father,
but with the acceptance of perishability and grief. I call the temporality thus grasped the “future anterior” temporality, which gives us a more flexible view of history in which the mutable image of the unfixed, perishable future is retrojected onto the present and the past instead of the melancholic historical view in which the immutable image of the ideal past is projected onto the present and the future.

In Chapter 5, I will further examine the significance of perishability suggested in Judith’s speech more closely, and then overview Jacques Derrida’s arguments on inheritance and friendship, which illuminate how the expression of grief can be a means to deconstruct the melancholic genealogy founded on the dream of fraternal identification. That expression, however, does not mean the completion of the “work of mourning,” or the negation of connection to the past, of genealogy and inheritance. It rather shows a way to grasp genealogy and inheritance in the future anterior temporality; while inheritance in white imagination is the very embodiment of the melancholic genealogy which implies both distance from and continuity with the past, inheritance in the future anterior perspective becomes an enterprise of at once inheriting and disinheriting the past.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of the hunting stories of Ike McCaslin, who is the representative pursuing white man in *Go Down, Moses*. His stories demonstrate how history and white male identity are produced by the repression of grief and how the return of grief disrupts them, which ushers Ike into the new mode of inheritance.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I will turn my attention to the fleeing black men, finding in *Go Down, Moses* the repetitive use of the pattern of “the exile and homecoming of the black man” as
the counterpart of the unending hunting of the white man. Through this pattern, Faulkner dramatizes the identity crisis of the black man who is allowed to flee from but must eventually return to the black home, which the Southern social system defines as the cache of grief, or as the domain of blackness and femininity, and therefore which deprives him of masculinity. This pattern gives the black man what little whiteness and masculinity he can obtain, and as such it is also instrumental to the sustainment of white-dominant history, contributing to the imperfect demarcation between black and white. But this balance collapses when the black man is caught and killed; the black man’s dead body, when it is circulated around the society in the process of finally settling it in the black home, practically functions as the public reminder of perishability, grief, and the irreparable loss of the past, which must be confined within the private domain of blackness and femininity. And in *Go Down, Moses*, the driving force for the end of pursuit is again female characters as I will discuss in Chapter 7.

Yet this plot also suggests that in order for the black man to get out of the society’s melancholic structure, he must sacrifice his life. *Go Down, Moses* describes the black family’s warm and comical ties, but it is also suggested that they are produced within the white-dominant social system, and the black family cannot but be afflicted by the burden of the oppressive ideology which black people also incorporate in themselves. If he is to survive, the black man needs to take part in the sustainment of the repetitive failures of white men, as I will argue in Chapter 8. Thus, in the final chapter of this dissertation, I will examine how Faulkner fails to offer an alternative, viable way for those with the heritage of blackness to divulge the unspeakable emotions and get out of the melancholic, white-male-centered history without being
As I mentioned above, theoretically, my arguments largely draw on Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida. Butler’s subjection theory, which I will examine in Chapter 1, illuminates how the subject is produced through subjection to social norms, whose regulation is first of all directed toward establishing possible forms of love and foreclosing the other forms of love. In order to be a subject, one has to love appropriate objects, and the primary object of love is social norms’ foreclosure, the foundation of the possibility of love and subject. This attachment to foreclosure, or what Butler calls the “desire to be” (“Psychic” 7), explains why people in Yoknapatawpha obstinately stay in the melancholic structure of the Southern society. Though Butler sees a possibility to subvert social norms in the iterability of subjection and the temporal gap involved in it, this is practically equivalent to the repetitive failures in the white Southern man’s melancholia, and its subversiveness is neutralized by the desire to be. The concurrence of the achievement of the ideal and the return of the foreclosed love in Absalom then shows an alternative way to imagine a way out of melancholia, though Quentin chooses to remain attached to the now dysfunctional, dead norms, which is the true cause of his suicide.

Derrida then provides us with an insight into the importance of grief for overcoming the desire to be, as I will argue in Chapter 5. He argues that patriarchal societies are sustained by the dream of fraternal identification, or the resurrection of the past, dead father, and the inheritance of heritage functions to ensure sameness and consanguinity. The acceptance of death and grief then overturns the whole premise of this social system and allows us to reconceptualize inheritance. It does not lead to total severance from the past, which is still to be inherited. But the
past is now not the immutable entity to define and be faithfully repeated by the present and the future. Rather, the new mode of inheritance after the acceptance of death sees the past in the future anterior time, from the perspective of unexpected death and mutability in the future, and exposes it to the possibility of reinterpretation, ever destabilizing the norms and foreclosures working in subjection.

I call this kind of inheritance that is at once inheritance and disinheritance of the past “dis/inheritance,” which is the title of this dissertation. In Go Down, Moses, it is Ike who is forced to dis/inherit the past when at the end of “Delta Autumn” he encounters the grief which he has repressed. And the black men’s dead bodies in “Pantaloons in Black” and “Go Down, Moses” press other townspeople, too, for dis/inheritance. Yet Faulkner, as suggested above, fails to present a way for the black man to be a subject to survive with grief, not mere agency of dis/inheritance. And this makes Faulkner himself, I argue, a heritage for us to dis/inherit.
Chapter 1
Ineffable Love and Melancholic Repetitions

*Absalom, Absalom!* is a novel of love. It is by no means fruitful love, of course. The novel revolves around the local legend of the Sutpens, in which love is always unrewarded, aborted, frustrated, and never consummated, whether it may be romantic, familial, or fraternal. But it seems more than simply unconsummated; there are some pieces of information lacking in the legend to explain why it ended so.

Central to the legend is a mysterious guy named Charles Bon, Henry Sutpen’s best friend and his sister’s fiancé, who was nonetheless rejected by their father Thomas Sutpen and later killed by Henry for a reason no one knows at the present time of the novel. Quentin Compson, who is, in *The Sound and the Fury*, also afflicted by the memory of abortive love toward his sister Caddy, explores the mystery of Bon, and eventually discovers the crucial secret that Bon was a son Sutpen had begot on a black woman; what Sutpen tried to do was to establish a continuing aristocratic family, and for that purpose, he needed to keep the blacks out of his familial kinship in accordance with the South’s norms concerning race and class. For Sutpen, Bon was therefore not eligible to be a son, and Henry, sharing the norms, could not accept him either as his brother or as his sister’s husband. This plot is coherent enough, and the local legend of the Sutpens then becomes a conveyer of the violent history of the South’s racism.

Yet even after the revelation of the secret of Bon’s blood, there persist more mysteries for which many critics have failed to give a sufficient explanation: why could Sutpen not confront
Bon by himself, why did Henry have to disappear after he had killed Bon, and why did they have to keep Bon’s lineage secret?¹

The answer which I propose hereafter is that they loved Bon, and it was the kind of love that the South’s norms prohibited them from cherishing. As I shall explore, in the racial logic of Yoknapatawpha, the white man’s love toward the black man is not only prohibited, but must be denied, repressed. And when love turns out to be a prohibited kind of love belatedly, its memory must be dissimulated; in the case of the Sutpens, the fact that Bon was black has been repressed. The legend of the Sutpens is handed down to posterity as a story of ideologically safe unconsummated love while the repressed memory leaves inexplicable mysteries in it up until near the end of the novel where Quentin and his Harvard friend Shreve McCan dig up the truth—the truth not simply about race in the South, but about love, as they declare “we’re going to talk about love” (AA 253).

The focus of my reading of Absalom is on this kind of prohibited and repressed or dissimulated love, which I would call ineffable love; it is inexpressible and unimaginable in the

¹ Noel Polk, for example, poses a series of similar questions concerning Absalom’s seemingly incongruous plot such as: “Why should the strong, imperious, even demonic father give the responsibility for stopping an incestuous and miscegenous union to the son? Why not stop it either by killing Bon himself or by whisking Judith away to a nunnery, say, since obviously just forbidding the marriage is not going to work?” (21). Polk then simply renounces these questions by offering another plot centering on male characters’ anxiety over cuckoldry, insisting that the matter for the Sutpens was not race, that “Sutpen’s race card must be understood as Quentin’s and Shreve’s narrative ace, offered so late not because other explanations for Henry’s murder of Bon would not do but rather because the other explanations are rife with issues that Quentin and Shreve do not want to deal with directly” (22). Yet I would argue that we can answer those questions without devising a fanciful interpretation that regards race in Absalom as “a mask for very serious matters of sexuality and gender” (22). As I will explore, the matter of race is of central importance in Absalom, and the matters of sexuality and gender are inseparable from it, or I should say that they all converge on the theme of love.
existent discourses, but at the same time it is lodged at the core of one’s being. It is the kind of love whose prohibition and repression ensures one’s identity and subjecthood, and conversely the pronouncement of it will jeopardize one’s social being and even the social system itself. Love in this novel is not a spontaneous realm of the individual free from social constraints; on the contrary, it is ineluctably entwined with the society’s norms, and it even constitutes the foundation of the subject and sociality. *Absalom’s* complicated narratives of ineffable love disguised as un consummated but socially sanctioned love can then be read as struggles to maintain the social regulation of love while they ultimately attest to the denied existence of ineffable love.

Before getting into my analyses of the novel, let us first elaborate the relationship of the subject, the social, and love. As may be evident, my conception of ineffable love owes much to psychoanalysis, and in order to understand exactly how it functions in *Absalom*, I find it particularly useful to refer to Judith Butler’s argument on “theories in subjection” and some concepts developed in relation to them especially in her book with that subtitle, *The Psychic Life of Power*. Butler, linking Freudian psychoanalytic theories to the Foucauldian understanding of power, elucidates the essential relevance of the production of possible and impossible forms of love by social norms to subject formation. But when it comes to resistance to norms regulating subjection, she proposes an unconvincing way, that is, power’s almost automatic, inevitable failures deriving from the temporal gap involved in subject formation, which structure is, incidentally, virtually identical with what many critics mistakenly have described in *Absalom* as its limitations. As I will examine later, it is true that many Faulknerian characters including those
in *Absalom* are trapped in that temporal structure, but in my view, the novel manages to exceed it, and thereby even functions as a complement to Butler’s theory of subjection.

Butler argues that “[t]o become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject” (*Excitable* 133), and the domain of the speakable is, before everything, produced by “a foreclosure that structures the forms that any attachment may assume” (*Psychic* 24), or “a regulatory ideal, an ideal according to which certain forms of love become possible and others, impossible” (25). The social thus depends on whom one is and can be attached to and affiliated with according to certain ideals, and the founding foreclosure makes certain objects into “lost” objects “which, if loved, would spell destruction for the one who loves” while the loss—of the objects as well as of certain forms of love—is unavowable and ungrievable (27). That primary loss is necessary for subject formation but must be denied and repressed; one must not admit that one has ever had a prohibited form of love or that it is possible for one to have it one day in the future. It must be asserted that it did, does, and will never exist. Certain forms of love thus exceed speakability regulated by social norms and become impossible and unspeakable. The recognition or return of those foreclosed forms must entail the alteration of the foreclosing norms. Thus, even emotions are not exempt from ideological mediations; rather, because “affective responses are invariably mediated, they call upon and enact certain interpretive frames” (Butler, *Frames* 34), and if we attentively examine them, “they can also call into question the taken-for-granted character of those frames, and in that way provide the affective conditions for social critique” (35).
In Butler’s formulation, then, every social subject is a melancholic subject that refuses to recognize certain losses. The melancholic is characterized by the denial of loss and consequent self-beratement, aggression against the lost object or grudge over its disappearance that is now turned to oneself, or “reproaches leveled against the other that now turn back upon the ego” by the super-ego or conscience (Psychic 181). In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud, on whose definitions Butler depends, regards melancholia as a pathological mental state, but later in “The Ego and the Id,” he argues that melancholia is a “common” and “typical” mental process, and even a constitutive part of the formation of the ego and the super-ego (28). In melancholia, one incorporates and identifies with the lost object to discredit the loss and preserve the object (which also results in self-beratement), and therefore one’s character is to a large extent decided by the objects one lost or gave up: “the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and . . . it contains the history of those object-choices” (29). If subject-formation requires the founding foreclosure as an effect of social norms and the disavowed loss of certain forms of love, then, the subject is indeed melancholic in principle. This kind of melancholia has a social aspect which is particularly evident in the workings of the super-ego, for the “unspeakability and unrepresentability of [the] loss translates directly into a heightening of conscience,” in which “forms of social power emerge that regulate what losses will and will not be grieved” (Butler, Psychic 183). Freud himself suggests that the formation of the super-ego involves the incorporation of prohibitions historically and culturally constructed, especially those concerning the Oedipus complex, which direct object-choices as well as the formation of gender and sexuality (34-35). Then, even though melancholia is an almost universal condition for
subject formation, every subjection, identification and incorporation must be under the influence of historically and culturally specific prohibitions; therefore, the “constitutive historicity of loss” is “found in identification and, hence, in the very forms that attachment is bound to take” (Butler, *Psychic* 194-95).

Yet connecting this historicity to social critique or the alteration of the foreclosing norms is not an easy task. For one thing, “what is lost” in the formative process of the subject through foreclosure “never had any entitlement to existence” (24), and therefore the foreclosed must be ever impalpable, while foreclosure itself, which causes loss and its repression, is also lost and repressed since the process or fact of loss itself must not be acknowledged. Moreover, identification with the lost love-object makes the ego into a love-object, so that it brings about the “transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido” (Freud 30), not just self-beratement. This narcissistic self-attachment, especially that in the primary melancholia in subject formation, seems to be equivalent with what Butler expresses as “the desire to persist in one’s own being,” “the desire to survive” as a social subject (*Psychic* 28), or “the desire to ‘be’” (7). Since the founding foreclosure is a fundamental and indispensable part of the subject formation process, the subject’s desire to be is fulfilled by submitting to social norms that have occasioned the loss of certain forms of love and the subsequent melancholia and choosing legitimate objects of attachment. Prior to attachment to sanctioned objects of love, then, the subject’s desire to be is expressed as attachment to norms themselves and above all to the unacknowledged foreclosure, the fundamental condition of the possibility of love and subjecthood.

The dissimulation of ineffable love as simply un consummated love in *Absalom* can then
be understood as an effect of this attachment to foreclosure. The concealment of Bon’s black blood, for instance, at once saves the possibility of love toward him or the existence of Bon as a lovable object (which is nothing but a melancholic preservation of the lost object) and obfuscates infringement against foreclosure (and thereby saves the possibility of love and subjecthood itself). This attachment to foreclosure or desire to be makes it difficult to imagine resistance to the existent social configuration or power relations.

Butler then finds the chance of resistance, of getting out of repressive melancholia through mourning ungrievable losses, in the fact that “social power is not always as effective as it aims to be” (183); for instance, traces of an unavowed loss are discernible in the “plaints” of the melancholic, a reaction to the “pain of loss” caused by the “prohibition on grief” in which the “loss is understood as a fault or injury deserving of redress,” though the plaints are “invariably misdirected” to oneself (184). While Butler asserts that the “faded social text requires a different sort of genealogy, one which takes into account how what remains unspeakably absent inhabits the psychic voice of the one who remains” (196), the resistance which she assumes is more than the revelation of the historicity of loss through careful examination of the plaints, and the “genealogy” here is genuinely Nietzschean and Foucauldian in that it demonstrates the potential reversal or usurpation of social power which frustrates its regulatory telos and modifies the current power relations. For, the incorporating process of melancholia entails the “psychic idealization” of power, and therefore “its disappearance as an external object” (191). The ego comes into existence through the incorporation of the regulatory function of power, but according to Butler, social regulation, which works by being displaced into the singular
individuals’ psychic realms, always fails to achieve its goal while it is unstably sustained by the repeated incorporation by the subjects that become “sites of rearticulation, conditions for a ‘working through’ and, potentially, a ‘throwing off’” (191).

The process of the incorporation of power and its imperfect regulation can be explained as the very formative process of the subject that is enabled by social power relations and at the same time constitutes resistance to them. Butler contends that social categories, the discursive boundaries between the intelligible and the unintelligible, the grievable and the ungrievable, or the included and the excluded, on which the possibility of a subject’s being relies are all formed only as effects of the endless process of subjection in which norms and power relations are reiterated within subjects again and again. In that reiteration Butler finds the temporal gap between the two modalities of power, “power presupposed” and “power reinstated” (12), which is for her a promise of the alteration of power:

If in acting the subject retains the conditions of its emergence, this does not imply that all of its agency remains tethered to those conditions of agency. Assuming power is not a straightforward task of taking power from one place, transferring it intact, and then and there making it one’s own; the act of appropriation may involve an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made that assumption possible. (12-13)

It follows then that “iterability . . . becomes the non-place of subversion, the possibility of a re-embodying of the subjectivating norm that can redirect its normativity” (99).

However, this plot of resistance by the failure of regulation within the melancholic
subject is a little too optimistic and unlikely to lead to a major alteration of power, considering that melancholia is a way to preserve the lost object. If social power or the configuration of the social world is lost and incorporated in melancholia as Butler argues, then the melancholic strives to preserve that lost object as that is precisely how attachment to foreclosure, the desire to be, works. Butler herself seems to be aware of this point; while in the Freudian theory the melancholic aggression against oneself is the introversion of “aggression against the other who is gone,” which impoverishes the ego, since this introversion is a part of the process of the ego and the super-ego’s simultaneous formation, Butler points out that “reexternalizing that aggression” or resistance to social power “uncontains’ the ego” (193). For a resolution of melancholia, or a shift to mourning, “the aggression instrumentalized by conscience against the ego is what must be reappropriated in the service of the desire to live” (192), but the “desire to live is not the desire of the ego, but a desire that undoes the ego in the course of its emergence” (193-94). Melancholia is necessary for the survival of the ego, or the emergence of the subject, and however much social power fails and is lost in melancholia, that loss will be negated by that very melancholia.

Butler then argues that “[s]urvival” from the self-impoverishing aggression of melancholia “does not take place because an autonomous ego exercises autonomy in confrontation with a countervailing world; on the contrary, no ego can emerge except through animating reference to such a world” (195). One cannot arbitrarily free oneself from social power, the other that conditions and even makes possible the ego, so that “[s]urvival is a matter of avowing the trace of loss that inaugurates one’s own emergence” (195), or of admitting that
“[f]rom the start, this ego is other than itself; what melancholia shows is that only by absorbing
the other as oneself does one become something at all” (195-96). Admitting loss is certainly a
way to mourning, but how is it possible? Butler again finds a possibility in the incorporated
social power’s repeated failures—failures to regulate or “interpellate” (in the Althusserian sense)
the subject:

[Social terms that are never fully one’s own] institute a linguistic life for the
“one” who speaks prior to any act of agency, and they remain both irreducible to
the one who speaks and the necessary conditions of such speech. In this sense,
interpellation works by failing, that is, it institutes its subject as an agent precisely
to the extent that it fails to determine such a subject exhaustively in time. (197)

However, if the melancholic’s plaints or aggression against oneself are symptoms of
social power’s failures in a dissimulated form as Butler contends, then they are also the negation
of the absolute loss of the power’s ideals through dissimulation; it is the subject’s fault that
power fails to achieve its goals, and there remains a hope that the ideal regulation will be
performed someday. The subject’s desire to be thus takes into account the failures of social
power and preserves its ideality by means of the very idealization within the psyche. As a result,
it is not at all clear in Butler’s formulation how one can take advantage of the incompleteness of
subject formation and resist the terms of the other, overcoming the desire to be.

Now let us go back to Faulkner, for, in my view, it is this aporia that he tackles in
Absalom. Faulkner’s people are melancholic not simply because they experience and repress the
loss of certain objects of love; on a more fundamental level, they become melancholic subjects as
a result of the founding foreclosure of certain forms of love, and they cannot get out of that melancholia because they suffer another, interrelated melancholia concerning social norms which mandate that foreclosure—they cannot sever themselves from the lost ideal past which the norms aim to regain, or in other words, they cannot acknowledge its irredeemable loss or impossibility. Norms fail to achieve its goals, their ideals always already lost, or lacking and impossible from the beginning, but at the same time preserved in melancholia in a dissimulated form as temporarily lost, with a hope for resuscitation in some future. Here is working a typically Faulknerian logic that the assumption of loss makes what has never existed into what once existed but is now lost; this is the Faulknerian melancholia, in which the absolute loss, death, or impossibility of ideals is negated by means of temporary losses or repetitive failures to regain them. Therefore, failures to achieve the ideals alone do not fundamentally undermine them; rather, the temporal gap involved in the past ideals, the present failure, and the expected future achievement serves to conceal the ultimate impossibility of the ideals. In the context of *Absalom*, for instance, the unconsummation of ideal forms of love does not pose threat to the norms that regulate them, and almost everyone, though unsatisfied with his or her failures, does not doubt the norms themselves—what prevents one from achieving an ideal is a personal “mistake” as Sutpen calls it (*AA* 215). In these circumstances, it is true that change cannot happen in the form of the subjects’ willful resistance because of their desire to be, while the death of norms and their ideals is, despite their inherent contradictions and unachievability, is negated by the very failures which Butler considers to be occasions for subversion.

*Absalom*, however, ultimately contends that the intensified desire to be, not the temporal
gap or repetitive failures in power relations, disrupts the founding foreclosure and makes it possible to regain what has been lost in the primary unavowable loss because of its persistent demand to be faithful to the society’s normative terms. If loss or failure sustains ideals, logically speaking, it is virtually a taboo to attain them, for it will disclose their emptiness and destroy them. This does occur in Absalom, and does so with the greatest irony that the consummation of the society’s ideal form of love simultaneously reveals that it is also a foreclosed form of love, that certain forms of love are foreclosed not simply because they are unspeakably abominated but because they embody the ideals’ own contradictions. That is why the foreclosed must be unspeakable, ineffable; they are in a complementary relationship with the ideals, constituting the absent center of the subject that belongs to the Lacanian Real, the lost plenitude that cannot even be named or imagined. Some characters in Absalom touch this tabooed center, trying to be true, not resistant, to the norms in a historical situation in which the possible forms of love become more and more strictly regulated and the hope for the achievement of the ideals strengthened all the more because of its difficulty.

In that situation, attachment in Absalom is almost always tinged with some sort of ineffability, as a result of which it is either dissimulated as unconsummated but socially sanctioned love or simply disacknowledged; otherwise the foreclosure that delimits the society’s frames of recognition, frames to understand the world including race, class, and gender, or one’s identity and subjecthood, would slip and the society’s whole order would be overturned. Yet

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2 Thus, the object of ineffable love is the prohibited object of desire that is ideal but must not be obtained. The structure of the Lacanian Real and the prohibited object of desire, or the objet a as its representation, is also crucial to understand what Ike McCaslin in Go Down, Moses is engaged in, and therefore I will elaborate it later in Chapter 6.
those who have attachment do not notice at first that it is ineffable; it turns out to have been ineffable only belatedly at some fatal moment and are consequently denied or repressed, their own ineffability kept hidden. Thus, mysteries are generated.

This structure is most obvious in the climactic scene in which the novel’s central secret is revealed, that is, when Henry learns that Bon has black blood in him and kills him. In Quentin and Shreve’s re-creation, Henry, while knowing that he must prevent Bon from marrying Judith, says to him, “You are my brother,” and Bon replies, “No, I’m not. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister” (286). Bon’s reply clearly shows what the Southern legal and ideological injunctions dictate: first, there is no possibility of love between a black person and a white person whether it may be fraternal or romantic. Because he is now identified as a “nigger,” if Bon tries to approach a white woman, it is construed as an intention of rape, a matter of lust, not an act of love. One cannot be at once a brother of a white man or a fiancé of his sister and a black man—the blacks must be strictly excluded from the network of white kinship in order to maintain the purity of whiteness. Nevertheless, Henry declares that Bon is his brother, for he has loved Bon as a friend and brother since before he learned about his black blood. Still, he kills Bon and disappears without telling anyone what has happened to them.

The pseudo-biological category of race is sustained by the purity of the pseudo-biological entity of white kinship, and the foreclosure to which Henry must cling in order to survive is the exclusion of the black man from the familial love among white people. As the position of the Sutpen’s black daughter Clytie in the Sutpen family amply illustrates, blood relation alone does

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3 All italics in citations are original unless otherwise noted.
not establish kinship—it is known by community members that her father is Sutpen, and though she seems more privileged than other slaves, she is not openly treated as Sutpen’s daughter, distinguished from the white Sutpens. Faulkner asserts that Sutpen did not acknowledge her as his daughter and that “would not have mattered” to him because she “was a female” (*FU* 272), whereas Bon’s blood matters because Sutpen’s design depends on the genealogical continuity of his white male descendants. In other words, what should be maintained for the existence of the white subject is, exactly speaking, the continuing purity of white male kinship, and filial and fraternal love between black and white males is the most detrimental to that system because it means the inclusion of black men in white kinship. The normative love in the novel is then always any attachment that contributes to the establishment of white male kinship as the Southern patriarchal community’s foundation, whether it may be romantic or familial. After all, romantic love must eventually transform itself into familial love if the maintenance of white male kinship is the primary concern, or in other words if the espousal of the ideal of white male kinship is the subject’s primal attachment. Miscegenation and even passing in themselves therefore do not pose a fundamental threat unless a person with black blood establishes a familial affective bond with a white person and thus invades into white male kinship’s genealogical continuity and expansion.

The Henry-Bon scene illuminates the novel’s basic assumption: just as Butler argues, the possibility of love is the possibility of existence, of living as a social subject, and to maintain the domain of the social, certain forms of love—in this case, interracial love—must be foreclosed. As Bon points out, miscegenation is the reason why Henry has to prevent him from marrying
Judith, but his fraternal love toward Bon urges him to call the black man “my brother.” This declaration of interracial love violates the fundamental foreclosure, but even then Henry’s attachment to foreclosure overwhelms his attachment to the brother, and forces him to kill Bon.

But why does Henry have to kill Bon, instead of publicly divulging Bon’s black blood to disqualify him from entering the Sutpen family? A possible answer is that he kills Bon precisely because he does not want to divulge it. We can interpret the murder itself as a strategy to conceal the truth of Bon’s blood as well as his love toward the man who has now turned out to be black. Henry has to repress his fraternal love toward Bon because it became a dangerous love that exceeds and destroys the social norms at the moment when Bon turned out to be black. It is not only that he is not allowed to love Bon anymore in order to sustain his white identity, but that if he follows the Southern ideology’s logic, he must act as if there had never been love between them. However, Henry’s remarks and behavior toward Bon up to that point too plainly and irrevocably have expressed his love toward Bon, and the only thing he can do is then to cover up the secret again. As critics have pointed out, if it had been known that Bon was black, Henry would not have been severely punished for the murder.\(^4\) Nevertheless, he disappears without revealing the secret. For, as long as it remains hidden, this incident is regarded as an unconsummated love affair among the three white persons, Bon, Henry and Judith, that is strangely inexplicable but stays within the framework of the social norms, not the dangerous ineffable love that destroys the white identity. The crucial secret for Henry is then not so much Bon’s black blood as his interracial love toward the black family member. It is kept hidden,

\(^4\) See, for example, Bibler 89.
dissimulated as a story of unconsummated love, until rediscovered by Quentin and Shreve several decades later.

The disclosure of ineffable love illuminates the “historicity of loss” in the legend of the Sutpens, and it also makes absurd the historically specific foreclosure working there. Ineffable love is made impossible, foreclosed under certain historical conditions; when expressed, it reveals the fundamental contradictions that invalidate the socially sanctioned forms of love, or the concept of the “socially sanctioned” itself which regulates and produces the possible forms that the social subject can take. The denial of the possibility of ineffable love which makes one a melancholic subject is the denial of the absolute impossibility of ideals, or more precisely, a way of their production and preservation in melancholia as discussed above. It is not that certain forms of love exist before foreclosure and are later sanctioned or foreclosed; on the contrary, “[a]s foreclosure, the sanction works not to prohibit existing desire but to produce certain kinds of objects and to bar others from the field of social production” (Butler, *Psychic 25*). The foreclosing injunction which makes Henry’s fraternal love toward the black man Bon ineffable tautologically founds itself by producing the distinction between black and white. Then, if that ineffable love is possible, the condition which has made it ineffable itself breaks down—the instant a white man loves a black man as a family member, the distinction between black and white becomes invalidated. Henry in a sense achieves a normative ideal of the society, the exclusion of the black man from the white family, but because he does so with a declaration of love, it also destroys the ideal. Henry kills Bon the black rapist, but the latter is also a brother, who is a white man by definition. By killing Bon, then, Henry also kills a white man, a white
family member and by extension his white subjection sustained by white male kinship. This double bind makes Henry socially dead—as suggested by his disappearance after the murder and later corpse-like body—for, he remains to be the melancholic who incorporates and identifies with not only the dead Bon but also the dysfunctional, dead social norms. He thus loses the norms to depend on, and his desperate attachment to foreclosure, his persistent desire to be, does not let him remain alive as a social subject anymore, though it produces further melancholic repetitions by perpetuating the Sutpens’ story as a mysterious story of unconsummated love, and thus saves the ideals of the patriarchal Southern community at least in the others’ eyes.

As I more closely examine in subsequent chapters, since Henry’s love toward Bon incites him to murder, the penetrating shot can even be construed as a symbolic touch that acknowledges Bon as a beloved family member, and in this sense, too, it can be the achievement of a patriarchal ideal, the ideal rapport of male family members. The shot therefore makes Bon an impossible being that is both black and white and must be at once included in and excluded from the family. In Absalom, the end of melancholic preservation of an ideal as yet-unachieved is mostly caused by the achievement of the ideal, and it reveals contradictions which invalidate the ideal and norms that prescribe it. The achievement of the ideal is therefore conterminous with its destruction.

This structure works on various levels of the novel, as in the exploration of the story’s coherent meaning. The mysteries left by the Sutpens induce the repetitive efforts and failures to solve them by the character-narrators in the later era, resulting in the novel’s infamously complicated narratives which many readers have found hard to go through. The eventual
revelation of ineffable love, then, gives the mysterious story a coherent meaning, but at the same time it stops making sense any longer since the norms and the ideological frames of recognition as the source of coherent meaning are fundamentally destroyed—after all, if there is no longer a distinction between black and white, the story about the prohibition of love between black and white is absurd. Here we can find the homological melancholic structure of the subject, the community, and the narrative which hold on, even if incompletely, through melancholic compulsive repetitions—or repetitive failures to achieve their goal—as long as the fundamental contradictions of the Southern ideology condensed into ineffable love are concealed. In reverse, the disruption of the melancholic structure lets us see a set of ideological assumptions that have been naturalized and opens up a future possibility for other frames of recognition and other relations between people.

To read *Absalom* as a novel of and about love—who can love whom—is to read it as an exploration into the entire social configuration of the South through the affective responses of individuals. It shows that the forms of love that the South’s socioeconomic situations during the time span of the novel—from around the Civil War till the early-twentieth century—demand have everything to do with the problem of race. As the novel amply shows, race is not a biological matter, for the body is “materialized” as “the effect of a dynamic of power” (Butler, *Bodies 2*), just as the subject comes into being in a dynamic relation to power. And it is the family that plays the defining role to materialize the racialized body in this novel. Indeed, *Absalom* can also be called as a novel of and about family, which would be easier for many readers to swallow, but all the same its central concern is how to regulate love in order to
maintain the Southern structure of family as the means to control race, class, gender, and sexuality, or more precisely how to disrupt that regulation not by willful resistance but by achieving the society’s ideals.

In subsequent chapters, I will further examine how the structure of melancholia, particularly that concerning love, works on various levels in *Absalom* in conjunction with the desire of self-preservation of the subject, the society, and the narrative, how ineffable loves and unspeakable fundamental contradictions embodied by them are dissimulated into lost loves or ideals, when ideological norms are ironically produced and retained as those which are not as yet achieved, and how the intensified desire to be paradoxically functions to disintegrate what it wants to preserve. The type of melancholia I focus on here is thus the one that denies the absolute loss of ideals together with the primary loss of ineffable loves through dissimulation. It admits a temporary loss or failure of normative ideals without facing their destructive contradictions. It prompts us to analyze, as many critics have done, the structure of norms’ frustration in terms of the universal temporal gap—the ideals are somehow lost in the past or remain to be unachieved in the present, but there persists an expectation that they may be retrieved in the future or at least kept intact as lost—and thus puts the repetition of incorporation back into the old model of compulsive repetitions without alteration, or melancholia without mourning. Yet I argue that *Absalom* so thoroughly explores the logic working in that structure as to show the deficiency of this understanding and criticizes it in the end, revealing the

5 The most typical example of this kind of melancholia is the Agrarians’ espousal of the ideal Old South which actually never existed but was produced and preserved as a lost ideal. See Duvall, *Faulkner’s* 7-13, and Moreland 23-25.
historical specificity and limitations of the Southern norms of race, class, gender, and sexuality which are working in subjection. Eventually this leads to the acquisition of what I would call the future anterior perspective, which Shreve and Judith put to work in their speeches in their own ways. In melancholia, the ideal lost past is projected onto the present and the future. The future anterior time is, on the other hand, characterized by the retrojection of the unforeseeable future onto the present and the past. It even fluidizes the meaning of the past, and compels one to accept this unstable condition. These will be clarified by examining the instances of ineffable love that Sutpen, Quentin and Rosa experience and dissimulate respectively, from the vantage point we obtain when we discover Henry’s ineffable love.
Chapter 2
The Southern Father’s Family Trauma, or Why Sutpen Is Unable to Face Bon

Much has been said about Sutpen’s design and its failure, but any of the interpretations have offered a satisfying reason why he could not directly confront Bon by himself, why he withheld the information about Bon’s blood until the last minute, and why he said that playing that “last trump card” would result in destroying his “design with [his] own hand” (AA 220). As many critics have pointed out, if he had publicly announced that Bon was black, that might have solved the whole problem without violating the legal and moral codes of the South, for then Bon would have been readily expelled from the white family as should have been done.6 However, Sutpen somehow could not do so. Importantly, Henry’s attitude toward Bon is a repetition of Sutpen’s in that both refrain from revealing Bon’s black blood to the public while refusing to accept him as a family member. After all, it is because Sutpen, before Henry, did not disclose the secret that the Sutpens’ story becomes mysterious and incoherent, and accordingly triggers and feeds compulsive repetitions of the incomplete storytelling and subject formation played out throughout the novel by various characters. Then, Sutpen’s inability to efficiently expel Bon from the family may be equivalent to Henry’s failure to deny his love toward Bon. Indeed, Henry’s episode gives us a clue for the repressed and dissimulated factor without which Sutpen’s actions would remain to be inexplicable: that is, Sutpen’s familial attachment to his first wife and son, Eulalia and Bon.

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6 See Kuyk 13-14, Polk 20, and Williamson 384.
Faulkner himself later gives an explanation to why Sutpen did not announce that Bon was his black son: “[Sutpen] was going to create a dukedom. He’d have to have a male descendant. He would have to establish a dukedom which would be his revenge on the white Virginian who told him to go to the back door. And so he—to have a Negro, half-Negro, for his son would have wrecked the whole dream. If he couldn’t—if he had thought that that would ever be exposed that Bon was his son, he may have killed Bon himself” (FU 272). If Sutpen incorporated the Southern ideology that demanded him of the strict exclusion of the black man from the white family, naturally Sutpen could not admit Bon into his family as his legitimate son. As many examples in Faulkner’s works show, moreover, whereas white masters often have sexual relationship with female slaves and have children as its result, they refuse to openly admit their filial relation even though in most cases it is an open secret. If Sutpen were a usual Southern planter, his reluctance to say that Bon was his son would be understandable. However, Faulkner’s explanation as well as Sutpen’s carefulness in the novel implies more: Sutpen could not even let the public know the fact that he begot Bon. This is beyond what the Southern ideological codes usually demand. There could have been ways for Sutpen to hint at Bon’s black blood without openly admitting their filial relation, but it seems that Sutpen could not even face the fact that Bon was his son. In order to explain why Sutpen could not do so, we need to

7 Joel Williamson even argues that in light of historical incidents if one had enough economic power, one could make others tolerate moral and even racial transgressions, so that “[i]n real life, almost surely, Thomas Sutpen could have publicly recognized Charles Bon as his son and had the essence of his Grand Design, too. In the real world, Bon could have married white and eventually graced Sutpen’s Hundred as its master” (384). The latter half may be exaggerating since Williamson bases that claim on a historical incident in the old southeast, not Mississippi. But we can at least say that usual planters’ desire for controlling the family’s blood was not as strong as Sutpen’s.
examine Sutpen’s design and its failure, and its exact distance from or affinity to the Southern ideology more closely.

My point here is, indeed, not that Sutpen is an anomalous outsider who has little in common with his contemporary Southern white planters as has been sometimes argued. It is true that Sutpen seems less paternalistic than usual antebellum planters because of his relentless dehumanization of blacks and women, which may suggest the affinity of his sensibility to postbellum racism. Yet closer examinations clarify that that sensibility is not incompatible with the antebellum South’s moral code, either, and in fact, Sutpen even utilizes paternalistic rhetoric especially when he speaks about his first family. I would argue that through the career of Sutpen, the planter of the Civil War era with the Jim Crow racial sensibility, Faulkner rather demonstrates that the Southern whites held the same class aspiration and necessity to establish racial distinction from the antebellum period till the author’s own time. Most importantly, the reason for Sutpen’s failure to consummate his design reveals persistent contradictions inherent in that aspiration, one of which is found in his attachment to his black family or inability to dehumanize them completely, though this is sharply at odds with conventional interpretations of Sutpen’s character.

First, I examine what the paternalist logic is and how Sutpen adopts some of it to conceal his love toward his black family. He nevertheless fails to settle his emotional turbulence in that way and is put in a kind of melancholic state, but it at least manages to disguise his love so much as to deceive the listeners—and readers—of his story, while that turbulence points to something unspeakable in his narrative of his life. Then I go on to prove that though Sutpen’s racism is
closer to that of the postbellum South, the process of Sutpen’s building of his design and its failure shows that the germ of it was already in the antebellum South. The origin of the design suggests that Sutpen needs at once to confirm the nonexistent fundamental difference between black and white and deny the existent difference between white and white more desperately than other planters, though this need is implicitly shared by them. The difference between white and white must be denied in order to naturalize the difference between black and white, but the existence of the brutalized poor whites paradoxically blackens the rich planters when they achieve identification with each other. Lastly, then, I examine how the white male kinship exemplified by Sutpen’s design is sustained melancholically and collaboratively by white men both rich and poor through their failure to achieve identification, focusing on the relationship between Sutpen and Wash Jones.

The reluctance for the white master to admit miscegenation mostly came from the composite logic of paternalism and patriarchy in the plantation society. The South’s slavery system first of all needed the invention of the binary categorization of race, one to be enslaved as dehumanized labor power and the other to own those slaves. As critics have pointed out, in the patriarchal community the father supposedly tries to reproduce himself in his son,⁸ which amounts to “the reproduction of patriarchal order through the production of a male heir” (Duvall *Faulkner’s* 102), but this patriarchal urge became further intensified in the Southern slavery

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⁸ See, for example, Bibler 84, and Peterson 237.
because of the need to maintain the pseudo-biological racial divide. In this regard, a black son was recognized not as a legitimate son but another slave of the white master, and it would be no problem for the father to admit the existence of a miscegenetic child, male or female, as long as the filial rights were denied and the black lineage was separated from the genealogical continuity of the white patrilineage. However, in order to naturalize and justify the slaves’ subordination and thereby preempt the danger of collective resistance, the system of slavery also needed another ideological code which was to be called paternalism, in which the white master assumed the role of the protective father for the slaves he possessed. Eugene D. Genovese argues that especially after the closing of the African slave trade, the antebellum Southern economy, sustained by the slaves’ labor power, had to depend on the “willing reproduction and productivity of its victims” (5). Gradually the paternalistic code which “defined the involuntary labor of the slaves as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction” was organized to “overcome the fundamental contradiction in slavery: the impossibility of the slaves’ ever becoming the things they were supposed to be” (5). Paternalism thus fostered a “special sense of family” in the South which made the master into the authoritative father to the extended family including black families (74).

A seemingly preposterous passage written in 1854 by a Mississippian lawyer and sociologist, Henry Hughes is comprehensible if seen from this paternalist light: “Hybridism is heinous. Impurity of races is against the law of nature. Mulattoes are monsters. The law of nature is the law of God. The same law which forbids consanguineous amalgamation forbids ethnical

\footnote{As for the developmental process of the Southern racial ideology, see Fields.}
amalgamation. Both are incestuous. Amalgamation is incest” (239-40). Hughes’s treatise tries
to vindicate slavery with paternalistic rhetoric, regarding the white master as the father of the
slaves (254-55). Miscegenation then could be morally problematic in paternalism as the
incestuous sexual exploitation of feeble children.

The above passage from Hughes has still more ominous insinuation for the Southern
slavery system than the author seems to be aware of, because regarding the sexual relationship
between black and white as incest implies interracial familial kinship. This conceptualization
itself can be a considerable step toward amalgamation or integration, the disappearance of
difference. This danger was of course inherent in the paternalistic rhetoric of family itself that
regards black slaves as part of the extended family. The paternalistic morality therefore must be
conditioned by a more fundamental patriarchal imperative of the racial divide: the whites should
treat the slaves as if they were family members and humanize them to a certain extent, but not
too much—they must not actually love them as family members that constitute white
patrilineage so that they can exclude the blacks from white kinship.

This precarious balance shows that paternalism was at once a cover-up and symptom of
the central contradiction in the Southern slavery, in which the slaves were both humanized and
dehumanized. The miscegenetic child was then the most obvious embodiment of the
contradictory intersection of humanization and dehumanization—included in the extended
family as a slave but excluded from white familial kinship even though he or she had an actual

\[\text{As Michael O’Brien observes, Hughes makes this comment in relation to the social}
\text{improvement of hygiene through racial segregation (971-72), but his reference to incest is}
\text{rather abrupt, and leaves O’Brien puzzled: “But who had mentioned incest?” (972).}\]
blood relation. It is understandable that the white father was unwilling to confront this problematic existence unless he had a desperate reason to do so.

Nevertheless, it is not that there was a strict ideological prohibition against the white master’s admission of miscegenation and even a sense of guilt insofar as the guilt was of mere sexual exploitation. The fact that Hughes had to express the threatening warning in his treatise is a proof that miscegenation was neither rare nor generally regarded as an act of incest. And admitting the guilt of sexual exploitation rather serves to sever miscegenation from the matter of love, striking a just balance between the humanization and dehumanization of the slaves. Genovese reports that “[w]hite southerners admitted their sexual exploitation of black women but tried to deny that anything like love ever could enter into white men’s feelings about them,” while there is evidence that it actually happened frequently (418). Therefore, the “tragedy of miscegenation lay, not in its collapse into lust and sexual exploitation, but in the terrible pressure to deny the delight, affection, and love that so often grew from tawdry beginnings” (419), or in the dissimulation of ineffable love. Thus, what endangers the system of slavery is not the expression of guilt, but love involved in miscegenation, and the rhetoric of guilt can be a strategy of paternalism to repress the dangerous possibility of interracial love.

This structure of paternalism in the South is exemplified in Absalom by a confrontation between Bon and Henry over Bon’s octoroon wife told in Mr. Compson’s version of the Sutpens’ story. Mr. Compson tries to produce a coherent story by supposing Bon’s bigamy as the cause of Sutpen’s rejection of Bon. In this version, Bon at first thinks that his relationship with his octoroon wife would not be “a valid objection to marriage with a white woman” (AA 74), and
that he does not have to tell “his secret” to the Sutpens (73), because it is a “situation in which probably all his contemporaries who could afford it were likewise involved and which it would no more have occurred to him to mention to his bride or wife or to her family than he would have told them the secrets of a fraternal organization which he had joined before he married” (74). In short, while Mr. Compson describes Bon as an “enigmatic” sophisticate (74), he is also a paternalist who shares and takes advantage of the Southern moral sensibility to have a miscegenetic relationship with a woman of black blood and keep it a secret.

But Henry’s eventual murder of Bon forces Mr. Compson to create a story in which Bon fails to justify his bigamy with his paternalistic logic. In Mr. Compson’s version, Henry is shocked by Bon’s relationship with the octoroon because it is not a simple miscegenetic sexual relationship but bigamy with a formal wedding ceremony which he thinks undermines the legitimacy of the ceremony with Judith. In “Evangeline,” one of the short stories that were developed into Absalom, the reason for Henry’s murder of Bon is indeed bigamy. In that story, Bon is a white man and the black blood of Bon’s New Orleans wife is not revealed until near the end of the story, and the narrator eventually discovers that secret when he sees a “picture in the metal case” which is supposed to be of Judith but is actually of Bon’s wife, whose face has “all the ineradicable and tragic stamp of negro blood” (US 608). The picture, moreover, has an inscription which is a proof of love between Bon and his wife: “A mon mari. Toujours. 12 Aout, 1860” (609). It is against Henry’s sense of honor and pride and seems “disgraceful” to him (599),

11 As for the process of Faulkner’s writing of Absalom, see Muhlenfeld, Introduction.
clearly because it is incompatible with his racial consciousness and jeopardizes the distinction between black and white.

In *Absalom*, however, that dangerous connotation of Bon’s bigamy is obfuscated by the paternalistic rhetoric of Mr. Compson, a descendant of the declining former planter-class family. In his version, Bon is again supposed to be white, but Henry at first does not seem to be aware of the potential racial problem in this bigamy, and it is Bon who takes up the issue of race. But it is not to call Henry’s attention to interracial love which this bigamy and ceremony can imply, but rather to conceal it even before Henry takes notice of it by furthering his paternalism to make the ceremony a moral indictment against the system of slavery and its racial and gender ideology. In Bon’s explanation, the octoroon is a symbol of the dehumanization of blacks as well as of women, a part of “the supreme apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for that sale” (*AA* 89), or the “eternal female, the eternal Who-suffers” (91). In Bon’s logic, because the “white men . . . made them, created and produced them,” they should “save that one” even though they “cannot, perhaps . . . do not even want to, save all of them” (91). The rhetoric here is not that of love but of guilt and compensation, and still paternalistic in that sense. It is remonstrance against white men’s dehumanization of slaves and females, but it does not go so far as to grant them full humanity. Bon says that white men should save suffering women, but not all of them; he does not intend to overturn the system itself. He thus keeps on embracing the paternalistic code without exploring its complicity with the immoral system already implied in that very code.
Mr. Compson is well aware that it is “just incredible,” that bigamy “just does not explain” Henry’s murder of Bon (80), which means that Bon’s excuse must have been convincing enough for Southern paternalists including Henry. Later he amends his theory and offers another unsuccessful theory: “as time passed and Henry became accustomed to the idea of that ceremony which was still no marriage, that may have been the trouble with Henry—not the two ceremonies but two women; not the fact that Bon’s intention was to commit bigamy but that it was apparently to make his (Henry’s) sister a sort of junior partner in a harem” (94). However, this is still another expression of paternalistic concern for women’s predicament in the Southern social and economic system of which the octoroon was already a representative figure in Bon’s former excuse. Mr. Compson says that the female sex is “separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction—ladies, women, females—the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesan to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity” (87). By attributing the corporeal, sensual factors to the other categories, the white virgins (and later wives and mothers) become just an instrument for the reproduction of the white father to secure the Southern economic system of slavery—while the octoroon represents a “female principle,” a “principle apt docile and instinct with strange and ancient curious pleasures of flesh,” her “white sister must needs try to make an economic matter of it” (92). After all, all the females in this economic system of slavery are thus victimized and commodified. By becoming a junior partner in a harem, Judith might be allowed to have the pleasures of flesh, but
at the same time she would still be commodified, and it is this commodification of Judith, Mr. Compson assumes, that Henry is indignant about. The conflict between Henry and Bon in Mr. Compson’s imagination thus revolves around the paternalistic rhetoric of guilt, and though they express regret about moral violation, they still do not call the social and economic structure itself into question. On the contrary, the supposition of the failure to amend that structure’s defects is an ironic and melancholic preservation of the structure itself while it also serves to dissimulate the dangerous possibility of ineffable love between the white man and the black woman. Mr. Compson is therefore able to have Bon say, despite his ostentatious indictment against the South’s racial ideology, that “this woman, this child, are niggers” to claim that the ceremony was invalid and there is nothing to impede his marriage with Judith (94).

Since Mr. Compson calls this race card the “trump” as Sutpen calls his own race card (94), Bon’s marriage and later denial of it prefigures, or exactly speaking, is prefigured by, Sutpen’s first marriage and discard of his black family later told in the Quentin-Shreve narrative. Even Henry’s appeal for obligation reflects Sutpen’s explanation that he first thought that his wife was white owing to the “very language he had to learn” (41). Henry says: “Suppose I assume an obligation to a man who cannot speak my language, the obligation stated to him in his own and I agree to it: am I any the less obligated because I did not happen to know the tongue in which he accepted me in good faith?” (94). As Mr. Compson’s version of the Henry-Bon episode testifies, to discuss obligation and guilt in terms of morality does not have a destructive effect on ________________

12 Here Mr. Compson also has Bon say that the wedding ceremony is “a ritual as meaningless as that of college boys in secret rooms at night” (93), as if to foreshadow Quentin and Shreve. Their ritual, or at least the story produced in it, indeed remains meaningless as long as ineffable love is kept concealed.
their identity and subjecthood based on the South’s racial ideology. Mr. Compson’s paternalistic rhetoric of guilt therefore fails to explain the tragic end of Henry and Bon. Meanwhile, Sutpen also tries to settle his personal problem concerning his family—his black family in Haiti—by employing the rhetoric of guilt and compensation and fails. His unsuccessful attempt suggests, as I will examine hereafter, the existence of repressed love, which, and only which, can explain Sutpen’s inability to face Bon and his failure to achieve his design, or to establish an enduring planter-class family, as its result.

Sutpen seems to have no hesitation to admit his obligation and guilt concerning his black family, and even compensates them for discarding them. Sutpen’s rhetoric to excuse himself for having abandoned his first wife and son is mostly based on the logic of economy and rational calculation though his affective response confounds it: “he struggled to hold clear and free above a maelstrom of unpredictable and unreasoning human beings, not his head for breath and not so much his fifty years of effort and striving to establish a posterity, but his code of logic and morality, his formula and recipe of fact and deduction whose balanced sum and product declined, refused to swim or even float” (221). This “code of logic and morality,” in which compensation offsets guilt, is not very far from the paternalistic morality of the slavery South, even though lacking in the pretense of the kind, protective father.

Sutpen’s guilty feelings may also seem close to Mr. Coldfield’s moral agony over the South’s economic system “erected . . . not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage” with which he himself is complicit (209)—he makes money through a seedy deal with Sutpen. In fact, Mr. Coldfield and Sutpen are similar in that
both of them are concerned with “spiritual solvency” (30, 38, 66). And this sensibility which Melanie R. Benson calls “ledgerlike mentality” has affinity to paternalism in its gesture to strike a balance between guilt and compensation (46). Mr. Coldfield’s seclusion in protest against the South’s cause in the Civil War is a gesture of seeking for stern morality, but it is also a melancholic gesture of retaining the paternalistic moral ideals as yet-unconsummated. He opposes the system of slavery from the viewpoint of morality and justice, being “not only calm but logical” (AA 64) as Sutpen is when he argues with his conscience about his abandonment of his family and the seedy trading with Mr. Coldfield—“Sutpen . . . told him [General Compson] how his conscience had bothered him somewhat at first but that he had argued calmly and logically with his conscience until it was settled, just as he must have argued with his conscience about his and Mr Coldfield’s bill of lading” (211). Mr. Coldfield nevertheless seems to be aware of the contradictory, hypocritic nature of his morality, for he hates “his conscience and the land, the country which had created his conscience” that finds fault with the economic system of the South and in so doing takes a balance of guilt and compensation (209). He then chooses to retreat to the closed attic and thereby avoid directly and thoroughly confronting his conscience with the

13 Robert Dale Parker discerns in Sutpen and Mr. Coldfield “the same overcalculated illusion of morality,” “the same moral presumptuousness” that “contaminates the merchant’s close trading and the upstart despot’s seizure of economic dominion” (242, 243). As for the complicity of Sutpen and Mr. Coldfield across the class gap, see also Matthews, “Recalling” 245-52. Particularly important is Matthews’s daring but convincing argument that Sutpen was involved in illegal “colonial slave trade” which “sustained the South’s domestic paternalism,” for it “makes sleeping partners out of all Jeffersonians, slaveowners or not” (252). Though Cleanth Brooks contends that “Mr. Coldfield is as definitely set off from the community as is Sutpen” (Yoknapatawpha 301), we should rather think that Mr. Coldfield has to face (and repress again) contradictions at the base of the South’s economic system concealed by the community’s morality which he partly shares because of his complicity with Sutpen in some immoral trading.
country, which would reveal the repressed fact that his morality has already been undermined by his complicity with Sutpen and the Southern economic system at large. His conscience is such that he is incompetent to change the society or even try to do so, and in that way he keeps his ideal stern morality unachieved but unblemished. In this sense, Mr. Coldfield’s conscience is not a personal, individual morality that is truly opposed to the society.

On the other hand, Sutpen’s morality clearly exceeds the paternalistic rhetoric of guilt. His morality appears, for example, in the following passage: “[Sutpen was] fogbound by his own private embattlement of personal morality” (218). We need to be careful not to confuse his “code of logic and morality” and “personal morality” here: the former (mistakenly) supposes that his abandonment of the Haitian family can be materially compensated, whereas the latter imbues him with something excessive in conflict with the former’s logic. Takuya Niiro argues that Sutpen cannot face Bon because he has an acute sense of guilt for the abandonment of his wife and son in Haiti. As Niiro points out, in the light of the Southern (if not Haitian) morality at that time, it was “too benevolent” of Sutpen that he left most of his fortune behind for his abandoned black wife and son (114), and it shows how considerable his sense of guilt was. Sutpen himself says that “by certain lights there was injustice in what he did but that he had obviated that as much as lay in his power by being above-board in the matter; that he could have simply deserted her, could have taken his hat and walked out, but he did not” (AA 211). Yet the point is what has made Sutpen’s sense of guilt so grave that it cannot be settled by generous compensation, and why he cannot reveal that his former family are black. When Bon reappears, Sutpen finds that he has failed to offset his sense of guilt even with that compensation, and “feels vulnerable to his
past sin and emotionally drawn to his son” (Niiro 119). The criteria of spiritual solvency are now dysfunctional because of his personal morality, which is more emotional than economic or judicial and produces some excess, some attachment to his deserted son that cannot be measured by the paternalistic scale of guilt.\textsuperscript{14}

Sutpen’s loyalty to the Southern racial ideology forces him to adopt a limited set of vocabulary to explore his “mistake” which he does not fully understand but which he believes will bring the collapse of his entire design (AA 215), and the paternalistic rhetoric of guilt, justice, morality and conscience allows him not to look squarely at what the matter really is, leaving him—and the reader, too—confused. General Compson shares the same rhetoric and contributes to misleading us and themselves. Still, if we refuse to be deceived by Sutpen’s self-incurred confusion, it is almost obvious that Sutpen’s morality or conscience exceeds judicial or even ethical matters. According to General Compson, it is Sutpen’s personal morality, not ledgerlike mentality, which prevents Sutpen from telling him everything and even knowing what Sutpen himself is talking about, and “that morality . . . would not permit him to malign or traduce the memory of his first wife, or at least the memory of the marriage even though he felt that he had been tricked by it, not even to an acquaintance in whose confidence and discretion he trusted enough to wish to justify himself, not even to his son by another marriage in order to preserve the status of his life’s attainment and desire, except as a last resort” (218). This is nothing but an

\textsuperscript{14} Woodrow Stroble argues that Sutpen’s behavior is based on “an ethical value called integrity,” too strong a sense of justice or conscience opposed to irrationality or passion (162). This sense of justice, however, does not explain why Sutpen cannot confront Bon by himself without considering Sutpen’s irrational or passionate aspect as well, for his care for Eulalia and Bon which Stroble ascribes to Sutpen’s sense of justice seems to exceed mere rational calculation.
expression of attachment to the lost wife and son. Otherwise it cannot be explained why “the same conscience . . . would not permit the child, since it was a boy, to bear either his name or that of its maternal grandfather, yet which would also forbid him to do the customary and provide a quick husband for the discarded woman and so give his son an authentic name” (214). His conscience here is split as he has two sets of morality: he cannot accept them as his family, but he refuses to sever himself from them completely, either (and thus he is in a state of melancholia). He cannot see Bon either as his son or a black man because of this split; indeed, Bon is for him a black son, an impossible being for the white planter. This impossible familial attachment is his mistake, and he must keep it repressed; he must not understand what his mistake has been. The rhetoric of guilt and morality is then a dissimulation of his love toward his black family, which is unimaginable and ineffable if he sticks to the patriarchal imperative of the racial divide. Butler argues that in melancholia what is “rendered unspeakable, that is, lost through prohibition or foreclosure,” emerges “in the indirection of complaint and the heightened judgment of conscience” (Psychic 196). Sutpen, who confesses his personal morality, is walking a tightrope. It is almost a confession of his attachment to his first wife and son and is barely acceptable only by repressing his knowledge that they were black and making it a matter of justice and his own miscalculation; this marks the limit of his reflexivity.

We may also be able to read Sutpen’s attachment in the following passage, the only remark Sutpen said “quiet and simple” instead of his usual forensic and oratorical way (AA 200):

On this night I am speaking of (and until my first marriage, I might add) I was
still a virgin. You will probably not believe that, and if I were to try to explain it you would disbelieve me more than ever. So I will only say that that too was a part of the design I had in my mind. (200)

Sutpen says that General Compson would not believe it, probably because in the South what matters is female virginity, and in contrast boys are “ashamed of being a virgin” and they “lie about it” as told in The Sound and the Fury (78). Richard Godden claims that Sutpen’s continence is “a shield against mingling and co-present bodies” of black and white (Fictions 244n49), but this is unsupportable considering that Sutpen has sexual relationship with slaves even after his experience in Haiti,15 which must have strengthened his sexual modesty if he had such a shield. The point is that Sutpen’s concern with his own virginity cannot be explained by any Southern logic. Whatever the reason may be, it is part of his personal morality and does not accord with the South’s ideological code and morality, and then we will be allowed to imagine that Sutpen fostered all the stronger personal attachment to his first wife and son because he had an ideal marriage just as he designed.

John V. Hagopian points out that in the Biblical narrative of David, Absalom, and Amnon, who supposedly parallel Sutpen, Henry, and Bon respectively, David “maintains his love for his oldest son,” Amnon, even after his rape of his sister (133). Though Hagopian sees this as an example of difference between the Biblical narrative and Absalom, this can be another hint at Sutpen’s love toward Bon, his oldest son, who is also a black rapist targeting his own sister in the

15 According to Genealogy attached to the end of Absalom, Clytie was born at Sutpen’s Hundred in 1834 (AA 308).
Critics have not thought of “love in connection with Sutpen” as people in Jefferson do not because of his attitudes toward people after he has come to Mississippi (AA 32). However, his emotional turbulence over the memories of his first wife and son is unmistakable, and there is no reason to think that he is so consistent a person—at least his design is not so consistent. Sutpen says about his discovery of Eulalia and Bon’s black blood: “I was faced with condoning a fact which had been foisted upon me without my knowledge during the process of building toward my design, which meant the absolute and irrevocable negation of the design; or in holding to my original plan for design in pursuit of which I had incurred this negation” (219-20). Being a virgin until marriage was “a part of the design” he had in his mind, and the fact foisted upon him is that because of this plan, he fostered interracial familial love, which negates the design founded on the racial divide. Then, he was forced to alter his plan, “choosing and discarding, compromising with his dream and ambition” (41)—when he reestablishes his family in Jefferson, he is no longer a virgin, that item must be deleted from the design, and he shows no shade of love toward his wife or children. As Shreve says, Sutpen, instead of his monogamous attachment to the first family, “chose lechery” (220), the sexual system of the South in which slaves are supposed to be objects not of love but of sexual exploitation, and women instruments for reproduction. When his

16 Maxine Rose also sees the biblical reference to the story of Absalom and David solely as “ironic” since Bon, who in her view plays the roles of both Amnon and Absalom, is unable to get “recognition by his father that Bon seeks throughout Absalom, Absalom!” unlike Absalom, for whose death “David weeps and cries, ‘O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom’” (225), but if there is a parallel between Bon and Absalom, this cry, from which Faulkner took the title of his novel, is also Sutpen’s repressed cry of love and grief toward his unlovable and ungrievable black son.
morality is mentioned again not as his personal morality but as “that old impotent logic and morality” (224), it is now the Southern patriarchal and paternalist logic and morality that hides its own contradictions under the mask of rational calculation of guilt and compensation.

When he represses his personal morality together with his attachment to the black family, he attempts to become a ruthless demon without any paternalistic care for blacks and women, by one of whom he thinks he was betrayed, but the repressed past, the black son Bon, returns and agonizes him. Shreve caricatures Sutpen’s design at the end of the novel in his mocking calculation to clear “the whole ledger” given as an explanation for the existence of the only surviving, black Sutpen, Jim Bond, instead of a white heir Sutpen wanted, as an outcome of Sutpen’s ledgerlike mentality (AA 302). This miscalculation on Sutpen’s side stems from his love which he could not write down in his spiritual ledger. What Sutpen experienced in Haiti was the blackening of his beloved ones, which would be repeated by Henry later. Sutpen first thought that his wife was white through “misrepresentation” (211), but when Bon was born, he somehow noticed that they had black blood. Here Sutpen, like Henry, saw his supposedly white family become black. This means that humans easily turn black or white by uncontrollable language, and that there is no essential difference between black and white, that he can love blacks as his own family, which knowledge destroys the very foundation of the distinction between black and white. Sutpen cannot totally foreclose this fact because his love toward the black family is an existing desire that can barely be repressed through dissimulation. Otherwise, Sutpen could declare that Bon and his mother are black, just as townspeople in Light in August, when they find that Joe Christmas is a murderer, say, “I said all the time he wasn’t right. Wasn’t a white man.
That there was something funny about him” (309). All Sutpen should say is that he did not love them, that he knew that they were black and unlovable beings from the beginning (or, that “this woman, this child, are niggers” as does Bon in Mr. Compson’s imagination), and then he could blacken them completely. But because of his attachment to them (though repressed for his own survival), he cannot do so; with the repressed memory of love, he cannot even so much as confront Bon to reject him.

The cause of Sutpen’s failure is, contrary to critics’ usual assumptions, his inability to abide by the Southern racial code and relentlessly dehumanize his first wife and son. He unconsciously fears lest the repressed love return and the foundation of his subjection as the white father be ruined, and he pushes the task to re-repudiate and re-blacken Bon on to Henry. Only in this way can Sutpen barely avoid confronting Bon and his fatal ineffable love. It is Henry—and later Quentin—who pays the price. They repeat Sutpen’s traumatic experience, which is, I would argue, actually the trauma of the Southern white father, which haunted white men not only in the antebellum period but also in the twentieth century when the author Faulkner lived.

There has been controversy over Sutpen’s Southernness, but we should recall that in later works of Faulkner such as Requiem for a Nun, Sutpen is mentioned as old a name as “Sartoris and Stevens, Compson and McCaslin . . . and Coldfield” (8). Or, these names are actually mentioned as “new names” (8)—they were relatively new at the time of the establishment of Jefferson. While the Sartorises are usually regarded as a typical aristocratic family of
Yoknapatawpha, the first settler John Sartoris was “another newcomer” who came to the town a few years after Sutpen had come (31). In Absalom, Sutpen may seem to be an anomalous outsider for the community because of Rosa’s demonization of him and the description of his first appearance in the town of Jefferson as a mysterious figure with no past, but later works suggest that he is no different from other Southern planters, and is a caricature of them at best. Though such critics as Cleanth Brooks claim that Sutpen is a liberal capitalist whose morality is far from that of the Old South, we should say that “Sutpen’s activity is modeled on such settlers as the Compsons” (Kinney, Faulkner’s 204).

Recent criticisms of the novel from postcolonial perspectives have discussed the Old South’s capitalist, colonialist, and imperialist aspects. Don H. Doyle argues that the “Old South that took form in northern Mississippi was far from a stable, hierarchical, traditional community in harmony with nature, as the latter-day Agrarians imagined, and the planter class was all too much a part of the larger market revolution that extended itself rapidly westward across antebellum America” (12), and reports that there were many planters like Sutpen in Mississippi, so that a “Sutpen on the Mississippi frontier would hardly have stood out as an alien pretender among a refined gentry” (11). That Sutpen is a capitalist therefore does not necessarily mean that he is not a part of the Southern society.

This may lead to a reassessment of Absalom as a novel about capitalism and colonialism in general. Carolyn Porter, who situates Sutpen and the Southern economy in a larger history of

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17 See C. Brooks, Toward 283-300.
18 For more discussions on the relationship between the South’s economy and colonialism represented in Absalom, see Aboul-Ela 130-59, Baker, Duck, Ladd, Nationalism 142-47, Matthews, “Recalling,” and Saldívar 102-19.
capitalism in the United States, argues that paternalism is a cover-up of the “basic incompatibility of the cash nexus and the family, both black and white, whose unity it destroyed” (Seeing 231), and that these are not peculiarly Southern but “a set of contradictions inherent in American capitalist development” (226). Sutpen is solely intent on his design, and his rationally calculating “innocence” prevents him from being more attentive to the contradictions and acting like “a benign paternalist” (234). On the contrary, his “career in pursuit of this design can serve to expose these contradictions to us” (235). In Porter’s view, particularly problematic about Sutpen is the relentless dehumanization of the black slaves on which the cotton plantations and their owners’ freedom and prosperity depended but which was usually mitigated and obscured by paternalism.

I agree with Porter in that Sutpen’s inability to adopt usual Southern paternalism brings about the exposure of the contradictions in the Southern economy, which was a part of the larger development of capitalism. However, as we have seen, Sutpen is not simply a cold-blooded dehumanizing demon. Porter ignores Sutpen’s psychological aspects that make him more than a merely functional figure to divulge the universal problems of capitalism concealed behind the Southern paternalistic morality. If Sutpen could dehumanize the blacks without any hesitation, there would be no reason why he cannot get rid of Bon more efficiently. It is rather that Sutpen cannot totally adopt paternalism because he fears the return of the beloved black family he must repress; he could not stand the dangerous rhetoric of the extended black family, and he cannot so much as tell his experience in Haiti with personal emotions (“he was not talking about himself. He was telling a story” [AA 199]). On the way to become a Southern planter, he is split between
the Southern economy’s imperative of the racial divide and his personal attachment to his black family. Sutpen’s life is rooted in the peculiar historical conditions of the South, even as it addresses problems that can be extended to a larger context.

Although the lack of paternalistic care for black people makes Sutpen seem stricter on the racial divide than other planters, we can observe that his anxiety over interracial love is covertly shared by them, especially if we suppose that General Compson and others are aware that Sutpen’s first wife and son were black as such critics as Eric J. Sundquist, Richard Godden, and John T. Matthews have argued. Particularly Matthews’s persuading argument that the famous “anachronism” in Absalom is not really anachronism gives us a considerably different picture of the novel. Conventionally, the laborers’ rebellion Sutpen experienced in Haiti in 1827 has been construed as an anachronistic slave rebellion because the Haitian slavery was abolished in 1804. However, Matthews points out that Sutpen does not use the word “slaves” to describe the rebellion. In fact, the Rural Code put into effect in 1826 practically made black laborers semi-slaves, and it “led to a series of bloody revolts by blacks in Haiti” (Matthews, “Recalling” 253). If it is not anachronism, moreover, those who know the history of Haiti immediately notice that the sugar plantation owner whose daughter Sutpen married was not white, since no “white sugar planters remained in Haiti in 1827” (250). Because the abolition of slavery in Haiti had great impact on the Southern slaveholders, it will be natural to suppose that General Compson is well

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19 As for Sundquist’s and Godden’s arguments about other characters’ (especially Rosa’s) knowledge of Bon’s black blood, I will discuss in subsequent chapters.
20 As for the problem of “anachronism” and the obviousness of Eulalia and Bon’s mixed blood, see also Matthews, William 192-94.

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aware that Eulalia and her son were not white, while Sutpen did not notice it at first because of his ignorance.

It then follows that General Compson is annoyed by Sutpen’s having ruthlessly discarded them and tried to settle the problem economically even as he knows that they were black. Yet it is unmistakable that he takes over Sutpen’s rhetoric of “justice” and “conscience,” and condemns Sutpen because he treats it as a sheerly economic matter while General Compson converts it into a matter of paternalistic and misogynistic concern with “the dread and fear of females,” in a similar way to Mr. Compson’s version of Bon (AA 213). In other words, General Compson takes issue over Sutpen’s violation of moral code in terms of his lack of paternalistic care, while facing away from a more dangerous racial connotation involved in Sutpen’s behavior. General Compson’s reticence about the racial matter in general can be an indication that he shares Sutpen’s inability to look squarely at the fact that his first, beloved family were black. This is why General Compson avoids any efforts of inference when it seems easy for him to notice that Charles Bon is Sutpen’s black son. Sutpen’s fear is implicitly common to other Southern planters.

Because of the traumatic experience in Haiti, however, Sutpen cannot assume a more generous and duplicitous paternalistic attitude; he cannot humanize and dehumanize Bon at the same time to the extent allowed in the paternalistic code through admitting that he begot him and denying him any filial rights. This rather shows that he is not an outsider but a Southerner enough to incorporate the racial ideology in which the patriarchal imperative of the racial divide

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21 In fact, Sutpen supposes that there were “white people” on the Haitian island (AA 211).
has priority over paternalistic morality. Richard Godden is right when he says that “[p]aternalism does not suppress enough for Sutpen” because of “its presentation of the master as ‘father’ to an extended black family” (*Fictions* 75). Fear for integration which Sutpen shares with other planters inhibits him from wearing the paternalist mask of the protective father and orders him to repress his love toward his black family

Godden, however, regards the matter of family and sexuality as an expedient excuse to hide a more fundamental problem, that is, what he calls “labor trauma.” This unique argument is worth examining in order to stress my point, the centrality of the matter of family, sexuality, and love in *Absalom*. In Godden’s view, what Sutpen discovers at the Virginian planter Pettibone’s house is the Hegelian master-slave relationship in which the master has to depend on the slave for his existence. Sutpen then becomes always vigilant against the disclosure of the master’s dependence and the slave’s revolutionary usurpation of the master’s power. Godden’s interpretation of Sutpen’s gesture of physical domination over the slaves through the extraordinary fighting in Sutpen’s Hundred is particularly pertinent; after experiencing the laborers’ revolt in Haiti, he needs to be ever more careful about the possibility of revolution.

However, when Godden describes the return of Bon as the return of the black servant at Pettibone’s house, who is supposedly a symbol of the master’s dependence, he symptomatically shows the centrality of the family matter even in labor trauma:

The return of Bon to Sutpen is, for Sutpen, the return not of a son but of a slave. Sutpen has no apparent difficulty withholding his paternal acknowledgment because he does not see Bon as his child but as “goods.” Indeed, it is as “goods”
and not as a son that Bon threatens him; the threat derives not from miscegenation but from labor, since Bon reminds Sutpen of "the actual condition of things" under slave production—that every master and every master’s son is a black in white face. (75)

This passage strangely denies Bon’s sonhood for Sutpen while presupposing it; the argument—particularly the last line, “every master and every master’s son is a black in white face”—would not hold if Sutpen did not recognize Bon as at once goods and son. As Keith Byerman points out, Bon, “the black son, has at least sufficient power in his position as son to compel Sutpen to find a way to destroy him,” and “though Bon himself vainly seeks a sign of his paternity, he is . . . acknowledged to the extent that his father is forced to take action” (131). The Hegelian labor trauma itself is premised on the impossibility of the complete dehumanization of the slaves. Above all, in order for the fear of usurpation to exist, there must first be the precarious pseudo-biological distinction between the whites as the dehumanizing masters and the blacks as the dehumanized slaves, and therefore the familial matter is inseparable from the labor matter. To give a son the name Bon, “goods,” is another expression of Sutpen’s urgent need to repress the blacks’ humanity and his love toward them, which invalidate the distinction. Sutpen’s rejection of paternalism is, before being a counterrevolutionary tactic, a symptom of his fear for integration through an unsanctioned familial relationship, which would make the concepts of revolution and counterrevolution absurd. Godden claims that “Sutpen’s sexuality will eventually bring his house down; it does not and cannot bring down the plantation as a system of production” (Fictions 66). On the contrary, Absalom shows that that system of production is
supported by the control of the family and sexuality. Granting that symptoms of labor trauma are discernible here and there, it is necessarily interlocked with white people’s family trauma, which is of primary concern for practically all the white characters in the novel.

Importantly, Sutpen’s racial ideology without paternalism reflects the general concern of whites, and particularly of “rednecks,” rather than of antebellum rich planters, and is closer to postbellum racism. Or we should rather say that the germ of postbellum racism was already in the antebellum South. Sutpen’s rise from a poor white to a rich planter and fall to a shopkeeper demonstrate how a certain class aspiration supported by the Southern racial ideology is embraced by whites across time and class. Richard Moreland points out “the continuity of the commercialized New South and the Old,” or “the exploitative capitalism often denied in nostalgic portraits of the Old South and the continuing racism and inflexible social hierarchy often denied even in ironic portraits of the New South” (24). I would argue that this is accurately illustrated by Sutpen’s career and particularly his conception of the “design.”

The descriptions of the originary event of Sutpen’s trauma and design—being told to go to the back by the black servant of the Tidewater planter Pettibone—demonstrate that the patriarchal urge of Sutpen, the need to establish a dynasty, derives from his desperate need to maintain white supremacy and equality among the whites. What Sutpen’s experience at Pettibone’s house brings him is not a sudden revelation of an entirely new truth, but it enables him to see what he has been overlooking:

before the monkey nigger who came to the door had finished saying what he did, he seemed to kind of dissolve and a part of him turn and rush back through the two
years they had lived there like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before, rushing back through those two years and seeing a dozen things that happened and he hadn’t even seen them before. . . . (AA 186)

What he discovers there is the poor whites’ actuality in which they are as dehumanized and brutalized as the black slaves and forced to live in even harsher conditions than them by the white planters who dominate the Southern economy. This he had already seen even before the incident at Pettibone’s house. He had already seen his father thrown out from a doggery door by the “first black man, slave, they had ever seen” (182) and not “allowed to come in by the front door” at a tavern (183). It is said that Sutpen “had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men . . . without being aware of it yet” (183). He took a glimpse not only of the racial ideology that divides black and white, but also a hierarchization of the whites that complicates the divide—as the juxtaposition of the two differences suggests, the poor whites come closer to the brutalized black slaves. What shocks him is not the master’s “labor trauma,” an anxiety over future revolution inherent in the system of slavery, but his own already brutalized status in it.

At that time, however, he regarded the hierarchy as just a matter of “luck” and advocated a kind of paternalistic relation among the whites, thinking that luckier ones “would feel if anything more tender toward the unlucky,” because of the “innocence” he had not noticed he had (183). As General Compson says later, that innocence prevents Sutpen from comprehending
“what he must have been seeing every day” (203). Innocence is “his trouble, his impediment” that at first denies him the full recognition of the meaning of his experience at Pettibone’s house (188). But later he competes with it and incorporates the perspective of Pettibone who “looked out . . . at the boy outside the barred door . . . looking through and beyond the boy” (190).

Sutpen, then, while being the boy outside the barred door, sees “his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them” (190).

John T. Irwin argues that Sutpen “adopts the plantation owner as his surrogate father, as his model for what a man should be” and “will have his revenge by becoming richer and more powerful than the planter” (98), but his revenge can mean more than that. We should note that he regains innocence right after he thinks of the harsh reality, the undeniable gap between the planter and himself because of which he amounts to nothing to the other:

*there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him. It was like that, he said, like an explosion—a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse: just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence rising from it like a monument. . . . (AA 192)*

This explosion and the discovery of innocence (or rediscovery after the fall) imply the repression of what he has just seen and realized—the necessary existence of the brutalized poor whites including himself in the Southern economy. To become rich then will be part of his revenge because it denies the gap between the poor whites and the planters.
However, this does not necessarily explain why he persists in the establishment of a dynasty. According to the novel’s description, it is only after Bon reappears in front of Sutpen that he realizes the true aim of his design dictated by his innocence. Until then, he seems to have intended to repeat what Pettibone did, even planning to train a slave “to go to the door when his turn came for a little boy,” but Sutpen now denies that “boy-symbol at the door” that incorporated Pettibone’s perspective, and instead

now he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it: and not at all for mere shelter but so that that boy, that whatever nameless stranger, could shut that door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known, and look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendants who might not even ever hear his (the boy’s) name, waited to be born without even having to know that they had once been riven forever free from brutehood just as his own (Sutpen’s) children were. . . . (210)

Dirk Kuyk, Jr. says that Sutpen “remains faithful to his innocent boyhood belief in what we might call an egalitarian noblesse oblige” (20), but perhaps we should say that he regains his faith here and pretends that he has been faithful all the time since the “explosion.” The traumatic event at Pettibone’s house taught him the brutalized status of the poor whites, but he tries to make the boy and himself regain innocence and repress that knowledge, shutting it out of the door instead of simply taking the boy into the door in a condescending, paternalistic manner.
The image in the above passage implies that Sutpen also retains the racial ideology he discovered together with the whites’ inequality, that his egalitarian benevolence is in principle limited to the whites, particularly the white males. In the above passage, taking the boy into the “white door” suggests taking all the white males, poor or rich, into the one egalitarian and perpetually continuing white family in which there is no brutalization or dehumanization, whereas the outside of the door is defined as the realm of brutehood. In other words, Sutpen tries to establish the pure and equal white identity by excluding the others from the genealogical continuity of the white family and leaving them in brutehood. The others here are of course the blacks; as mentioned above, it is because of Bon’s reappearance (and Sutpen’s inability to take that son of his in) that Sutpen finally understands the aim of his own design. Thus, the irony is that he realizes his true aim when “after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless child came to knock at it” in the shape of Bon, who cannot truly be admitted into the house even though “no monkey-dressed nigger” is “anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away” (AA 215). The return of the repressed beloved black son poses a danger of the dissolution of the black/white distinction even as Sutpen tries not to notice it, and it must remind him of the necessity to deny the brutalized, half-blackened existence of the poor whites, which also blurs the naturalized racial distinction. Sutpen makes believe that there did not, do not, will not exist brutalized white people, that it is not just a momentary present condition but a perpetual genealogical truth. It can be read as his “desire to be”; because of his own experience of brutalization or dehumanization, Sutpen all the more strongly sticks to the racial norms which
give him a possibility of existence as a social subject, a decent human being, or a white man, while melancholically disavowing its fundamental impossibility.

As Barbara Fields, speaking of slavery in the United States, suggests, the “conception of absolute equality resting on natural law” contributes to the production of “absolute inequality resting on natural law,” creating the strict racial distinction that justifies slavery (129). Sutpen’s design indeed aims at absolute equality among the whites and absolute black/white inequality, and represents the illusion of the potential kinship (as the figure of sameness and equality) of all the whites that founds the Southern economy, at the same time repressing the existing inequality among them. The black servant in Pettibone’s house, the “monkey nigger barring [the white door]” who “happened to have had the felicity of being housebred in Richmond maybe” (AA 188), is then not a symbol of the master’s dependence but an uncanny semi-humanized figure in paternalism. That figure at once confirms the difference among whites and confounds the black/white distinction by its ambiguous semi-humanized status that assumes the master’s authority, which makes Sutpen realize the gap between the planter who has power to grant or deny others humanity and himself as a brutalized laborer closer to the slaves. Because of this experience, Sutpen has a reason to discard paternalistic attitudes toward the blacks even before experiencing the riot in Haiti. And his lack of paternalism is consistent with his innocence in that both are rooted in anxiety over the brutalization of whites that jeopardizes the racial ideology on which the present economic system is built but which planters like Pettibone who take their status as granted are not very particular about.
Sutpen was not born a planter’s son, but a poor white who had to climb up the social
ladder to acquire pure whiteness. However, many other pioneering planters were also born poor.
Sutpen’s career shows not only “how fluid class positions had become after the war but also how
fluid they must have been at the outset of frontier plantation society” (Matthews, William 182),
and historically speaking, even after the first generation, even “the old planter families of
tidewater Virginia . . . were deeply troubled by economic insecurity” (Doyle 7). This class
mobility shows that there is no fundamental difference between the thriving planters and the poor
whites. This creates a grave problem for the racial system of the South; for, it means that the
planters are potentially brutalized, half-blackened like the poor whites. Pettibone and probably
General Compson and other white planters as well then must have their own kind of innocence
that varnishes over the instable class structure—they cope with it simply by not caring about the
poor whites. On the other hand, because of his two traumatic experiences—his own brutalization
in Virginia and the blackening of his supposedly white family in Haiti—Sutpen needs a different
and more forcible kind of innocence that literally believes in the equality of all white men while
dispensing with paternalism especially toward blacks and women.

Fields points out that “[d]emocracy and majority rule did not rank high in the aspirations
of the planter class,” and “[i]nequality” in the slavery South “ordained by God . . . was
applicable not only to relations between slaveholders and slaves, but also to relations between
men and women and between the planter elite and the non-slaveholding majority” (144). The
“organic intellectuals of the planter class,” according to Fields, even “regretted that the white
laboring poor of their own society could not be brought under the benevolent regime of slavery”
The “pro-slavery intellectuals” did not state so “publicly and forthrightly” since it “would not do, after all, to tell an armed and enfranchised white majority that they, too, would be better off as slaves” (145), but the plantation economy must produce a limited number of rich planters and many poor whites, and Sutpen’s obsession with equality is certainly atypical for a Southern planter.

Although Fields emphasizes the material aspects of the time to explain the slaveholders’ unwillingness to endorse inequality among the whites publicly, Sutpen’s racism without paternalism, which is also atypical in the antebellum South, if not in the postbellum South, reveals their deeper motivation for sustaining a deceptive sense of equality which derives from the racial ideology fundamental to the system of slavery. Walter Benn Michaels, discussing literary works in the Reconstruction period, states that “racism replaces slavery, and, insofar as slavery is understood to have divided not only North and South but rich and poor, racism becomes a way to reconcile them” (“Absalom” 137). Racism and democratic egalitarianism are not antinomic in this regard. Michaels then rightly connects Sutpen’s sensibility to Jim Crow laws, whose imperative for strict racial distinction produces “brothers in whiteness” (138). As has been pointed out, the cliché, “the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister,” and the word “miscegenation,” which Bon utters in the Quentin-Shreve narrative (AA 286, 285), are anachronistic because concern over them spread after the Reconstruction era, when the control over kinship and especially blacks’ sexuality became harder.22 It is mentioned in Absalom that, 

22 See, for example, Ladd, Nationalism 150, Michaels, “Absalom” 146, and Sundquist, House 122. Barbara Ladd sees in Quentin’s re-creation of Bon’s final confrontation with Henry a certain rhetoric similar to the one prevalent in the postbellum South in which the white racist refuses “to acknowledge a black man as brother or ‘social equal’—the purity of the family line
legally speaking, only people with more than “one eighth of a specified kind of blood” are regarded as black (91); even Quentin’s time is several years ahead of the implementation of the so-called one-drop rule in Mississippi. As Michaels observes, depicting the threat and fear of miscegenation so acutely, Absalom “retrofits the social configurations of Jim Crow to the plantation” (“Absalom” 146).

This is a penetrating argument. Certainly, the urgent need to maintain the racial divide to ensure the whites’ economic superiority is a sensibility conspicuous in the Jim Crow period. In an essay written in 1956, Faulkner himself expresses his regret about the entanglement of class and racial aspirations in the Jim Crow South: “it is our southern white man’s shame that in our present economy the Negro must not have economic equality; our double shame that we fear that giving him more social equality will jeopardise his present economic status; our triple shame that even then, to justify our stand, we must becloud the issue with the bugaloo of miscegenation” (ESPL 105).

However, Michaels’s concise recapitulation of Sutpen’s failure is not precise: “the point of this retrofitting will be to destroy Sutpen’s class ambitions by redescribing them, to destroy his successful attempt to assert the difference between white men and white men by redescribing it as a failed attempt to enforce the difference between white men and black men” (“Absalom” 146). Though Michaels considers the ultimate aim of Sutpen’s design to be the establishment of difference between white men and white men, as I argued, Sutpen tries to deny that existing being a kind of metaphor for citizenship and rights to govern” (Nationalism 151). It suggests that the sensibility that one cannot or must not be both black and brother was more conspicuous in the postbellum Jim Crow period than in the antebellum system of slavery as the white economic and political superiority became more and more destabilized.
difference to revenge himself on Pettibone. As a result, the design is marked by the essential contradiction concerning equality and inequality, sameness and difference, within the antebellum plantation economy, where the planters already needed to establish the strict racial distinction to naturalize slavery. Thus, on one hand, the plantation economy produces the poor whites, with whom the planters must not identify (or, they need difference, inequality among the whites); on the other, they have to repress the existence of those brutalized whites and advance white supremacy (or, they need sameness, equality among the whites).

In the process of his career, Sutpen is forced to confront the two elements that pose a fundamental threat to this precarious balancing of equality and inequality, that is, ineffable love toward the black family and the brutalized existence of the poor whites, both of which dissolve the racial distinction on which the Southern plantation economy depends. Through these experiences he acquires a Jim Crow racial sensibility, for his trauma concerning whiteness, white kinship, or the white family is equivalent to the postbellum white Southerners’ fear of passing and insidious miscegenation and blacks’ increasing social mobility. Though Sutpen consequently becomes an atypical planter, he thereby exposes the essence behind his time’s moral code. Sutpen, the antebellum planter who has the class aspiration of his time but lives in the racial nightmare of the Jim Crow South, serves to shed a clearer light on the central contradiction in the structure of family and economy already inherent in the antebellum South which is later reshaped and intensified after the War. His family trauma is, in the final analysis, that of the Southern white father, both before and after the Civil War, which was not the beginning or the end of the problem; it was just a deepening and complication of the consistent contradiction. The answer to
Rosa’s question, “Why God let us lose the War” (AA 6), is then because in the antebellum South there had already existed the destructive contradiction that survived and became more evident in the Jim Crow South. We can believe it when Faulkner says that the novel is “a manifestation of a general racial system” or “constant general condition in the South” (FU 94).

Lastly, let us see more closely at the structure of white male kinship represented in Absalom to examine how this imaginary kinship is sustained while unachieved in melancholic gestures collaboratively performed by both rich and poor white men. Because it is male kinship and its purpose the establishment of sameness, it necessarily leads to incestuous, narcissistic and homoerotic relationship among the white males and the alienation of the white females. For example, Mr. Compson, who discloses the economic function of the white virgins as discussed above, stresses the homoerotic desire between Henry and Bon in their triangle relationship with Judith. Here, she is “not the object of Bon’s love or of Henry’s solicitude” (AA 95). She is instead an object of exchange between Henry and Bon, and moreover “the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve . . . what each conceived the other to believe him to be—the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another, seduced and been seduced, victimized in turn each by the other, conquerer vanquished by his own strength, vanquished conquering by his own weakness” (95). This passage suggests not only Henry and Bon’s identification with each other through the interchange of their roles but also self-identification—identification with each other makes any relationship with the other into a narcissistic one because the other is now also oneself. This self-identification is the most
important in this Henry-Bon relationship since the primary and true object of love here is each one’s own image created by the other and preserved in Judith, or in the male kinship as self-relation established by the exchange of the woman. As Mr. Compson says, it is truly a “pure and perfect incest” in which Henry will fulfill not only incestuous desire but also narcissistic desire through incest with his brother-in-law, his sister, and himself, and achieve sameness, oneness with Bon and himself:

In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister’s virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. (77)

The true aim of the expansion of white kinship through marriage is then narcissistic identification among white males through the medium of white females.

This Henry-Bon relationship reflects the patriarchal logic in general. Luce Irigaray’s argument will be helpful here:

The exchanges upon which patriarchal societies are based take place exclusively among men. Women, signs, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to another; if it were otherwise, we are told, the social order would fall back upon incestuous and exclusively endogamous ties that would paralyze all
commerce. . . . This means that the very possibility of a sociocultural order requires homosexuality as its organizing principle. (192)

Men in patriarchy is essentially homosexual, while women are mere products to be exchanged in order to ensure reproduction while avoiding the paralyzing incest and endogamy. But Absalom further suggests that in the South homosexuality among white males desires to be actually incestuous and exclusively endogamous at bottom because of their fantasy of sameness and pure whiteness though people are never outspoken about it as it leads to deadly stasis without continuity and expansion in actual life if really achieved. Michael P. Bibler points out that “Southern culture can tolerate . . . queer relations between white men, . . . but only as long as the South’s traditional social hierarchies continue to shore up white male supremacy” (63), and indeed, “the queer love between men of the planter class is ironically consistent with the plantation’s dominant forms of white masculinity and male homosociality” (64).

As Christopher Peterson argues, the “patriarchal model of kinship—exemplified by the Christian tradition—requires the return of the father’s seed to himself in order to save him from death and preserve his immortality” and “racial amalgamation threatens to derail the reflexivity of the father’s self-relation” (237). In this situation, as Sundquist argues, all things considered, incest

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23 Norman Jones, arguing about the “disruptive potential of illicit pleasures” in Absalom (361), asserts that “[h]istory in Absalom is haunted by what it denies—haunted not by its legends but by its lacunae, symbolized here by the precarious possibility of a gay romance that is suggestively racialized” (362). This conclusion is convincing enough, but we should also take into consideration the ideological structure working in this novel in which homoeroticism is at once prohibited and desired by the male-centered society, hence the hauntedness of the history. 24 In this sense, homoeroticism, like incest, will not fundamentally undermine the social system even if it is actually achieved. This makes unsupportable Betina Entzminger’s contention that the racial matter Quentin and Shreve discovers is a cover-up for the more dangerous homoeroticism between them by the “safe(r) zone that permits evasion and/or erasure of homosexuality” (90).
can be tolerated—and surreptitiously desired—as a defense of the “purity of blood” against miscegenation, and yet the sharp irony in the Henry-Bon-Judith triangle is of course that “incest may not insure such genealogical purity” (122).

This homosexual structure of patriarchy as self-relation suggests, moreover, that even before the problem of race is involved, the father-son identification is, strictly speaking, frustrated by the intervention of the wife/mother. In the final analysis, the “materiality of the mother’s body” (Peterson 237) is, as already suggested in Irigaray, a necessary evil that is required to avoid the actual narcissistic stasis without future continuity. Accordingly, the men acquainted with Sutpen before his marriage with Ellen regard him as a “perfect existence” without any shadow of femininity in the house (and with the completely brutalized black slaves who “belonged to him body and soul”), even though the absence of femininity leaves the house uncompleted (AA 29-30). When Rosa mentions “that magic in unkin blood which we call by the pallid name of love,” she exposes women’s position in the structure of patriarchal kinship or the bleakness of the sanctioned forms of love available to them (135). Whereas the blacks are excluded from the network of kinship, the white virgins are unstably included in it as “unkin blood” necessary for the dialectical expansion and continuation of kinship. (And for white women, the other forms of love amount to exclusion from white kinship, which I will explore

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The story of Henry and Bon that Quentin and Shreve re-creates is not simply a passing narrative as Entzminger assumes, but an interracial love romance, which is far more destructive than white males’ gay romance for the white patriarchy in the South.

25 Barbara Ladd points out that in the Western political and psychoanalytic theories “one conclusion is the same: woman is the necessary other whether the same is polity, civilization, or the symbolic” (Resisting 4).
more closely in Chapter 4.) And this female unkin blood, something extraneous, makes the
dream of identification between father and son ever compromised and unfulfilled.

As Koichi Suwabe argues, it is in fact women’s uncontrollable intervention in the
genealogical continuity of white male kinship that truly frustrates Sutpen’s design. The problem
is not only Eulalia’s black blood (though certainly that experience made him aware of danger in
putting confidence in women); if Ellen had given birth to another son instead of Judith, if Rosa
had accepted Sutpen’s offer, or if Milly’s child had been a boy, Sutpen’s design could have
survived; thus, Sutpen’s design fundamentally depends on women and luck—he must leave it to
chance whether a woman gives birth to a male child for him, and in that sense, women embodies
the uncontrollable fate for him (Suwabe 402-03). In Shreve’s imagination, Bon thinks that the
father’s blood becomes “corrupt and tainted by” the mother’s blood (AA 257), not because it is
black but because it is an “alien blood whose admixing was necessary in order that he exist” but
which becomes a barrier against his identification with the father, Sutpen (254). What Michaels
reads in a novel of Willa Cather applies to Absalom, too: heterosexuality itself may be “a form of
miscegenation” (Our America 48).

In his life in Mississippi, whereas Sutpen desperately strives to join the homosocial and
homosexual network of white male kinship, he does not show any paternalistic care for blacks
and women, and treats them as instruments for the achievement of his design. As for women, we
can infer that he cannot have love and care toward them after the “betrayal” by Eulalia. His
family trauma experienced in Haiti forbids his espousing paternalism not only for blacks but for
women. Sutpen, who does not so much as have a paternalistic justification and naturalization of
the hierarchized relation, is then retaliated by them in Mississippi, as it were.

However, if women embody luck, the barrier set by them does not indicate the essential
defect of Sutpen’s design; rather, the universal problem of the temporal gap here again functions
to cover its inherent contradictions produced by the sociohistorical situation in which Sutpen is
put. It is notable, then, that he aptly meets his end by the hand of Wash Jones, one of the poor
whites, whom his design was conceived to save. For, the bitterest contradiction for Sutpen is the
impossibility of white male identification across the class gap. Thus, for a thorough examination
of his design and its failure, we need to go back to the relationship between Sutpen and other
white males, particularly Wash, which reveals that Sutpen’s egalitarianism, despite his dream of
taking the little boy in, actually needs to comply with a principle of the Southern patriarchy that
“homo-ness between white men depends on the persistent inequality” not only between black
and white and between men and women, but also among white men (Bibler 63).

For Sutpen, white male kinship exists solely for the maintenance of the purity and
equality of the white males, as is typically shown in the fact that after he has married Ellen, he
refrains from “taking a family meal with his wife’s people” (AA 20). There is no description in
the novel that refutes Rosa’s contention that “since [Mr. Coldfield] had given him respectability
through a wife there was nothing else he could want from [Mr. Coldfield]” (20), or Mr.
Compson’s claim that Sutpen just wanted “the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-
law” (39). This is not only for ensuring the whiteness of the wife so that he can obtain a
legitimate white son, but also for establishing his own whiteness. Elizabeth Freeman argues:
“Only by marrying the propertied and pedigreed Ellen can grant Sutpen the whiteness he feels he has been denied; he understands that the whiteness is both property ownership and conjugal respectability” (78). As has been pointed out, Sutpen’s own racial status is ambiguous because of his “obscure origin” (AA 211). His affinity with slaves is repeatedly emphasized in the novel, and he needs to be married to a white woman because, according to the patriarchal logic represented by the Henry-Bon relationship, it allows him to identify with the wife’s white kinsmen and become totally white. (It is suggestive that the white male with whom Sutpen identifies through the marriage is Mr. Coldfield, whose first name is Goodhue, “good color” [Suwabe 394].) After getting the whiteness he wanted, he puts a companionship with other white men before the solidification of the familial bond in a narrower sense; instead of visiting the Coldfields to “complete the ceremonial family group,” he prefers “to spend [time in town] . . . with the men who [gather] each noon at the Holston House” (AA 50).

As Freeman points out, both property and marriage are crucial for whiteness, and it means that in order to be included in imaginary white male kinship (which is not limited to direct blood relations) and attain a position to take all the whites, rich and poor alike, in the white door, Sutpen paradoxically has to separate himself from the poor whites who are dehumanized and thereby half-blackened as he himself once was. Sutpen is obviously against the social code in many ways, but wealth invites him into the community of respectable white males regardless of minor violations of code. Those exasperated by his behavior are mostly lower-class white men, and other upper-class men like General Compson are more generous to Sutpen especially after he

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26 As for Sutpen’s blackness, see Snead 113-17.
has become affluent. Thus, while “traders and drovers and teamsters” become the “mob” at the wedding ceremony for Ellen, “those who [came] in the carriages and buggies to see a Roman holiday” go to “Sutpen’s Hundred to call and (the men) to hunt his game and eat his food again and on occasion gathering at night in his stable” to see Sutpen and his slaves fight (44). The fighting itself is abnormal in the light of the Southern paternalism, but it does not break Sutpen’s social bond with other white men as long as it achieves paternalism’s deeper aim, the subjugation of the slaves. The wedding ceremony, on the other hand, functions as a ritual of separation from the brutalized, blackened status of the poor whites.

As discussed above, Sutpen’s innocence blinds him to his egalitarian design’s contradiction of joining the homosociality of the upper-class white men who brutalize the poor whites in order to save them—Sutpen shuts them out of the white door to invite them in eventually. This contradiction is aptly represented in the figure of Wash, the one who kills Sutpen. Moreover, Wash reveals complicity among the whites, both poor and rich, in the melancholic sustainment of the innocent belief in white egalitarianism.

In earlier short stories which were later developed into Absalom, “The Big Shot” and “Wash,” Faulkner depicts how poor whites’ experiences similar to Sutpen’s lead not to antagonism toward planters or the social system but to a “mystical justification of the need to feel superior to someone somewhere” because of their desire to be (US 508). In the former story, in a situation very similar to Sutpen’s, a poor white man named Dal Martin is sent away by the white “boss” himself. But he does not “hate him at all” (509) and instead tries to identify with him, while the “antipathy between [Martin’s people and kind] and negroes” comes to surface
when he sees the figure of a black servant standing behind the boss (508). In “Wash,” Wash
Jones is sent away by a black servant of Sutpen, and almost identifies himself with Sutpen:

It would seem to him that that world in which Negroes, whom the Bible told him
had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white
skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his; that world in
which he sensed always about him mocking echoes of black laughter was but a
dream and an illusion, and that the actual world was this one across which his
own lonely apotheosis seemed to gallop on the black thoroughbred, thinking how
the Book said also that all men were created in the image of God and hence all
men made the same image in God’s eyes at least, so that he could say, as though
speaking of himself, “A fine proud man. If God Himself was to come down and
ride the natural earth, that’s what He would aim to look like.” (CS 538)

In this passage, Sutpen is for Wash a transcendent being with whom complete identification is
impossible, a figure of an ever-unfulfilled ideal which is nevertheless preserved in a melancholic
structure; he can at least dream of the sameness of men (excluding the brutalized blacks) in
God’s eyes, and of identification as the phrase “as though speaking of himself” suggests. Wash is
here the boy outside the white door, and Sutpen serves as the father with whom Wash in vain
wishes to identify. Still, in this short story version, there seem to be more mutual trust and
dependence and a better possibility for identification between Wash and Sutpen as is seen in the
scene where Wash replies to Sutpen’s calling his name in his sleep, whereas in Absalom Wash’s
reply is to Sutpen’s meaningless groan (CS 540; AA 150). Wash barely retains his faith in white
supremacy because of the existence of the planter class, and he still believes that he may be able to be like Sutpen, to prove that he is better than the blacks. Thus, both Martin and Wash demonstrate how poor whites support the society’s structure of race and class despite their own debased status.

However, Wash in the short story feels disappointment with Sutpen when he finds that the child between his granddaughter Milly and Sutpen is a girl, that Sutpen fails to beget his heir, “thinking for the first time in his life that perhaps Sutpen was an old man like himself” (CS 543). This is an ironic success of the father-son identification. Wash is not only the boy to be taken in but also a double of Sutpen’s poor white father (and Sutpen’s relation with Milly almost makes him a grandfather-in-law of Sutpen), and identification between father and son here occurs on this level: Sutpen is taken out of the white door, when identification is achieved between poor whites. It is not only the consummation of Wash’s desire, but it teaches him the degradation of former rich planters after the Civil War into the same petty beings as the poor whites like Wash himself, and announces to him that the ideal of white supremacy no longer holds. Only after that does he get enraged by Sutpen’s remark which brutalizes his granddaughter.

In Absalom, on the other hand, this identification does not occur, and though the above passage about God and Sutpen is almost exactly replicated in the novel, “as though speaking of himself” is emblematically deleted. Wash is shocked solely by Sutpen’s undeniably dehumanizing remark against his granddaughter, and sees his true relationship with Sutpen, not as the two degraded human beings one of whom has lost grandeur after the War and become no different from him, but as the dehumanized laborer and the exploiting white master which they
have always been. Wash feels that he cannot escape from the men “who set the rule and living,” and “for the first time in his life he began to comprehend how it had been possible for Yankees or any other armies to have whipped them” (AA 232). This realization is already expressed in the short story (CS 547), and both in the short story and the novel, condemning his own complicity in the exploitation by the planters, Wash thinks: “Better if his kind and mine too had never drawn the breath of life on this earth” (CS 548; AA 233). Nevertheless, while in the short story, Sutpen is depicted as a pathetic old man without his grand design who becomes like Wash after the Civil War, Sutpen in Absalom is more impervious to Wash’s desire of identification, and Wash does not try to identify himself with Sutpen especially after Sutpen’s dehumanizing remark.²⁷ Consequently, the gap between the poor whites and the former rich planters rather than their homogeneity is emphasized in the novel, even as Sutpen now has to transgress the class gap by seducing a poor white girl (whose grandfather is not allowed but unstoppably enter into Sutpen’s house after the Civil War as the class distinction is blurred) in order to hang onto his design in the predicament after the War, and becomes closer to the brutalized people.

Wash’s murder of Sutpen reveals that white supremacy and equality is not only a justification of the slavery system but also a petty excuse to gloss over the class relation among the whites, and furthermore that Sutpen’s design is totally compatible with the racial and class ideology embraced by both planters and poor whites. Yet particularly in Absalom, while the Civil War deprives planters of wealth, a source of their whiteness, and exposes their baseness that has been veiled by the paternalistic racial ideology, the blurring of the difference between brutalized

²⁷ For a detailed discussion on differences between “Wash” and Absalom, see Nakano.
poor whites and planter-class whites, which by extension jeopardizes the distinction between black and white, evokes even stronger need to reconfirm the distinctions both between white and white, and black and white, though the need has consistently existed. Now that Sutpen is debased, Wash’s ardent attachment to or desire of identification with him must not be expressed anymore because it suggests that Sutpen is fundamentally no different from him, the brutalized, and if he admits it, it demolishes the ideal figure of the patriarchal white father without which the entire social order would collapse. Wash’s withdrawal of his desire to identify with Sutpen then functions, if only barely, to preserve the grandeur of the former rich planters as the momentarily lost ideal and defer the revelation of its ultimate impossibility. Then, the two contradictory distinctions between white and white and between black and white are also barely sustained by the failure to achieve white male identification. The white door must be kept closed, for the opening of the door is at once the achievement and destruction of the ideal white male kinship—in short, the door embodies the society’s founding foreclosure. Thus Sutpen, who managed to keep the door closed, appears to Quentin, at least at first, as a mythic God-like figure that creates Sutpen’s Hundred with “the Be Sutpen’s Hundred like the olden time Be Light” (4), or Quentin and Shreve can imagine the dead Sutpen and Wash drinking together without so much as being aware that they are dead, “unmarked by time or a change of weather” (152). The dream of the God-like white father, or of white supremacy and equality, lives on.

Sutpen’s is the family trauma of the Southern white father, but its full implications are kept concealed until the secret of Bon’s blood is divulged. It seems that everyone around Sutpen, including even Wash, consciously or unconsciously contributes to defer the revelation of this
trauma of the father regarding family and whiteness. It is Quentin who discovers the hidden truth and thereby becomes a bridge between the antebellum South and the contemporary Jim Crow South, embodying the consistency of the father’s family trauma.
Chapter 3
Quentin’s Achievement and Destruction of the Ideology’s Ideal

If the Southern father’s ideals, aspirations and problems are consistent from the antebellum South till the Jim Crow era, we will be allowed to gather that not only General Compson but virtually all the characters are complicit with Sutpen in the obfuscation of his family trauma, especially when we accept Matthews’s claim that there is no anachronism in *Absalom*. For, knowing what General Compson knows, it would be easy for them to infer the filial relation between Sutpen and Bon, and Bon’s black blood. But they choose, as does Sutpen, to remain confused, keep on mystifying the story with their confusion, and by so doing let the ideal of the Southern father survive and even become enforced after the Civil War, repressing the knowledge of Bon’s black blood and its dangerous connotation of interracial love. The ideal of the Southern father and white male kinship is the foundation of whiteness and the society’s order in Yoknapatawpha, and they try to preserve it through the repetition, transmission

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28 John T. Matthews also discusses how Mr. Compson evades the easy inference (*William* 187). According to Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, some manuscript drafts of *Absalom* point to the community’s knowledge of Bon’s black blood though they were discarded (Introduction xxxi). Gerald Langford points out that some descriptions show General Compson’s realization that “Bon was Sutpen’s part-Negro son” and his telling his son about it (8), but since it contradicts other descriptions in the novel, Langford, based on his careful examination of Faulkner’s manuscript, concludes: “Such inconsistencies, the manuscript reveals, are the result of Faulkner’s change of plan during the writing of the novel. Apparently the original idea was that the truth about Bon should be known from the beginning. . . . In writing Chapter IV Faulkner suddenly changed his original plan” (9). These circumstances exemplify, I would argue, that Faulkner assumed that Bon’s black blood was inferable enough for the Compsons and others but chose to have them repress that knowledge for the thorough exploration of its psychologically and socially traumatic effects.

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and sharing of the story of the Sutpens without the crucial information to explain its mysteries. Or in other words, the circulation of the inconclusive story of the Southern father is a way for the melancholic preservation of the father, whiteness, white subjecthood and the white dominant society. This Absalom illuminates by its own narrative structure, in which the revelation of the secret is delayed as much as possible so that the story can hold, and accordingly the concept of whiteness can hold, as long as possible.

Let us first investigate, then, into the novel’s narrative structure, paying particular attention to Quentin’s reception of the Sutpens’ story and his eventual reconstruction of it. For one thing, since he is not only one of the main character-narrators but the primary listener of the novel, his experience overlaps with that of the novel’s reader. He repeatedly listens to the Sutpens’ story, but he knows the main plot from the beginning; the reader is also informed of it at an early stage. However, it does not make quite sense to him and the reader. As a result, both Quentin and the reader are involved in a kind of “detective work” (Porter, Seeing 241) to straighten out the mysteries in the inexplicable story that is seemingly about un consummated love affairs and lost ideals. Moreover, he is the most appropriate character to play that role, since the novel in which he first appeared, The Sound and the Fury, is about lost ideals of love and melancholic adherence to them. He has a reason to be absorbed into the detective work, to find the secret. And he is too absorbed and too efficient a detective to overlook the truth that is inconvenient for white Southern men, and he receives a vital blow when he, through the collaborative storytelling with Shreve, finally discovers that Bon was black, that the lacking information to make the story complete is ineffable love dissimulated as simply un consummated
love. As I explore in this chapter, the completion of the Sutpens’ story is enabled by Quentin and Shreve when they achieve what Sutpen could not in life, that is, white male fraternal identification, or transubstantiation into the Southern father. However, *Absalom* demonstrates that it is the very moment when the potential blackness of the father is disclosed. This is the achievement of the society’s ideal and simultaneously its destruction. Eventually Quentin and Shreve demonstrate that efforts to dig up hidden meanings become meaningless when it is achieved by retrieving what has been foreclosed from the existent frames of recognition, for it changes the frames themselves, and getting out of the melancholic repetitions of the past leads to the unexpected production of new meanings in the future. Quentin drives home this realization to the reader who follows the process of his detective work.29

The basic structure of the novel is as follows: compulsive repetitions of narratives as a result of the repression and concealment of ineffable love which leaves unsolvable mysteries, and what Édouard Glissant calls “deferred revelations” (*Faulkner* 9). This structural tension affects both the character-narrators and the characters in the story told by them. The ineffable love which each of them stumbles upon exposes the fundamental contradictions latent in the society’s norms which they have incorporated into themselves. The dissimulation or repression

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29 Philip Weinstein makes a similar argument. He says that *Absalom*’s tangled, nonlinear narrative allows us to perceive “how, in ongoing time, its actors and tellers (and readers) actually encountered all this experience” (*Becoming* 147). Especially the revelation of Bon’s black blood “must come last because [Quentin], we and the others in the novel must experience Bon otherwise until the end. We internalize (as Henry does) the developing emotional value of his becoming a brother. We live inside his subjectivity as a man who does not know he is black” (154).
of that ineffable love, then, lets their subjecthood survive together with the incomplete story and the society’s order dependent on it. In the novel, the character-narrators reiterate the story of the Sutpens, engaged in a kind of detective work to establish a coherent meaning. Yet they repeatedly fail to do so, and narratives are told and retold, conveyed from one person to another or from one generation to another, in compulsive repetitions without a conclusion until Quentin and Shreve finally reveal the secret.

This structure of compulsive repetitions is first presented as defeated Southerners’ obsession with the past, lost ideals. Quentin’s relation to the story is initially not more than that of a mere member of the community. He already knows the main events of the Sutpens’ story because it “was a part of his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about [Sutpen]; a part of the town’s—Jefferson’s—eighty years’ heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed” (AA 7). Being a member of the Southern community is having many stories of this kind in which “the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad,” and therefore it is famously said that Quentin “was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth[,] . . . a barracks filled with stubborn backlooking ghosts” (7). The ghosts are melancholically obsessed with the irretrievable past, Rosa being one of them, at least at first. As a member of the community, Quentin needs to listen to those “garrulous outraged baffled ghosts” who tell the same old stories and “[has] to be one” himself (4).

As Mr. Compson suggests, moreover, the sharing of a story as a communal heritage connects people in the virtual network of kinship. He tells Quentin that Rosa chose him as an attendant to go to the Sutpen house because the Compsons may know what happened between
Sutpen and her as the story is inherited from grandfather to father, and from father to son, which makes the Sutpens, the Coldfields, and the Compsons a kind of single family so that whatever happens “will still be in the family” (8). The circulation of the repeated story thus creates a synchronic communal tie which connects the members in a virtual kinship as well as a diachronic tradition of the community based on the patriarchal family system in which a heritage is handed down from grandfather to father and to son (though Rosa’s decision also implies her realization that in her version of the story there is something that she cannot let other people in the community know, something that marks the limit of its communality). 30 Gradually the story of the “interchangeable” ghosts produces narratives full of personal obsessions with a specific lost or unconsummated love, but we find the same melancholic structure in each of them, the same obsessive attachment to a lost plenitude. It is suggested that even Quentin is involved in the story deeper and deeper because of his own obsession with the brother-sister relationship depicted in *The Sound and the Fury*, which overlaps with Henry and Judith though never directly mentioned. The obsessions with the past of Rosa and Quentin make them belong to the Southern ghosts despite their individuated grudges. Their (and the Sutpens’) tragedies seem to be results of the curse of the South whatever it might be, and their fates become implicated in the same single story that is repeated in vain to restore a coherent meaning or a lost plenitude.

As long as the revelations of ineffable love are deferred, individual narratives through

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30 This establishment of kinship through the sharing of the story also ignores the fact that the construction of the Sutpens’ story was impossible without the contributions of slaves: some important pieces of information about crucial moments such as the confrontation between Henry and Sutpen on Christmas were passed around by slaves. They, however, remain nameless, confined on the margins of the story and excluded from kinship, while it implies the deceptive nature of white kinship.
which people vainly try to reach a conclusive meaning are perpetually produced and repeated, keeping people melancholically obsessed with lost ideals or loves and making them incessantly ask “Why? Why? and Why?” as Rosa does (135), without allowing them to obtain an answer. Almost all of the characters in *Absalom* try to defer the revelation, because melancholia is a way to avoid finally giving up the lost thing and preserve it in oneself. In our context, they persist in their “desire to be” until the last minute, as is the case with Henry, Sutpen, and even Wash.

No wonder that the novel’s narratives are mostly fatalistic and pseudo-teleological. The character-narrators reiterate the story whose main plot is already known. They know what will happen next in the Sutpens’ story precisely because it is what happened in the past; retrospectively speaking, they tell it as if everyone in the story were treading a path toward an end predetermined by fate, even though they cannot gain a coherent meaning out of it. The “Cassandra-like” Rosa tells of “fatality and curse on the South and on our family” (14), and of prophetic “instinctive knowledge” she has (18). Mr. Compson’s narrative in Chapters 3 and 4, also full of the rhetoric of fate and prophecy, even articulates the fateful structure of melancholic repetitions. For him, people are stage actors directed by the “stage manager” (57), but he also claims that the meaning of the past which now possesses “heroic proportions” is ultimately unattainable because “we are not supposed to know” (80). He compares the situation to the execution of a chemical formula on old paper. The paper seems “almost indecipherable, yet meaningful,” but when you try it nothing happens so that it forces you to re-read it and make another trial over and again to no avail (80). In later chapters, even Quentin and Shreve, influenced by these predecessors, adopt the rhetoric of fate from time to time.
Mr. Compson’s description can also be applied to a typical experience of the actual reader of *Absalom*. Peter Brooks points out that “[a]s readers, we encounter in the novel certain sequences of action, of event, that seem to lack any recognizable framework of question and answer, and hence any clear intention of meaning” (“Incredulous” 248-49). With this sense of incomprehensibility, moreover, a sense of reading a fateful story coexists, not only because the character-narrators frequently employ the rhetoric of fate, but because even the novel’s third-person narrator follows that fatalistic mode of telling, especially in the first half of the novel. The narrator tells what will happen in advance as if telling retrospectively after everything has ended. The very beginning of the novel already implies it: “From a little after two oclock *until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon* they sat” (*AA* 3, emphasis mine). Then later, more explicitly: “It would be three hours yet before he would learn why she had sent for him” (7). At the beginning of the second chapter, even the Harvard scene in which Quentin and Shreve retell the Sutpens’ story together is foretold: “five months later Mr Compson’s letter would carry up [the odor, the scent] from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin’s sitting-room at Harvard” (23). After all, if one has read *The Sound and the Fury*, one already knows that Quentin is to meet his end soon by committing suicide. In that case, the reader is indeed looking back after everything has happened, while finding it difficult to organize it as a coherent story. Put in a similar position to the character-narrators, then, the reader may feel involved in fateful melancholic repetitions.

John T. Irwin concisely sums up the structure of the fateful melancholic repetitions articulated by Mr. Compson in his influential psychoanalytic reading of Faulkner, *Doubling and*
Incest: “Faulkner’s modern classical sense, his sense of the tragic absurd, is not the sense of the meaningless but of the almost meaningful—the sense of the meaningful as the always deferred” (9). Irwin argues that this is the structure of the patriarchal Oedipal drama and explains Quentin’s tragedy both in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom* (as well as Sutpen’s) in terms of the inevitable and unbridgeable temporal gap between the attained reality and the past ideals modeled after the father. The gap generates the sense of guilt in Quentin, but the irreversibility of time hinders him from perfectly identifying with the father and urges him to repeat the efforts of identification compulsively and endlessly. In this model that “ontologiz[es] the ‘patriarchal principle’” (Porter, “Absalom” 180-81), the ideals are immutably preserved, though never fully realized, and the revelation of the ultimate impossibility to establish a coherent meaning is deferred through the endless repetitions as the almost meaningful.

Since *Absalom*’s narratives are highly convoluted and often devoid of hard facts, the novel has been read as an expression of language’s fundamental impossibility to establish a coherent meaning by many critics. They practically accept Irwin’s description as the structure

31 See, for example, Aswel 105-07, P. Brooks, “Incredulous,” Guetti 81, McPherson 445, Slatoff 201, and Watkins 63. Gerhard Hoffman tries to distance himself from a modernist reading in which inaccessibility to historic truth urges one to construct a private and existentialist domain of meaning, and instead reads in *Absalom* a step to postmodernism, which is characterized by “the disposability of [the concepts of identity and historic truth] under the perspective of imaginative play” (285). However, as I discuss below, *Absalom* is concerned with the South’s specific conditions which produce certain historical truths, and the Sutpens’ story attains a convincing truth and coherent meaning even though it loses the coherence at the moment of attainment. This is not simply a testimony to “the uncertainties of epistemology” and celebration of the freedom of imagination (Hoffman 291), but a deconstructive critique as to how epistemology is framed by historical conditions. The embracement of the postmodernist “play” is more a form of modernist melancholia than a critique of it unless it is taken into consideration that imagination is never exempt from mediation by historical conditions.
of the whole novel, or Mr. Compson’s remark “we are not supposed to know” as the novel’s moral. John T. Matthews in his *The Play of Faulkner’s Language* criticizes critics who lament that structure of Faulkner’s language, and valorizes it as the “infinite play of signifiers” (118-19).

Matthews sees an almost Lacanian story of the generation of language that revolves around “lost love,” “lost coherence,” and “the lost plenitude of an origin” (118). However, this is just casting a positive light on the melancholic, regressive structure of the Southern community dominated by the backlooking ghosts (and, in Irwin’s description, the patriarchal community in general).

Under the rubric of the “play of signifiers,” Matthews approves of the compulsive repetitions of the same old story, the melancholic obsession with the past which preempts any futurity or possibility of change. Either way, as long as we read *Absalom* as the story structured around the lost plenitude, the peculiar historical Southern conditions are reduced into the universal model of Oedipus complex, patriarchy, or language.

Certainly, the structure which Irwin and Matthews find applies to *The Sound and the Fury*, in which, as Sartre once observed, “nothing happens” but “everything has happened” so that the future is “already past” (227-28). In that novel, Quentin tries to protect his family’s honor condensed into his sister Caddy’s virginity in behalf of his impotent father. To do so, he tries to be the father of his father: “Say it to Father will you I will am my fathers Progenitive I invented him created I him Say it to him it will not be for he will say I was not and then you and I since philoprogenitive” (SF 122). Moreover, when Quentin says “if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away” (177), he seems to believe that his solipsistic imagination, his monologic words (in the
Bakhtinian sense), can create “truth and reality” (Lockyer 33). However, as Judith Lockyer argues, the above quote also implies that Quentin cannot actually say it; he knows that “words are not the same as their referents” (33). His words then can be properly called the play of signifiers that revolve around the unreachable lost plenitude. In this sense, he is a ghost even before his suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*.

As discussed above, *Absalom* also at first gives us a fatalistic impression that “everything has happened.” It eventually turns out, however, to be a novel of exorcism—it is about refusals to be a ghost forever entrapped in compulsive repetitions. Glissant discusses Faulkner’s usage of a refurbished version of the epic and the tragic, or of “Oedipal disclosure” of the truth without any redemptive effect (*Faulkner* 96): “Epic song and tragic disclosure have traditionally had as their purpose a restoration of a lost unity. Through their intervention, we are guaranteed to regain it. The Faulknerian intervention accepts the impossibility of a return to equilibrium. This is the source of its originality and force” (98). “Deferred revelation” in Faulkner, according to Glissant, therefore “has nothing to do with the suspense of a detective novel or with social or psychological clarification; rather, it is an accumulating mystery and a whirling vertigo—gathering momentum rather than being resolved through deferral and disclosure” (9). Even though this looks similar to the patriarchal or modernist melancholia, it is important that there are moments of revelation and disclosure in Glissant’s formulation. And I would add that deferred revelation in Faulkner can, if momentarily, be social or psychological clarification and a resolution of a mystery though it generates a further vertigo in which there can be no expectation to redeem the lost plenitude. In *Absalom*, a coherent meaning is regained when lost, denied or
unconsummated love turns out to have been ineffable, and at the same time the existent frames of recognition, the frames to produce meaning, are destroyed, as when Henry realizes the reason why Sutpen rejected Bon. The disclosure of the truth marks not only the end of the detective work but of compulsive repetitions within the Oedipal drama, not because it attains the ideal unity, but because its foundation is fatally undermined. The reader will then be expected not to admire language’s inconclusiveness but to witness an emergence of the new kind of vertigo by internalizing, together with Quentin and Henry, “the developing emotional value of [Bon’s] becoming a brother before he can be unmasked as black” (Weinstein, What 54), and then experiencing the deferred and destructive revelation of ineffable love.

Richard C. Moreland’s criticism against romantic irony is helpful here. He calls ironic valorization of compulsive repetitions (including Mr. Compson’s attitude toward incomprehensibility) romantic irony. In Moreland’s view, such critics as Walter Slatoff, Irwin, and Donald Kartiganer are examples of romantic irony, and we can add to this list the poststructuralist Matthews of The Play of Faulkner’s Language and any critics who see language’s fundamental incomprehensibility as the main theme of Absalom. Moreland suggests that those arguments tend to hypostatize the original core of compulsive repetitions as the “unspeakable real” (32), while Faulkner explores its “more particular, more recognizable historical, social, and psychological motivations and consequences” (33). Indeed, in my view, those critics who valorize language’s incomprehensibility remain to be a reader-participant in the fateful melancholic repetitions that forever defer the revelation of the historical factors, implicit

Matthews’s later historical arguments on Absalom in “Recalling the West Indies” and William Faulkner, however, practically function as self-critiques.
with Mr. Compson as well as the other character-narrators and the third-person narrator. Though Moreland considers that *Absalom* does not go so far as to the actual exploration of the historical, social, and psychological motivations and consequences, but only prepares a stage for it through showing the failure of irony, I would argue that *Absalom* is engaged in the exploration by exposing ineffable loves which, as we have seen with regard to Henry, Sutpen, and Wash, are inseparable from peculiarly Southern conditions.

After all, if Quentin’s problem derived from the universal structure that perpetuates patriarchal ideals, why would he commit suicide? One becomes melancholic in patriarchy and it may make one brood over death, but it will not necessarily be literally deadly; otherwise patriarchy would not hold. Then, does Quentin die because he has an extraordinarily sensitive disposition which drives him into unnecessary suicide? It may be so in *The Sound and the Fury*. Yet *Absalom* gives us another picture of the structure of repetition through the revelation of ineffable love and makes us rethink the cause of Quentin’s death. If intertextuality between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom* means just the repetition of the same melancholic structure, why did Quentin, who committed suicide in the former novel, have to be summoned up again to be engaged in the story of another family just before his suicide? As readers, we are asked to complete the detective work together with Quentin, to find his true motive for suicide that outdoes the problem of Caddy’s virginity, which is not mentioned at all in *Absalom*, and to share the shock he receives at the moment of completion.

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As Irwin persuasively observes, we can see in Chapter 4 an intertextual link between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom*, the dialogue between Mr. Compson and Quentin being “a continuation of their discussions of Candace’s loss of virginity and Quentin’s inability to lose his virginity contained in Quentin’s section of *The Sound and the Fury*” (114). Mr. Compson points out that “deferred love” can supply one with “the will to exist” (*AA* 68), and concludes his narrative in this chapter by having Judith say that people do not commit suicide “for love” even after love is lost (101). Matthews aptly argues that Mr. Compson consciously shapes his narrative “to warn Quentin about his dangerous obsessions,” or to convince him that those obsessions are not so dangerous if he can deal with them properly (*Play* 134); Mr. Compson audaciously admits the “world . . . has been deprived of natural, transcendental meaning” and through his romantic irony makes it a chance of survival through repeated rituals that produce personal expedient meanings (137). With Bon’s (and his own) ironic detachment as a model case, Mr. Compson claims how the loss of love is not fatal but ironically becomes an opportunity to preserve the ideality of love. Mr. Compson thus moderates Quentin’s intense tragic sense in *The Sound and the Fury* by means of ironic preservation of the lost ideals through melancholic repetitions in which unconsummated love and the desire to be go hand in hand.

Quentin in *Absalom* seems to be aware that this advice to accept repetition for survival is after all reduced to the pseudo-universal temporal problem of the father-son relationship that is possible only by concealing concrete historical conditions. While listening to Shreve retracing the story of the Sutpens, Quentin notices that Shreve sounds like his father Mr. Compson (and
later Shreve notices that Quentin also sounds like his father), and Quentin thinks:

Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished.

Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn’t matter: that pebble’s watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple space, to the old ineradicable rhythm . . . Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (AA 210)

In this observation obviously echoes the passage about throwing a stone into a river in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature*, in which ripples are said to be the type of “influence” (21). Emerson goes on to say that the sky is the type of the “universal soul,” or the “Creator,” of which man is a “property,” and “man in all ages and countries, embodies it in his language, as the FATHER” (21). Though the above passage contains similar images, it slightly displaces Emerson in a few

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34 The whole passage reads: “Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence. Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life, wherein, as in a firmament, the nature of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom, arise and shine. This universal soul, he calls Reason: it is not mine, or thine, or his, but we are its; we are its property and men. And the blue sky in which the private earth is buried, the sky with its eternal calm, and full of everlasting orbs, is the type of Reason. That which, intellectually considered, we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself. And man in all ages and countries, embodies it in his
important points. First, the ripples for Quentin are not just the inevitable influence from the origin in which he cannot but acquiesce because of the filial connection through the umbilical cord, but a technology to preserve the traces and effects of the lost origin—in other words, he suggests that genealogy or patrilineage is a way to preserve the “original ripple space” and the “old ineradicable rhythm” through melancholic, compulsive repetitions. As the latter part of the passage shows, Quentin is well aware of the interdependence of father and son, of the fact that both father and son are effects of each other, that while the father begets the son, the original father is only inferred through the repetition in the son. And he feels that it is an inescapable fate for him to perpetuate the father in those repetitions of the father-son interdependence: “I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do” (AA 222). In these lines, the father obviously exceeds the physical existence of one’s biological father and becomes something preserved as the “watery echo” which reigns over not only the members of the local Southern community but also the Canadian, Shreve, since in this novel the ripples are the story that they tell each other, and the sharing of the story makes them kinsmen beyond regional differences—it is said that Quentin and Shreve are connected by the “River” as “the geologic umbilical” which is at the same time “very Environment itself” (208). Then, it would be justifiable to read this recognition of Quentin as a “sign of the helplessness of the individual in the grip of temporal repetition” that is universal or at least universally discernible in patriarchal language, as the FATHER” (Emerson 21).  

35 Here, the material intervention of the mother is only subtly insinuated by the image of water which swallows in the original stone to make it unreachable for the son while providing the umbilical cord, the means of repetition on which the existence of the son depends.
Still, we should not take it as the novel’s entire structure as many critics have done, for in the above passage there is another crucial shift of emphasis. In Emerson, the stone itself that creates the ripples is strangely given no symbolic meaning; it is mentioned once, and then forgotten. Above all, the ripples are not linked with the sky which symbolizes the original Creator or Father, but the “private earth is buried” in the sky, and this all-encompassing sky embraces every individual example of symbolization in nature in a mystical way (Emerson 21). In Quentin’s version, however, the severance between the sky and the earthly matters is more obvious; the unchanging sky is merely reflected, illusorily preserved in the pools, and the origin that has created the ripples is given more importance. And the origin here is a concrete, historical object, the pebble, lost in the past and irretrievable forever under the illusory reflection of the seemingly universal, immutable sky.

Or is it really lost forever? Is it impossible to infer the shape and weight of the pebble by measuring the ripple space and rhythm? Actually, Quentin and Shreve do infer the origin eventually in the most persuasive way and thereby puts an end to the ripples—if we suppose Bon’s black blood at the core of the Sutpens’ story, it explains everything, at least for Quentin and Shreve; it is the lost origin, the lacking information which has created the succeeding incomplete narratives. Moreover, the retrieved origin reveals the impurity of the father and the deceptive nature of the society’s whole order; it reveals the father’s ineffable love toward the black son, and it destroys the racial divide and therefore the ideal concept of the white Southern father. This is not a universal patriarchal plot, but a historically and regionally specific one.
Considering this, it is notable that right before he thinks of his perpetual entrapment in
the repetition of the story and the outliving of the father, Quentin prevents Shreve from taking
over his speech and talking about the “trump” Sutpen played (AA 222). At this point, they
recognize that Bon was Sutpen’s son and Judith’s brother, and also that incest was not the
ultimate reason of Sutpen’s injunction against Bon’s marriage with Judith and of Henry’s murder
of Bon, since they know that Sutpen had a “trump” that was more forceful than incest. Most
likely they are even aware that Bon was black, though that information is withheld and repressed
for a while longer. Either way, Quentin’s reaction suggests that he wants to turn their attention
away from the pebble, keeping it in the unknown water as long as possible in order to remain
entrapped in the quasi-universal repetition, however unsatisfactory it might be, especially
because the pebble is related to the specific historical problem that endangers his subjecthood,
the ideality of the father and the order of his community. It is a manifestation of his desire to be,
his attachment to foreclosure and ideal fatherhood.

However, Quentin cannot keep the pebble repressed because of the same obsessive
attachment to fatherhood. He explores the ripples and the rhythm, or the echoes of the patriarchal
ideals too thoroughly, and thereby correctly reproduces the shape and weight of the pebble, as it
were. The end of Chapter 5 indicates that Quentin is emotionally involved in the Sutpens’ story
by finding a parallel between the Henry-Judith relationship and his own situation. Henry
successfully plays the father role to protect his sister’s virginity, the role which Quentin fails to
play in The Sound and the Fury. Still, Quentin cannot know exactly what happened, why Henry
killed Bon, and why he disappeared after the murder. Quentin is barred from the knowledge he
wants, and he finds “something which he too could not pass—that door” (139). The motif of the
doors frequently appears in this novel, and at this point it is more closely related to Rosa’s
inability to get into the door told in Chapter 5. But once we know Sutpen’s design, we notice that
Quentin is also the little boy outside the white door, for without the knowledge inside the door,
he cannot identify with the patriarchal father. Yet he is hesitant to pass the door, as if he knew he
should not do so to preserve the ever-unattained ideal—the door is the obstacle to ideal love,
ideal white kinship, and ideal fatherhood, but it is also the embodiment of the foreclosure of
illicit love; beyond the door ideal love and illicit love turn out to be one and the same. Indeed,
when he does get into the door of the Sutpen house, even though reluctantly following Rosa’s
request, he discovers the devastating truth together with the emaciated corpse-like body of
Henry, the supposedly potent father figure.

The process in which Quentin discovers the secret of Bon’s blood has been a point at
issue, but if we believe the novel’s description, Quentin notices something when he sees Clytie at
the Sutpen house. Shreve says to Quentin: “[Clytie] didn’t tell you in the actual words because
even in the terror she kept the secret; nevertheless she told you, or at least all of a sudden you
knew” (280). It can be surmised that Quentin noticed that Bon was Sutpen’s black son by
inference when he saw Clytie, who he knew was Sutpen’s black daughter. Once he has noticed it,
then, the only logical conclusion will be that Sutpen and Henry loved Bon despite his blackness;
otherwise Sutpen’s discarding of Eulalia and Bon, his hesitation to face Bon, and Henry’s
murder and disappearance as its result would be inexplicable, and Henry’s deathly presence
serves to corroborate it. After all, if we suppose that there is no anachronism in Absalom, it is
immediately known (probably even to Shreve) that Sutpen’s Haitian family were black. Still, Quentin seems to postpone that inference and does not realize the full meaning of the events until he confronts it with the help of Shreve. Thus Quentin ambiguously thinks when he sees Bon’s grandson, Jim Bond, after seeing Clytie: “The scion, the heir, the apparent (though not obvious)” (296). It is not clear whether he is thinking that Bond is an actual descendant of Sutpen, or just that he is a practical heir of the house as the only man left in it. Either way, he must sense the ominous resonance of the fact that a black man resides over the white planter’s house as heir while the white descendant who fulfilled his fatherly role is dying on the bed, and this experience leads Quentin into the exploration of the details of the Sutpens’ story at Harvard. While repressing and deferring the dangerous conclusion, he is too much attached to the highly patriarchal story of the Sutpens to be ironically detached.

Quentin and Shreve then slowly build up their narrative through “ratiocination” without jumping at the conclusion (225). They delay the revelation of what Quentin sensed at the Sutpen house until they reach the point where they find it to be the only conclusion they cannot deny logically and emotionally. They even interrupt each other and themselves when they get too close to the key to the whole story, saying “Wait,” as when they are talking about Quentin’s visit to the Sutpen house and about to refer to the identity of the person hiding there, when Shreve mentions

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36 Hershel Parker claims that Quentin reaches the conclusion of Bon’s black blood together with Mr. Compson after he tells his father the incident at the Sutpen house (278n5). As Koichi Suwabe points out, however, Mr. Compson does not seem to be aware that Bon was black even as he notices that Bon was Sutpen’s son (367). In my view, it is possible for Mr. Compson to infer Bon’s blackness, but even in that case he must repress the knowledge as did his father. At least there is no description in the novel which suggests that Quentin and Mr. Compson have talked about the possibility of Bon’s blackness. See also note 28.
Sutpen’s “trump” (222), or when Shreve stops himself speaking of Bon’s annoyance with Eulalia’s blood: “[the blood] could have become corrupt and tainted by whatever it was in Mother’s that he could not brook.—Wait” (257).

As the last instance suggests, Shreve is more interested in the filial relationship between Bon and Sutpen, and Bon’s story which he creates testifies his gradual identification with his own version of Bon who desperately covets Sutpen’s acknowledgment. While Quentin seeks for the lost ideal of the father, the Canadian Shreve also seeks for the patriarchal father he does not have. He says: “I just want to understand it. . . . Because it’s something my people haven’t got. . . . What is it? . . . a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgetting General Sherman, so that forever more as long as your children’s children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett’s charge at Manassas?” (289). At this point, it is more a half-mocking expression of his inability to sympathize with the melancholic genealogy of the Southerners, but we should note that this is uttered after he has found the structure of the melancholic structure of the Southern society sustained by concealing the racial problem at its core. Shreve is not a mere “modern ‘liberal,’ twentieth century reader, who is basically rational, skeptical, without any special concern for history, and pretty well emancipated from the ties of family, race, or section” (C. Brooks, *Yoknapatawpha* 313), but his zeal in the storytelling shows his sincere interest in the patriarchal story, though he cannot share the racial obsession implicated in the *Southern* patriarchal story.

The repression of their knowledge about Bon’s lineage then enables Quentin and Shreve to explore the Sutpens’ story as if it were a universal story of patriarchy. Hosam Aboul-Ela points
out that the reason Shreve is attracted to the Sutpens’ story together with Quentin is affinity between the post-Reconstruction South and Canada in terms of their economic dependence on the U.S. North (143-44). This observation is convincing especially considering Quentin’s own situation, the decline of the Compsons and their need to send him to Harvard by selling their land; as Rosa says, “there is little left in the South for a young man” (AA 5).

Shreve, as well as Quentin, thus seeks for a link to the potent father at the Northern university. The “cold room” of Quentin and Shreve is, the narrator says,

dedicated to that best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen’s morality and Miss Coldfield’s demonising—this room not only dedicated to it but set aside for it and suitably so since it would be here above any other place that it (the logic and the morality) could do the least amount of harm;—the two of them back to back as though at the last ditch, saying No to Quentin’s Mississippi shade who in life had acted and reacted to the minimum of logic and morality, who dying had escaped it completely, who dead remained not only indifferent but impervious to it, somehow a thousand times more potent and alive. (225)

This passage defies an easy interpretation, but the context implies that Sutpen’s morality mentioned here is not the “personal morality” but that of the patriarchal and paternalist South which (mis)calculates the balance between guilt and compensation by ignoring the contradictions in that very morality and eventually brings him retaliation by the victims of those contradictions. Then the quote shows that Quentin and Shreve’s narrative is also implicitly following the
patriarchal logic and morality (and so is Rosa’s as we shall see later). Far removed from the South, however, they seem to be invulnerable to the contradictions of the South, and they refuse the melancholic preservation of the lost, defeated father represented by Sutpen. The dead Sutpen is also invulnerable because now dead he does not have to care about the dysfunctional Southern logic and morality whose contradictions he could barely repress in life. Only by having failed and been dead without revealing the fatal truth can he become the transcendent father figure of the community that is handed down from father to son through melancholic repetitions of the inconclusive narratives, of failures to complete the story.\footnote{In a similar vein, Carolyn Porter argues that the dead fathers become the effective symbolic fathers by not realizing that they are dead. See Porter, “Symbolic” 83-88.} Now fully aware of this structure, Quentin and Shreve in the North start looking for a way to achieve the patriarchal ideal of male kinship or the narcissistic self-relation of the father instead of mere preservation of the ideal through repetitive failures.

Retracing Sutpen’s career, Quentin and Shreve must realize the difficulty of achieving the patriarchal ideal whether it may be because of the necessary intervention of women or because of the temporal gap between father and son. It is suggestive that Sutpen is killed by Wash with a scythe, a symbol of Father Time. It implies that his design does not enable him to overcome the temporal gap in patriarchy and that he cannot throw away his own past as a poor white boy (though the ideal is preserved in melancholia as long as the problem is conceived to be the universal temporal gap in this way). Quentin and Shreve then shift their focus on the fraternal relationship between Henry and Bon, who get out of the filial relationship, Henry by repudiating his birthright and Bon by being denied acknowledgment by his father. The Quentin-Shreve
narrative is still concerned with love and blood, but not for the sake of the diachronic, genealogical continuity of patrilineage. They are rather absorbed into the synchronic and homoerotic identification of the brothers without the father, the true path to the achievement of the Southern father’s ideal, and in that process Quentin and Shreve gradually identify with each other through their storytelling that explores the fraternal relationship between Henry and Bon.

Importantly, it is expressed not as individual identification between them, but as an establishment of the community of the youth. The narrator says: “there was now not two of them but four, the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more and less than twins, the heart and blood of youth . . . strong enough for two, for two thousand, for all” (236). It seems to them that the blood unites all eternally and universally, defying chronological or genealogical time: “[It did not matter] what faces and what names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed—the blood, the immortal brief recent intransient blood which could hold honor above slothy unregret and love above fat and easy shame” (237). Then, even the absence or uncertainty of the father and the mother’s antipathy toward the father are now for them felicity to let them unite through youthful blood and passion in all-inclusive communal kinship, as Shreve imagines through Bon:

no man had a father, no one personal Porto Rico or Haiti, but all mother faces which ever bred swooping down at those almost calculable moments out of some obscure ancient general affronting and outraging which the actual living articulate meat had not even suffered but merely inherited; all boy flesh that walked and breathed stemming from that one ambiguous eluded dark fatherhead and so
brothered perennial and ubiquitous everywhere under the sun— (239-40)

The third-person narrator emphasizes that Quentin and Shreve’s narrative is a collaborative act in which their thoughts merge together: “it was Shreve speaking, though . . . it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal” (243). Eventually they totally identify with Henry and Bon: “now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither” (280).

The collaborative narrative of Quentin and Shreve, which might be called “interior dialogue” (Ohashi 201), finally transforms itself into an impossible, improbable third-person narrative (improbable in the sense that it is extremely difficult to imagine them actually speaking aloud or even visualizing in mind the scene). François Pitavy rightly says that “no recognizable voice . . . tells the confrontation of Sutpen and his son, then of the two half-brothers, in the Carolinian night: it is seen immediately” (“Narrative” 203). Here is the self-relation of the transcendent voice; the Quentin-Shreve narrative, as it were, acquires the omniscient “God’s point of view” (Hiraishi, Shosetsu 183, my translation), as if they became a transcendent father, an Emersonian “transparent eye-ball” (Emerson 10), a part of God or “FATHER,” which, in the “strange calm of realism” (Hiraishi, Shosetsu 185, my translation), sees through and divulges the truth about Bon and Henry.

This Quentin-Shreve narrative has often been valorized as an alternative, ideal way of community formation. For example, Carolyn Porter sees it as the establishment of an ideal intersubjective community and asserts that “Shreve and Quentin, in their joint act of creation,
have accomplished what no one else in the novel could have, and this because they do it together, in act of love, not vengeance” (Seeing 270). In the novel, it is said that in their collaborative narrative, “each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other—faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived—in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false” (AA 253). The narrator even grants that their narrative is “probably true enough” (268).

However, Quentin and Shreve’s intersubjective community itself basically does not violate the patriarchal logic and it does not do so even with its homoerotic connotations; homoeroticism is tolerated or even desired in patriarchy as we have seen above—after all, their communal narrative is based on an ideal love preconceived within the existent frames of recognition. Quentin and Shreve achieve the narcissistic identification of men with each other by displacing it from the diachronic filial relation to the synchronic fraternal relation in which there is no temporal gap between the identifying men. It is not because they are living in the same era, for they identify with Henry and Bon, too. Rather, it is possible because it dispenses with the

38 Here are some other examples: Andrea Dimino interprets it as one of “liberating modes of writing” inspired by Rosa’s narrative in Chapter 5, which, in Dimino’s view, embodies intersubjective affiliation (“Miss Rosa” 193), and Martin Kreiswirth also valorizes the “happy marriage” as an expression of “transference-love” (118), a kind of intersubjective relation that becomes a model for postmodern intertextuality enabled by “the multiple affective relationships between the tellers and the told” (119). I would argue that since affection is not exempt from ideological mediation—love per se does not justify anything—if Quentin and Shreve’s relation is intersubjective, it is not liberating for others, especially women, and is criticized by Rosa’s narrative as I argue below.

39 For detailed analysis about the homoerotic descriptions of Quentin and Shreve, see Pearson.
intervention of women, which after all is what the patriarchal structure paraphrases as the temporal gap. The Quentin-Shreve narrative is aptly called “some happy marriage of speaking and hearing” (253), and indeed it is a happy marriage exempt from unkin blood which interferes men’s pure identification, a male kinship achieved through the fraternal and homoerotic collaborative storytelling, not through the handing down of a story from father to son. Heterosexual relationship necessary for the genealogical continuity of men is thus replaced by homoerotic desire between men. And when the story is completely shared, it needs neither speaker nor listener—it does not have to be vocally repeated, there no longer being a gap between the speaker and the listener. The community thus formed is a narcissistic one based on the self-relation or “homo-ness” (Bibler 71-72) of the speaker-listeners who identify with each other, and their queer intersubjective relation is not a subversive portrait of an “alternative community” (Duvall, *Faulkner’s* 118), but the very ideal of the patriarchal community.40

40 Stephen M. Ross points out that “Faulkner’s discourse habitually disengages voice from person so that individuals are taken out of themselves and implanted in a broader communal nexus defined in part by qualities given to voice ‘as such,’ that is, as separated from human speech as source” (*Fictions* 26). Ross calls this kind of voice “phenomenal voice,” and defines it as a phenomenon that “exists outside of particular speech acts, residing in the world as object or event” (20). Naturally he does not mention the Quentin-Shreve narrative, which is ungraspable in terms of realistic phenomena. But Ross’s description of phenomenal voice suggests that its ultimate form is the impersonal, transcendent voice of the Quentin-Shreve narrative:

Voice serves as one force, fundamental in Faulkner, of intersubjectivity. Language as communication can bind people together, but beyond the talking, the gossip, and the story telling that cement a community like Jefferson, Faulkner’s discourse creates “in chanting measures beyond the need for words” a phenomenal voice such that it embodies the communal relation itself, in either the affirmative symbolic sense of communion and rejuvenating harmony or in the negative symbolic senses of entrapment, suffocation, and loss of individuality. (21-22) Quentin does have the senses of communion and entrapment while speaking with Shreve, but eventually the “happy marriage” in which there is no speaker nor listener seems to establish an ideal intersubjective community. What *Absalom* further elucidates is, however, that even that transcendent voice is ideologically mediated, or more precisely, that voice is the voice of the
Nevertheless, it also suggests that if they pursue it too much, if they really achieve their synchronic homoerotic desire, it brings about a dangerous consequence for the patriarchal community, because it means the end of its diachronic continuity. Therefore, whenever their homoeroticism is suggested, the room becomes “tomblike” (AA 240, 260, 268, 275, 276). The eternity of the youth’s identification then strangely resembles the “eternal damnation” in hell which incest would give to Henry, Bon, Judith, and Sutpen (277). Incest is another way to preserve the purity or homo-ness of the father, but it also hinders the expansion of kinship and enduring establishment of the patriarchal community; the achievement of purity, the exclusion of unkin blood, is also the stasis and death of the father in reality. Once the unkin blood of Judith turns out to be kin blood for Bon, it ceases to be a perfect incest, and instead becomes deathly stasis. Consequently, incest would make them trapped in the solipsistic hell of the father, in which the three of them—Henry, Bon, and Judith—are “just illusions he [Sutpen] begot” (277). Therefore, it must not be actually consummated though the idea of incest does not conflict with the patriarchal logic. It is against “the old heredity and training” for Henry (277). His image of hell here is obviously reflected in that of Quentin, who, according to “Appendix: The Compsons,” “loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian community’s ideology.

41 To give just an example of this, after Shreve has mentioned “all boy flesh that walked and breathed stemming from that one ambiguous eluded dark fatherhead and so brothered perennial and ubiquitous everywhere under the sun,” both homoeroticism and death are foregrounded: “They stared at one another—glared rather—their quiet regular breathing vaporising faintly and steadily in the now tomblike air. There was something curious in the way they looked at one another, curious and quiet and profoundly intent, not at all as two young men might look at each other but almost as a youth and a very young girl might out of virginity itself” (240). As for homoeroticism and death in the Quentin-Shreve relationship, See also Bibler 72.
concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires” (637). Quentin’s imagined incest is a melancholic preservation of the ideal qua unconsummated love, and so is Henry’s, at least while unachieved. And unlike these, Quentin and Shreve’s identification is achieved.

Matthews in The Play of Faulkner’s Language also evaluates the Quentin-Shreve narrative as a prime mode of narration because in it “meaning is conferred to the story through acts of loving partnership in telling rather than discovered through patient logical research” (120). Quentin and Shreve are not engaged in solipsistic sheer improvisation but respect “many (often unspeakable) certitudes in the narratives,” and thereby enact “a version of the story that is personally and affectively ‘true’” while the Quentin-Shreve narrative endlessly defers the attainment of conclusive meaning in the structure similar to différance (120-21). This is practically an evaluation of the Quentin-Shreve narrative as the melancholic preservation of the unconsummated ideals of the lost father.

However, Quentin and Shreve do reach a conclusion—Bon’s black blood—that is not only personally and affectively but objectively and logically true enough. It is true enough because it is the only conceivable conclusion within the patriarchal logic of the South by which Henry and Bon must also have abided—if Bon was black, everything adds up, and that is the original stone lost in water. (Even for Henry, Bon’s blackness must have been a convincing explanation of his father’s behavior, so that in their imagination Quentin and Shreve have Henry immediately believe it without any proof.) In order to retrieve the lost stone, Quentin needs to
become the transcendent father that overcomes the temporal gap by achieving homo-ness with Shreve and also with Henry and Bon. In that process, he shares not only passions but also the community’s code and morality with them, and thoroughly examines the ripple space created by the stone and becomes aware of the historically specific patriarchal logic of the South implicitly working within the seemingly universal structure of repeated deferral to realize that the lost stone is after all a historically specific object, and that the true problem of homo-ness in this Southern community is not the incestuous hell of deadly stasis but the abiding possibility of interracial love and the cancellation of the essentialized racial and social divide itself as its result. In their collaborative storytelling, Quentin and Shreve make sure that incestuous love cannot be the reason Henry killed Bon, and when they achieve identification at last, they inevitably notice that this is after all a Southern patriarchal story in which the unconsummated incestuous love is at best a dissimulating excuse to cover up the more fundamental and destructive contradictions concerning the racial and familial ideals of the South, and that this identification is fatal.

As discussed above, Henry’s murder of Bon is also an achievement of the Southern patriarchal ideal, the exclusion of the black man from the family; yet Henry is ruined because Bon does not cease to be a family member, an object of Henry’s narcissistic desire. If it were not for familial affective bond, Henry did not have to kill Bon; then he or Sutpen could make it public that Bon is black and not eligible for marriage with Judith. However, Henry, on behalf of Sutpen, cannot but kill Bon because of his and his father’s love toward the black family. The murder is then a proof of love, and penetration by the bullet can be construed as a displaced form of paternal acknowledgment (as well as homoerotic identification) through the touch of flesh
which Bon covets in order to feel what Henry calls “that rapport of blood” (AA 282), hence the achievement of the patriarchal ideal in this sense, too. As a result, however, Henry at once identifies with and kills Bon, and therefore he kills himself, excluding himself from the white family. At the very moment of the achievement of ideal identification, Henry’s identity and the family’s and the community’s foundational logic are killed together with Bon, who now turns out to have truly been “the dynamite which destroys the house and the family and maybe even the whole community” (245). The consummation of the ideal thus becomes its destruction. The fraternal and homoerotic love between Henry and Bon as well as between Quentin and Shreve is fully mediated and within the framework of the Southern patriarchal logic. All the more for it, it becomes fatal when it turns out to have actually been ineffable from the beginning, and thus destroys the division between the inside and outside of the family or community, the accepted forms of love and the foreclosed ones, and black and white. The repeated story of the Sutpens—as well as the insistent dream of the Southern father—thus comes to a decisive end.\textsuperscript{42} Quentin relives Henry’s lethal pronouncement of ineffable love himself, and it prevents him from dealing with the Sutpens’ story as an individual anomalous case of illegitimate interracial love. With Shreve as accomplice and witness, he in a sense experiences it even more undeniably than Henry. He even replicates Henry’s gesture of clinging to the society’s norms by the repeated answer, “I don’t hate it,” to Shreve’s question, “Why do you hate the South?,” thus

\textsuperscript{42} James A. Snead’s observation that “absolute merging . . . betokens the death of identity” or that “[m]erging is in every sense ‘the end of narrative’” is right (\textit{Figures} 120). Snead pays attention to the merging of the gender, racial, and class opposites in Faulkner’s works, but it is notable that in \textit{Absalom} the merging occurs only as an effect of the achievement of supposedly white male identification and the exclusion of blacks and women to establish sameness and difference.
summarizingly performing a melancholic repetition once again (303). In the final chapter, Quentin’s body lying on the bed is overlapped with Henry’s emaciated dying body. His white identity being irrevocably undermined, the body “jerk[s] all over, violently and uncontrollably” (288). Now the past ideal to give order and meaning to the world is destroyed, what is left for Quentin is this material body which is uncontrollable and indefinable, never given any meaning in the existent frames of recognition. Since Quentin is identifying with Bon as well as with Henry when the truth is divulged, he experiences the moment not only when his beloved brother becomes black, but also when he himself is made black. This means not only that incest may not insure genealogical purity, but that even fraternal identification does not insure pure whiteness, and therefore that whiteness is always already tainted. His integrity as a white subject is thus forever lost, and the Southern ideology cannot sustain itself now. The novel thus performs a kind of “working through,” while Quentin refuses to sever his attachment to the dead ideology whose death is now undeniable. Consequently, his subjecthood is already dead before the death of his body. In The Sound and the Fury, Quentin dies by drowning himself in the Charles River; in

43 Doreen Fowler valorizes Quentin’s identification with Henry in the final chapter as a “postmodern awareness” that “existence is one, fluid, and continuous; and identity and meaning are human constructions” (“Revising” 106). Her claim is that Quentin commits suicide because this awareness “arrives too late for Quentin” (106). His awareness, however, is rather that the foundation of subjecthood, identity and meaning has been destroyed, and as a result he loses the legibility of his existence, and cannot posit any cognitive frames, even the one called postmodern, while he cannot throw away his “desire to be,” or attachment to the now lost foundation. This is precisely the reason why he commits suicide—he perishes with the foundation. And the awareness cannot arrive for a melancholic subject like Quentin without being too late since the postponement of the revelation sustains his subjecthood.

44 In Butlerian terms I discussed in the first chapter, Quentin clings to his melancholia, his desire to be surpassing his desire to live, and since the lost ideals preserved in melancholia are irrevocably destroyed, his persistence in melancholic identification with them brings him his own death.
*Absalom*, by identifying with Charles Bon.

Quentin and Shreve’s disclosure of Bon’s black blood shows that what Henry as well as Sutpen sought for was the impossible pure kinship, which is ultimately nothing but white brotherhood, and that it is also Quentin’s own aspiration; otherwise he would not be so shocked by the hidden truth, the long-concealed trauma of the Southern father. And because it is a matter of brotherhood rather than filiation, it is Quentin and Henry, not Mr. Compson and Sutpen, who have to take the full brunt of the trauma—with Shreve and Bon as partners, they achieve the timeless fraternal identification which unites four of them and reveal that the South has been espousing this dream of pure white brotherhood from the antebellum era till the present Jim Crow era, in which Quentin lives.

This identification, this “happy marriage” breaks down when the historical and regional specificity of the story—the South’s obsession with the racial divide—is exposed, and we witness the “painful disintegration of the communion between Quentin and Shreve” in the final chapter (Kartiganer 104). For, the Canadian Shreve does not have to cling to the strict racial ideology which the Southerners including Quentin refuse to relinquish. At the end of the novel, he mockingly challenges Quentin’s obstinate melancholic attachment to the Southern ideology, saying:

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

This is a biting sarcasm against the white supremacy of the Southern patriarchy as it suggests that the transcendent father may always already be black like the “wraithlike and insubstantial,” omnipresent Jim Bond (300). It is, therefore, an indictment against the intolerant ideology of the historically specific region. The name of Jim Bond, the one produced and left alone as the ultimate consequence of the story of ineffable love, is then highly ironic because it “reminds us that the bondsman of slavery continue to haunt the bonds of kinship” and “thus allegorizes how kinship and slavery are implicated in one another” (Peterson 258).

The peculiar future anterior tense of the last sentence, moreover, shows that Absalom does not valorize the compulsive repetitions of patriarchal melancholia without mourning or timeless fraternal identification. It announces the opening up of an entirely different conception of temporality made possible by the revelation of ineffable love, which pulls down the very foundation of one’s identity and being since in the novel’s world, what one loves is what one is. Quentin and Shreve discover that Sutpen and Henry noticed that their love toward Bon had been ineffable only after they had irrevocably fostered it and tried to repress the knowledge of Bon’s black blood. And the two young men do so only after they themselves have been inextricably involved in the story of love and relive the traumatic experience of the belated revelation of ineffable love. Absalom thus dramatizes how the meaning of an act, event, or even affection, changes after the fact, belatedly.
Moreover, it further complicates the temporality of subject formation: it makes us realize that, in an unexpected way, one will possibly have been something different from what one thinks oneself to be. The discovery of ineffable love will permanently shake up one’s identity and being, because it means that the love one has felt and expressed suddenly turns out to have been different from what one has thought it to be, which in turn means that one is not and has not been what one has thought oneself to be. As a matter of course, then, there is an abiding possibility that sometime in the future it will turn out that one will have been different from what one now thinks oneself to be. The present being can be radically transformed or die, as it were, while another life will then be attributed to it. As Peterson pertinently says, Shreve’s remark means that “the racial amalgamation that he imagines as taking place in some future past will have already divided his present/presence” (243). Yet the scope of the novel’s critique is not limited to the specific racial problem. Since the problem of race in Absalom is deeply related to the general structure of subject formation through foreclosure (particularly the foreclosure of certain forms of attachment), this divided time is the temporality of the subject in general that gets out of melancholic repetitions.

The thorough exploration of the past thus opens up the time of the future anterior—this is the peculiar temporality of Absalom. Then, one ceases to be a ghost whose life is haunted by the unreachable and unchangeable past with which one repeatedly tries and fails to accord, but one’s present subjecthood is divided by the ever-uncertain future, when even the meaning of the past is also fluidized and can be radically changed belatedly. It is not merely the revision of the meaning of certain past events, much less a shift from ignorance to knowledge. It changes the frames of
recognition themselves, including the understanding of the way the frames are formed and changed. Therefore, I agree with Richard Moreland when he says that *Absalom* exceeds modernism (taken as literature of compulsive, melancholic repetitions), but saying that Faulkner’s repetition is “a repetition with difference” is not enough (32). *Absalom* drives the repeated story into the dead end beyond which the repetition or storytelling itself becomes impossible without a fundamental change of the story’s meaning and the renunciation of the existent frames of recognition as well as of an expectation for a permanently coherent meaning. This is not the resignation of coherent meaning as such, for a coherent meaning can be obtained. Yet it is done through the discovery of what Toni Morrison calls “a drop of black blood that means everything and nothing” (“Art” 101)—the achievement of a coherent meaning is the very moment of its destruction when the full picture of the existent frames and their limits are exposed and overcome. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison argues:

> Does Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* after its protracted search for the telling African blood, leave us with just such an image of snow and the eradication of race? Not quite. Shreve sees himself as the inheritor of the blood of African kings; the snow apparently is the wasteland of unmeaning, unfathomable whiteness. (58)

I would add to this that the whiteness of the snow turns out to represent unmeaning in the white discourse when Shreve the achiever of white fraternal identification becomes the inheritor of another, black genealogy because pure whiteness, when attained, becomes a non-color of contamination that destroys the very concept of color and race, nullifying the distinction between

45 As for the relationship between modernism and compulsive repetitions, see also O’Donnell 33-34.
black and white which supports the ideal of the transcendental Southern father. This whiteness of
the snow is therefore equivalent to that advocated by Ishmael in *Moby Dick*:46

Or is it, that as an essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence
of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that
there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a
colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? (Melville 1001)

*Absalom* forces the reader, together with Quentin, to penetrate this true nature of
whiteness and reconceptualize genealogy, race, and love. And the novel demonstrates that this
revelation happens not because of sheer loathing but because of obsessive attachment which
cannot be content with the melancholic preservation of its object as lost or unconsummated but
manages to attain it, even as that attainment reveals the fundamental contradictions that undo the
present possibility of attachment. The author’s position then overlaps with Quentin’s to a certain
extent; his thorough exploration of and fervent attachment to his own Southern tradition makes
him aware of the contradictions in it.47 But Faulkner did not choose death; he chose to write
down the story of the destruction of his own tradition and the emergence of the future anterior
temporality in place of Quentin.

46 I owe this association to Morrison’s argument on *Moby Dick*’s “The Whiteness of the Whale”
chapter in her “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” (14-18). She sees in Ishmael’s notion of
whiteness in that chapter an example of what she calls “unspeakable things unspoken,” “the
ineffable,” or the “informing and determining Afro-American presence in traditional American
literature” (11, 17, 18), and I find the same in Shreve’s snow.
47 Kevin Railey reports Faulkner’s display of attachment to the Southern tradition and his
unstable sense of identity (29-46).
Chapter 4
The Incorrigible Body of Rosa and the Perishable Body of Judith

Quentin and Shreve’s queer relation momentarily achieves the ideal patriarchal homoness and thereby exposes its limits and the self-division of the white male subject. In this sense, the Quentin-Shreve narrative is men’s story through and through. The reappearance of Rosa in the final chapter—after the patriarchal story has broken down—then reminds us of the alienated and almost excluded status of the females in the patriarchal system, of which Quentin and Shreve take little notice in their version of the story. The end of the Sutpens’ story as a male-centered patriarchal story prompts us to look at its other aspects seen from the side of the alienated and the excluded in its coda. Thus, Shreve, now awaken from the Southern patriarchal dream, incites Quentin to recall the memory of Rosa, saying that Quentin does not know not only about the South but also about Rosa: “You don’t even know about her. Except that she refused at the last to be a ghost. That after almost fifty years she couldn’t reconcile herself to letting him lie dead in peace. That even after fifty years she not only could get up and go out there to finish up what she found she hadn’t quite completed” (AA 290). To refuse to be a ghost is, as I discussed above, to get out of melancholic repetitions and expose the foreclosed, primarily by achieving a yet-unconsummated ideal. Then, what is Rosa’s ideal, and what foreclosed elements does she discover?

Importantly, Quentin’s own refusal to be a ghost, his quest for the patriarchal ideal, is
triggered by Rosa’s quest. Not only does she attract his attention to the Sutpens’ story through her narrative, but also forces him to pass the barred door of the patriarchal house and achieve the fatal identification with the dying Henry, which he represses until the last chapter. Even before they reach the Sutpen house, Quentin is aware of the danger inherent in passing the barred door, and yet at the same time he is almost haunted by Rosa’s obstinate will to do so: “presently he found himself repeating her words: ‘If we can just get to the house, get inside the house,’ telling himself, recovering himself in that same breath: ‘I am not afraid. I just dont want to be here. I just dont want to know whatever it is she keeps hidden in it’” (293). Ultimately, what leads Quentin to the exploration is not the patriarchal father’s imperative or his own obsession—since they are mostly content with melancholic repetitions—but Rosa’s will to break melancholia. In this sense, as Erica Plouffe Lazure argues, “Rosa is the central catalyst of the novel” (480), though this fact is also obfuscated until the last chapter. At the beginning of Chapter 6, Mr. Compson’s letter announcing Rosa’s death urges Quentin to recall their visiting the Sutpen house, to remember how he thought “let’s dont find him or it, try to find him or it, risk disturbing him or it” (AA 143), but he puts off the revelation of the details and starts to be engaged in the fraternal collaborative storytelling with Shreve, which is the only way for him to retrace the footsteps of the supposedly ideal father figure and decisively open the closed door behind which the devastating truth is hidden.

But why is it Rosa that drives Quentin into the quest? My answer would be because Rosa is confronted with the sheer impossibility to be a social subject. As a result, she becomes the character who has the acutest “desire to be” in this novel—so acute that she refuses to satisfy
herself by repetitive, melancholic failures to open the door and achieve her ideal. Shreve’s outside perspective as well as his own desire to participate in the patriarchal network of kinship allows him to perceive the essential problem for Rosa. He therefore replies to Quentin’s remark about Rosa at the beginning of Chapter 6 as follows:

“No, neither aunt cousin nor uncle Rosa. Miss Rosa. Miss Rosa Coldfield, an old lady that died young of outrage in 1866 in summer” and then Shreve, “You mean she was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you? then what did she die for?” (142)

Quentin inadvertently discloses Rosa’s lack of her position in the network of patriarchal kinship, or “the denied kinship to the female/feminine” (Gwin, “Silencing” 167), and Shreve’s reply represents Rosa’s desire to be included in the kinship which seemingly connects all white people but in which virgins’ position is actually suspended as unkin blood necessary for the dialectical expansion of white male kinship, which function Rosa failed to fulfill because she broke her engagement to Sutpen in 1866 to save her respectability as a daughter of the decent white family. Moreover, it is surmised that now about sixty-five years old at the present time of the novel, she has lost her reproductive faculty. In the outrageous logic of patriarchy, she even ceases to be the dialectical unkin blood, and is almost totally dead as a social subject. Henry’s return to the Sutpen house is, then, the revived last chance for her “to be an aunt to Henry” (Edenfield 65), and to be barely included in the kinship as an aunt, or a vicarious mother, by fulfilling what “she hadn’t quite completed,” fulfilling her sister Ellen’s will by saving Henry. Shreve’s half-bantering repetition of “Aunt Rosa” is highly ironic; it is what she wants but fails to be.
Rosa is not a rebel against the society’s moral values; rather, she tries, as does Quentin, to abide by them so faithfully as to reveal their contradictions and fundamental impossibility. This is the basic structure of Absalom, and we cannot simply see her as resistant to the male dominant society. As Olivia Carr Edenfield rightly points out, “what compounds Rosa's frustration is her inability to fit into any of the roles that she should have been able to take for granted” (58). What Rosa wants is then to play a role in that system, but that role is inseparable from kinship. The patriarchal logic dictates that for virgins the almost only legitimate form of love is the one which results in marriage and childbirth, to become a wife and mother. But Sutpen’s brutalizing suggestion that “they breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry” deprived her of the apparently only chance for her to marry in a decent way appropriate to a Southern lady (AA 144), to participate in the patriarchal kinship through the only legitimate form of love and sexuality available to her “in a time when most of the young men whom [she] would have known ordinarily were dead on lost battlefields” (12). Being deprived of the only possibility of love (which is also the only possibility to give expression to her sexuality) is synonymous to being dead, and therefore Rosa says: “my life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago, since anyone who even had as little to call living as I had had up to that time would not call what I have had since, living” (12). In principle, for women in the Southern patriarchy, to live is to love, and to love is to marry, and marry as a decent Southern lady.

48 Richard Godden’s argument about Rosa’s goal is valuable here. Opposing critics who, relying on French cultural and feminist theories, assume that Rosa is subversive, he asserts that “Rosa does not seek to bring down the mansion of Patriarchy (self, phallus, and signifier) but to live in a planter’s house” (Fiction 92).
Carolyn Porter opposes feminist psychoanalytic critics who try to valorize Faulkner’s female characters by essentializing the female domain outside the symbolic order, and sees a more viable subversive strategy in Rosa’s speech. According to her, insofar as women are always supposed to be silent in the symbolic domain and figured as “absence, separation and loss, and so forth” in the imaginary, their own voices remain forever excluded from the symbolic and do not have power to alter it (“Symbolic” 80). Then, Porter argues that women in Faulkner do speak, appropriating the male-dominated language, Rosa being a representative figure of them. In her argument, they become a speaking subject as a woman one half of whom is subordinated to the symbolic order but the other half is outside it. This ambivalent position, according to Porter, enables them to speak subversively from within the symbolic. In Rosa’s case, it is the position of “aunt” that is actually not an aunt to anyone:

Rosa would seem to be both excluded and adamantly resistant to the terms of her exclusion. Unlike her own aunt, Rosa does not run away from the father’s house . . . to escape with a man. Like Sutpen, she insists upon the full letter of the law, not to mention all the ingredients of her adolescent fantasies of love and marriage. Once denied the chance to realize in the flesh the full terms of marriage and motherhood, Rosa in her career as aunt only serves to reveal the denials on which that position is predicated, at least in this novel. (116)

It is true that Rosa’s unstable position in the community reveals “the denials on which that position is predicated,” and that she “insists upon the full letter of the law,” in spite of, or rather because of, her inability to fit into any stable position.
But then, if we regard Rosa’s speech as a willful “campaign of revenge” against the patriarchal economy as Porter does (110), it will trivialize the workings of the desire to be and attachment to foreclosure which Faulkner so thoroughly explores in his fiction. For example, Rosa remains single because she refuses Sutpen’s outrageous suggestion to her. Porter interprets this act as follows: “what Rosa refuses is the status and function of the wife and mother under patriarchy. . . . Rosa chooses to remain a virgin, and insofar as her anger flows from her consequent exclusion from any legitimate domain for enacting her sexual desires . . . her protest is waged on behalf of her body” (109). As I examine more closely below, however, Rosa’s speech is full of grudge over her body which she has been deprived of any ways to domesticate in compliance with the society’s familial logic, and she blames not the patriarchal system itself but her own body and Sutpen’s personal vice. This illuminates her complicity with the society’s ideology concerning family, or race, class, gender and sexuality, expressed in the form of her attachment to subjection, to foreclosure, to attachment itself, or to the possibility of love. If Rosa’s ambivalent position as a speaking subject (in which she is actually not even given full status as aunt) gives her a critical power, what is enacted is not a willful resistance as Porter contends. Criticalness is rather in Rosa’s insistence to abide by the logic and morality of the community. Her attempt fails inevitably, but all the more grandly because she is so faithful to the tradition she is attached to, and in so doing she reveals the fundamental defects of the patriarchal society’s norms which are supposed to enable her to “be” but fails to create an efficacious domain of the speakable to define her body.

Her intense attachment also makes her notice the melancholic structure she is involved in,
but she wavers at the threshold of the barred door, or the way out of melancholia. Still, her final decision to cross the threshold at last together with Quentin lets us see the true picture of what lies beyond the door. Quentin finds there the potential blackness of the Southern father and therefore the dissolution of the concept of race itself, and he loses a way to define his body. Rosa, too, seems to keep interracial love behind the door, but her speech obsessed with domesticating her body also suggests her awareness and repression of the true brutalized position of the women in patriarchy, which Sutpen does not try to conceal while striving to conceal the brutalization of the poor white males, and which Quentin and Shreve do not care about since they aim to banish female materiality from white kinship to achieve fraternal identification. Rosa’s return in the last chapter then urges us to criticize these paternal perspectives. Moreover, it also urges us to reread Judith, particularly the episode about Bon’s letter she handed to Quentin’s grandmother, which male characters have misunderstood and misappropriated. Bon’s letter shows a hope for the body and temporality liberated from the framework imposed by the Old South, but Quentin translates it as a kind of pessimistic melancholia. On the other hand, Mr. Compson makes use of Judith’s interpretation of the letter for his own purpose, but when we reread it retrospectively after the last chapter of the novel, it can represent a moral of the future anterior which the novel offers as an alternative to the South’s logic and morality.

Then, let us first examine Rosa’s awareness and repression of female brutalization. Mr. Compson reports that when Sutpen picked up Ellen, women in Jefferson already knew that for him a “wife” was no different than “livestock or slaves” (AA 31). What shocked Rosa is that
Sutpen really treated her like a brute, not a “Southern gentlewoman” (137), and “spoke the bald outrageous words exactly as if he were consulting with Jones or with some other man about a bitch dog or a cow or mare” (136). This distinction between the brute and the lady reflects Rosa’s class consciousness. She obviously does not share Sutpen’s egalitarian paternalistic impulse toward white males (which is atypical of antebellum planters as discussed above), and distinguishes “gentlefolks, [her] own kind” and the “very scum and riffraff who could not have approached the [Sutpen] house itself under any circumstances, not even from the rear” (20).

Shreve guesses that “she couldn’t even tell [what happened between Sutpen and her] because of who her successor was . . ., that she might conceivably have ever suffered a situation where she could or would have to decline any office which her successor could have been deemed worthy, even by a demon, to fill” (144-45). Rosa looks down on poor whites, and calls Wash “that brute progenitor of brutes whose granddaughter was to supplant me” (107). She is enraged by the fact that there was no difference between them and her in Sutpen’s eyes, and fears the divulgation of that degradation of her to the public. She needs to deny it to protect her ideal image of the Southern lady that she thinks herself to be. This does not much concern male characters, but for Rosa, it is of central importance. Thus, she gives us a perspective on the patriarchal system from the other side that exposes problems ignored by men.

As Shreve suggests, Sutpen’s remark is “the thing which husbands and fiances have been trying to invent for ten million years” (147); in other words, it is a surreptitious desire of males in the patriarchal system immodestly divulged, or “the unspoken insult to women at the base of the planter ideal” that “shockingly gets spoken” (Matthews, William 178). Even Rosa is almost
aware that it was not a personal vice of the demon but an instance of contradictions of the system itself. She claims that it was a natural thing for her to be engaged to Sutpen, and therefore, while she repeatedly says “I hold no brief for myself” (AA 12), she also says: “I defy anyone to blame me, an orphan of twenty, a young woman without resources, who should desire not only to justify her situation but to vindicate the honor of a family the good name of whose women has never been impugned, by accepting the honorable proffer of marriage from the man whose food she was forced to subsist on” (13). The problem is that however much she tries to be submitted to the social norms by behaving as a Southern lady should, there is little possibility for her to gain a legitimate role in that patriarchal system, especially after the Civil War, or that her endeavor to behave like a lady even drives her into an unladylike position. Moreover, she almost admits that Sutpen was one of the Southern “heroes,” “one of these men . . . who had fought for four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land where she had been born” (13). And she now well recognizes that those heroes including Sutpen were not good enough. Rosa says: “But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it—men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?” (13). While Sutpen’s existence is associated with “fatality and curse on the South,” the “land primed for fatality and already cursed with it” (14), that holds true for other Southern men as well. As soon as Sutpen utters the outrageous words, he ceases to be a man for a Southern lady to marry, and love toward such a man becomes illegitimate, ineffable, and if other men are also like Sutpen from the beginning, actually any love is inappropriate, illegitimate and ineffable for Rosa. As she later realizes, it is
“the death of hope and love, the death of pride and principle, and the death of everything save
the old outraged and aghast unbelieving” (136).

However, Rosa ultimately blinks at the implications of Sutpen’s outrageous remark that the South’s heroes are not ideal gentlemen, that the primary significance of the adored Southern ladies, virgins, wives and mothers is in reproduction, that they are precious only insofar as they are instrumental to it, and that love is just an excuse for the exploitation of female reproductive function. For, they would destroy her ideological ideal of love and marriage, of the full-bloomed Southern lady in love with the Southern gentleman, which is the only possible form of love, and therefore of existence for Rosa. She then tells herself that it was Sutpen that was wrong and mad, not the system itself. It was Sutpen’s personal vice that made him seek for “whatever it was that Rosa Coldfield or any young female no blood kin to him represented in whatever it was he wanted” regardless of personality and ignoring Rosa’s humanity (134). Rosa even admits not only her own madness because of her willingness to “acquiesce, succumb” to Sutpen (128), but her brutehood to a certain extent, comparing herself, who was attracted to Sutpen, to a “dog” (135). It was her personal mistake, and it degraded her, but it does not undermine the ideal image of the Southern lady. And Rosa’s momentary fascination with Sutpen must not be acknowledged as sincere love; she has to say “it was not love” (131).

Thus, Rosa becomes a ghost that looks back at the moment Sutpen spoiled the only chance for her to be an ideal Southern lady, disacknowledging the delusiveness of that ideal itself. Shreve is again right when he says that what Sutpen said is also “the thing that without harming her or giving her grounds for civil or tribal action would not only blast the little dream-
woman out of the dovecote but leave her irrevocably husbanded (and himself, husband or fiance, already safely cuckolded before she can draw breath) with the abstract carcass of outrage and revenge” (147). The husband is safely cuckolded because the woman, instead of attacking the patriarchal system itself which gives her the possibility of a social position, sticks to the memory of the outrageous moment, the rage against what seemingly prevented her from consummating an ideal love, or the man who happened not to be an ideal gentleman, and thus melancholically preserves and remains attached to the unconsummated and actually unachievable ideal which covers up the females’ true brutalized position.

Rosa has had her melancholic disposition since she was born in exchange for her mother’s life, her existence itself a proof of the entanglement of female sexuality and reproductive function and the unavoidable dedication of women’s lives to it. In Mr. Compson’s view, thus she is “a breathing indictment ubiquitous and even transferable of the entire male principle” (46-47). Moreover, she was raised by her “spinster aunt,” whom “that principle had left . . . a virgin at thirty-five” (47). Without having had any chance to marry, the aunt cannot give expression to her sexuality, and produces “a grim mausoleum air of puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness in which Miss Rosa’s childhood . . . was passed” (47). That vindictiveness paradoxically leads to complicity with the male principle; the aunt, “that vindictive consistent woman who seems to have been twice the man that Mr Coldfield was and who in very truth was not only Miss Rosa’s mother but her father too” (49), has all the stricter sense of the social codes and makes much of rituals as is seen in the episode of Ellen’s wedding, and even her rage against the town issues from the fact that the wedding ceremony was far from
an ideal one. She has no doubt about the community’s values that have produced her ideals (at least at this point—she eventually elopes and escapes from the confinement of the community). Rosa also grows her attachment to the community’s values precisely because she is denied any meaningful relation to it in the “closed masonry of females” (46). Accordingly, when her father incarcerates himself as a kind of protest to the South’s cause, she starts writing the “odes to Southern soldiers,” siding with the community (65).

In her melancholic submission to the social norms, Rosa resembles Quentin, whose faithfulness to the norms enables him to produce a plausible enough story. In her childhood, she cannot pass closed doors, either. And even as thus shunning adulthood and particularly mature sexuality beyond the doors, she develops a longing for attaining it through romantic love. The inability to attain it makes her all the more eager to know what it is supposed to be like, and she often even claims that she knows well of what she could not see or hear precisely because she did not have access to it. She thus gains a kind of prophetic perception “by listening beyond closed doors not to what she heard there but by becoming supine and receptive, incapable of either discrimination or opinion or incredulity” (52). Because of this melancholic attachment to what she cannot get and receptivity to her surrounds, the community’s ideology is kept almost intact in her. As a result, she thinks that in her childhood she could imagine what was likely to happen within that framework without being there, or perceive the danger of Sutpen’s existence to her and her family without seeing him much. Quentin’s recognition will hold good for Rosa, too: “If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain” (155).

Rosa’s prophetic sense is intensified into that of more fatalistic and precarious
melancholic repetitions after she has seen and repressed the fundamental contradiction in her ideal through Sutpen’s words. Her recapitulating narrative of what happened then has a structure of “elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale” (15). It partakes, Quentin thinks, of the quality of “a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second” (15), so that it must retrace, or melancholically repeat, a predetermined course to an already set ending, as if listening to music composed beforehand or reading a printed tale already written to the end. Because of this intensified melancholia, Rosa, listening to the unheard sound beyond the doors, almost attains the devastating knowledge of the women’s fundamentally brutalized position in the society as examined above. That knowledge would give a coherent meaning to her narrative while destroying the ideal of the Southern lady, without which everything would be meaningless for her. Her room then becomes like a “tomb” (6) in the “dim coffin-smelling gloom” (4), prefiguring the tomblike Harvard room, and even taking over the impossible design of Sutpen, who, according to Rosa, “creates within his very coffin walls his fabulous immeasurable Camelots and Carcassonnes” (129). As has been argued, Carcassonne in Faulkner is associated with artistic imagination adjacent to solipsism and death, while Absalom demonstrates that the perfection of that imagination can result in the death of the subject and its ideals that sustain it.

Certainly, Rosa’s demonizing is the same as Quentin and Shreve’s ratiocination and Sutpen’s logic and morality in that they are all attached to and follow what they think is the logic

49 See, for example, Hönnighausen, “‘Pegasusrider’” 277-78, Pitavy, “Some” 29-30, and Ross, “Lying” 168-69. Particularly Hönnighausen’s comparison of the two narrators of the short story “Carcassonne” to Quentin and Shreve has much bearing on my discussion in this chapter especially in terms of their deadly artistic imagination.
and morality of the community, and do so to such an extent that they come too close to concealed contradictions that, when revealed, will destroy their ideals. Considering this, the figure of music in the above quote is ambiguous since even if we take it as scored music, rendition can be various and there seems to be space for creative alteration. Even the figure of the printed tale also eventually contradicts Quentin’s observation. For, the future anterior temporality that the novel attains in the end is the exact opposite of this melancholic recapitulation, and gives another, self-divided meaning to the “elapsed and yet-elapsing time” of a printed tale, which now becomes not the projection of the fixed past to the present and the future, but the retrojection of the unknown future death or transformation to the present and the past that produces new interpretations through retelling and rereading. Indeed, Rosa herself is not necessarily oblivious to the structure of melancholia, nor does she blindly believe in the paternalistic and patriarchal ideal fantasy which she fostered throughout her childhood up until Sutpen’s outrageous remark and has since preserved in melancholia. After all, while speaking to Quentin, she is now determined to break into the closed door, to get out of melancholia.

Still, it does not mean that she discards the patriarchal logic of kinship; on the contrary, as discussed above, she ventures on the last attempt to be an aunt instead of just asking “Why? Why? and Why?” (135), even as she is likely to be aware that it leads to the end of everything.50

50 Deborah Garfield regards Rosa’s “[b]reaking through the door that separates her from Henry” as her choice of the “exclusive tyranny of closure over the dialectic between deferral and consummation which dominates her narrative and actions” (77). Rosa’s breaking the door is an attempt to disrupt the melancholic repetitive pattern, and in a sense, she does try to complete the closure by breaking the door, hoping to acquire a desirable social position. Nevertheless, as Garfield elaborates, the “encounter with the object behind the ‘door’ is not the culmination of narrative; it marks its ceremonial end” (77). Or we should rather say that it is both the culmination and end of narrative.
She then summons Quentin to her house not only to have him help her invade into the Sutpen house, but also to have him judge whether she “was not right” (135). Whereas she asserts that Sutpen “wasn’t a gentleman” (9), she aligns herself with the community: “they [neighbors] thought not only as I thought but as my forbears thought” (123). Yet townspeople circulate rumors unfavorable for her as she keeps concealing the fact that her marriage with Sutpen was cancelled because of his outrageous remark which implies that she is not worth being treated like a lady, the fact of her own brutalization. Especially problematic for her is the repeated phrase “Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a man but couldn’t keep him” (136, 138), because it suggests her attachment toward Sutpen. She even denies her persistent rage against Sutpen as well as possession and loss, since it may point to some attachment to Sutpen which she should not admit she had. Therefore, she says: “But I forgave him. They will tell you different, but I did. Why shouldn’t I? I had nothing to forgive; I had not lost him because I never owned him” (138). Then, Quentin can be an authority to pass a judgment and correct the townspeople for her sake as the male heir of the family that she thinks is almost kin to her own family, serving as Rosa’s “male agent which her society has decreed is the only effective means of inscribing self on . . . patriarchy” (Coleman 428). Though Rosa’s gesture of denial is also a symptom of melancholia and within the Southern patriarchal system, her move toward a conclusive meaning can be a step out of melancholic repetitions. Her long speech in Chapter 5 shows that she understands the structure of melancholia quite accurately and she even criticizes her former attitudes, though it partly contributes to denying her affection toward Sutpen as delusory and insincere.

Rosa’s understanding of and ambivalent attitude toward melancholia is everywhere in
this chapter, and she expresses it particularly in relation to the problem of how to domesticate her sexual desire, which in the patriarchal logic can be fulfilled only by marriage and reproduction, for it is the only possible form of love for her and only way to make her a socially legitimate being. She ascribes her attraction to Sutpen to the function of “the incorrigible flesh” (AA 132), and “that hand [of Sutpen] put on [her] head” at the time of the proposal becomes for her the last part of Sutpen’s “ukase” she cannot refuse (132). Later her flesh is associated with hunger and will to survive rather than sexual desire, especially in townspeople’s eyes, as “dire necessity, the brute inexplicable flesh’s stubborn will to live,” as if to deny female sexuality (138). However, when Rosa says, “I was saved; mine was to be some later, colder sacrifice when we—I—should be free of all excuse of the surprised importunate traitorous flesh,” her flesh seems to be more closely connected to uncontrollable and unfulfilled sexual desire even as still brutalized (133). (And it seems that her menopause implied here relieves her of the pressure for the legitimate expression of her sexuality through marriage and reproduction and thereby both allows and forces her to look back at her failure to marry more thoroughly than just asking “Why?” repeatedly.) The touch of the flesh with another flesh is then a momentary fulfillment of her desire. But following the novel’s principle, the moment of fulfillment is also the moment of the destruction of the ideals. Thus, Sutpen’s touch is inescapably followed by his outrageous words, which ruthlessly divulge that the woman is always brutalized in this society—that female sexuality must be domesticated through marriage is itself a proof of the society’s brutalizing perspective toward her. But she obfuscates this truth by demonizing Sutpen, making it his personal vice and thereby melancholically preserving the ideals of the Southern gentleman and
Rosa’s narrative is full of such moments: the touch of flesh, the dangerous revelation of contradictions, repression, and dissimulating melancholia. The first touch of flesh told in Chapter 5 can be the most dangerous one because it addresses the racial problem at the core of the Sutpens’ story. When informed of Henry’s murder of Bon, Rosa goes to the Sutpen house, but Clytie blocks her way. Her body is then opposed to the “I” as “deep existence”: “[Clytie’s] face stop[ped] me dead (not my body: it still advanced, ran on: but I, myself, that deep existence which we lead, to which the movement of limbs is but a clumsy and belated accompanyment like so many unnecessary instruments played crudely and amateurishly out of time to the tune itself)” (109). However, the unstoppable clumsy body brings her an epiphanic moment in which the “I” is stripped of ideological norms by the touching flesh:

_I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman’s flesh. Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both:—touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am’s private own: not spirit, soul; the liquorish and ungirdled mind is anyone’s to take in any darkened hallway of this earthly tenement. But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too._ (111-12)
Even before the actual touching, Rosa feels a kind of empathy between Clytie and herself. Whereas she calls them “the two abstract contradictions,” their communication strangely resembles Quentin and Shreve’s happy marriage of speaking and hearing, for they “spoke to one another free of the limitations and restrictions of speech and hearing” (111). Then Rosa perceives that only Clytie does not treat her as a child, receiving her with “more grace and respect than anyone else [she] knew” (111). Since maturity is connected with sexuality in this chapter, the touch of flesh with flesh which “cuts sharp” is almost sexual, and that lets Rosa take a glimpse of another possible relation to Clytie outside the racial and class norms, which resembles the male homoerotic relation between Quentin and Shreve—the ideal of the Southern patriarchy—and is all the more subversive for it.

The impact of the epiphanic recognition, however, immediately wanes as Rosa converts the empathic woman without caste and color into “the negro, the woman” or “nigger” who is just a volitionless instrument of Sutpen or “it,” the will of the house itself:

Yes, I stopped dead—no woman’s hand, no negro’s hand, but bitted bridle-curb to check and guide the furious and unbending will—I crying not to her, to it; speaking to it through the negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage because it would be terror soon, expecting and receiving no answer because we both knew it was not to her I spoke: ‘Take your hands off me, nigger!’ (112)

Rosa thus shifts her attention from the possibly dangerous identification with the black woman to her ideologically safe confrontation with Sutpen.
The subversiveness of this scene has been a point at issue since Rosa is thus wavering between the revelation and repression of the dangerous knowledge as she is in other enlightening moments. Even after the touch with Clytie, Rosa’s continuing affiliation and kinship with her is suggested, though now oddly enabled by the hand and arm of “it”: “the two of us joined by that hand and arm which held us, like a fierce rigid umbilical cord, twin sistered to the fell darkness which had produced her” (112). They are tied together by an “umbilical cord” again like Quentin and Shreve, as if affiliated through their common victimhood regardless of the racial and class difference, which sororal tie places them in the same darkness or blackness, but Rosa obscures it by putting the main focus on the function of “it,” the victimizer.

While this affiliation is itself subversive, it also makes Rosa aware of something that she says she already knew on entering the house and seeing Clytie’s Sutpen face, of “what [she] could not, would not, must not believe” (112). The next cry of Rosa is highly ambiguous and enigmatic: “And you too? And you too, sister, sister?” (113). Rosa says that this cry is not to Judith, which may suggest that on the surface it is to Judith though deep down it is to “it.” Or, the addressee might be literally her sister, Ellen, who told her to “save Judith” (15). Rosa says that she, “self-mesmerized fool,” then may have expected “Henry,” the male rebel against the house, “to emerge and say ‘Why, it’s Rosa, Aunt Rosa. Wake up, Aunt Rosa; wake up’” and herself to wake into the world in which she can be settled in the family as the saving aunt, “into the reality, the more than reality, not to the unchanged and unaltered old time but into a time altered to fit the dream which, conjunctive with the dreamer, becomes immolated and apotheosized” (113). Yet what she finds upstairs is the calm Judith, who does not need any help, and she realizes that
“there was nothing there to save” (113). The cry then is a shocked indictment against female complicity with “it” though its true target is “it” as the mastermind. Judith or Ellen is also an instrument of “it,” which blocks Rosa from getting into the house, so that there can be no possibility for her to participate in the Sutpen family as an aunt; she is still shut out of the closed door of Judith’s bedroom.

Some critics such as Eric Sundquist and Richard Godden interpret Rosa’s cry as directed at Clytie; in that case, it suggests Rosa’s tacit assumption that Bon is Sutpen’s black child as is Clytie (House 113-14; Fictions 80-81).51 The novel does not endorse this reading of Rosa’s realization with clear evidence,52 and it is improbable that the cry is primarily directed at Clytie. Still, we can suppose that her realization is actually about Bon’s blood but is camouflaged as a less dangerous realization of her impossibility to be an aunt in order to repress the devastating implications in Bon’s black blood, which, by integrating all of them, black and white alike, into a single family, would make the discourse of white kinship essentially inept. One of the reasons that make Sundquist’s and Godden’s interpretations convincing is, first of all, the similarity of the situation to the moment when Quentin notices Bon’s relation to Sutpen by seeing Clytie’s face. Moreover, if what Rosa finds is just that she cannot play the role of aunt to her niece and nephew as she seems to claim here, her wording, “what she must not believe,” sounds too strong; even as she desperately desires to be an aunt, her failure to do so, unlike Bon’s black blood, does not fundamentally undermine her ideal itself. Then, after imagining Henry’s voice, she now

51 Joseph R. Urgo and Noel Polk also consider Rosa’s cry to be directed at Clytie. In their interpretation, it suggests her realization that “they are enemies” (Urgo and Polk 64).
52 Therefore, Sundquist ascribes this realization of Bon’s black blood to “Faulkner’s imagination” rather than Rosa’s (113).
imagines another voice to tell her to wake up not to the desirable world but to the cruel, stark reality that she cannot, must not believe: “Ay, wake up, Rosa; wake up—not from what was, what used to be, but from what had not could not have ever, been; wake, Rosa—not to what should, what might have been, but to what cannot, what must not, be” (AA 113). But her abiding melancholia prevents her at this moment from renouncing “what might have been,” which is nothing but an as-yet unconsummated ideal preserved beyond the barred door. By not breaking into Judith’s bedroom and confronting Bon, she at least saves her and the society’s racial ideology, on which her being depends. Bon’s secret is repressed together with her momentary, implicitly sexual affiliation with Clytie. The familial attachment to them is ineffable and must be displaced into the matter of the demonized Sutpen’s incomprehensible and invincible evilness.

The figurative, convoluted passage after Rosa has seen Judith in front of the closed door shows her accurate understanding of the structure of melancholia and hesitation to break it. First, she transfigures the closed door that inaugurates melancholia into a veil which can be easily rent:

That’s what I found. Perhaps it’s what I expected, knew. . . . Perhaps I couldn’t even have wanted more than that, couldn’t have accepted less, who even at nineteen must have known that living is one constant and perpetual instant when the arras-veil before what-is-to-be hangs docile and even glad to the lightest naked thrust if we had dared, were brave enough (not wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to make the rending gush. (114)

Then she goes on to say, “Or perhaps it is no lack of courage either;” and explain why she cannot tear the veil, describing “that sickness” and its structure, which is hard to grasp unless we
suppose Rosa’s assumption of Bon’s black blood:

*Or perhaps it is no lack of courage either: not cowardice which will not face that sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant, wroils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and prisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) all of space and time and massy earth, relicts the seething and anonymous miasmal mass which in all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but only how to recreate, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished: nothing—but is that true wisdom which can comprehend that there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth, from which the dreamer, waking, says not ‘Did I but dream?’ but rather says, indicts high heaven’s very self with: ‘Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?’* (114-15)

The “factual scheme” seems to be the ideological frames of recognition that support themselves by holding at its foundation a certain kind of sickness, or the injunction against interracial love. An individual “prisoner soul” then has an immutable, timeless ideal, “that spark,” “dream,” or “might-have-been,” which should give the world a complete, coherent meaning but only throws people into melancholic repetitions; the ideal after all amounts to nothing even if achieved, or especially when achieved. The last question exhibits her ambivalence or doubt over thus correctly understanding the structure; perhaps she had better not notice the futility of might-
have been and wake up into what must not be, for she can thereby survive, retaining the ideal of the Southern lady of the decent white family she failed to be. At the Sutpen house in 1865, she has the same concern over breaking into the closed door as Quentin’s, which he is to have on the way to the Sutpen house to pass the door with her in 1909.

That she articulates this structure means that she is practically awake at present. She is giving up preserving her ideal as ever unattainable might-have-been; she is determined to revisit the Sutpen house and open the closed door this time, whatever might await her. Still, she cannot lift the repression of her knowledge about Bon’s blood, and hangs onto her attachment to the ideological injunction to foreclose the blacks from the family for a little more while. For, one cannot simply relinquish one’s “desire to be,” and on this side of the closed door, she can still talk about her unconsummated love toward Bon.

Rosa asserts her lonely unfulfilled sexual desire despite her immature body that is “less than any female flesh”: “But root and urge I do insist and claim, for had I not heired too from all the unsistered Eves since the Snake?” (115). She develops her “spark” by moving “from one closed forbidden door to the next” (116). Then she starts expressing her love toward Bon in a denied form, and this is also performed in order to save a possibility of love but in a different way than her denial of love toward Sutpen. Bon’s existence gives a more concrete shape to her longing for love she has fostered in the “closed masonry of females.” Rosa recalls that his visiting to Rosa’s house left “some seed . . . to cause a child’s vacant fairy-tale to come alive in that garden” precisely because she was absent and could not meet him (117-18). Looking back now, Rosa correctly understands its melancholic structure similar to that of virginity or the
idealized Old South. It is “love which gives up what it never had” (119); the fact of giving up or loss is what enables love and its object to have been where there had not been love before that. As Alain Geoffroy observes, “it seems that Rosa’s life had always been organized around missing objects of love” (315). More precisely, Rosa vicariously experiences someone else’s love as love always already lost for her, and in so doing preserves her ideal of love beyond the unreachable closed door.

Rosa then even reveals that the true object of her love is the possibility of love itself. She, “that nondescript too long a child yet too short a woman” (AA 119), is attached to love, to any kind of love, all the more passionately because of her inability to attain love:

*I who learned nothing of love, not even parents’ love—that fond dear constant violation of privacy, that stultification of the burgeoning and incorrigible I which is the meed and due of all mammalian meat, became not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love’s androgynous advocate.* (117)

This is a bare expression of her attachment to foreclosure and the possibility of love as what is supposed to give her a being in the situation where there are few forms of love and subjecthood left for the white woman even before the Civil War. Even though, or precisely because, that possibility is just “that might-have-been which is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality” (120), it helps a melancholic subject to survive with a tenuous hope of love. Here she virtually discloses the basic power dynamics of this novel: the most fundamental love is love toward foreclosure and the possibility of love itself, which is synonymous with the “desire to be,” and by which people are made complicit with the social system.
Rosa’s survival tactics even enables her to ignore the material reality, including Bon’s death. She emphasizes that she only “heard an echo, but not the shot,” “saw a closed door but did not enter it” and even denies the existence of Bon’s corpse (121). This is the moment when through a desperate “desire to be,” an unstable subject and the foreclosing social norms join hands to sustain themselves. Rosa’s retrospective narrative reveals how deeply she has been soaked in the ideal fantasy, and how love and foreclosure work together to produce a melancholic subject. She could not even elope as her aunt did, and instead has strained to protect the ideal of love even though it means an escape from the reality. Certainly, as Mr. Compson suggests, Rosa has her own version of “innocence” (61).

It is worth repeatedly pointing out Rosa’s attachment to the society’s ideology because it is this attachment which gives her power to open the closed door to disclose the hidden truth, though some critics have thought that Rosa more directly resists the oppressive society, finding her subversiveness, for example, in the manless life that she leads with Judith and Clytie at the Sutpen house during the Civil War, regarding it as an alternative form of community that defies patriarchy. Andrea Dimino describes it as “a community of strangers” which should not be confused with the “harmonious ‘community of women’ evoked as an ideal by feminism criticism,” but is still a kind of “counterfamily” contrasted with the patriarchal family (“Fathers” 148). Rosa distinguishes herself from the other two, who belong to the Sutpens, and says that she cannot understand them, but Dimino sees “paradoxical assertions of the greatest difference

53 Laurel Bollinger also claims that the three women’s “union of race and gender” that retains their autonomous identities “has the potential to interrupt the established discourse of white patriarchy” (199).
and the greatest closeness” in the affinity with Clytie which Rosa feels at the moment of the
touch of flesh (148). This is a little misleading because that epiphanic moment is not a part of the
communal life the three women lead. It is true that during that life Rosa asserts not only
difference but also closeness regardless of class, race or even gender: “We led the busy eventless
lives of three nuns in a barren and poverty-stricken convent . . . not as two white women and a
negress, not as three negroes or three whites, not even as three women, but merely as three
creatures who still possessed the need to eat but took no pleasure in it . . . It was as though we
were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate” (AA 124-25). This passage, however,
suggests that it is possible because the issue of sexuality and reproduction, and by extension of
family, is suspended in the life like nuns while they are talking “of him, Thomas Sutpen, of the
end of the War ([they] could all see it now) and when he would return, of what he would do;”
thus expecting and waiting for Sutpen to come back (127). Race, class, and gender do not matter
much not because it is a “counterfamily” but because it is not related to the family at all; or in
other words, this life does not deny or refute the system of the family, but it just suspends it. The
momentary lack of defining norms is why they can be at once “one being” and “three strangers”
(126), but Rosa knows that the matter of family and sexuality is to come back along with Sutpen.
Therefore she is aware of a decisive difference from Judith, considering her niece to be
“created . . . to pass through the soft insulated and unscathed cocoon stages: bud, served prolific
queen, then potent and soft-handed matriarch of old age’s serene and well-lived content” (125-
26), and as for herself, Rosa is attracted to Sutpen after he has come back as expected and
accepts his offer of marriage. The three women’s life cannot be valorized as an alternative ideal
community since it is only momentarily possible by means of suspension and repression of female sexuality.

Rosa’s narrative in Chapter 5 demonstrates that at the center of her melancholia lies her flesh and female sexuality, which cannot be fulfilled apart from its reproductive function instrumental to the white males’ patriarchal kinship. As I have argued, the present impossibility to participate in the family in that way and the revived chance to be an aunt occasioned by Henry’s reappearance prompt her to get out of melancholia by opening the closed door she once left inviolate. What she finds there is again that there has been nothing to save, for the truth that Henry’s deadly existence insinuates is the impossibility of the white kinship itself that regulates and produces the possible, legitimate forms of love. The refusal to be a ghost is the extremely intensified form of the desire to survive or to be, and at the same time, paradoxically, its renunciation. It will also mean the opening up of other possibilities of love and sexuality, not as might-have-been but as will-have-been in the future anterior temporality as Shreve hints in the last chapter. And since Rosa’s relation to Judith and Clytie does not represent an alternative ideal community, if Rosa is subversive at all, it is in the fact that the very frustration of her sexuality, the difficulty to give significance to her own body, drives her and Quentin into the last quest for the ideals, and eventually leads them to destroy the white male kinship in which they have wanted to participate. This driving force which female sexuality produces thus gives us a clue to criticize the male-centered narratives including that of Quentin and Shreve, which is consistently concerned with male relation even after its breakup.
The flesh or the body is also an important motif in Bon’s letter to Judith, and the reappearance of Rosa in the final chapter invites us to return to the letter and its reception by Judith to reinterpret them from a perspective different from the patriarchal one of the male characters. The letter says: “thank God (and this restores my faith not in human nature perhaps but at least in man) that he really does not become inured to hardship and privation: it is only the mind, the gross omnivorous carrion-heavy soul which becomes inured; the body itself, thank God, never reconciled from the old soft feel of soap and clean linen and something between the sole of the foot and the earth to distinguish it from the foot of a beast” (103). The flesh here is not the brute flesh in need of domestication or feeding; on the contrary, it is a hope for humanity. As the following passage suggests, it incites a sheer belief in immortal humanity outside the local ideological rationality:

*I must stop. Stop what? you will say. Why, thinking, remembering—remark that I do not say, hoping—; to become once more for a period without boundaries or location in time, mindless and irrational companion and inmate of a body which, even after four years, with a sort of dismal and incorruptible fidelity which is incredibly admirable to me, is still immersed and obliviously bemused in recollections of old peace and contentment the very names of whose scents and sounds I do not know that I remember, which ignores even the presence and threat of a torn arm or leg as though through some secretly incurred and infallible promise and conviction of immortality. (104)*

Despite the prospect of survival in the letter, however, Quentin takes it as “incurably
pessimistic,” probably interpreting it as a fatalistic expectation of the postbellum Southerners’ lives doomed to be ghosts looking back at the lost ideals (102). It is true that the body here still longs for some lost plenitude and dreams of immortality while Bon senses its illusoriness, and in that sense, it is in a kind of melancholia.

What is important for Bon is, however, his conviction that the body’s will to live allows him to survive until the body is actually relieved of the confinement of the local racial ideology as time passes by. Thus, Bon expects an entirely new world and a new life with Judith after the miserable war:

> Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS——. . . I cannot say when to expect me. Because what IS is something else again because it was not even alive then. And since because within this sheet of paper you now hold the best of the old South which is dead, and the words you read were written upon it with the best . . . of the new North which has conquered and which therefore, whether it likes it or not, will have to survive, I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live. (104-05)

His comments on the body is inserted in parentheses in the first omitted part of the above quote, and while the melancholic body dreaming of immortality subsists him for a little longer, what essentially energizes him is the anti-melancholic severance between the past “WAS” and the present “IS,” which gives him the prospect of integration. This Bon in his letter which conveys

54 The prospect of integration is also symbolically expressed by the fact that “the words of Bon (who is black) is written with black stove polish (that represents the North), toward Judith (who
the only words ascribable to him considerably differs from what the other character-narrators imagine him to have been. We can discern in his insinuation of the postbellum integration, especially when we reread the letter after we have learnt of Bon’s blood, his keen awareness of his own blackness, which does not exist anywhere else in the novel except in his reaction to Henry’s final rejection of him.\footnote{Faulkner says: “Bon knew all the time that his mother was part Negress, but during Bon’s childhood that was not important. . . . It became important only when Bon realized that it was important to his father” (\textit{FU} 272). In the Quentin-Shreve narrative, it was just before his death that Bon realized that it was important to his father, but his letter to Judith shows his concern about his race precedent to it. In fact, Faulkner admits that Bon “knew that if she knew that he was part Negro, with her training and background it would have destroyed her” (273).} It then resounds as a voice from outside the narratives of the Southern white men, and the letter can be read as “an affirmation of life, both content and intent” after the fall of the institution (Muhlenfeld, “‘We’” 175).

Later, the Quentin-Shreve narrative appropriates this motif of the body as well as its will to live in Bon’s attempt to persuade Henry, and in turn Henry’s to persuade Sutpen, into accepting incest. Whereas Bon’s letter thanks God for the humane body’s will to live since it enables him to endure until the postbellum integration, the Quentin-Shreve narrative discards the prospect of integration and transforms the body undefined by ideological norms into the hopeless, Godless brute meat that almost automatically tries to survive only for the survival’s sake even after ideological norms are extinguished. Thus, Bon says to Henry:

\begin{quotation}
if you dont have God and you dont need food and clothes and shelter, there isn’t anything for honor and pride to climb on and hold to and flourish. And if you haven’t got honor and pride, then nothing matters. Only there is something in you
\end{quotation}

is a Southern lady), on white paper (that represents the South)” (Suwabe 399-400, my translation)
that doesn’t care about honor and pride yet that lives, . . . that probably even
when this is over and there is not even defeat left, will still decline to sit still in the
sun and die, but will be out in the woods, moving and seeking where just will and
endurance could not move it, grubbing for roots and such—the old mindless
sentient undreaming meat that doesn’t even know any difference between despair
and victory. Henry. (AA 279)

And Henry, persuaded by Bon, repeats this to Sutpen:

we wont have anything left: honor nor pride nor God . . . and when you dont have
God and honor and pride, nothing matters except that there is the old mindless
meat that dont even care if it was defeat or victory, that wont even die, that will be
out in the woods and fields, grubbing up roots and weeds. (283)

Bon and Henry resort to the body’s renunciation of honor and pride to justify incest. As
discussed above, however, the imagined incest for Henry is a way to revive the authoritative
father, and therefore this argument over the body is a desperate prayer for the melancholic
preservation of the patriarchal ideals, similar to Rosa’s “lives of three nuns” or “three creatures
who still possessed the need to eat but took no pleasure in it,” in which the patriarchal familial
logic is at once suspended and retained in their implicit expectation of the patriarch’s return.

While Bon’s letter, expecting integration, welcomes the arrival of “IS,” which is
decisively separated from “WAS,” Quentin and Shreve ignore this peculiar temporal sensibility
by interpreting the wartime as the simply suspended time. This rhetoric is, however, defeated by
the more fundamental injunction against miscegenation that cannot be renounced despite the
gesture of renunciation. We can say that the patriarch does come back, even only to destroy himself by conclusively implementing the injunction. And for that matter, the body dreaming of immortality in Bon’s letter cannot overcome the injunction, either; Bon cannot survive because of it, after all. Whether it might be the humane body or brute meat, the surviving flesh that seems to be emancipated from the old social conventions cannot be free so easily as Bon optimistically hopes.

It is Judith who reinterprets the body and time in Bon’s letter in her own way to show a means to resist the old social system. Bringing Bon’s letter to Quentin’s grandmother one week after Bon’s burial, Judith describes people’s lives as each trying to “weave his own pattern” with the “same strings . . . on the same loom” in vain (101), as if to illustrate the futility of melancholic lives people have to have. Still, she tries to find a way to give significance to those lives:

yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it’s all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they dont even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn’t matter. And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would
have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be *is* because it never can become *was* because it cant ever die or perish. (101)

The unperishable stone evokes the authoritative father’s ukase “*like a sentence . . . to be read carved in the bland stone which pediments a forgotten and nameless effigy*” which Rosa feels in Sutpen’s courtship (132), and Judith seems to suggest that it cannot be changed by individual struggles or scratches. However, she sees a possibility of a significant scratch in the handing of a letter to a stranger by reconceptualizing time. In Bon’s letter, the capitalized “WAS” and “IS” are stably separated, retaining their independent, autonomous status, but here Judith reconnects the two by pointing out that in order to be “*is,*” one must be able to be “*was*” someday. At first glance, the structure seems similar to that of virginity, which is “a false quantity which must incorporate in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence” (77). However, whereas virginity preserves its ideal meaning in melancholic attachment to the lost, the letter per se does not have a meaning. And the handing of the letter is also different from the communal sharing of the story, nor is it an admission for “whatever nameless stranger” into the white house as in Sutpen’s design; because of the strangeness of the stranger, here is no expectation of the establishment of a community or family, of a coherent, immutable meaning overseen by the authoritative father.56 Important for Judith is

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56 In his poststructuralist interpretation of Bon’s letter, David Krause concludes that “[a]ny chance we may have to read Bon’s letter and Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* ‘better’ than we
that the letter is handed among the mortal humans, using as a medium paper, which is itself perishable and therefore a reminder of people’s mortality, or life and death. It reminds people that the present existence is always already divided by death in the future—its perishability marks the inescapable changeability of meaning in the future, or the possibility to become “was” as well as its living status as “is.” This is not the simple, irrevocable sequence of time from the dead “WAS” to the renewed “IS” as in Bon’s letter. Judith’s is a kind of future anterior perspective that looks back at people’s lives and their meanings from their death in the future, and thereby finds not in intersubjective understanding but in the sharing of the perishability of the letter and the body a hope for the emergence of a new meaning in its afterlife, a new human relation that is doomed to live beyond melancholia, demonstrating it in her very reinterpretation of Bon’s letter. This is sharply contrasted with Quentin and Henry, who die because they persist in their “desire to be.”

This is also the only speech of Judith conveyed to the present day and gives us an impression that does not correspond with her images described in the other places, where she is mostly silenced and considered to be the inheritor of the “ruthless Sutpen code” (95), especially when we reread it after the final chapter. Claire Crabtree points out that Judith, who is silenced, objectified, and victimized in the struggles between Quentin and Shreve and between Henry and Bon, is made “less a character than a symbol” (199). True as it may be, we also need to pay have so far requires that we begin by attentively reading their self-inscribed figures of reading and by recognizing the failures of Compson and Quentin . . . as figurations of our own inevitable failures” and finds “pleasure in the text’s play,” in repetitive rereadings and failures (239). This virtually regards the letter (and the novel, too) as that which provides the absent center that fuels melancholic repetitions and thereby contributes to the sustainment of the patriarchal system of the society. In my view, however, Judith’s remark forestalls it.
attention to another Judith who appears through the critique of the male relations in the novel.\footnote{As Molly Hite puts it, “Judith goes through so many transformations in the various narrators’ retellings that she exists in irreconcilably multiple versions” (74). Hite argues that though Judith, and also Clytie, are mostly objectified in the male narrators’ narratives, “on the few occasions they utter . . . disruptive remarks that indicate they have points of view all along” (75).} Her act of handing the letter to Quentin’s grandmother is a declaration of her hope for the future anterior time, and it is itself waiting to be reinterpreted retrospectively and retroactively, if not by the novel’s characters, then by the reader.

Mr. Compson, for example, tells this episode to Quentin obviously for dissuading him from committing suicide as I argued above and misconstrues Judith’s “scratch” as resistance to perishability, as “that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed” (\textit{AA} 102), while in Judith’s remark only the stone, not the mark or scratch, is undying. He regards Judith as passive and naïve, waiting during the war “not knowing what” and “not even knowing for why” (100). Moreover, he emphasizes the impenetrability of her face over and again, refusing to speculate her inside.

Judith in Quentin’s imagination is more complicated. Especially her relationship with Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, the son of Bon and his octoroon wife, is troublesome for Quentin after his visit to the Sutpen house because of insidious interracial familial love in it. Together with Clytie, Judith takes care of Charles Etienne after Bon’s and his octoroon wife’s death. He is at least one-sixteenth black, and in Mr. Compson’s re-creation of their life after the war, Judith and Clytie recognized that “he was, must be, a negro” (161). As a result, Charles Etienne is put into an identity crisis similar to that of Joe Christmas in \textit{Light in August}, but Judith refuses to treat him as totally black. In the Sutpen house, he sleeps on a trundle bed and later on a
cot, the height of which is just between Judith’s bed and Clytie’s pallet. This in-between state along with his apparent whiteness makes him undefinable even to other townspeople’s eyes, and therefore when he is summoned to court for a minor crime, the justice notices that he is not white and cries, “What are you?” (165). What annoys Quentin is then Judith’s familial love toward Charles Etienne, which is not a paternalistic care for a black member of the extended family but love toward a son of the man she loved, which he cannot but discern despite the apparent coldness and impenetrability of Judith in his reconstruction. And because he is recalling Mr. Compson’s telling the story to him in the Harvard room after the visit to the Sutpen house, it reminds him of Bon’s potential blackness, too. Therefore, Quentin imagines the scene in which Judith admits that Charles Etienne is black but still demands “Call me Aunt Judith” to take the role of a vicarious mother (whether or not she knows Bon’s lineage), and he associates the dangerous suggestion of interracial love there with Bon’s letter, which Mr. Compson regards as a proof of love between Judith and Bon:

Because there was love Mr Compson said There was that letter she brought and gave to your grandmother to keep He (Quentin) could see it, as plainly as he saw the one open upon the open text book on the table before him, white in his father’s dark hand against his linen in the September twilight where the cigar-smell, the wisteria-smell, the fireflies drifted, thinking . . . that letter, and who to know what moral restoration she might have contemplated in the privacy of that house, that room, that night, what hurdl ing of iron old traditions since she had seen almost everything else she had learned to call stable vanish like straws in a
Quentin is almost aware that the “iron old traditions” which Judith is hurdling is those which foreclose interracial love as ineffable, and that they are just local codes which do not hold true in, for example, New Orleans, where, as Mr. Compson says, “pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls and the scent and the rose-colored candle shades, where the very abstractions which he might have observed—monogamy and fidelity and decorum and gentleness and affection—were as purely rooted in the flesh’s offices as the digestive processes” (161). In Jefferson, Mississippi, where the flesh as well as affection is never free from pigmentation, the letter which is a proof of interracial love darkens the father’s skin. Nevertheless, Quentin tries to weaken the subversive nature of Judith’s act by not clarifying exactly what “moral restorations” or “hurdling of old iron traditions” were in it.

In this novel, virtually every Southern man including Quentin cannot discard his desire to be, his attachment to foreclosure or the possibility of love within the society’s code and morality, nor can Rosa, though her too strong desire to be enables her to disclose how the society’s foreclosure works in complicit with the social subject and also to drive Quentin and herself into entering the closed door of foreclosure. Their lives demonstrate how love and sexuality are in the world of Yoknapatawpha essential elements for giving significance—particularly whiteness—to the body and thereby making one a social subject. Then, it is only Judith who seems to have the courage to overcome the desire to be and the injunction of interracial love, to see the body away from the imperative of racialization, regarding it as the perishable body, vulnerable to death but at the same time expecting its afterlife or new meaning in the future. How she, despite the
structural difficulty of subjection in general, reached this realization is not clear, for, her having been dead for a long time, all we have are the biased fragmentary recollections or re-creations by male characters and the demonizing Rosa, aside from her abrupt speech made to Quentin’s grandmother and handed down to her descendants. As a novel’s character, she might not be fleshed out enough for us to know what she actually thought and what she actually was. Consequently she seems to serve as merely a functional character, but this also makes it appropriate for her to declare the new moral of the perishable body which, emancipated from the existing foreclosure or frames of recognition, refuses the stability of stone. After the breakdown of Sutpen’s, or the Southern father’s, white door, we can now see a different Bon, a different Judith, and a different relationship between them. It is neither a “perfect incest” at the service of white male kinship nor even an ineffable love between black and white. It is now a matter of how to imagine a new relationship through receiving, conveying, and sharing the perishable body seen in the future anterior. This theme will be taken over and further developed by Go Down, Moses.

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58 Deborah Clarke is right when she argues that “Judith denies the fixity of meaning on which phallogocentrism is grounded, both in her refusal to accept the terms of patriarchal family structure and also in her own fluid identity” (146), though her valorization of female characters’ “maternal ability to erode clear distinctions and divisions” (146) seems another example of the essentialization of the female domain that is but an effect of the male-centered symbolic order, which Porter criticizes.
Faulkner famously said in an interview: “time is a fluid condition which has no existence expect in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as was—only is. If was existed there would be no grief or sorrow” (LG 255). This remark points to Faulkner’s assertion of the inseparable intertwining of the past and the present, and particularly his refusal to reify the past as an autonomous entity. It exists only insofar as people in the present repeatedly express it in some way.

As for the reason why it involves the matter of grief, one possible interpretation is Sartrean. Jean-Paul Sartre argues that Faulkner’s characters are in a situation of “a man sitting in a convertible looking back” (228). Obsessed with the past, they cannot escape from its grasp. The past’s “outline is hard, clear and immutable” while the “indefinable and elusive present is helpless before it; it is full of holes through which past things, fixed, motionless and silent, invade it” (228). The “Faulknerian man” in Sartre’s interpretation is therefore “a creature deprived of potentiality and explained only by what he was” (231). Another remark which Faulkner made as an answer to a question about his characteristic long sentences seems to confirm this interpretation:

no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his and her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any
moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him, and the long sentence is an attempt to get his past and possibly his future into the instant in which he does something.

(Sartre 84)

Sartre’s formulation suggests not only that Faulknerian characters, because of the *is*-ness of the past, do not have a sense of futurity and instead feel that the future is only an imperfect repetition of the past, but that the past which they reify actually cannot be substantial and is unreachable since “the car takes them away, as they look back” (Sartre 230). This obsession with the unreachable past constitutes what John T. Irwin calls Faulkner’s “sense of the tragic absurd,” the sense “of the almost meaningful—the sense of the meaningful as the always deferred” (9). In this case, the lost object, the object of grief, is the unattained past or full meaning which conditions the present of those who cannot give it up, and the structure of the tragic absurd lasts insofar as the Faulknerian man keeps on pursuing after the illusion of the reified past. This grief in the Sartrean understanding of Faulkner is therefore not the mourning grief that admits the absolute loss of the object, but a kind of feigned grief that constitutes melancholic repetitions, and we can find here the melancholic *is*-ness of the past. Then, if there existed *was*, sundered from *is* and left behind in the old world as in Bon’s letter, there would be no grief even of this melancholic kind.

It is true that many characters in Faulkner’s works fall into the category of the Faulknerian man, preserving his hope for the retrieval of the past in repetitive failures. Particularly men of patriarchal families feel obligated and fail to be the faithful inheritor and repetition of their idealized fathers and become melancholic Faulknerian men, or what are called
in Absalom, Absalom! “backlooking ghosts” (7).

As I argued in the previous chapters, however, Faulkner deconstructs and overcomes the structure of the tragic absurd in Absalom. Sartre bases his observation on his readings of Faulkner’s early works, particularly The Sound and the Fury, but his later works do not necessarily endorse the perception of the Faulknerian man. Absalom illustrates how the patriarchal community’s ideals break down exactly at the moment of achievement because it exposes their fundamental contradictions. The supposedly immutable but unattained past then turns out to be absolutely illusory, and Absalom introduces another understanding of the is-ness of the past, the temporality that I call the future anterior, in which the unforeseeable future makes the past (and the present) fluid and vulnerable to unexpected future alteration without denying the significance of the past as individuals’ backgrounds; the past is then not to be repeated but to be fluidized and intervened by the present and the future, in which sense it still is.

In Chapters 1 to 4, I focused on the issues of love in Absalom, but in order to explore the is-ness of the past further, we need to examine its ineluctable relation with grief; for what matters is how to get out of melancholia, after all. Judith Butler suggests the production of desirable forms of love entails “what Hegel calls ‘the loss of the loss’” or “a foreclosure that constitutes an unknowability without which the subject cannot endure, an ignorance and melancholia that makes possible all claims of knowledge as one’s own,” and moreover, it causes “a longing to grieve—and, equivalently, an inability to grieve—that which one never was able to love, a love that falls short of the ‘conditions of existence’” (Psychic 24). The loss of the foreclosed love, and also of the object of that love, is therefore ungrievable while waiting to be grieved. The
Faulknerian subject trapped in the structure of the tragic absurd is, then, melancholic in a double sense: on one hand, one cannot sever oneself from the ideal past, or in other words, one cannot acknowledge its irredeemable loss or impossibility; on the other, one experiences and represses the loss or foreclosure of certain objects of love made ungrievable. In *Absalom*, Sutpen never shows any grief over the death of Charles Bon, but now that we have exhumed his ineffable love toward his first son, we may also hear his repressed cry of grief for his ungrievable, unlovable beloved black son.

If melancholia is “a refusal to lose a time that is already gone” as Butler says (183), the Faulknerian man’s melancholia is also a refusal to lose the past in its entirety, and by extension to admit irreparable loss in general. Sartre is right when he says that for the Faulknerian man, in a sense “everything was” (228). Everything seems to be an imperfect repetition of the past which the Faulknerian man himself reifies, and if there is a sense of grief, it is always feigned melancholic grief for the unreachable past that denies irreparable loss and incites a hope for future retrieval, or we could say that that grief issues not from the fact of loss but from failure to regain the past. In order to expose the past to the fluid *is*-ness, then, one has to sever oneself from the illusion of the ideal immutable past. For the Faulknerian subject, it is synonymous with the acquisition of the possibility of mourning grief for the lost, or the acceptance of the fact of loss in general, acknowledging that everything in the past is lost and irretrievable. “If *was* existed,” or if everything *was* in Sartre’s sense, “there would be no grief” except as the Faulknerian man’s abiding melancholia, and conversely, if no other grief existed, there would be no present time that is no longer a repetition of the immutable past.
If we go back to Judith’s conception of was and is in Absalom, we can find the germ of the alternative understanding of the past’s is-ness as its fluidization though we have to mind its difference from Faulkner’s usage of was and is in the above remarks, in which was primarily means the reification of the past as “WAS” in Bon’s letter does. Let me quote her remark again. She claims that people are all trying to weave their own pattern into the rug on the same loom in vain, and then says:

And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be is because it never can become was because it cant ever die or perish. (AA 101)

Here, was indicates the possibility of loss or the perishability of the object, and Judith opines that that perishability is necessary for is. And the acknowledgement and propagation of the perishable object opens a possibility for one to get out of the system in which individuals’ acts are swallowed up by the totality of the loom that sets people in endless repetitions which “cannot matter” (101). This acknowledgement of perishability, of loss, is the retrieval of the possibility of grief, and it also results in the retrieval of alternative possibilities of knowledge and meaning.
The melancholic structure that governs the Faulknerian man makes everything a perpetually imperfect repetition of the past, or lets the unchanged past survive and dominate the present and the future, and in so doing ultimately denies loss or death in general; conversely, the promulgation of the perishability and grievability of the object at once asserts the mutability of the object or its liberation from the past pattern and performs an intervening alteration by making “a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday.” The purpose here is then not the retrieval or perpetuation of the lost object that once was; Judith’s focus is on “a scratch, something, something that might make a mark” occasioned by handing the perishable object to someone rather than on the object itself which does not “mean anything in itself.” It is through attention to the individuated perishable object that the retrieval of grief, grievability, and perishability occurs, and the most important thing is not even the “mark” but the “scratch,” this intervening act, this event which “would have happened” and indeed demonstrates that it will have happened anytime by declaring liberation from the supposedly immutable past. As Gail L. Mortimer says, the “need to cling—to deny loss—is a central emotional reality underlying [Faulkner’s] fiction” (1), and his “protagonists . . . enact rituals that end simply as repeated obsessive behavior” (9). But Faulkner also shows that the retrieval of grief, or the confrontation with the fact of loss or death, can be a way out of that obsessive repetition and an inauguration of another perception of temporality which I call the future anterior.

Absalom does not elaborate this point any further, and I would argue that it is in Go Down, Moses that Faulkner fully explores it. While Absalom illuminates love’s essential relationship with race and with family and genealogy in the South, Go Down, Moses puts more
emphasis on the repression of grief, and by so doing shows how vital the control of grief is to the
historical consciousness of the Southerners. This is mainly expressed by the historical view of
Isaac (Ike) McCaslin. Though earlier critics tended to think that Ike, a central character of the
novel, reflected the author’s own moral vision, recent critics have regarded him as a more
problematic character. They practically argue that he, in the final analysis, is the Faulknerian man
par excellence; despite his repudiation of patrimony, Ike is also obsessed with the ideal past he
reifies and tries to repeat the pattern set by it in vain. My reading partly follows this trend, but in
my view, Ike’s story is not simply another presentation of the melancholic structure that captures
the inheritor of the patriarchal family. It also demonstrates the disruption of Ike’s conception of
history as imperfect repetitions of the past, but in a different way from Absalom, that is, through
the unexpected eruption of repressed grief, which lets Ike and us glimpse another history, another
meaning of and relation to the past. As I examine in following chapters, moreover, Go Down,
Moses demonstrates the handing of the perishable letter in the form of the circulation of the dead
black body in stories in which Ike does not appear. Describing griefs that elude repression by
white men, the novel marks the culmination of Faulkner’s own reinterpretation of the is-ness of
the past.

Before proceeding to my analyses of Go Down, Moses, let me point out that the
reinterpretation of the is-ness of the past must involve what Jacques Derrida calls “genealogical
deconstruction” with regard to the problem of inheritance and fraternity. Derrida insists on the
necessity to “think life on the basis of heritage” (Derrida and Roudinesco 4), for everything
comes before us conditions us, and never allows us to be completely free from it, while heritage
cannot fully predetermine us precisely because we are not identical or identifiable with what comes before us as the temporal gap necessarily produces difference. The heir is bound to inherit a heritage that he did not choose (therefore it is the other) and must more or less repeat it. This could be an exact description of the Faulknerian man’s melancholia. In *Go Down, Moses*, Ike realizes that despite repudiation “no man is ever free” from his heritage, and since it gives him the ground for his identity, he “probably could not bear it if he were” free (268). If one persists in the full attainment of heritage by ignoring its difference from oneself or the otherness of the other, it brings about the sense of the tragic absurd and the melancholic repetitive pattern. However, Derrida points out that the necessary iterability of heritage imposes a “double injunction”—a mandatory injunction to appropriate the inappropriable heritage as a free subject—on the heir:

> the heir must respond to a sort of double injunction, a contradictory assignation: It is necessary to know how to *reaffirm* what comes “before us,” which we therefore receive even before choosing, and to behave in this respect as a free subject. . . .

[I]t is necessary to do everything to appropriate a past even though we know that it remains fundamentally inappropriable, whether it is a question of philosophical memory or the precedence of a language, a culture, and a filiation in general.

(Derrida and Roudinesco 3)

What is necessary to “appropriate a past” and get out of melancholic repetitions is, then, precisely “to know how to *reaffirm* what comes ‘before us.’” Thus, Derrida goes on to say:

What does it mean to reaffirm? It means not simply accepting this heritage but
relaunching it otherwise and keeping it alive. Not choosing it . . . but choosing to keep it alive. Life—being-alive—is perhaps defined at bottom by this tension internal to a heritage, by this reinterpretation of what is given in the gift, and even what is given in filiation. This reaffirmation, which both continues and interrupts, resembles (at least) an election, a selection, a decision. One’s own as that of the other: signature against signature. (3-4)

Life is not just subjecting oneself to the transcendent, unchangeable other, but it is to accept “this formal and apparent contradiction between the passivity of reception and the decision to say ‘yes,’ then to select, to filter, to interpret, and therefore to transform; not to leave intact or unharmed, not to leave safe the very thing one claims to respect before all else” (4). Life defined by this tension concerning heritage thus involves “reinterpretation, critique, displacement, that is, an active intervention” that might let something—“an event, some history [de l’histoire], an unforeseeable future-to-come” (4)—happen.

This reiterative relationship with heritage may look similar to the subject’s subjection to power in Butler, and there persists a question as to exactly how one can reinterpret heritage. We can find an answer in The Politics of Friendship; as Derrida pursues it in that book, the rethinking of inheritance must involve further close examination of genealogy, or “genealogical deconstruction,” which is not “an operation proceeding only through genealogical analysis, retrospection and reconstitution. At stake would thus be a deconstruction of the genealogical schema, a paradoxical deconstruction—a deconstruction, at once genealogical and a-genealogical, of the genealogical” (105).
Derrida refutes an assumption that genealogy in both literal and figurative senses guarantees natural historical continuity, legitimacy and certainty. Genealogical deconstruction, however, does not mean the total relinquishment of genealogy or history, for it is still a matter of heritage and inheritance, and it still assumes an aspect of a certain kind of filial relationship, even though those concepts are made to break with familiar meanings. His deconstructive inheritance is therefore always a “double injunction” that implicates both continuity and discontinuity, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, and familiarity and unfamiliarity. In a sense, the Derridean inheritance is also partly disinherance, and this kind of inheritance I call dis/inheritance. One can neither simply part with or take over a heritage; dis/inheritance is partial succession and repudiation which entails the alteration of the heritage.

Of course here again persists the problem of the “desire to be” I discussed in Chapter 1. How can one resist a heritage, power, norms, or whatever it is called, when it seems to give one, if imperfectly, subjecthood and identity? Derrida’s arguments on genealogy and inheritance in *The Politics of Friendship* then suggest the central importance which death and grief bear to the deconstruction of the genealogical.

Derrida’s “genealogical deconstruction” comes up when he attempts to inherit the Western traditions of politics, friendship and family. In the traditional Greek conception of friendship, it is equated with kinship, for it is

- founded on *homogeneity*, on *homophilia*, on a solid and firm affinity . . .
- stemming from birth, from native community. This kinship nurtures a constant and homophilial friendship . . . not only in words but in fact, in deeds . . . In other
words, the effectivity/actuality of the tie of friendship, that which assures
constancy beyond discourses, is indeed real kinship, the reality of the tie of
birth. . . . Provided that it is real—and not only spoken or set by convention—this
syngenealogy durably guarantees the strength of the social bond in life and
according to life (92).

This condition is, however, always “a dreamt condition . . . because a genealogical tie will never
be simply real” (92), and “[e]verything in political discourse that appeals to birth, to nature or to
the nation—indeed, to nations or to the universal nation of human brotherhood—this entire
familialism consists in a renaturalization of this ‘fiction’” (93). Derrida calls this strategy of
familialism “fraternization,” the allegation of “a real fraternity” and the regulation of “spiritual
fraternity, fraternity in the figurative sense, on the symbolic projection of a real or natural
fraternity” (93).

As we observed in previous chapters, this familialism appears in *Absalom* (and as we
shall see, also in *Go Down, Moses*) as the egalitarian male kinship based on their conviction of
consanguinity, and its ideal form is fraternal identification. In order to sustain the institution of
slavery and the postbellum white dominance in the South, white men needed to establish
genealogies to ensure their excellence, or pure whiteness, but since filiation intrinsically entails
the temporal gap and suspicion about consanguinity always remains in it to some degree, in
Faulkner, too, fraternity represents the ideal tie that overcomes the temporal gap. The
Faulknerian man’s desire for the perfect repetition of the ideal past then appears as the desire to
attain fraternity, the egalitarian and democratic aspiration among brothers, even as it remains
impossible and constitutes melancholia.

It is notable that Derrida finds the “privileged resource” of the discourse of “fraternal democracy” in “the testimonial, testamentary fervor of the heir—in other words, in the funeral oration” which announces the inheritance of pure blood (93-94). It is “a summons to appear before the dead. You must answer for the dead, you must respond to them. Here and now. But this responsibility can be called for only by first of all summoning the dead. They are, after a fashion, made to be born again” (94). It therefore entails the is-ness of the past or of the dead, but it is of a melancholic kind. Fraternal democracy “must engage memory in the present, in the presence of the dead, if that can be said; for however difficult this remains to say . . . the dead live and the absent are present” (95). Democratic friendship based on fraternity thus presupposes the “co-engagement” of the living and the dead, and practically forecloses, as does the Faulknerian man, the possibility of mourning grief and the fact of death as absolute loss without any prospect of resurrection or reciprocit(94). For, “the social bond, the community, the equality, [or] the friendship of brothers” in this democracy (or “aristo-democracy”) is after all “identification qua fraternization” (99), and for that identification, it must ignore the loss of the ancestors who should guarantee the legitimacy of genealogy and the sameness of everyone within it (93). The rejection of mourning that severs the heir from the ancestors is the rejection of difference and otherness. Only on this condition can one join the transhistorical friendship based on fraternal kinship.

It is no wonder, then, that in deconstructing this tradition of fraternal friendship, Derrida sees a possibility of a friendship that does not presume fraternal reciprocity in the
acknowledgement of the otherness of the dead and the possibility of grief. He therefore directs our attention to the association between grief, which “means primarily pain or mourning,” and grievance, which “expresses the subject of the complaint, injustice, conflict, a wrong that must be righted, a violence to be repaired” (ix). Thus, in grief “accusation mingles with mourning to cry out from an infinite wound” (x).

Derrida derives the possibility of this grief from Aristotle’s conception of “friendship for the deceased.” It is a feeling of oneself “borne to love the dead other” before any contract (12). We can paraphrase it as the acceptance of an imposed, inappropriable dead heritage, and since the dead other is absolutely devoid of the prospect of reciprocal co-engagement, on this Derrida bases a friendship beyond reciprocity, fraternity, or sameness. In this friendship, a friend may have been dead in the past or will have been dead in the future; there persists a “possibility that the beloved might be dead,” which designates the irreducible otherness of the other, and then one has to survive this possibility of death in mourning, even before the actual death of the friend (13). Therefore the “anguished apprehension of mourning . . . insinuates itself a priori and anticipates itself; it haunts and plunges the friend, before mourning, into mourning. This apprehension weeps before the lamentation, it weeps death before death” (14). Derrida then observes that the “time of surviving thus gives the time of friendship” (14).

Later, Derrida asserts that “O my friends, there is no friend,” the key phrase of the book which is conventionally ascribed to Aristotle, “means initially and finally this overrunning of the present by the undeniable future anterior which would be the very movement and time of friendship,” and avows “an undeniable future anterior, the absolute of an unpresentable past as
well as future—that is, traces that can be disavowed only in convoking them into the daylight of phenomenal presence” (249-50). For, while “there is no friend” announces the death or non-presence of the other as friend, “O friend” implies one’s inexhaustible anticipation of and inescapable relation to that dead other. The absent other belongs to the unpresentable past as well as future, but as such it conditions the present, in which the past and the future do not present themselves (though the melancholic man would see the presence of the past and future in phenomenal presence in the present conceived as a repetition of the past as Derrida suggests here). Thus, one at any time has a responsibility, an obligation to answer to the other in advance, in its absence. This constitutes the “dissymmetrical anteriority” of the self’s relation to the other (250), and resists against the presupposition of the “unity of the subject” (250), for there is no longer the immutable past or the predestined future repeated and presented in the present to define the subject, while one is nonetheless never free from the unpresentable past and future. It furthermore implies that one who survives in mourning must in principle also anticipate that his present subjecthood will have been dead in some future—“one would find the other in oneself, already; the same dissymmetry and tension of surviving in self, in ‘oneself’ thus out of joint with its own existence” (24). Or we can also say that survival in mourning demands “[l]eaving oneself as of oneself—which can be done only by letting the other come, which is possible only if the other precedes and informs me” (42), when the other may or will have been dead. It is therefore a matter of an alternative genealogy through dis/inheritance, and grief—the renunciation of the hope to attain fraternization by retrieving the immutable past in the future—is indispensable for it. The friendship conceived in dis/inheritance then expects the “incalculable equality of [the]
friends of solitude, of the incommensurable subjects, of these subjects without subject and without intersubjectivity” (43), instead of the griefless intersubjective fraternal kinship based on sameness, the retrieval of the past, or the resuscitation of the dead. In this context, relaunching what comes before us, the past, or heritage otherwise and keeping it alive—or, the act of dis/inheritance—requires acknowledging the death or loss of the immutable past and the supposedly stable subjejecthood sustained by it. Paradoxically, only in this way is it possible to regain other possibilities of the past and the future that have been foreclosed and whose loss have been made ungrievable.

As may be obvious by now, the future anterior temporality I have found in Absalom has an unmistakable affinity with the Derridean future anterior, and when Faulkner says that “time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people” and that he tries to get a man’s “past and possibly his future into the instant in which he does something,” it can indicate this Derridean future anterior as the time of surviving or the time of friendship in which traces of the foreclosed past and future that exceed the conviction of sameness in fraternal friendship haunt the present phenomenal presence. The fluid is-ness of the past, which is nothing but the recognition of time in the future anterior perspective, then depends on the very unpresentability or irretrievability of the past and the future, which conditions mourning, or grief. And Judith’s handing of the letter to a stranger with its destructibility in mind is indeed an act of the recognition of the division by this unpresentable past and future, an act of survival in mourning that deconstructs the genealogical and founds the future anterior friendship.

It is therefore also a declaration of parting from fraternal democracy founded on the
belief in sameness or consanguinity, which is the ultimate ideal of the Southern father in *Absalom* and also in *Go Down, Moses*, and can be a point of departure for another conception of democracy founded on dis/inheritance. Derrida claims that since democracy implicated in the future anterior friendship remains to be unpresentable, or “remains to come: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept” (306). Or in other words, it is always on the side of the foreclosed that haunts a heritage, and always outside the domain of knowledge. And however similar this democracy-to-come may seem to the Faulknerian man’s obsession with the immutable and unreachable past projected onto the present and the future, the possibility of mourning grief distinguishes the democracy-to-come from fraternal democracy. The central wager here is no longer keeping a heritage as it is to ensure sameness or consanguinity, but relaunching it otherwise through grief/grievance, which incessantly threatens the limits of knowledge and meaning, and functions as a pressure to dis/inherit and survive in mourning.

It is worth reemphasizing here that because Derrida supposes our inseparable relation with what comes before us, what I have called “mourning grief” does not mean mere severance from it—that is why it is still a matter of inheritance as double injunction, or what I call dis/inheritance.⁵⁹ In fact, Derrida regards successful Freudian mourning as impossible and problematic, for it leads to “faithful interiorization,” which “bears the other and constitutes him

⁵⁹ For example, Derrida regards his deconstruction of the phrase “O my friends, there is no friend” as a matter of an inheritance of a testament (*Politics* 26).
in me (in us), at once living and dead,” and “makes the other a part of us, between us—and then
the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us,
like an unborn child, like a future” (Memoires 35). Successful mourning has a strange
resemblance to fraternal friendship, in which the dead remain to live in the heir’s testimonial
memory, but it is impossible because “the other as other, the nontotalizable trace” is “interiorized
in mourning as that which can no longer be interiorized . . . in and beyond mournful memory—
constituting it, traversing it, exceeding it, defying all reappropriation” (38). Mourning for Derrida
is therefore neither simple severance from the object of grief nor fraternal identification with it,
but it calls for dis/inheritance in its relation to the other.

If mourning grief as “double injunction” is not successful mourning, it does not mean the
termination of melancholia. As argued in Chapter 1, Freud himself thinks that melancholia is a
“common” and “typical” mental process and a constitutive part of the formation of the ego and
the super-ego (28). Butler argues that melancholia constitutes the domain of unavowable losses
“prior to speech and declaration”; it is “the limiting condition of its possibility: a withdrawal or
retraction from speech that makes speech possible” (Psychic 170). Moreover, the foreclosure that
divides the speakable and the unspeakable, the legible and the illegible, works “as a mechanism
of production,” not as a prohibition of existing items as in what Michel Foucault calls the
“repressive hypothesis” (25). Thus, we should not neglect the productive aspects of melancholia
even when we aim to destabilize it. Mourning grief in this context, serving as grievance, does not
demolish the possibility of knowledge constituted by melancholia; instead, it alters the existing
domain of knowledge. And moreover, if it leads to the “non-presentable concept” of democracy-
to-come, what matters is not simply the retrieval of the foreclosed or alteration as a one-time act, since the foreclosed are part of products of the existing foreclosing melancholia. A more important function of mourning grief is to leave the structure of inheritance open to the unpresentable past and future, to the time of the future anterior. I believe that this is why Faulkner has Judith consider the “scratch,” an inscribing event that will have happened anytime, to be more important than the inscribed “mark” of intervention.

In the chapters that follow, I examine how in *Go Down, Moses*, this scratch appears as the retrieval of mourning grief banished from the white family and confined in the black home. In this novel, Faulkner dramatizes it with the repetitive usage of the pattern of “the pursuing white man” and “the fleeing black man.” The hunting trilogy of Ike, the representative “pursuing white man” in the novel, explores how avoiding grief is central for the white man to cherish a hope for retrieving the ideal past signified by the immortal democratic wilderness, while he fails to achieve it to conceal its fundamental impossibility and thus becomes the Faulknerian man. Ike dreams of the co-engagement of the living and the dead, the transcendence of time, or fraternal identification, but he learns not to achieve it by clinging to the patriarchal historical views founded on genealogical inheritance, which implies hope for filial identification qua fraternization and its failure because of the temporal gap, even after his repudiation of patrimony. Nevertheless, he is eventually forced to confront the foreclosed grief at the core of the Southern history he has made up, and the novel suggests Ike’s rethinking of genealogy or dis/inheritance of the past—not simple severance from the past but the acceptance of the past as the dead other and of the future anterior time. *Go Down, Moses* juxtaposes this deconstruction of the white
family’s genealogy with black men’s predicament in this social system, in which the black home functions as the cache of grief. The novel shows the repeated pattern of the black man’s exile or escaping from the black home and homecoming, his abortive attempts to gain manhood outside the black and feminine space. The white man’s hunting and the black man’s exile are two sides of the same coin, the black man being the object of pursuit—thus what is happening is consistently what may be called “the race between the pursuing white man and the fleeing black man”—but when the black man goes too far the pattern comes to have a different meaning: the black man is caught and killed, and forcefully returned to the black home, and on the way home the dead black body with traces of grief, serving as a letter to be handed to strangers, circulates within the community, propagating the foreclosed grief and thereby occasioning communal dis/inheritance. This pattern of “the race between the pursuing white man and the fleeing black man” is a variation of the pattern of failure and achievement, in which achievement again disrupts the white man’s ideal (and therefore, the race must be perpetuated to preserve the dream of the pure and powerful white father and the Southern notion of race itself). And indeed, it has a similar structure to the pursuit in Absalom, in which the object to be caught is the truth about Charles Bon, or his evasive blackness. Absalom therefore already depicts a kind of “the race between the pursuing white man and the fleeing black man” with ineffable love as its absent, or repressed, center. But this pattern developed in Go Down, Moses with grief as its key emotion further shows the deeper predicament for the black man, for it suggests difficulty to imagine a viable way for the black man to survive in the time of dis/inheritance; he must choose either to be dead to become an agency of dis/inheritance as do Rider in “Pantaloons in Black” and Butch in
“Go Down, Moses” or voluntarily return to the black home as Tomey’s Turl in “Was” and Lucas in “The Fire and the Hearth.” Yet Faulkner at least fully investigates and deconstructs the society’s ideological assumptions and shows another possible conception of genealogy and inheritance through the intricately intertwined stories of the black and white families that revolve around the foreclosed grief/grievance.
Chapter 6

The “Constant and Grieving Rain” on the Wilderness:

The Return of Grief and Ike’s Dis/Inheritance of History

As discussed above, the profoundly melancholic Faulknerian man ultimately denies loss or death, while the retrieval of mourning grief becomes an opportunity for him to perform dis/inheritance. In this regard, Ike’s strange reticence about the death of the slave woman Eunice throughout Go Down, Moses bears importance. Ike “posits his grandfather’s incestuous miscegenation” with a slave girl named Tomasina, who was a daughter of a slave named Eunice and his grandfather old Carothers McCaslin, “as the immediate proximate cause of his own renunciation” of patrimony (Godden and Polk 120), and he reaches that conclusion through meditation on the death of Eunice, or her “griefless” suicide, recorded in the family ledgers (GDM 257). This meditation is the originary moment of his whole idea of history and justice, repudiation and redemption. Yet after that, he never mentions Eunice’s death or old Carothers’s incestuous miscegenation, except for that moment when he once more remembers the process in which he found it during his discussion with his cousin, McCaslin (Cass) Edmonds. Even while he is persuading Cass to accept his repudiation of patrimony and advocating the redemptive history of the white man’s guilt and compensation as the ground for his decision, however, he does not refer to the presumed point of departure of his idea. When he encounters a descendant of Eunice and Tomasina in “Delta Autumn,” she appears primarily as a granddaughter of Tennie’s Jim, a grandson of Tomasina, and Ike keeps on repressing the memory of Eunice’s
As we shall see, Ike, both before and after his repudiation of patrimony, founds his interpretation of history on his assumption of genealogical connection with the immutable ideal past, which is ultimately represented by the wilderness, and dreams of fraternal identification with it. In the final analysis, his gesture of disinheritance is a way to keep intact the ideal of fraternity and the white family’s genealogical continuity, and therefore a rejection of the Derridean double injunction at the time when the traditional economic system is collapsing and consequently the traditional inheritance of patrimony is becoming insufficient for the sustainment of the ideal. Ike is thus one of the Faulknerian men, obsessed with the melancholic is-ness of the past.

It comes as no surprise then that the exclusion of mourning grief features Ike’s discourse, and his reticence about Eunice’s death reflects his anxiety that it might exceed the ideal fraternity which supposedly nullifies death and grief and bring back the possibility of mourning because it embodies the originary process of his melancholia without concealing traces of what must be foreclosed. Indeed, I would argue that Eunice’s death or “griefless” suicide marks the repression, not the primary lack, of grief, and points to traces of repressed affective responses to the white man’s familialism and implies an alternative history which the patriarchal family’s history at once produces and represses. And though Ike tries not to touch this memory, it subtly comes back from time to time, and this occasional return of grief culminates in the encounter with the descendant of Eunice, which forces Ike to dis/inherit and reinterpret the history of his family. Since it leads to the alteration of his view of history, from the melancholic one of the Faulknerian
man to a more open one characterized by grief (as grievance) and the future anterior perspective, it will be at the same time the dis/inheritance of the past, and of history, historicity and historiography.

A typical melancholic Faulknerian man until the last stage of his life when the repressed grief catches up with him, Ike tries to preserve his ideal through repetitive failures to achieve it. Then, I will first investigate into the repetitive pattern Ike establishes and develops in his hunting trilogy—“The Old People,” “The Bear,” and “Delta Autumn”—in order to preserve his subjecthood and identity with the ideal fraternity of the mythical past as its absent center.

Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber appropriately compares that pattern to the structure of the Lacanian subject. In that structure, what sustains the subject is the desire “to attain the missing part of one’s own being,” and yet the “missing part” is actually “lacking” and unattainable from the beginning (482). The subject then needs a “social reality based on repression of what is lacking,” and it is the dominant society that “creates a shared reality by projecting and articulating unattainable desire onto objects/others” (482). This projection constitutes what Lacan calls the objet a, “the representation of desire outside of the symbolic and imaginary network” (482). In other words, the objet a is the representation of what is on the side of the foreclosed, or what Lacan calls the real, the domain beyond representation in the existing symbolic order or shared reality. We can say that the objet a is that onto which ineffable love or desire is projected in a safer, dissimulated way, as is the unracialized Bon in Absalom.

Importantly, one can sustain one’s identity only insofar as one does not attain the object of desire
represented by the *objet a* and stop the pursuit, for attainment is equivalent to stepping outside the existing symbolic order which defines and articulates one’s present identity. Therefore, “the subject actually engages in the *pursuit* itself rather than in the gratification of a need” (482), and “a pattern of repetition in regard to the *objet a* sustains [the] concept of self” (487).

As Schreiber points out, Faulkner’s remark concerning the repetitive pattern of the hunt Ike engages in has a clear affinity with this structure of the Lacanian subject:

The hunt was simply a symbol of pursuit. Most of anyone’s life is a pursuit of something. That is, the only alternative to life is immobility, which is death. This was a symbolization of the pursuit which is a normal part of anyone’s life, and dramatic to me. . . . I was simply telling something which was in this case the child [Ike]—the need, the compulsion of the child to adjust to the adult world. . . . And always to learn something, to learn something of—not only to pursue but to overtake and then to have the compassion not to destroy, to catch, to touch, and then let go because then tomorrow you can pursue again. If you destroy it, what you caught, then it’s gone, it’s finished. And that to me is sometimes the greater part of valor but always it’s the greater part of pleasure, not to destroy what you have pursued. The pursuit is the thing, not the reward, not the gain. (*FU* 271-72)

For the Lacanian subject, as for the Faulknerian subject, “the actual fulfillment of desire” means “dying,” or the loss of the subject’s identity (Schreiber 482), so that what is represented by the *objet a* is always a prohibited object of desire. For the hunter, then, killing the object means killing the subject’s identity as the hunter. In this case, the logic is simple; one ceases to be a
hunter if there is no game to hunt. But Schreiber aptly argues that the wilderness itself functions for Ike as the objet a. He is indeed in this repetitive pattern of pursuit without attaining what is represented by this objet a by killing the totemic animals that he thinks embody the wilderness, most notably Old Ben in “The Bear.” It is almost Lacan’s version of the Freudian fort-da game, in which the repeatedly lost and retrieved reel plays the role of the objet a. The endless game “as a whole symbolizes repetition, but not at all that of some need that might demand the return of the mother” (Lacan 62), the true object of desire, and the “function of the exercise with this object refers to an alienation, and not to some supposed mastery, which is difficult to imagine being increased in an endless repetition, whereas the endless repetition that is in question reveals the radical vacillation of the subject” (239). It appears that the source of subjecthood lies in this very repetition that shows the alienation of the subject. The subject therefore must not conclusively attain the objet a and stop the game. Although Ike seems to gain a mastery of the wilderness, he implicitly ascertains his alienation from it, inability to fulfill his desire, by tracking down Old Ben and letting him go. Likewise, as we shall examine more closely later, he can neither completely subject himself to the wilderness nor achieve the moral ideal it emblematizes.

In Go Down, Moses, there is no attainment of the object of ineffable love, and instead Faulkner thoroughly explores the structure in which the subject, which is in principle alienated, split, and vacillating as Lacan formulates, sustains its subjecthood through repetitive failures to obtain the objet a, thus managing to adjust to what Faulkner calls the “adult world.” Charles Shepherdson argues that while the objet a appears as “the memory of a past that is somehow
preserved in all its archaeological purity” (46-47), it is “strictly mythical” (47) and “actually impossible or originally lost, but the prohibition produces the illusion of a possible possession—either in a mythical past or in a promised future” (48). This is a typical tactic of the Faulknerian man who constructs and preserves an impossible ideal as an object of desire which once existed but is momentarily lost or prohibited, the presumed fact of momentary loss serving as a proof of the object’s existence in the past. In “The Old People,” for example, what Sam Fathers calls “the People,” the ancient people who inhabited the wilderness, play the role of this mythical past (GDM 162).

Familialism, fraternization, or aristo-democracy, which, as Derrida argues, entails the co-engagement of the living and the dead or the resurrection of the dead, characterizes this ideal mythical past with which Ike wishes to identify while he, as a typical Faulknerian man, endlessly postpones the consummation of identification. In “The Old People,” Ike goes through an initiation rite performed by the hand of Sam Fathers, a son of a Chickasaw chief and a slave woman. Through this rite Ike affiliates himself to the transcendent People, marked “forever one with the wilderness” (169), “with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people” (173). Ike imagines that the patriarchal genealogical line leads from the People to him via the Indian tribe and then the white family. He legitimates his grafting the Indians’ genealogy onto the whites’ genealogy on the ground that they are both noble lines of “chiefs and kings” (157). However, though Sam hands down the memory of the People to Ike, since the former “had not had time to ever know and so could not remember” them (162), they cannot be material beings that once lived and died such as Sam’s father Ikkemotubbe. The People thus
remain to be the ideal genealogical past which Ike expects to be present in some promised future that never comes.

In Ike’s imagination, the transhistorical, immortal People function as a figure of spiritual fraternity based on the conviction of the real and figurative sameness of blood and characterized by the overcoming of time, death, and materiality and the lack of grief. The wilderness then becomes a place inhabited by such immortal, immaterial, transhistorical beings as the People, “the ancient immortal Umpire,” and others (172). Even the buck that Ike shot for the initiation rite overcomes death in the wilderness: “the buck still and forever leaped, that shaking gun-barrels coming constantly and forever steady at last, crashing, and still out of his instant of immortality the buck sprang, forever immortal” (169). Thus, death is rather an opportunity to enter this immortal realm and is not to be grieved over. The deaths of individual material beings then become insignificant, for they have prospects to be a part of the immortal wilderness.

Still, “The Old People” confirms that since the present living people cannot actually identify with the People, they only have provisional immortality by presupposing not only the past genealogical lines but also their continuity in the future. Ike is “marked” by Sam with the blood of the buck he shot, and the sacrificial death of the buck and the symbolical acknowledging touch join “him and the man forever, so that the man would continue to live past the boy’s seventy years and then eighty years, long after the man himself had entered the earth as the chiefs and kings entered it” (157). The touch connects the genealogical line of Sam, “the old man past seventy whose grandfather had owned the land before the white men ever saw it and who had vanished from it now with all their kind, what of blood they left behind them running
now in another race and for a while even in bondage and now drawing toward the end of its alien and irrevocable course, barren, since Sam Fathers had no children,” and that of Ike, “the child, not yet a man, whose grandfather had lived in the same country and in almost the same manner as the boy himself would grow up to live, leaving his descendants in the land in his turn as his grandfather had done” (157). Living individual beings cannot reach the ideal status of transhistorical fraternity represented by the People, but the perpetuity of Sam through the joining of the genealogical lines suggests that the ownership and inheritance of the land and the patriarchal family’s genealogical continuity as repetitions of the ancestors grant the family members’ pseudo-immortality beyond materiality.

In order to sustain its genealogy, however, the white family has to retain as the proof of the family’s continuity the crudely material aspect of the owning and inheritance of patrimony that implies the unavoidable temporal gap in filiation. This aspect must be overcome to achieve fraternity and seems to Ike inessential, “trivial and without reality” (163). Yet this compromise through the material sustainment of genealogical continuity contributes to constituting the melancholic structure in which Ike can keep the objet a at a distance as unattainable and yet not totally lost. It is suggestive that he has to experience “grief over the missed opportunity” (174) to shoot game in order to meet the spiritual buck addressed by Sam as “Chief” and “Grandfather” (175), a symbolical figure into which the ideal immortal beings are eventually condensed. Being “a hunter and a man” (169), Ike has to learn to restrain himself from attaining the object of desire by not shooting, in this case, the spiritual buck, and later in “The Bear,” the totemic bear, Old Ben.
If there ever exists grief in the wilderness, it is not grief over death—even the shot buck is immortal in the wilderness—but over (practically preplanned) failures to attain the desired object. But this grief is in a sense not sincere grief because it at the same time means the unchangeability and permanence of the desired object, as the stanza from Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” which Cass reads to Ike in “The Bear” suggests. Cass asks Ike the reason why he did not shoot Old Ben, and reads the poem as an answer to his own question which Ike fails to answer. Cass then repeats one stanza, of which the text reproduces only the last lines: “She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, ‘McCaslin said: ‘Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair’” (282). The stanza announces the inescapable perpetual postponement of the fulfillment of desire because the object of desire is always an unattained object: “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/ Are sweeter” (Keats 282). The object of desire obtains its immortality as long as it remains unattainable, as the formative structure of the Lacanian subject and the Faulknerian hunter also suggests. Thus the lines right before the ones reproduced in “The Bear” reads: “Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss, / Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve” (282). Immortality ultimately excludes grief of any forms, even grief derived from the unattainability of the desired object, while in actuality the failure to attain the object enables the ideal of immortality to survive. It is this principle of the wilderness—and of patriarchal genealogy—which Cass teaches Ike through the recitation of Keats’s poem.

It is pertinent that David Minter invokes the title of Wallace Stevens’ poem “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” when he discusses “the reiterative bent of [Faulkner’s] imagination” (232). Minter claims that the peculiar styles of modernists are “signs simultaneously of what was
possible—approximation of supreme order and closure—and of what was not—their attainment” (232). Since Minter takes this melancholic structure as that of Go Down, Moses, almost naturally he sees the ideal human relationship in the harmony of “Sam’s speaking and the boy’s listening” in “The Old People” which, in his view, results in a “full collaborative sharing of a world that is, paradoxically, contingent yet almost unmediated” and overcomes the modernist division (242). Though Minter emphasizes that this relation gives words “manifold meaning” (242), it supposes the unity of meaning among “unmediated sharers” of the world including the reader (243). This collaborative sharing through speaking and listening which overcomes division has an unmistakable resemblance to Quentin and Shreve’s “happy marriage of speaking and hearing” (AA 253), which establishes the fraternal intersubjective community where its members overcome the restriction by time and collaboratively attain the immediate understanding of meaning. Since in “The Old People” Ike “would just wait and then listen and Sam would begin, talking about the old days and the People” without reacting to questions (GDM 162), the relationship between Sam and Ike in “The Old People” is not mutual and actually does not match up to the “happy marriage of speaking and hearing,” but this unilateral speaking and hearing does allow Ike to foster his desire to join the fraternal community of the People that exceeds the temporal gap of filiation. Then it is reasonable to regard the establishment of that community as the ultimate but ever-unattained end of the characters in “The Old People,” if not of the entire novel, around which the pattern of repetitive failures is constituted.

While “The Old People” thus precisely exhibits the melancholic structure that captures the Faulknerian man, it does not clearly state why one must not attain the objet a. But the
problem is chiefly racial again as in *Absalom*. The initiation rite in “The Old People” avoids the fulfillment of desire or the achievement of a fraternal bond that negates the temporal gap between father and son through immediate identification. Since the buck vicariously takes the deadly touch (by a bullet) of paternal acknowledgement reminiscent of Henry’s murder of Bon, joining and marking through the initiation rite only implies imperfect identification through the symbolic consecration by sacrificial blood, not the dangerously revealing consummation of identification. We can consider identification with Sam to be fatal for Ike because, as emphasized in the description of his genealogy, Sam was a slave and is still officially a “negro” even though he behaves and is treated differently from other negroes (162). Sam cannot divest himself of the “mark . . . of bondage,” and Ike demands Sam’s liberation, crying “Let him go!” (159), which evokes a line in the abolitionist spiritual used as the title of the novel, “Go Down, Moses”—“Let my people go.” Ike’s acknowledgement of the figurative filial relation with the negro Sam as the proof of his connection with the People is potentially dangerous for him, the heir of the white Southern family.

Still, “The Old People” suspends the problem of black blood in the potentially dangerous kinship between Ike and Sam by prioritizing paternal blood. Cass trivializes Sam’s black blood by regarding the mixture of it into Sam as betrayal “by his mother,” who was a mixed-blood slave woman (160). In a typically patriarchal move, Cass ascribes evilness to women, attaches more importance to paternal blood and treats Sam as a noble descendant of the Chickasaw chief. Moreover, the narrator of the story repeatedly emphasizes that Ike is destined to be a repetition of his white male ancestors. Though Ike is a boy in this story, the narrator already foretells his death

182
at around the same age as his ancestors on the first page: “He would live to be eighty, as his father and his father’s twin brother and their father in his turn had lived to be” (155). And the narrator mentions that Ike will leave “his descendants in the land in his turn as his grandfather had done” and that the land which “had been his grandfather’s and then his father’s and uncle’s and was now his cousin’s . . . someday would be his own land” (163). Thus, the narrator situates Ike in the repetitive structure of the white genealogy. Significantly, “The Old People” begins with Sam’s acknowledging touch and ends with another acknowledging touch by Cass, Ike’s cousin and white father figure, who states that Ike’s experience of seeing the spiritual buck after the initiation rite is actually a repetition of his own. The substitutive nature of the rite and the emphasis of white patrilineage collaboratively contribute to obscuring the dangerous aspect of Ike’s pursuing the ideal past which may be not only unattainable but prohibited for the racial reason. “The Old People” thus demonstrates how the assumption of genealogical connection with the mythical origin plunges Ike into the melancholic structure of the patriarchal family, though he, being a little boy, does not have the sense of “tragic absurd” yet, and the story only obliquely shows the contradictory nature of the ideal past as the objet a.

However, we know that the boy’s future foretold in “The Old People” is not true, and that he gets out of this repetitive pattern sustained by genealogical continuity through ownership and inheritance. The very opening of the first chapter of the novel, “Was,” tells us that “Isaac McCaslin, ‘Uncle Ike’, past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated anymore” is “a widower now and uncle to half a country and father to no one,” and “owned no property and never desired to since the earth was no man’s but all men’s” (5). “The Bear” suggests that it is
because Ike finds his grandfather’s sinful acts and realizes that the family’s history of the possession of the land and people is criminal.

Nevertheless, we should not mistake this as Ike’s overcoming of the repetitive pattern organized around the objet a. Rather, Ike avoids encountering the fundamental contradictions inherent in the assumption of the white family’s legitimate genealogy by reshaping history and making the liberation of black people the white heir’s hereditary task, renouncing the sustainment of genealogy through ownership and inheritance, which would have made him confronted with the aporia of love which Faulkner explored in Absalom and suspends in “The Old People.”

In “The Bear,” Ike comes to think that Indians who also owned the land and slaves were complicit with white people and the imagined link with the mythical People becomes tenuous. He then makes the wilderness itself into the main object of desire. He creates another repetitive pattern with this wilderness as the objet a, keeping on imagining the wilderness as the realm of immortal fraternity that belongs to the mythical past. The totemic bear Old Ben is also “not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life” (183). Just like the People, the bear Ike pursues after is in a sense already lost, located in the past, and preserved through the annual ritualistic hunt designed as almost purposeful repetitive failures to catch it that varnish over the loss. But Ike eventually notices that Old Ben is not only an apotheosis of the immortal “timeless” woods, but also “a mortal animal” to be killed (190). Indeed, the hunters eventually kill Old Ben, and its death lets Major de Spain, the current owner of the woods, sell the land to a milling
company and accelerates the decrease of the wilderness.

Nevertheless, Ike makes the losses of the material existence of the bear and the wilderness into felicitous opportunities to preserve the ideal wilderness in melancholia. In the final section of the story, Ike sees the industry’s large-scale exploitation of the woods at first in “shocked and grieved amazement” while he had “forewarning” and has been “prepared” (302). But Ike soon displaces this grief over the loss of the material wilderness into melancholic longing for the past ideal wilderness, which is lost from the beginning. Ike stops looking save toward the still seemingly “impenetrable and impervious woods,” and turns his thought to the memory of the good old days in the wilderness and averts his gaze from the actuality of the diminishing wilderness (305). As Ike focuses his attention on the past, the present proof of exploitation vanishes, and the wilderness becomes transcendent: “Then it [the sound of the train] was gone. It had not been. He could no longer hear it. The wilderness soared, musing, inattentive, myriad, eternal, green; older than any mill-shed, longer than any spur-line” (306). For Ike, the woods “did not change, and, timeless, would not, anymore than would the green of summer and the fire and rain of fall and the iron cold and sometimes even snow” (307). This eternal wilderness eventually denies any forms of death. In the seasons’ “ordered immortal sequence, the deathless and immemorial phases of the mother” (310), death in the wilderness is immediately followed by rebirth, and subsumed into the “wilderness’ concordant generality” (312), so that “death [does] not even exist” there (311). Individual deaths, including that of Sam, Ike’s “spirit’s father . . . whom he . . . loved and lost and grieved” (310), are then denied as “no
The dead become “free in earth and not in earth but of earth, myriad yet undiffused of every myriad part . . . in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one” (312). Even Old Ben resurrects as eternal game engaged in the perpetual “long chase” with “no heart to be driven and outraged, no flesh to be mauled and bled” (313). As long as Ike believes in immortality in the wilderness, therefore, it spares him grief.

Because Ike does not kill Old Ben or destroy the wilderness with his own hands and thereby avoids the mortal touch, he can keep the objet a intact, and the wilderness remains to be a desired but prohibited object. By belonging to the transcendent wilderness instead of possessing it as property (as in the patriarchal genealogy of ownership and inheritance), individual material beings become free, immortal, and immaterial, identified with each other. This identification is the ideal form of fraternity, or what Ike calls the “communal anonymity of brotherhood” (244).

Then, though Schreiber regards the wilderness as the domain of “the individual” in opposition to the democratizing society that effaces difference and individual identity (477), this view fails to explain the repetitive pattern in Ike’s hunting stories. Ike in “The Bear” considers that the sin of possession and particularly of slavery has corrupted the Southern society, and even the present mid-20th-century society invaded by the Northern industrialism is not democratic at

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60 Richard Moreland argues that Ike’s “symbolic gift of a sack of candy to Sam’s grave suggests that his willfully innocent denials of the reality of death in the wilderness should not be taken too literally, that they are not only melancholic resistances—suspensions of mourning—but also partial, tentative gestures in a process of articulating his grief” (183). However, Ike thinks that his gift is immediately “gone too . . . not vanished but merely translated into the myriad life” (GDM 312). Accordingly, this is still another indication of Ike’s melancholic anticipation of the immediate overcoming of grief in “the wilderness’ concordant generality.”
all; on the contrary, the Northerners and their descendants aggravate oppression and exploitation “against the race their ancestors had come to save” (GDM 276). The wilderness for Ike, in contrast, serves as the democratic realm of freedom in which everyone including the hunters, “not white nor black nor red but men,” coexist beyond racial division (181). Sam’s remark to ask others to let him die in the wilderness—“Let me out, master. . . . Let me go home” (232)—resonates with Ike’s cry in “The Old People” and emphasizes liberation from bondage in the wilderness, supposedly the prelapsarian place before the bondage and exploitation of black people. What Ike projects onto the wilderness is, as James A. Snead puts it, the “pre-exchange state of things, an origin before the need for articulation, division, difference, and domination” (180), or the “pure and intact preserve of pastness” (181). The wilderness as the object of Ike’s desire is therefore a figure of “merging and unity” rather than individualization (180). Then, Doreen Fowler’s interpretation that the wilderness for Ike is the “original undifferentiated state” in which “there can be no separate subject” is more convincing than Schreiber’s (Faulkner 149).

However, since Fowler supposes a universal psychoanalytic model to describe what the wilderness means to Ike, she cannot offer a persuasive explanation as to why Ike actually hesitates to identify with the wilderness. Though Fowler considers that Ike implicitly accepts the “death of the subject” or the effacement of difference implied in the wilderness (149), as I examine in the following, Ike’s claims during the discussion with Cass in the fourth section of “The Bear” and his attitudes toward the mistress of his kinsman, Carothers (Roth) Edmonds, in “Delta Autumn” reveal that he still clings to his identity and subjecthood as white male. Precisely because of that, the democratic wilderness which annuls difference functions for Ike as the objet
In “The Bear,” Ike laments that white Southerners and Indians before them have unduly owned the land, and thinks that he and his family were “elected and chosen” by God to carry out the redemptive mission to make people return to the prelapsarian state of the wilderness (*GDM* 269). Ike connects the possession of the land with that of slaves and the predicament of blacks after the Civil War, for the existence of dehumanized laborers is indispensable for the plantation and post-plantation economies. And he says that God “used the blood which had brought in the evil to destroy the evil,” or “to set at least some of His lowly people free,” so that his family has to compensate for their own guilt (246). This is what “He had foreseen,” and Ike is in this view destined to be a redeemer (246). Using this fatalistic and “homeopathic logic” (Kodat 101), he builds up a history in which the inherited redemptive mission is the ground for the genealogically guaranteed whiteness while he makes black people into inheritors of the history of suffering racial oppression attendant to the white history of redemption—inheritors “of slaves” (*GDM* 259), “of the long chronicle of a people who had learned humility through suffering and learned pride through the endurance which survived the suffering” (281), or “of generation after generation to whom an unannounced white man on a horse was a white man’s hired Patroller wearing a pistol sometimes and a blacksnake whip always” (264). Ike can sustain his white identity, therefore, as long as he remains to be a redeemer without actually succeeding in the liberation of the blacks and the land. It is virtually a variation of the patriarchal history of ownership and inheritance, though what he inherits now is not patrimony but the redemptive mission. The prelapsarian wilderness is then the symbol of the moral ideal; it is the fraternal,
democratic place to which everyone is supposed to go back at the end of history. In order to perpetuate the repetitive pattern of this history and retain his white identity, however, Ike needs to keep it unattained and the white man’s guilt unredeemed.

Ike most evidently shows what he really wants to sustain when he expresses terror of miscegenation and economic equalization in “Delta Autumn” after he has learned that Roth’s mistress is mixed-blood:

This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires’ mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares. (346)

Together with Ike’s clearly racist attitudes toward Roth’s mistress, this passage attests to his persistence in racial and economic division, which contradicts his ostensive desire for the democratic wilderness. Ike refuses change and postpones it until a distant future: “Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now!” (343). This makes a clear contrast with Shreve’s future anterior perspective at the end of Absalom, which allows the unforeseen future symbolic order to divide the present identity.
Mark T. Decker correctly points out that “Ike gives voice to the fears of a Southern society trapped within its own dread of cultural change that can be easily coded as contamination” (471). The above passage shows, in Decker’s view, that Ike associates inter-regional railroads and locomotives with a “geographic, economic, and cultural miscegenation” which undermines the “regionally distinct culture of privilege” he wants to preserve (472). The modern transportation system connects the North and the South and brings into the South non-local people and new technologies that transform the Southern economic configuration and the way to run farms in particular. Ike then imagines the wilderness as a “utopia” exempt from any forms of contamination (473). Gary Harrington points out that while “Ike perceives the woods to be a respite from the civilized society of the plantation,” the hunting camp, “far from representing the apex of ‘social perfection,’ . . . not only reproduces the ills of the civilized society but intensifies them. Women are excluded from the camp altogether, and the blacks are relegated solely to the position of servants” (522). Ike, together with the other hunters, thus sustains the social hierarchy even in the wilderness.

However, true as it may be that Ike tries to distinguish the wilderness from the ongoing racial and economic miscegenation, the wilderness is also a place of “merging and unity,” and his anxiety over the destruction of boundaries is inherent in the utopian wilderness itself. In fact, we can find the imagery of modern technology attached to the wilderness. For example, Old Ben is compared to the locomotive twice (GDM 199, 225). Later the actual locomotive which runs through the woods is compared to a “snake” while in the wilderness Ike comes across a snake, “evocative of all knowledge and an old weariness and of pariah-hood and of death” (313), which
he addresses as “Chief, . . . Grandfather” (314). Snead reads these associations between the totemic animals and the locomotive as evidence that the “fatedness of the woods’ destruction through technology and greed was already there at the beginning in disguised form” (189).

Certainly, as Snead implies, the hunters are complicit with the Northern industrialism; after all, it was Major de Spain who sold the woods to the lumber company. In Ike’s view, white Southerners as well as Indians have “translated” the wilderness “into money,” made it into property and an object of economic transaction (GDM 241). Yet Ike’s associations moreover show that he sees the elements of destruction, death, and accursedness in his conception of the wilderness itself rather than intervention by the hunters. Therefore, it is more a disguised expression of Ike’s implicit perception of the destructive power of the ideal wilderness that threatens his identity than of his guilty feelings about the white Southerners’ complicity in the destruction of the woods. If the wilderness is exempt from contamination, it is because it is a place where there are no divisions that contamination presupposes.61

Since the ideal wilderness as the objet a represents the moral ideal which results in the obfuscation of racial division, it eventually becomes an implicit figure of black people, those who are virtuous but with whom Ike must not identify himself. After all, if the wilderness becomes reachable only after racial and economic miscegenation, it means for the white Southerner Ike the blackening of whiteness; the legal and social system of his time considers a mixed-blood person to be black if that person has even a drop of black blood in him or her.

61 Thus, the wilderness in Go Down, Moses also approximates Ishmael’s “wide landscape of snows” in Moby Dick in which “there is such a blank dumbness, full of meaning . . . —a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink” (Melville 1001).
Despite the taboo of miscegenation, however, blacks also represent the moral ideal Ike desires; because they are “without past, property, or male lines of inheritance” in contrast with the white patriarchal family tainted by the sin of possession, Ike gives them “a certain timeless nobility” (Snead 191). Indeed, when he describes them as a “better” people “who had learned humility through suffering and learned pride through the endurance which survived the suffering” (GDM 280, 281), it has a striking affinity with the timeless wilderness held intact in what Ike calls “the communal anonymity of brotherhood” where “all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread” (244). When Cass refutes Ike by pointing out blacks’ “[i]nability to distinguish mine and thine,” it only means that they are free from the sin of possession, so that Ike can say that black people got their virtues “from the old free fathers a longer time free than us because we have never been free” (280). Thus, in “The Bear,” black people, instead of the ancient Indian People, become a figure of the past ideal, or the “prelapsarian innocence” (Moreland 181), and overlap with the wilderness.

Thadious Davis sees Old Ben as “that mighty abstraction, ‘The Negro,’ the trope par excellence of endurance and sufferance” (7). This observation is justifiable considering that both black people and the wilderness which the bear embodies (or the hunters make it embody) are at once the figures of the mythical past and victims of the white Southerners who translate them into property. Indeed, right after speaking about the superiority and freedom of black people, Ike parallels the old bear that has “the fierce pride of liberty and freedom” with Sam Fathers, “an old man, son of a Negro slave and an Indian king” (GDM 281). Blackness, which problem Ike once suspended in “The Old People,” now becomes a pathway to the ideal mythical past because it is
a mark of dispossession. Therefore, blackness is, as is the wilderness, the implicitly desired but strictly prohibited object which, if attained, brings death on the white subject. Sam and Old Ben are qualified to be a part of the immortal wilderness when they die not only because they are related to the ancient times but also because they are dispossessed and blackened, absolved of the sin of possession. Thus, Ike finds that the noble Indian people “existed there only in the solitary brotherhood of an old and childless Negro’s alien blood and the wild and invincible spirit of an old bear” (281). It comes as no surprise then that the embodiment of “Chief,” which was the majestic immortal buck in “The Old People,” becomes the snake “evocative of all knowledge and an old weariness and of pariah-hood and of death” at the end of “The Bear.”

Whereas Ike’s construction of the redemptive history is, as I discussed, a way to preserve his white identity, logically speaking, his disinheritance or dispossession is a risky attempt that approximates him not only to the wilderness, the place free from the concept of possession, but also to the dispossessed blacks. As John N. Duvall asserts, “a renunciation of his patrimony, a refusal to accept property . . . turns out . . . to kill his white identity” (“Was” 42). Ike is “a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one” (GDM 5), and his failure to be a father, his refusal to inherit patrimony, and his secluded life indeed make him almost socially dead, so that it allows Roth to say: “where have you been all the time while you were dead?” (329). Duvall persuasively argues that the nickname “Uncle Ike” itself insinuates his blackness because “uncle” was widely used to address a black man in the South while the prefix of “mister” was used only for a white man. Ike fails to acquire adulthood and manhood emematized by the prefix “mister,” and becomes a “‘black’ white man” even though he is not
of African American descent (“Was” 40).

Nevertheless, in the final analysis, Ike barely retains his identity as the white subject by building up the redemptive history of the white man’s guilt and compensation as an unending process of attaining the ideal. And though his disinheritance also has a risk of blackening him to some extent, some critics consider it to be a necessary step to uphold whiteness under the specific conditions in the 1940s South which jeopardize the traditional white male identity.

Richard Godden reads ambivalence toward blackness discernible throughout *Go Down, Moses* as the Hegelian drama of the labor lord’s dependency on the laborer. The white planter needs black chattel labor, but the changing economic system in the mid-20th-century modernizing South, especially after the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1933, made it difficult for white planters to keep black laborers in thrall in the plantation and sustain the traditional labor relation. In “Delta Autumn,” Roth Edmonds, the present owner of the former McCaslin plantation, complains about the loss of the land owner’s autonomy owing to the New Deal programs: “The country [is] full of people to tell a man how he cant raise his own cotton whether he will or wont” (*GDM* 323). Though black tenants engaged in agriculture were “virtual slaves” even after the Civil War, through federal funds and the restrictions on the production of cotton, the AAA and other “New Deal agricultural programs finally unbound black laborer and white owner” (Godden, *William* 60).

In Godden’s reading, in *GO Down, Moses*, desire for black labor intensified because of the South’s economic situation is displaced into erotic desire for black male body which the novel expresses mostly in figurative and dissimulating ways. Yet one cannot attain it since too
much intimacy destroys the labor lord/laborer distinction. Therefore, for example, the text presents Old Ben, the object of the hunters’ pursuit, as the object of erotic desire, and indeed as “a problematic African American body” (227n54), as is suggested in the description of its “loverlike” embracement and “erect” stature in the scene in which Boon Hogganbeck, together with the mongrel dog Lion, kills it by stabbing the blade of a knife into it, whereas Ike just observes it without participating in that act of destroying/attaining the object of desire (GDM 228).

In this view, the redemptive history Ike creates reflects that ambivalence between desire and prohibition concerning blackness, the indispensable counterpart of whiteness. In that history, black people retain the ineluctable relation to white people as the victims of the criminal redeemers who are not to be redeemed after all, and thereby let whiteness survive in a different way from the ownership and inheritance of material property. Some critics even consider the sexual relation between old Carothers and Eunice to be Ike’s invention not only because there is no textual evidence that Tomasina was old Carothers’s daughter but also because to admit his grandfather’s crime is advantageous for Ike in order to build up his version of history centered on the white man’s guilt and compensation. David H. Evans, for example, argues that Ike arbitrarily interprets the events in the ledgers and invents the crime of old Carothers in such a way as to fit the story into the traditional pattern of the American Jeremiad and make himself a Christ-like “chosen redeemer” (192).

In Godden and Noel Polk’s interpretation, Ike needs to invent “a culpably heterosexual grandfather” to repress “a deniably homosexual father” (148). They argue that the Percival
Brownlee episode Ike finds in the ledgers demonstrates illicit interracial homosexual relationships among Ike’s father Uncle Buck, his twin brother Uncle Buddy, and a slave man Brownlee, and that it reflects Ike’s hidden desire, the master’s “necessary love for the abjected” (148). Practically this is to read Go Down, Moses as a story of what I called ineffable love in my reading of Absalom (but without devastating conclusive identification with the prohibited object of desire). Ike in this plot represses and preserves the illicit interracial homoerotic desire by assuming the identity of the heterosexual white master who is to be at once a criminal and redeemer. Though I concede that Go Down, Moses does have these aspects and I will have to return to the topics of gender and sexuality later, let it suffice to say now that in my reading that tension is already observable in Ike’s contradictory desire for the objet a, the ideal wilderness as the democratic realm, and the novel goes beyond that melancholic structure.

So far, we have examined how Ike constructs and maintains the Faulknerian man’s melancholia. By sustaining the tension inherent in the objet a without experiencing an undeniable confrontation with fundamental contradictions, Ike, unlike Quentin in Absalom, seems to retain till the end a stable pattern of the repetitive unconsummated hunting, revolving around the desired but prohibited object. However, it is important that while old Carothers’s incestuous miscegenation seems to be the main cause of Ike’s repudiation of patrimony and would be helpful for him to convince Cass and others of the rightness of his repudiation, he does not disclose it to anyone. Evans regards Ike’s discovery or invention of his grandfather’s acts as contributive to his aim to assume the role of the redeemer, and Godden and Polk consider the criminality of the grandfather to be less problematic for Ike than the homosexuality of the father.
That there is no evidence of what Ike imagines old Carothers did all the more emphasizes that his grandfather’s incestuous miscegenation is within his expectations and plausible enough to allow him and most readers to believe that it actually happened, considering the social configuration of the time. What is even more important is that it nevertheless becomes unspeakable.

Since Ike “knew what he was going to find before he found it” (GDM 255), the event he discovers and the moral deterioration of the white master it suggests are a likely enough story within the system of slavery, and he reasonably bases his inference chiefly on the ledger entries about Eunice’s mysterious alleged suicide, the skin color of Tomey’s Turl, whose father the ledgers do not record but whom everyone regards as a son of Carothers McCaslin and Tomasina, and old Carothers’s wills not only to his black son but also to Thucydus, Eunice’s husband. Moreover, Ike begins his detective work by thinking “what he believed his father had thought when he found his brother’s first comment [about Eunice’s suicide]: Why did Uncle Buddy think she had drowned herself?” (255). The fatalistic anticipation of his finding is itself part of patriarchal melancholia in which everything follows a certain pattern of the past, and Ike in fact acts as a repetition of his father by thinking how people must have acted within certain ideological codes.

If his father and his uncle really thought as he does, furthermore, Ike actually repeats not only the inference of the event but also the concealment of it; obviously his father and his uncle did not tell anyone about it. But why does Ike have to conceal it especially when the evil criminality of his grandfather was not extraordinary within the system of slavery and rather

62 Ike “knew from his own observation and memory that there had already been some white in Tomey’s Terrel’s blood before his father gave him the rest of it” (GDM 257).
contributes to the sustainment of his identity? And despite the apparent importance of his
discovery of his grandfather’s acts, actually he cannot even think to himself that it is the cause of
his repudiation, as I will examine below. In order to explain this strange unspeakability, we need
to look beyond the repetitive pattern Ike creates around the objet a, the dream of fraternity that is
perpetually preserved as yet-unattained in the white man’s redemptive history. Thus, we have to
investigate into the event Ike cannot speak about, that is, Eunice’s suicide, which, whether it
actually happened or not, functions as the originary moment of Ike’s conception of that history,
and because of that, is a moment of foreclosure necessary to constitute it which contains traces of
the foreclosed.

Since the first-person narrator of “Lion,” one of the short stories which Faulkner
developed into “The Bear,” is Quentin, critics have found affinity between him and Ike. Linda
Wagner-Martin, however, asserts that Ike is “not another Quentin Compson,” for Ike’s
repudiation of patrimony and criticism against the crime of the white Southerners show that
“[b]y 1942 Faulkner had stopped romanticizing his inheritance of southern history, tradition,
legend, and myth” so that “Go Down, Moses is, in many aspects, a representation of the way the
South must relinquish its arcane values” (Introduction 5). Yet Absalom already shows the
untenability of the South’s arcane values, and does so through Quentin’s thorough
romanticization and exploration of his inheritance; he pursues it so much as to achieve the
patriarchal ideal of white male identification, relive the contradictory concurrence of the paternal
acknowledgement qua fraternal embracement of a white man and the exclusion and destruction
of the same man as a black rapist, and thereby realize that the concept of pure whiteness is delusory and impossible. However, Ike lacks this valor to catch, touch, and destroy the object of his desire. Although Wagner-Martin claims that in Faulkner’s earlier novels the reader has “to accept the impossibility of ‘knowing’” while “in Go Down, Moses Faulkner forces the reader to know” and “[a]wareness penetrates the reader as it has Ike McCaslin” (6), we should say that Ike, at least on the surface, is not as thoroughly aware of the ultimate impossibility of the community’s shared reality and his own ideal as Quentin becomes at the end of Absalom, and only in that sense can we say that Ike is not another Quentin.

Still, Ike’s relatively stable story of the chronic failure to redeem the moral ideal at least shows us its blind spot which foregrounds traces of the foreclosed or the real in Lacanian terms when it discloses its inability to address certain matters, particularly its own presumed origin. In Judith Butler’s formulation, the real is the “constitutive outside” which both secures and threatens the borders of intelligibility (Psychic 94). The subject formation is not a one-time act, but a process of the incessant reiteration of norms and power relations. The discursive boundaries between the intelligible and the unintelligible also depend on that reiteration, and there necessarily is a temporal gap between the two modalities of power, “power presupposed” and “power reinstated” (12). Butler sees here an opportunity to take a glimpse of and possibly regain what the present shared reality banishes out of the domain of knowledge and meaning. Thus the real is “the unconscious of power, in its traumatic and productive iterability” (104), and “iterability . . . becomes the non-place of subversion, the possibility of a re-embodying of the
subjectivating norm that can redirect its normativity” (99). Sheperdson argues that the return of the real is traumatic because as a result of an “intersection of signifiers” something impossible, something beyond the subject’s representational system, emerges (35). Trauma is an effect of symbolization, and the traumatic event is “a new signification that has retroactive effect on the past” (36). The return of the real, or trauma, occurs then “only in relation to the established order of representation” (34), and therefore this is an occasion for the reaffirmation or dis/inheritance of what comes before us.

As I argued in Chapter 1, however, Butler’s faith in reiteration is a little optimistic and it seems similar to the Faulknerian man’s repetitive pattern of the failed pursuit for the ideal past. The past does not exist unless reiterated by what Faulkner calls the present, “momentary avatars of individual people,” and though they cannot fully attain the ideal past, it preserves its ideality by taking advantage of their “desire to be,” allowing them to avoid confrontation with the real. Ike is also engaged in the repetitive pursuit, which reveals its own formative process but does not entail the subversive return of the real.

Nevertheless, as I examine hereafter, Ike does experience the traumatic return of the real when he inadvertently concludes his pursuit and thereby gets out of the repetitive pattern. As I

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63 According to Derrida, iteration frustrates the self-present animating intentionality presumed in J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory, and thereby introduces “structural unconscious” into utterance: “given that structure of iteration, the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content. The iteration structuring it a priori introduces into it a dehiscence and a cleft. . . . This essential absence of intending the actuality of utterance, this structural unconscious, if you like, prohibits any saturation of the context” (Limited Inc 18). In much the same way, Butler considers that the very assumption or incorporation of social power becomes “the unconscious of power, in its traumatic and productive iterability”; therefore, for Butler, the subject is always already the melancholic subject haunted by or cannot sever itself from what is lost to it, what it is not, or the other.
discussed in previous chapters, in *Absalom*, at the core of the white characters’ family trauma is the impossible interracial love which is constituted and foreclosed simultaneously with the division of race. And in *Go Down, Moses*, I would argue, what are foreclosed and eventually return as the traumatic real are again individual emotions, but this time they appear in the form of grief, which reasserts the mortality and materiality of individual beings and therefore, if exposed, disrupts the fraternal bond’s dream of the overcoming of time, mortality, and materiality.

There are two key events that constitute Ike’s trauma and bring about a new signification: the originary moment of Ike’s version of history, that is, the envisioning of Eunice’s suicide; and Ike’s meeting with Roth’s mistress, the situation of which is remindful of the relation between old Carothers and Eunice, and which therefore serves as an unexpected repetition of the untold origin. Though old Carothers’s incestuous miscegenation is probably within the community’s expectation, the entry of the ledgers written by Ike’s father Uncle Buck as an answer to Uncle Buddy’s inference of Eunice’s drowning herself reveals that her suicide was improbable in their sense of reality: “23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a niger drown ing him self” (*GDM* 254). What constitutes the unexplained unspeakability is then not the probable event of the incestuous miscegenation, but this improbable suicide of an exploited slave ineluctably intertwined with it. It urges Ike to repress its memory, renounce the conception of genealogy based on ownership and inheritance, which amounted to this unintelligible suicide, and reorganize the history of his family and the South to preserve the existent symbolic order and his identity that depends upon it. And precisely because it is the originary moment of Ike’s version of history, Eunice’s suicide signals the moment of foreclosure. Traces in this presumed origin of
what Ike in complicit with the community’s shared reality has foreclosed as the unknowable—which is, as I will elucidate later, grief in Eunice’s “griefless” suicide—haunt Ike’s patriarchal history as the constitutive outside and come up every time he tries to reinforce his view of history, and when Ike is forced to reenact a scene reminiscent of the white master’s unsympathetic treatment of the black woman which is the origin of his version of history, he finally has to confront the foreclosed. This experience gives him another conception of history, the past, and the wilderness, seen from the side of the formerly foreclosed.

First, let us examine how Ike keeps certain matters unspeakable. The fourth section of “The Bear” starts with the description of Ike’s opposition against the translation of the “tamed land” into money to make it into something to be possessed, bequeathed and inherited (241), and discussion between Ike and Cass over Ike’s disinheritance based on that thought follows it. Ike’s recollection of the experience of reading the ledgers is inserted presumably as the reason why he decided to repudiate his patrimony. However, he never tells Cass what he found there, and keeps on advancing his theory about the general criminality of possession and particularly slavery in the South. Reading the ledgers at first seems to give the slaves “substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passion and complexities too” and lets Ike notice “not only the general and condoned injustice and its slow amortization but the specific tragedy which had not been condoned and could never be amortized” (252). Yet after remembering how he speculated about and even pictured in mind Eunice’s suicide, he never returns to that scene, and resumes advocating the history of general injustice and redemption, as if to obscure the “specific tragedy” of Eunice and Tomasina.
Thus, Ike goes on to remember how he tried to execute his grandfather’s will for the descendants of Tomey’s Turl. The filial relation of old Carothers and Tomey’s Turl is a known fact in the novel even though there is “no definite incontrovertible proof that [old Carothers] acknowledged” other than his will to leave “the thousand-dollar legacy” to Tomey’s Turl (256). Ike interprets this will as compensation for old Carothers’s not acknowledging Tomey’s Turl as his son. In the patriarchal and paternalistic society, it “was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger” (256); while blacks can be members of the extended family of the plantation, they cannot be included in the white family, and the damage done to them is, though not ignored, only redressed by money. For the white father, then, the handing and receiving of money means the mutual consent to the deprivation of the father from the black son and his exclusion from genealogy.

Even though Ike is repulsed by his grandfather’s acts, his attempts to execute that will make him a repetition of his grandfather. In so doing, he also grasps the specific tragedy “which could never be amortized” in the economic logic of debt and amortization, or what Thadious Davis calls “an ideology of atonement” (152). This mentality of Ike is similar to that of Thomas Sutpen I discussed in Chapter 2, which Melanie R. Benson calls “ledgerlike mentality” (46) that quantifies and abstracts tragedies while repressing affective aspects involved in them in order to figure out spiritual solvency. Benson says that “the ledgers constitute a fetish of compensation and restoration” characterized by a “‘calculating’ discourse” (45), and the rhetoric of guilt

64 Erik Dussere argues that this kind of morality that depends on calculability and balance is actually modelled on the ledger’s logic which “takes on a special significance for America in the nineteenth century, and in particular for the institution of slavery” (332). According to him, “the ledger implies the ethicality of commerce and also provides a model for justice and moral
employed there is itself very paternalistic as examined in Chapter 2. Indeed, Ike the paternalist consistently calculates the balance between guilt and compensation, punishment or retribution. With this mentality, he nullifies the specificity of the tragedy that happened in his family’s plantation by making it just an example of common injustice in the unending general history of guilt and compensation. Accordingly, he calls Tennie’s Jim, the first surviving child of Tomey’s Turl, a “nameless inheritor of slaves” in general (GDM 259), and Fonsiba, the second one, becomes an “inheritor of generation after generation to whom an unannounced white man on a horse was a white man’s hired Patroller wearing a pistol sometimes and a blacksnake whip always” (264), while the last son Lucas, oblivious of his black ancestors, aligns himself with old Carothers. Ike thus refuses to let the descendants of Tomey’s Turl inherit the specific tragedy of Eunice and Tomasina.

Ike is indeed paternalistic enough to admit that the black family is part of his background and regard the ledgers as the “chronological and much more comprehensive . . . record than he would ever get from any other source, not alone of his flesh and blood but all of his people, not only the whites but the black ones too, who were as much a part of his ancestry as his white progenitors, and of the land which they had all held and used in common and fed from and on and would continue to use in common without regard to color or titular ownership” (254-55).

While this resonates with Faulkner’s remark about a person’s relation with his background which I discussed in the previous chapter, the same paternalistic code orders Ike to subsume the specific

practice” (332), and in the fourth section of “The Bear,” “Faulkner suggests the extent to which the ledger books provide a model for justice through the lens of commerce, by mingling discourses of justice and debt: ‘injustice must be ‘amortized’” (334).
history of his ancestry both black and white into the general history of guilt and compensation in which only whites can be active agents as criminals and redeemers while blacks are mere victims waiting to be saved. It is highly ironical that Ike imposes this view of history on the slave married to Eunice, Thucydides (Thucydus) McCaslin, whose name is taken from the “Greek general and historian” (Davis 115), and imagines him seeing “the ledger-page which he could not even read” without so much as being able to assess the accuracy of the account in it (GDM 253);

Ike expects that what mattered for that slave who was involved in the specific tragedy was also the accurate balance between debt and repayment.

That Tomasina may have been a daughter of old Carothers is not indispensable to this redemptive history; the presumed fact that Tomey’s Turl was his son alone is enough to support it. Thus, after these reminiscences of his black relatives, Ike returns to the discussion with Cass, but he does not mention or even think to himself what happened to Eunice. When he rethinks of the ledgers which now contain the record of the plantation to the present day, they come to represent the South at large; they become a “chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South” (279). At this point, Ike claims that blacks “will outlast” whites (279), because “[t]hey are better” (280). Yet he faintly falters during this speech, and in that instant shifts his thought to Tomasina’s impregnation by old Carothers.

Ike here regards it simply as the white master’s sexual exploitation of the female slave, or an example of the evilness of slavery and the sin of possession. This insertion therefore seems to explain why Ike thinks that blacks are better: because they do not possess.

However, when Ike falters, the narrator notices Ike’s inability to speak, and oddly
enough, does so without clarifying what or why:

it was not a pause, barely a falter even, possibly appreciable only to himself, as if he couldn’t speak even to McCaslin, even to explain his repudiation, that which to him too, even in the act of escaping (and this was the reality and the truth of his need to escape) was heresy: so that even in escaping he was taking with him more of that evil and unrepentant old man who could summon, because she was his property, a human being because she was old enough and female, to his widower’s house and get a child on her and then dismiss her because she was of an inferior race, and then bequeath a thousand dollars to the infant because he would be dead then and wouldn’t have to pay it, than even he had feared. (279-80)

Here, the narrator slyly shifts the topic from Ike’s inability to “speak even to Cass” to Ike’s remaining the heir of his grandfather despite his disinheritation. That Ike considers repudiation to be heresy shows that he is still within the patriarchal tradition in which the son is to inherit patrimony and thereby perpetuate the family, and he thinks that because of that he takes over old Carothers’s evil, the sin of possession. However, the evil crime of his grandfather mentioned here is not something Ike must conceal since obviously many people including Cass know that the father of Tomey’s Turl was old Carothers. What he cannot speak not only to Cass but actually also to himself “even to explain his repudiation” is of course the originary moment of the redemptive history for Ike, the discovery of the relationship between old Carothers and Eunice and her suicide following his sexual exploitation of their daughter. Ike cannot recall it even in his
own mind, and it constitutes the limits of his knowledge.

Does this mean that the incestuous miscegenation was too shocking and shameful for Ike to recall it once again even as its unredeemable criminality allows him to keep on living as the white redeemer within the endless history of guilt and compensation? Thadious Davis claims that shame is “a defining emotion” of this novel (5), especially when we focus on white characters’ consciousness, and that an “insistent longing for articulating shame across generational and racial lines but within the prevalent expressive discourses of familial generations and race difference marks Go Down, Moses as one of Faulkner’s major fictional achievements” (5). Davis then aims to add another perspective as “a reader with a particular social identity (black, female, southern)” (7), and find active resisting agency in the novel’s black characters. Yet before that, it seems to me that we need to examine whether it is really an “insistent longing for articulating shame” which is at stake for Ike, who is actually able to articulate and denounce the shame intrinsic in the system of slavery and its aftermath. We can readily agree with Davis when she says that “[s]hame and its association with death infuse the text with an emotion more palpable than grief or loss” (5), but considering that what causes Ike’s seeming lack of grief is the assumption of the immortal wilderness as the objet a, which is also the source of his identity as a white male subject, we need to put the reading organized around shame into question as a biased interpretation that follows the pattern Ike creates.

Ike tries to establish the redemptive history by emphasizing shameful deeds and moral degeneration prevalent in the South during and after the time of slavery, and in that process marginalizes or nullifies grief. In this regard, Ike and Cass are actually two sides of the same
coin. In “The Old People,” Cass expresses his moral view that is possibly the prototype of Ike’s. Cass says to Ike: “even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that’s shame” (GDM 177). Cass claims that you can get “a lot out of [grieving and suffering]” because “you can always choose to stop [suffering], put an end to that,” but “you cant be alive forever, and you always wear out life long before you have exhausted the possibilities of living,” and because of that, in Cass’s view, the earth “wants to use [dead things] again” (177). He then goes on to refer to the natural cycle of death and rebirth and in so doing nullifies grief for the dead. He eventually condenses that image into the immortal, immaterial buck that inhabits “still unchanged” places and does not “have substance, cant cast a shadow” (177, 178). Although the logical sequence of these remarks of Cass is not very clear, Ike in “The Bear” would agree, provided that suffering issues from abiding in shame or immorality and grieving is only a melancholic one over the unattainability of the object of desire or moral ideal (while the irony here is that those who actually suffer and grieve in place of whites who carry shame are black people). The possibilities of living for Ike then lie in the redemptive mission of compensating shame with efforts to stop suffering which is inherited and repeated across generations, and at the close of that repetition, beyond the possibilities of living, he expects not the ultimate death and nothingness but the transcendent, immaterial wilderness.

Unlike Cass, Ike in “The Bear” audaciously admits the white man’s guilt and shame, but there is a certain parallel between Cass’s saying and Ike’s logic in which he makes the redemption of the South into the white man’s mission and means to sustain his jeopardized white male identity.

Indeed, while Cass in the fourth section of “The Bear” urges Ike to retain the patriarchal
history of ownership and inheritance, they ultimately concur despite the apparent opposition of their standpoints. At an early stage of discussion, Ike argues for the white man’s redemptive mission ordained by God, but Cass says that the bound people are, according to the Bible, “the sons of Ham,” so that they are destined to be kept in bondage (246). To this, Ike replies that there are “some things reported of Him that He did not say” and yet the “heart already knows” truth because “the men who wrote His Book for Him were writing about the truth and there is only one truth and it covers all things that touch the heart” (246). Then Cass admits the possibility of immediate understanding through the heart that promises the attainment of truth, and appropriately expresses it as the overcoming of time, or the retrieval of the ideal past: “No time at all if, as you say, the heart knows truth, the infallible and unerring heart. And perhaps you are right” (247). Cass then concedes that there is God’s plan in the fatalistic pattern of history in which Uncle Buck, Uncle Buddy and “[a] thousand other Uncle Bucks and Uncle Buddies” as well as people in the following generations have indeed been engaged in the gradual, though yet-uncompleted, liberation of the bound people (247).

Cass cannot but accept Ike’s idea because, as it turns out later, Ike is here appropriating Cass’s rhetoric to explain Keats’s poem which he recited to Ike seven years ago: “He [the poet] was talking about truth. Truth is one. It doesn’t change. It covers all things which touch the heart” (282). Ike was not convinced of it at that point; the matter seemed to him “simpler than that, simpler than somebody talking in a book about a young man and a girl he would never need to grieve over because he could never approach any nearer and would never have to get any further away” (282). Nevertheless, having gone through the discovery of Eunice’s suicide, Ike
now assents to this idea that illustrates the structure of the objet a and appropriates the rhetoric in his discussion with Cass over his repudiation of patrimony.

As Cass suggests through Keats’s poem, truth is implicated in the objet a. Thus, although Ike claims that the heart knows truth, he also admits the difficulty of the heart’s access to truth because the heart contains not only what Cass regards as truthful things that touch it—“honor and pride and pity and justice and courage and love” (282)—but also other complex emotions: “They were trying to write down the heart’s truth out of the heart’s driving complexity, for all the complex and troubled hearts which would beat after them. . . . [I]f they who were that near to Him as to have been elected from among all who breathed and spoke language to transcribe and relay His words, could comprehend truth only through the complexity of passion and lust and hate and fear which drives the heart, what distance back to truth must they traverse whom truth could only reach by word-of-mouth?” (246-47).

Ike and Cass thus share the same idea, and they also know that they have to play different roles. Ike recalls Cass’s recitation of Keats’s poem when he is arguing for black people’s virtues in contrast with white men’s vices, and feels that Cass is also visualizing the scene, that it is “in McCaslin’s eyes too” (281). They share the same vision, and in fact, they then concur again that what is cursed is “not the land, but us,” those people who inhabit the land for generations and therefore are involved in the sin of possession (284). At the end of their discussion, Cass once again admits that Ike is right, that he has been “[c]hosen . . . by Him” to play a part in lifting the South’s curse derived from the sin of possession (284), and even as admitting it, he decides to maintain the plantation and continue the patriarchal history of ownership and inheritance because
the desired goal must not come as suggested in Keats’s poem, and whites and blacks must not be free from each other:

‘It will be long. I have never said otherwise. But it will be all right because they will endure—’ and McCaslin

‘And anyway, you will be free. —No, not now nor ever, we from them nor they from us. So I repudiate too. I would deny even if I knew it were true. I would have to. Even you can see that I could do no else. I am what I am; I will be always what I was born and have always been. And more than me. More than me, just as there were more than Buck and Buddy in what you called His first plan which failed.’ (285)

The context indicates that what Cass repudiates is Ike’s version of history, and he cannot but repudiate it and inherit the land even though or precisely because he admits that the redemptive history may be true, for that history requires people who undertake the criminal and shameful aspects while averting their glance from the existence of crime and shame. The patriarchal history of ownership and inheritance then functions as a necessary evil, a constitutive part of Ike’s redemptive history. The white man’s shame is therefore not the real problem for them.

Thus, it turns out that Ike and Cass are in collaboration rather than in conflict, the latter playing the negative but necessary role in the history of uncompleted redemption, and in order to do so, Cass has to assume to be in dissent from Ike. They complement each other to sustain Ike’s redemptive history and the possibilities of living for the white subject. As the above quote shows, Cass makes use of the history of ownership and inheritance as the ground for his fatalistic
conviction of his coherent identity, and Ike’s reply, “And more than me” (285), indicates that he shares the same conviction grounded on a variation of the patriarchal history in which he also follows the preordained pattern, though what he inherits is not the land but the redemptive mission. Cass then agrees with it and points out Ike’s inheritance from Sam Fathers, saying that Ike is a “co-heir perhaps with Boon, if not of his life maybe, at least of his quitting it” (285)—that is, not the life in bondage but expectation for liberation from bondage and mortality. Ike’s reply, which is the last remark in their discussion, is again a word of agreement: “Yes, Sam Fathers set me free” (285).

Still, it seems that the freedom in Ike’s remarks here relates to the irrepresible anxiety particular to him that repeatedly comes back, and the examination of it will contribute to understanding his inability to speak about the origin of his construction of the redemptive history. It is certainly not freedom from black people, which, as Cass says, is ever impossible as long as they retain their whiteness, nor is it the democratic, fraternal free status within the wilderness since he has not yet got and will never get through with the redemptive mission. A little before his concluding remark about his freedom, Ike declares, “I am free,” as a reply to Cass’s claim of Ike’s responsibility to inherit patrimony as the “direct and sole and white” descendant of the McCaslins (284). Accordingly, Ike’s freedom first of all means a flight from the obligation of criminal and shameful ownership and inheritance. This freedom is a proof that he is engaged in the lifting of the curse, which gives him the ever-unfulfilled promise of attaining the objet a, the immortal wilderness. Ike then senses “the frail and iron thread strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself and reaching beyond record and patrimony both to
join him with the lusts and passions, the hopes and dreams and griefs, of bones whose names
while still fleshed and capable even old Carothers’ grandfather had never heard,” and he claims
that he is free “of that too” (284). Whomever those bones might refer to, they are beyond any
version of the patriarchal history, and while Ike usually imagines those beyond history as the
mythical beings who are in the immaterial and immortal realm exempt from grief, the “bones”
here are obviously material, mortal and totally defunct, and even after death equipped with
emotions that, in Ike’s view, hinder them from attaining truth. Moreover, the “thread” implies the
existence of another history that leads to the dead who are not transferred into the transcendent
immortal realm, a history that certainly has not been recorded and inherited at least in the
patriarchal history. When he claims his freedom from ownership and inheritance, Ike thus at the
same time has to claim that he is also free from this strange resurgence of mortality and emotions
including grief, which seems to reflect Ike’s anxiety over the existence of another history.

On the other hand, Cass, who does not have to claim freedom, does not seem to share this
anxiety. Before this part Ike twice thinks of the newer ledgers which Cass kept after the Civil
War as “two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life
them who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on” (242, 279). They represent not only the
plantation’s history but also the “whole land in miniature,” or the “entire South” as the land
accursed because of its crime of the possession of the land and people. Perceiving this image, Ike
admits the necessary binding of black people “for a while yet” (279). Since Ike and Cass share
the knowledge of what happened to the South and what is written in the ledgers, they can evoke
the image together when Cass “merely lift[s] one hand” (277, 283), the “two threads” being part
of it. Yet it is only Ike who has to deny his connection with the other thread “beyond record and patrimony.” In fact, it is not clear whether Cass also envisions this third thread. The ungrammaticality of the passage makes it difficult to discern the origin of the image of the thread:

‘I am free:’ and this time McCaslin did not even gesture, no inference of fading pages, no postulation of the stereoptic whole, but the frail and iron thread strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself and reaching beyond record and patrimony both to join him with the lusts and passions, the hopes and dreams and griefs, of bones whose names while still fleshed and capable even old Carothers’ grandfather had never heard: and he: ‘And of that too.’ (284)

It may or may not have arisen from something in Cass, but at least he is not aware of the thread at all.

A similar thing happens when Ike remembers his experience of having read the old ledgers and found what happened to Eunice and Tomasina. Right before Ike starts to contemplate on the ledgers, it is suggested that not only Ike but also Cass has the knowledge of the ledgers:

“‘Yes. More men than Father and Uncle Buddy,’ not even glancing toward the shelf above the desk, nor did McCaslin. They did not need to” (247). Nevertheless, only to Ike does it seem “as though the ledgers . . . were being lifted down one by one in their fading sequence and spread open on the desk or perhaps upon some apocryphal Bench or even Altar or perhaps before the Throne Itself” (247-48). This suggests that Cass is unaware of what really happened to Eunice and Tomasina, and the unspeakable knowledge of it forces Ike to construct the redemptive
history. Naturally it is only Ike who has to refer back to the memory of the originary moment while explaining about his version of history.

As long as Ike grasps the old ledgers, which record “not only the general and condoned injustice and its slow amortization but the specific tragedy which had not been condoned and could never be amortized,” only in abstract terms of what Davis calls the ideology of atonement, they remain “fixed immutably, finished, unalterable, harmless” (GDM 255), and this recalling serves his purpose. Ike would be able to situate the incestuous miscegenation committed by old Carothers and the victimhood of Eunice and Tomasina safely in the redemptive history as yet-and ever-unrecompensed. Ike’s view of history anticipates that the old ledgers, too, eventually return at the end of history to the transcendent fraternal realm in which there are no individual identities or emotions, for he imagines this recalling as “a last perusal and contemplation and refreshment of the Allknowledgeable before the yellowed pages and the brown ink in which was recorded the injustice and a little at least of its amelioration and restitution faded back forever into the anonymous communal original dust” (248).

Nevertheless, at least while Ike is reading or remembering the ledgers, he cannot ignore the specificity of the event; the dead slaves in them “took substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too” (252), far removed from truth or the wilderness because of their material substantiality and complex emotions in contrast with the immaterial, spiritual buck that does not “have substance, cant cast a shadow” in “The Old People.” The alleged unconventional suicide of the slave woman then makes Ike contemplate thoroughly on what caused it and even envision the moment of suicide, when he perceives what Eunice must
have felt, that which the redemptive history cannot accommodate. Though Ike assumes that Eunice was “griefless” when she committed suicide, this has of course nothing to do with the overcoming of grief through the anticipation of immortality. In his vision, she walked “into the icy creek . . . six months before her daughter’s and her lover’s (Her first, he thought. Her first) child was born, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope” (257). Under the system of slavery, Ike’s assumption of Eunice’s repudiation seems plausible, for there must have been no ways for slaves to convey those emotions—particularly grief as grievance—to the white master. This repudiation, unlike that of Ike or Cass, does not contribute to the redemptive history. It is not a promise of the overcoming of complex emotions or mortality; it rather points to traces of the unexpressed, inexpressible emotions which Eunice, without any expressive discourse available, had to express negatively through suicide as the silent act of repudiation. Precisely because suicide was unconventional for a black person to commit at least to whites’ eyes, it suggests in a denied form the existence of something beyond conventions and bears on Ike long after her death. Her death is not the kind of death that one can momentarily grieve over and then deny by putting it into the immortal and free realm. Those whom she joins through her death are not so much the “old free fathers” as the “bones” with “the lusts and passions, the hopes and dreams and griefs.” Even though Ike can locate old Carothers’s incestuous miscegenation within the redemptive history organized around the white man’s shameful guilt, therefore, Eunice’s “griefless” suicide, the singular death that, because of the postmortem traces of unresolved complex emotions implicated in it, refuses freedom and resurrection, can paradoxically disrupt
that griefless history and open a possibility for another history in which the “wilderness’
concordant generality” cannot swallow up and cancel individual deaths.

What makes old Carothers’s crime unspeakable is therefore not its shameful criminality
but Eunice’s irrecompensable wound, from which the repudiated grief overflows to make the
griefless history of sin and redemption invalid. Though Ike tries to repress his anxiety over the
possibility of another history by putting a stress on his efforts to perform compensatory acts of
the repudiation of patrimony and the execution of his grandfather’s will, we can see its traces in
his strange reticence about old Carothers’s crime, which itself is not fundamentally problematic
for Ike, and in his occasional claim about freedom from grief. This becomes even clearer in
“Delta Autumn,” and there he at last undergoes a traumatic encounter with another history.

“Delta Autumn” shows that Ike, now an old man near eighty, retains the almost same
historical view as the one he embraced when he was young. Thus, he insists on the slow
improvement of human beings “because most men are a little better than their circumstances give
them a chance to be” (329), and whereas the actuality of the wilderness’s retreatment makes him
regard history as that of man’s “crime and guilt and his punishment” (332), this is still within the
ideology of atonement in which history is ultimately a zero-sum game (though it never adds up
and ends). Ike nostalgically sees how the wave of modernization has overwhelmed the former
balance between the old system of plantation and the wilderness, and death and rebirth. The
Yazoo, “the River of the Dead of the Choctaws—the thick, slow, black, unsunned streams almost
without current, which once each year ceased to flow at all and then reversed, spreading,
drowning the rich land and subsiding again, leaving it still richer” (324), symbolizes the natural
benefit of death and rebirth given even to planters, but most of that well-balanced ecological system is “gone now” (324). Still, Ike sees God’s providence in what he takes as punishment, and thinks that “He even foreknew the end” (332). The visible evidence of the ongoing and coming catastrophe such as the woods’ unstoppable diminution, the world market’s further invasion into the South, and the rise of fascism is, in his fatalistic view, interpreted as a process of atonement; he believes that everything will eventually be atoned, that the immaterial, immortal realm of transcendence still awaits him, the inheritor of the redemptive history, at the end of history:

He seemed to see the two of them—himself and the wilderness—as coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman, not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that old Sam Fathers who had taught him to hunt, the two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space where once more the untreed land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton for the frantic old-world people to turn into shells to shoot at one another, would find ample room for both—the names, the faces of the old men he had known and loved and for a little while outlived, moving again among the shades of tall unaxed trees and sightless brakes before the tireless belling immortal hounds, falling and rising phoenix-like to the soundless guns. (337)

Though the image here is very close to the one in “The Old People,” it is now highly ironical
since after “The Bear,” we know that Major de Spain was the very person who sold the hunting site to the lumber company and Sam was a former slave who led a life in bondage even after emancipation, so that the “two spans” resemble the “two threads” which record the lives of white planters and bound black people. The sustainment of this ideality of the wilderness still depends on the unachieved absolution of the white man from his crime of binding black people. As long as there remains this unabsolved sin and the necessity of redemption in which the genealogical lines guarantee Ike’s involvement, he can believe in the permanent repetition of death and rebirth beyond materiality and mortality—he can believe, in face of his own impending death and the wilderness’s “ultimate doom” (337), that his annual November hunting “would renew him” and “November would come again” (320).

In fact, “Delta Autumn” reports that Ike repudiated “the old wrong and shame” while he knew that he could not “cure the wrong and eradicate the shame” (334). Ike is of course aware that there remains shame despite his repudiation; after all, the Edmondses inherit and bequeath the land in place of the McCaslins. What he must exclude from the repetitive pattern is not the “wrong and shame,” but “Delta Autumn” illuminates again that it is grief. Yet it also suggests that grief never fails to come back in a denied form whenever the wrong and shame is evoked:

[Ike] at fourteen when he had learned of [the old wrong and shame] had believed he could do both [cure the wrong and eradicate the shame] when he became competent and when at twenty-one he became competent he knew that he could do neither but at least he could repudiate the wrong and shame, at least in principle, and at least the land itself in fact, for his son at least: and did, thought
he had: then (married then) in a rented cubicle in a backstreet stock-traders’
boarding-house, the first and last time he ever saw her naked body, himself and
his wife juxtaposed in their turn against that same land, that same wrong and
shame from whose regret and grief he would at least save and free his son and,
saving and freeing his son, lost him. (334)

Obviously Ike wanted to have a son even after he had decided to repudiate his patrimony, as his
wife’s remark “that son you talk about” shows (300). When she learned of his repudiation, she
offered the last-time sexual relationship with her husband and made it a term of the deal that if
they got a son by it Ike would inherit the farm. Since they failed to have a child then, Ike’s
repudiation resulted in his losing his son he wanted and the son’s exemption from inheriting the
land marked by the wrong and shame. Yet the above passage shows that Ike saved and freed his
son not from the wrong and shame but from “regret and grief” implicated in it. After all, even if
his son had inherited the wrong and shame, he also could have repudiated it and played his
redemptive role as his father did. The core of the problem is regret and grief from which Ike
himself appears not to have been saved and freed, even as he thinks in “The Old People” that
Sam Fathers “absolved him from weakness and regret” (173) through the initiation rite and
anticipates the overcoming of death and grief throughout the novel. It is notable that there is an
indirect reference to Ike’s experience of finding his grandfather’s deeds in the above passag
(“at
fourteen . . . he had learned of [the old wrong and shame]”).65 Even though the “old wrong and

65 According to the descriptions in “The Bear,” Ike learned of old Carothers’s deeds by reading
the ledgers when he was sixteen, and this line in “Delta Autumn” is likely to be Faulkner’s
mistake. See N. Taylor 219.
shame” seems to be a reference to the general sin of possession, the origin of Ike’s conception of it is obviously the “specific tragedy” of Eunice and Tomasina, and “regret and grief” suggests that Ike cannot entirely repress Eunice’s suicide and possibly Tomasina’s death in childbirth, too, triggered by his grandfather’s incestuous miscegenation, which he always tries to displace into the general sin of the white Southerners.

Then later in “Delta Autumn,” we actually witness the return of the repudiated grief when Ike comes across the old wrong and shame once again. When he meets Roth’s mistress, he learns that she is a “nigger” (343), and again repeats his grandfather’s gesture by handing her money and telling her to go to the North and marry a black man instead of letting her and her son have a familial relation with Roth, as old Carothers made Eunice marry Thucydus and gave some legacy to him and Tomey’s Turl. In this scene, what shocks Ike the most seems to be the fact that Roth’s mistress is a “nigger,” whereas the fact that she is a descendant of Tennie’s Jim, and by extension, of Eunice and Tomasina does not perturb Ike, at least on the surface.

It is not until she touches Ike to receive money that he has full realization of the returning of the “strong old blood”: “He didn’t grasp it, he merely touched it—the gnarled, bloodless, bone-light bone-dry old man’s fingers touching for a second the smooth young flesh where the strong old blood ran after its long lost journey back to home. ‘Tennie’s Jim,’ he said. ‘Tennie’s Jim’” (344). Since Tennie’s Jim left the plantation without receiving his thousand-dollar legacy

66 Roth Edmonds in “The Fire and the Hearth” exemplifies the generality of this “wrong and shame.” The adolescent white boy separates himself from and thus loses his black foster mother and brother. He ascribes his behavior to “the old curses of his fathers . . . stemmed . . . from wrong and shame” (107). Roth is of course not aware of the “specific tragedy” of Eunice and Tomasina.
and Ike sought after him to give him the money in vain, this touch means for Ike the delayed consummation of his grandfather’s will and the homecoming of Tennie’s Jim, to whom he feels obliged to make up for their grandfather’s sexual exploitation of Tomasina by money. Ike, therefore, grasps the whole incident as a repetition of the wrong and shame and partial compensation without realizing that this idea of monetary atonement itself derives from the same wrong and shame.

The “home” here is that of the extended family of the plantation over which the white master reigns, and the journey has been “lost” only for the master. After all, Tennie’s Jim left the plantation and refused to receive the legacy of his own will. As John T. Matthews warns, then, “the sentimentality of this touching moment ought not [to] deflate the novel’s work of analysis” (“Touching” 42). Although Eric J. Sundquist says that “Ike’s momentary touching of the woman’s hand . . ., for the moment it lasts, reconnects Ike to the paternal blood that will die with him but live on in the monstrous contagion of the Beauchamp line” (135), Ike at the moment of touch does not think of the monstrous contagion or of the continuity of the Beauchamp line beyond his paternalistic responsibility; on the contrary, the handing of money is a gesture of the exclusion of the black son from genealogy as discussed above. As Roth’s mistress points out, the McCaslin people “called him [James Beauchamp] Tennie’s Jim though he had a name” (343). Accordingly, “since Tennie’s Jim has lost patrimony, patronym, and place, that flesh returns him to ‘home’ only in the most abstract forms” (Matthews, “Touching” 42), and indeed, he returns as the “nameless inheritor of slaves” as Ike once thought. Though Ike thinks that the black family is part of his background, his imagination does not stretch to the family history seen from the
Beauchamps’ side.

Nevertheless, structurally speaking, the handing of the legacy is, like Henry’s murder of Bon in Absalom, not only the exclusion of the black man from the white family but also a gesture of the tacit acknowledgement of familial relationship to be concealed by the same act. Since Roth’s relationship with his blood kin is subtly reminiscent of old Carothers’s crime, Ike’s acknowledging touch (which his grandfather did not give to his son), this delayed ending of his hunting for Tennie’s Jim, virtually a black brother of him, occasions the return of what Ike and his grandfather wanted to obliterate, disclosing the decisive contradictions of the logic that structures the white family’s genealogy, as does Henry’s acknowledging touch with Bon.

Thus, at the next moment, Ike lets another history come up when he casually mentions the secret about Tomasina’s blood for the first time almost in a slip of the tongue. Looking at the child of Roth and his mistress, Ike says: “It’s a boy, I reckon. They usually are, except that one that was its own mother too” (GDM 345). Ike seems to think that Tomasina was in a position of her own mother because her sexual partner was her father, and though Ike still represses the existence of Eunice, he nonetheless hints at her relationship with old Carothers here. To this remark, the woman simply replies, “Yes. . . . It’s a boy.” (345). It is possible that she just ignored the old man’s insensible words, but her inattention to Ike’s reference to Tomasina’s blood can also suggest a possibility that she knows that Tomasina was a daughter between Eunice and old Carothers, that the specific tragedy of Eunice and Tomasina and its unexpressed regret and grief, instead of the general history of the victimized blacks that Ike assumes the Beauchamp descendants have inherited, have been handed down across generations in the family.
Ike imagines that Thucydus knew what old Carothers did to Eunice and Tomasina and why Eunice killed herself. He refers to Thucydus as “the slave whom his white owner had forever manumitted by the very act from which the black man could never be free so long as the memory lasted,” as if to suggest that that “act” was the reason why Thucydus refused the offer of the land in old Carothers’s will and of two hundred dollars from Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy (253). As for the reason why Tomey’s Turl did not receive the legacy, however, Ike simply thinks that he could not understand “what money was” (256), and he does not dare to infer why Tennie’s Jim and Fonsiba refused to receive their share of the legacy and left the plantation.

Davis argues that “perhaps like Thucydus, his surrogate father before him, Tomey’s Turl consciously and willfully refuses to accept a legacy from old Carothers because he will not give the McCaslins the satisfaction of absolution through alms-giving” (164). It is a refusal of the paternalistic ideology of atonement, a refusal to let the McCaslins subsume the history of the black family into the general redemptive history of guilt and compensation dominated by the whites. Moreover, though Davis regards this as “Turl’s stubborn resistance to the will, the document and the desire, of the father” (164), he may have noticed that old Carothers was not only his father but also his grandfather. And considering that Lucas, the only child of Tomey’s Turl that receives the money and stays in the plantation, obviously does not know that Tomasina was a daughter of old Carothers, conversely, it is possible to assume that Tennie’s Jim and Fonsiba refused the money because they knew it as their father and adoptive great-grandfather.

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67 In “The Fire and the Hearth,” Lucas says that “old Carothers never seemed to miss much what he give to Tomey that night that made my father” (55-56). If he knew that Tomasina also has old Carothers’s blood in her, he would be likely to mention it here.
had probably done. Fonsiba’s declaration “I’m free” (GDM 267), which she says to Ike when he tries to hand her old Carothers’s legacy, could be the opening of “another space,” or the “beginning of her Africanist narrative” as Minrose Gwin argues (“Her Shape” 88). This could be her assertion of freedom from the patriarchal and paternalistic history which obscures the black family’s genealogy. Yet Ike takes no notice of this remark at this point, and instead appropriates it and says “I am free” later at the end of his discussion with Cass to claim his version of patriarchal history premised on his freedom from ownership and inheritance, and from another narrative, another history of materiality, mortality, and emotions (GDM 284).

Godden and Polk opine that Thucydus the historian “does create an independent black history” by refusing the land and the money and instead opening and running a blacksmith’s shop with a “cash wage” he earned with his own hands (136). Yet the history which Thucydus, who survived the deaths of Eunice and Tomasina, creates and conveys to following generations can be more than that; it can be a history that is organized around the truth of Eunice’s death and therefore subvert the history transmitted by the white McCaslins which has concealed it. Roth’s mistress, if she really knows Tomasina’s hidden lineage, has inherited that alternative history from Thucydus, perhaps through her grandfather Tennie’s Jim, or “James Thucydus Beauchamp” (GDM 259).

This alternative history is, however, not the “true” history. After all, there is no clear textual evidence that the black family have owned and inherited it. It is rather a history that was at once produced and foreclosed when Ike conceived the white man’s redemptive history, and as such haunts and threatens to disrupt it as the constitutive outside. And anyway Ike seems to be
unaware of this alternative perspective and retains his version of history up until the very end of the story. He supposes that the woman was attracted to Roth because of his whiteness and wants “revenge” for her victimhood in the relation (346). Even after the woman denounces Ike for not remembering “anything [he] ever knew or felt or even heard about love” (346), and thereby suggests that the relation arose out of love even though unrequited in the end, Ike directs his attention to his fear of racial and economic miscegenation, and takes it as a kind of punishment, the woods’ “revenge” accomplished by the “people who have destroyed it” (347). Indeed, Ike cannot take into consideration the matter of love. For, he had to discard the possibility of his grandfather’s love, “[s]ome sort of love” (256), toward Tomasina when he built up the history of the white man’s guilt and compensation or punishment based on his inference of old Carothers’s sexual exploitation of Eunice that had produced Tomasina. With his ledgerlike mentality, Ike keeps on refusing to see the affective aspects of history and remains to be an advocate of the paternalistic calculating discourse until this final stage of his life.

Still, the alternative history eventually invades into Ike’s consciousness after his unexpected encounter with the “strong old blood,” which for Ike should be a proof of the white man’s criminality and attendant redemptive mission but is also evocative of the alleged suicide of Eunice while the reference to (the repression of) love is also subtly remindful of the process of Ike’s inference on what happened to Eunice. The “nigger” woman who wears a man’s clothes, who understands the Southern “honor” and “code” and yet comes to the camp site (341), and whose face is “queerly colorless but not ill and not that of a country woman despite the garments” she wears (340), as Snead argues, “confuses all expected figures of social division”
and incites Ike’s fear of racial, cultural, and economic miscegenation (206). More significantly, she disrupts the division between the speakable and the unspeakable, or the legible and the illegible, by evoking Eunice, whose repudiation points to traces of the emotions which Ike needed to foreclose from his version of history; as a result, the experience conjures up the foreclosed, and things in the wilderness supposedly exempt from mortality, materiality and individual complex emotions come to bear different meanings for Ike in the ending scene of “Delta Autumn.” When one of the hunters, Legate, comes back to the tent and reports that Roth killed a deer, Ike asks: “What was it?” (GDM 347). To this, Legate replies: “Just a deer, Uncle Ike. . . . Nothing extra” (347). Nevertheless, Ike asserts that “[i]t was a doe” (347). This specification is important especially because in the earlier part of the story Ike speaks of “does and fawns” in generalized terms. At first Ike mentions “does and fawns” as the objects of paternalistic protection sanctioned by divine authentication: “The only fighting anywhere that ever had anything of God’s blessing on it has been when men fought to protect does and fawns” (323). Then he agrees with Roth in that “does and fawns,” or “women and children,” “are two things this world aint ever lacked” (331). Thus, he objectifies “does and fawns,” deprives them of individuality, and makes light of their lives and deaths. Nevertheless, the hunted doe stops being just one of many killed deer in the end. He dwells, now without any anticipation of resurrection, on the death of the specific doe in which he is obviously seeing in premature mourning the tragic trajectory of the life of Roth’s mistress, and also those of Eunice and Tomasina, the women whom the white man did not protect but drove to suicide and death in childbed respectively.
Because this contemplation on the individual death disables Ike from imagining the wilderness as the immortal realm in which killed game resurrect, moreover, November rain becomes the “constant and grieving rain” falling on everything in that space (347). In Ike’s hunting stories, Faulkner describes rain in the woods over and again. The “faint, cold, steady rain” is the first object that fills the mythical space of the wilderness where “[a]t first there was nothing” in the opening of “The Old People” (155), and it always accompanies the important moments in Ike’s hunting life through which he gradually fortifies the ideality of the immortal wilderness, including his initiation rite, his first participation in the hunting party, and the killing of Old Ben. As for grief, before he learns of the genealogy of Roth’s woman, Ike cries in a “grieving voice”: “Get out of here! I can do nothing for you! Cant nobody do nothing for you!” (344). This grief is, however, over his inability to achieve the democratic moral ideal represented by the wilderness and serves right for Ike’s uncompleted redemptive history. But now the grieving rain signals that the wilderness is a place inhabited by mortal and material beings and announces the ultimate impossibility of the history, subjecthood, and identity constructed around the immortal wilderness as the objet a, the object of melancholic attachment. The hunted doe, Eunice, Tomasina, and Roth’s mistress then all loom up as individual grievable beings whose singular deaths one has to mourn and survive.

The ending of “Delta Autumn” thus indicates the possible moment of Ike’s dis/inheritance, the sudden traumatic transformation of the past not as what preordains the immutable pattern of white male identity and subjecthood but as marked by grief, which declares that the past is of the dead other, and thereby disrupts the pattern and asserts the fluid is-ness of
the past. His acknowledgement of grief and the specificity of the doe is not simply an
acknowledgement of the black family’s genealogy and the alternative history owned and
inherited by them; rather, it cannot but transform his conception of history itself, for it indicates
his getting out of the melancholic repetition and dis/inheriting his heritage, everything that comes
before him and conditions him. As we have seen, Ike’s disinheritance of patrimony is a way to
keep intact the mythical past as the immortal, fraternal realm, the patriarchal history as a proof of
genealogical connection with it, and whiteness, all of which are interrelated and support each
other. It allows him to remain a hunter who dreams of joining the “communal anonymity of
brotherhood” without actually achieving it at the time when it is becoming more and more
difficult for the Southern white man to retain that melancholic structure. Eunice’s alleged suicide
then functions as the presumed origin of Ike’s disinheritance and revision of the patriarchal
history, and precisely because of that he cannot return to that moment, for it marks the necessary
foreclosure to which he has to be oblivious. Yet as Ike’s stories in *Go Down, Moses* amply
shows, iterability involved in the process of maintaining his version of history invites the
foreclosed back into that history, and Ike has to deny and repress it repeatedly. Since the
melancholic structure demands the ungrievability of the foreclosed, the most important among
the foreclosed is the possibility of grief itself—not the hunter’s melancholic grief which denies
death and is not sincere grief in the final analysis, but mourning grief over the dead and the lost.
And when this possibility finally returns into the domain of knowledge through the traumatic
intersection of signifiers, it discloses the fundamental impossibility of the history organized
around the anticipation of fraternity qua immortality and sameness. It therefore becomes the
announcement of the liberation of the present and the future from the immutable past, and urges Ike to reinterpret the past as the dead other—the other that does not resurrect or co-engage with the living and because of that is ever open to reinterpretation or reappropriation while impossible to fully reappropriate. It then further lets him prematurely anticipate death and loss or the unexpected transformation of meaning in the future under the “constant and grieving rain.”

It is apt that the novel does not depict Ike thereafter; the “story leaves Ike in the position of a corpse” subtly reminiscent of Henry in Absalom (Snead 207)—“the blanket once more drawn to his chin, his crossed hands once more weightless on his breast” (GDM 347)—so that we cannot even know whether he survives this death of his own white subjecthood in mourning or not. It keeps the entire picture of his future and his reinterpretation of history and the past unfixed and open as what Derrida calls “an event, some history . . ., an unforeseeable future-to-come.” Instead, Faulkner makes us reexamine the relation between grief and the community’s shared reality through the treatment of the dead bodies of the black men, Rider in “Pantaloon in Black” and Butch, the last descendant of the Beauchamps, in “Go Down, Moses.”
Chapter 7

Exile and Homecoming:

The Circulation of the Black Body in “Pantaloon in Black” and “Go Down, Moses”

“Pantaloon in Black” and “Go Down, Moses,” the two stories which encompass Ike’s hunting trilogy, deal with black people’s death and grief. Since whiteness in *Go Down, Moses* presupposes the foreclosure of death and grief, it is natural that no members of the McCaslins and the Edmondses appear in both stories. However, the two stories are not simply sympathetic records of blacks’ death and grief ignored by local whites, let alone praise for the honesty and morality of oppressed black people, which would relocate them within Ike’s version of history. What penetrates the two stories is, rather, difficulty in articulating grief, particularly in the public space, which resonates with Eunice’s repudiation of grief. Although Ike relinquishes his patrimony and thereby threatens his whiteness to some extent, his version of history still retains the most fundamental part of the project of the white patriarchal family: the abiding hope for the white male fraternity in the immortal, immaterial realm and the attendant suspension or sublimation of grief for material individuals. The white family is therefore programmed to nullify grief and materiality, as it were. On the other hand, in this logic, blacks are forever destined to suffer and endure their burden of grief and materiality without any ways either to overcome or fully articulate their hardship as long as they are confined within the history.
constructed for the sake of whites. As Eunice had to express her grief only negatively through repudiation, black people in later days struggle to find ways to cope with their inexpressible burden.

Barbara Ladd associates the white-dominated history in Faulkner’s works with the Western and particularly Hegelian concept of the “universalizing History” that does not admit the existence of other histories (“William” 33), and focuses on the bodies of those who are marginalized in History in Faulkner. She finds a possibility of their resistance in Edouard Glissant’s concept of the “assumption of history as passion” (Caribbean 81; qtd in Ladd “William” 44), which in “its aesthetic project of inscribing History on the body as a form of dramatic and finally liberating interpretation . . . mounts a challenge to the Western project of ‘transcendence’ of History” (Ladd, “William” 45). As Judith Butler expounds, the materiality of the body is dependent on the productive power of the “regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (Bodies 2). Therefore, we cannot simply assume that the materiality of the body is a medium of resistance liberated from dominant discourses. Rather, it remains a solution “imagined within the private heart” at best unless the “social and material conditions” are revealed as John T. Matthews claims (“Touching” 41). The “assumption of history as passion” or its project of inscription takes on significance, then, because it can reveal how and in what social and material conditions the body produced by History’s norms comes to bear passion. And I would argue that we can see this project of inscription in the dead black bodies in Go Down, Moses.

In Yoknapatawpha, passion, both as suffering and emotion, and with all its Christian
implications, is part of the universalizing History. In its process of transcendence, passion is a necessary hindrance to truth to be eventually overcome; as Ike says, “one can comprehend truth only through the complexity of passion” (GDM 247), that is, only after one gets over passion. While whites expect to reach the domain of truth symbolized by the wilderness at the end of history, blacks—not only slaves but also their descendants—in their stead have to continue carrying passion, or what may be called the passion of materiality: material mortality and grief over it as well as physical exploitation. This black history is coupled with the white history of redemption, and together they constitute the universalizing History. Yet as Ike imagines, the black history as whites see has to be simply the general suffering of the victimized that is to be atoned someday, so that whites can be oblivious to the insurmountability of the individual material and affective aspects of passion and preserve their hope for immortal fraternity—this obliviousness completes the imposition of passion on blacks. The body is then first of all defined as a carrier of passion and a burden to be overcome, and the black body in particular is forever destined to be the material object and as such is the abiding obstacle to the ideal fraternity. Then, the “assumption of history as passion” can be a liberating act only when whites witness the traces of grief inscribed on the black body, which marks the impossibility of transcendence of History, and thereby disrupts the project of the white patriarchal family.

In Go Down, Moses, this always happens in the double movement of exile and homecoming. Ladd has a point when she mentions that in Go Down, Moses “exile and grieving or the inability to grieve are central” (“William” 40). Though she does not expound it, what makes black men unable to stay home in this novel is, for one thing, the imposition of the
generalized history of suffering and endurance that forces them to carry grief while being unable
to express it in the face of their beloved ones’ death. The black body in exile itself is then a
material testimony to the forced repudiation of grief, and therefore to the repudiated grief. When
exile is paired with homecoming, which occasions a public witnessing of the exiled black body,
it undermines the ideological premise of History as well as the space defined as home within It.

Thus, in Ike’s stories, those who inherit Eunice’s repudiated grief refuse to settle in his
version of history as the victimized who suffer and endure, and leave their home country.
Nevertheless, they eventually come back with Eunice’s grief to Ike after the long exile through
the medium of her descendant’s body. When he touches it, Ike feels the return of what he calls
“the strong old blood,” and of Tennie’s Jim, the self-exiled black man, but he tries to
accommodate it in the “home” of the extended family controlled by the white master/redeemer
who imposes the history of suffering and endurance on blacks (GDM 344). Yet Ike notices, after
his inadvertent mentioning of the long-hidden secret of Tomasina’s blood, the existence of
another history of the repudiated grief handed down from Eunice to this nameless descendant of
her, a repressed history of the black home which turns out to have been functioning as the cache
of the foreclosed grief.

The return of the formerly exiled black body to the home of the extended family in which
grief must be hidden from whites’ eyes then makes Ike perceive the true nature of the ideal
wilderness symbolized by the “constant and grieving rain”: the supposedly immortal domain is
full of grief, the marker of death and irrevocable loss. It discloses why the white male subject
must not attain the wilderness and makes Ike realize that the presumably “lost” ideal is
fundamentally impossible. Grief has broken out of the confinement of the black home; it now contaminates the wilderness, or more precisely, it turns out that the wilderness, the core of the extended family’s patriarchal ideology, is actually another black home. It is a prohibited object because it is not a place exempt from death and grief but a cache of death and grief thanks to which white males can be oblivious to them. This disclosure, this witness of death and grief in the midst of the wilderness, makes the concept of pure whiteness untenable. Ike has to give up his version of history in which he inherits the redemptive task, and instead admit another history of the inheritance of grief. The double movement of exile and homecoming thus brings about what I call dis/inheritance in Ike’s hunting stories.

“Pantaloon in Black” and “Go Down, Moses” focus on black characters to describe this movement of exile and homecoming from the other side. In both stories, a black man who notices that his supposed home is not, or no longer, a place for him to dwell in becomes a self-appointed exile and meets his end as its result. Some critics construe this pattern as Faulkner’s nostalgia for the nurturing black home and warning against black migration, with the epigraph dedicated to Faulkner’s recently deceased “Mammy,” Caroline Barr as its most prominent proof. Or in psychoanalytic feminist readings, the private domestic space of home tends to be valorized as a feminine and presymbolic domain with subversive possibilities, opposed to the public, male-centered space of the oppressive symbolic order.

However, the two stories render the complicity of black domesticity with the community’s dominant ideology. In Go Down, Moses, or practically in any work of Faulkner, white families lack the nurturing domestic space which can properly be called home, and instead
the image of home is mostly associated not only with femininity but with blackness. In this sense, in Faulkner, a home is a place which stores what white males reject and is opposed to the dominant symbolic order. Or more precisely, the black and feminine space of home haunts the public male space as the constitutive outside, for, it is produced as an effect of the community’s ideological codes and reenacts the assignment of traditional gender and racial roles. After all, in a typical psychoanalytic plot, the womb-like maternal space of plenitude has to be lost to the subject for the sake of the constitution of the symbolic. Roth’s childhood episode, to which I will return later, eloquently shows that the white male subject in this society has to lose the black home to “[enter] his heritage” (110), the white genealogical system in which grief is sublimated in the expectation for the immortal, immaterial realm that awaits them at the end of history. Thus, on the one hand, the loss of home puts white men into a melancholy over the lost black home symbolized by the mammy as I will examine in next chapter. On the other, the blackness and femininity of home engenders a certain predicament for black men especially when they internalize the society’s gender norms, for as long as they are settled in the black home, the masculine identity is unavailable for them. Even before they are put in a situation in which they have to deal with grief, then, black men have a motivation to flee from home, the domestic space of blackness and femininity.

Interestingly, the wilderness, the place supposedly reserved for the hunters’ brotherhood, is also associated with both blackness and femininity, suggesting affinity between those two elements antithetical to white masculinity—after all, in this society, blackness prevents one from attaining masculinity. Louise Westling discusses how the wilderness, along with Sam Fathers and
Old Ben, is represented in feminine and motherly terms, and observes that “Ike's masculine heritage is defined as sexual union with the animal who personifies the land,” or “the fearfully exhilarating realm of the erotic feminine” (515), while such union should not be achieved as Keats’s poem which Cass cites suggests. Whereas the attainment of union seems to be the assertion of masculinity, union with the mother can also lead to the dissolution or death of masculinity—in short, Faulkner gives the wilderness a kind of “womb-tomb” imagery. Bart H. Welling further argues that since the wilderness, Sam Fathers, and Old Ben are also associated with blackness, they (or particularly Old Ben in Welling’s view) “can be read as a surprising, and disturbing, incarnation of memories of Callie Barr” (487). The black feminine space of home and the wilderness then both function as the resigned (but not appropriately mourned) object of desire that sustains the illusion of ideal white masculinity by not being attained.

For black men who covet masculinity, then, the black home can work in a similar but more forcible way as something that they cannot or should not identify with but cannot sever themselves from, either, because, as I will expound more closely, it can also give them what little amount of masculine identity they can obtain as husband or father. Consequently, it is black men who have to suffer from the acutest sense of identity crisis in this society while women seem to be mostly content with or at least able to “endure” playing their role as bearers of the passion of materiality. And without legitimate genealogies, black men’s efforts to attain the masculine identity almost always end up a failure and they are reabsorbed into the home space, which functions as a device for containment in the oppressive social system, and thus forced to keep carrying passion
If this pattern of the ineffectual flight of black men is more than an expression of Faulkner’s melancholic attachment to the lost black home or sympathy for the black man’s difficulty of attaining the masculine identity, it is because eventual homecoming mixes up the private and public or black and white spaces and thereby exceeds the melancholic pattern premised on the demarcation between blackness and whiteness. As in Ike’s case, in the process of bringing the exiled black body back home, the white male subject cannot but witness the traces of grief on the body that must be confined within the black and feminine space. Particularly in “Pantaloon in Black” and “Go Down, Moses,” homecoming is a social task carried out by white males who find it necessary to bring the deviant black men to the black home—as Ike exemplifies, the white male subject needs blacks who suffer and endure at the black home under white dominance. But then, the exiled body that for a certain reason comes to bear traces of grief is necessarily brought to the public eye and undermines the foundation of the system itself. The black home is part of the community’s oppressive system and undertakes the role to cache grief, but grief, when inscribed on the black man’s body, sometimes breaks out of that black and feminine space and threatens the concept of the white male subject.

The homecoming of the exiled body is therefore not a sign of conservatism. However, it is not simply a triumph of the resistant black men, either. For, they have to pay the price by their lives. Rider in “Pantaloon in Black” and Butch in “Go Down, Moses” fail to gain an identity and subjecthood they want, and return home as corpses, or totally objectified bodies. Still, while the bodies do not mean anything for white males, the society’s existent discourses cannot deal with them properly because of the traces of grief inscribed on them—Rider’s inexpressible grief over
his dead wife and the black home’s private grief over Butch. Consequently, the bodies facilitate the subversive propagation of grief precisely when the community succeeds in restoring its order, that is, when the black men are sent to the black Christian home as they should be as per the community’s ideological codes through the instrumentality of white men. While particularly Butch can be regarded as a variation of what Nancy Tischler terms the “black Ulysses, the ne’er do well male character, without significant or enduring role in family life” paired with the “faithful mammy” in modern Southern fiction (51-52), he does not simply disclose the modern black family structure formed under certain historical and social conditions as the black Ulysses type defined by Tischler does. The black man in the double movement of exile and homecoming in Go Down, Moses, when made into a dead body and circulated as such, functions as the “letter” in Judith’s speech in Absalom, the perishable object which does not “mean anything in itself” but by being handed to others occasions “a scratch, something, something that might make a mark” that reminds people of perishability and grievability, the possibility of becoming was and thereby empowering the is-ness of the past necessary for getting out of the melancholic repetitive pattern on which the patriarchal Southern community founds itself.

As I will examine in detail in the following, both in “Pantaloon in Black” and “Go Down, Moses,” this “scratch” is illustrated by the juxtaposition of the dead black body with white men’s inability to either comprehend or ignore affective complexities involved in the body. In the former story, the failure of the sheriff’s deputy to organize Rider’s suicidal acts, which overlap with the suicide of Eunice, into a coherent narrative foreshadows Ike’s unsuccessful attempts to subsume the specific tragedy of Eunice into the history he makes up. In the latter, which
concludes the novel, a lawyer in the town of Jefferson, Gavin Stevens, instead of the heirs of old Carothers McCaslin, is perplexed by the sudden encounter with the modern sequel to the grief behind the sin of the patriarch. Grief then comes to have social implications beyond a few white and black families as the “letter” is handed to strangers. Moreover, “Go Down, Moses” shows that women (including white women who have failed to be wife and mother as the society expect them to) as bearers of passion, while at once marginalized and instrumental to the ideological containment by being faithful to traditional norms, drive white men to carry out the task ultimately destructive of the society’s foundation. As Rosa in Absalom forces Quentin to break into the Sutpen house, women in this story invite Stevens into the house where the white man encounters with what he has to reject and ignore. Even as Faulkner does have pity and sympathy for anachronistic white Southern ladies and black mammies, it does not simply furnish him with melancholic desire for the lost tradition to make him another Faulknerian man; instead, he lets them revenge themselves by becoming the driving force of the disorganization of the society’s oppressive system.

The second section of “Pantaloon in Black” is composed of a recapitulation of Rider’s acts after the death of his wife Mannie which the deputy tells his wife. A series of Rider’s acts incited by his wife’s death—the acrobatic feat he performs at the mill, excessive intoxication, the killing of a cheating white man, and the breaking out of the prison despite the risk of lynching—are “clearly suicidal” (Bockting, “Look ”91). However, Rider’s acts are beyond the deputy’s imagination—a white man usually does not imagine that a black man commits a suicide as
suggested in “The Bear”—and the deputy does not see behind his acts “unbearable grief” (86), which Rider cannot but express through suicide as does Eunice. “Them damn niggers . . . aint human. . . . [When] it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes” (GDM 147), he says, and doubts Rider’s ability to grieve: “His wife dies on him. All right. But does he grieve?” (148).

The deputy’s biased description of Rider’s acts in the second section indicates a “crisis in interracial literacy” (Moreland 171) while it can also be an “act of containment by dominant community” (Lahey 102). Because of that, it prepares the reader to pay attention to Ike’s intention and failure of containment vis-à-vis Eunice’s suicide. As Michael Lahey puts it, “Rider’s actions and utterances unsettle the deputy’s presumptions enough to compel the deputy to speak at length privately in his kitchen” (100). Simply stating that “niggers aint human” cannot satisfy the deputy, and he obsessively goes on to retell the incidents even as that attempt only produces an “unconvincing interpretive displacement of the first section” (100). He perceives something that his society’s racist discourses cannot explain away and discloses the limitations of those discourses. In this sense, Rider’s unacknowledged, inexpressible grief can have the “politically transformative emotional power” (99).

Indeed, at the end of the story, the deputy shows his inability to complete containing interpretation, which even makes him closer to Rider. Arrested and put into the jail, Rider refuses incarceration, saying “dont lock me up” (GDM 150). Then, his laughter simultaneous with tears frustrates the deputy’s interpreting effort. The deputy has no way to name this complex emotion of Rider occasioned by Mannie’s death, nor can Rider himself properly deal with it. Thus, Rider
says, “Ah just cant quit thinking,” and immediately after reporting that, the deputy asks his wife, “And what do you think of that?” (152), as though he is also unable to quit thinking about Rider’s death, split between his desire and inability to understand it, trying to infect others with this pathological state.

The deputy’s obviously racist interpretation and inability to perceive Rider’s grief has the same root as Rider’s “inability to articulate his loss in any of his society’s dominant discourses” (Moreland 171). It is not simply a misreading of Rider’s acts, but reflects the problematic expressive capability of those discourses. The only way to understand and explain Rider is therefore to go beyond those discourses and recognize their limitations, which is synonymous with the acknowledgement of the foreclosed grief. Hoke Perkins vindicates the deputy’s honesty, observing that “he is in a state of near empathy” (232), but we can also say that his obsession to tell stems from his position similar to Ike’s as a witness to the originating moment of foreclosing repudiation that supports the shared reality of the society but has to be kept unacknowledged. In order to maintain his fraternal ideal, Ike tries to create a coherent historical narrative by concealing its origin, Eunice’s suicide and repudiation of grief, which nonetheless catches up with Ike and frustrates his attempt. Likewise, Rider’s suicidal death and unarticulated grief challenges the deputy to execute an impossible task, that is, creating a coherent interpretive narrative while denying the existence and even repudiation of grief. Moreover, the deputy is not Rider’s kin in any sense, and the propagation of traces of Rider’s repudiated grief beyond the family complements Ike’s stories that deconstruct the history and genealogy of the single planter-class family, demonstrating that the problem of grief is indeed social, and that grief can wield its
dis/inheriting power beyond the family to which the deceased belongs.

We have to wait until the stories of Ike to fully understand why grief, or its repression, plays so central a role in this society’s discourses—as examined above, the foreclosure of grief sustains the structure of the white family and its fraternal ideal, and the resurgence of the repudiated grief as a result of the intersection of the histories of the white family and of its black companions forces dis/inheritance on Ike. Still, “Pantaloon in Black” at least shows that the matter of grief is related to the society’s discourses particularly concerning the concepts of family and home, and also illuminates differences between the black family and the white family. The deputy’s observation at the end of the second section figuratively expresses these. For him, the tears Rider sheds while laughing look like inorganic, insentient “glass marbles” and yet the “popping sound” of their falling onto the floor reminds him of “bird eggs,” a figure of progeniture, even though the sound is actually “like someone dropping bird eggs” (GDM 152). The deputy thus implicitly associates Rider’s affective deficiency with the frustration or repudiation of hope for regeneration or genealogical expansion and continuity impossible for black people who, unlike the white Faulknerian man, have to bear inexpressible grief. Moreover, the reference to the bird reminds us of the Birdsongs, the clan of the killed white man who take revenge on Rider, and contrasts the powerful network of white kin with the situation of Rider, whose only relative is his aunt, who, without any power to protect him, is mentioned in the second section only as “its next of kin” to whom “the body” of Rider is surrendered (147). The deputy’s wife is certainly unsympathetic to the deputy, which offers an example of the white family’s general “warmless” relationship in Faulkner’s works (Clough 397), and yet “Pantaloon
in Black” does not give us a bright picture of the black family, either.

We need to shift our eyes to the first section for the closer examination of what engenders this situation. It describes how Rider reacts to his wife’s death and illustrates that the society’s familial discourses do not properly function for black people especially upon the death of a family member. First of all, we should note that although Rider’s fierce reaction to his wife’s death shows his intense love and grief for her which he cannot properly express and therefore the deputy cannot acknowledge, it is not simply a proof of the moral superiority of the black family to the white family. Certainly, the inattention of the deputy’s wife to her husband is contrasted with Rider’s strong affective ties with Mannie, but more important are the conditions that produce racial differences in the familial relationship as well as in other aspects. For, the first section of the story reveals that the black man’s stronger sense of “home” is also premised on social inequality, and if there is something that is inexpressible in the community’s shared reality, it is that very reality which simultaneously produces and represses it. Although Nicole Moulinoux interprets what deprives the deputy of the ability to speak about the incident properly as “preoedipal vernacular” (98), and sees “a world of lost plenitude” in the black family’s home (94), those elements lost to the reality are themselves products of the community’s dominant discourses. If the propagation of traces of repudiated grief has dis/inheriting effects, it is not because it leads to the retrieval of love and grief and a better form of home, but because it deconstructs those discourses which produce that unacknowledged love and grief.

Benjamin H. Ogden argues that Rider’s love implicated in his grief is not simply romantic but inseparable from the community’s socioeconomic structure, and that “it may be not
only love that is the impetus for Rider’s despair but also the loss of self-identity constructed through property and money that marriage makes possible” (382). Indeed, as Ike’s stories amply show, in Go Down, Moses, “self-identity” is “entangled in a discourse of self-possession,” and “because self-possession is indivisible from private property only white males can, in theory, achieve a particular level of individual autonomy and psychological maturity,” and conversely “black males” suffer “a particularly egregious feeling of emasculation and dispossession” (381). But Rider, an efficient wage-laborer who makes “good money” (GDM 131), nourishes “a sense of ownership” and gains “property-as-identity” by establishing their home and saving money after he marries Mannie (Ogden 385). Marriage serves “as the province of the adult, fully matured body” especially for blacks who were prohibited to marry in the antebellum era (Davis 69), and sets off Rider’s accumulation of assets. Thus, in order for Rider to gain property-as-identity, the existence of his wife as keeper of home is indispensable, hence his intense love and grief.

The above argument suggests two important points. One is that property in question is not simply monetary or material assets; it becomes the source of identity only when it is consolidated into the form of home. What matters is the sense of duration, of the continuing security of property through time in the marital life opposed to the single man’s waste of money in drinking and gambling. The “fire on the hearth” Rider built in imitation of Lucas symbolizes the lasting matrimonial bond with Mannie, and it lets Rider have a sense of time and duration, or endurance (GDM 132). The other point is that as Rider’s property-as-identity depends on the mortal presence of his wife, the black family’s home cannot endure beyond the death of a certain
individual family member. Thus, after his wife’s death, Rider feels that “all those six months” he spent with her there “were now crammed and crowded into one instant of time until there was no space left for air to breathe, crammed and crowded about the hearth where the fire which was to have lasted to the end of them . . . had already fallen to a dry, light soilure of dead ashes” (133-34). The endurance of the fire does not hold on beyond their mortality, and when Mannie is gone, it dies out. The duration of the matrimonial bond then seems to Rider to be a transient illusion, and the house ceases to be his home. Upon Mannie’s death, their home is immediately lost together with the sense of ownership. Though Rider says “Ah’m goan home” after having buried Mannie, he finds “nothing” beyond the gate of the house he has been renting from Carothers Edmonds, because the “house had never been his anyway” (132-33), and even the renovation he made seems “a part of the memory of somebody else” (133). As Ogden points out, the “identity of property owner that [Rider] so valued—and that conferred a sense of masculinity normally unavailable to black men—at this moment deteriorates into an acknowledgement that it had always been an illusion” (390).

A crucial implication of Ogden’s argument which requires more elaboration is that Rider’s inability to overcome the loss of subjecthood and identity simultaneous with his wife’s death derives from the temporality of the black family’s property, and here lies a decisive difference from the white family. The transience of the black matrimonial bond makes a sharp contrast with the patriarchal white family’s prospects for perpetuity through the inheritance of patrimony as melancholic longing for immortal fraternity as revealed in “The Old People.” Even Ike’s conviction of genealogical continuity and inheritance of the redemptive mission in “The
“Bear” is premised on the continuance of the shameful inheritance of patrimony in the Edmondses. What sustains the white male identity is not just property but hope for perpetuity acquired through the filial relation and inheritance between father and son, which exempts the white family from persisting in the living existence of individual family members and results in the lack or instant overcoming of grief as argued above. This is impossible for the black man who may own some property but no patrimony to inherit and bequeath. The black families in Faulkner’s works only have synchronic, present familial ties, and this is proved by the fact that they are almost always not bigger than the size of nuclear family, without a sense of genealogical continuity beyond the living parents, while even the nuclear family is unstably organized, in many cases the father missing and the role of the mother substituted by a grandmother or an aunt. Thus Rider, too, does not “remember his parents at all” (GDM 130), and even if he did, it would not give him a sense of genealogical continuity as in the white family. In this regard, Lucas’s fire and hearth indeed emblematizes not only the solidarity of the matrimonial bond but its transience. For, Lucas, who tries to affiliate himself on his white ancestor Carothers McCaslin, has no sense of continuity or inheritance within the black family. After all, the marriage of Lucas’s parents results from the white master’s gamble—the major antithesis of the marital life’s stability—as told in “Was,” and the father, Tomey’s Turl, is, if seen in the community’s dominant discourses, only a part of the master’s property that ensures his white identity. If the slave has an identity in the discourse of property-as-identity, it is indeed as objectified property.

As a black man without genealogical continuity, in this society Rider cannot so much as sublimate his wife’s death into the transcendent immortal realm such as the wilderness. That we
cannot know the cause of Mannie’s death underlines the precariousness of black life—it can end suddenly at any time—which is a sign of the fundamental dispossession of the black man. It is pertinent that Rider feels that the “close walls of impenetrable cane-stalks” subtly remindful of Ike’s timeless impenetrable woods “gave a sort of blondness to the twilight and possessed something of that oppression, that lack of room to breathe in, which the walls of his house had had” (141). Since the cane-stalks are part of the economic system dominated by whites that enables Ike to preserve the ideality of the immortal wilderness, this is an ironic homecoming during exile: the space delimited by the walls is no longer what gives him the sense of plenitude but figures oppression and containment especially by the white-dominated discourse of property-as-identity, and reminds Rider of the fact of death—not only of his wife but his subjecthood and identity.

Since Rider’s love and grief is inseparable from the social configuration which disposposes blacks, the idea that the black family is morally superior is not far from Ike’s paternalistic and Christian perspective in which blacks are “better” because they are dispossessed. Thus, when Rider’s aunt sends him a message through her husband and tries to take him back “home” by employing a Christian rhetoric, Rider rejects it, saying: “Whut Mannie

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68 As Richard Godden observes, “Mannie, youthfully dead for no traceable reason, represents the arbitrary violence that haunts the social practices of successful black life. . . . Mannie returns from the dead to make manifest the unlivable nature of aspirant black life in Mississippi in 1942, where arbitrary and violent death is a constitutive feature of black sociability.” (William 90).

69 Walter Taylor claims that “[t]o have revealed any reason for Mannie’s death would have forced [Faulkner] to connect Rider’s grief with the accidents of Negro experience; with the cause unspecified, Rider can be shown consciously able to account for his loss only as an act of God” (435), but these descriptions of the walls show that Rider rather interprets his loss as inescapable Negro experience in the white-dominated Southern society which God imposes on black people.
ever done ter Him? Whut He wanter come messin wid me [?]” (138). Rider’s disbelief in and rage against God is comparable to Eunice’s suicide, which is an act prohibited in Christianity and committed on no other day but Christmas and therefore can be interpreted as protest against God, as Kazuhiro Nishikawa points out (169). Nishikawa argues that both Rider and Eunice escape from the discourses that impose virtues such as “endurance” on blacks (169), but when he feels the sense of oppression while moving between the walls of impenetrable cane-stalks, Rider, “this time, instead of fleeing it,” tries to challenge it with a help of alcohol, and says: “Try me. Try me, big boy. Ah gots something hyar now dat kin whup you” (GDM 141). It is a defiance against the world which forces the black man to endure the shortage of duration and grants the prospect of perpetuity only to the white man.

For Rider, the memory of containment ineluctably intertwines with the memory of Mannie and her death, of the satisfying sense of home and its illusiveness, of which almost everything around him seems to remind him—he cannot but be aware of the “narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife’s bare feet” which are “fixed and held in the annealing dust,” of “his body breasting the air her body had vacated,” and of “his eyes touching the objects . . . her eyes lost” (131). Unable to cope with anguish derived from this memory through proper mourning, then, Rider tries to “quit thinking.” His efforts for this include excessive drinking and the dangerous bodily feat at the mill. Notably, in so doing, Rider tries to deliver himself up to the sheer materiality and physical force of his body beyond the containment of home or the community’s defining discourses and even beyond the control of his own consciousness, which dwells on the anguishing memories. This is a way for his defiance; he feels “free” and “all right” as “his
moving body” drunkenly runs “in the silver solid wall of air he breasted,” this time without recalling the memory of Mannie (141).

Since Rider cannot sever his attachment to his dead wife, she becomes an objet a, a desired but prohibited object for him. Mannie’s ghost evokes both the lost plenitude and death but is not something to be “afraid” of, as a bear or a deer for Ike is not (134, 196). When Rider sees Mannie’s ghost, he says, “lemme go wid you,” but the materiality and physical force of his body prevents him from doing so:

he could actually feel between them the insuperable barrier of that very strength which could handle alone a log which would have taken any two other men to handle, of the blood and bones and flesh too strong, invincible for life, having learned at least once with his own eyes how tough, even in sudden and violent death, not a young man’s bones and flesh perhaps but the will of that bone and flesh to remain alive, actually was. (134)

This tension between desire and prohibition gives him an aspect of the Faulknerian man, making him trapped in the “junctureless backloop of time’s trepan,” obsessed with the past (145). However, unlike Ike, who also feels the barrier of materiality to the objet a, the black man without expectation of transcendent immortality beyond the barrier cannot keep an appropriate distance from the objet a—Mannie’s ghost does not promise the retrieval of the ideal past in the future and instead simply emphasizes the crude fact of the irreparable deaths of his wife and his subjecthood and identity. Whereas the immaterialized totemic animals symbolize eternity and immortality, the ghost in the black community’s superstition only serves as a negation of what
“the preachers tell and reiterate and affirm,” that is, a Christian belief that the dead “left [the earth] not only without regret but with joy, mounting toward glory” (130). Unlike the dead in Ike’s imagination who become “free in earth and not in earth but of earth, myriad yet undiffused of every myriad part . . . in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one” (312), dead blacks remain individual ghosts as bound to earth as they were when alive.

Accordingly, Mannie comes to emblematize the fact of loss that Rider cannot properly deal with and overcome. She and the house haunted by her become associated more with the inexpressible, dangerous grief than with plenitude. In fact, at the beginning of the story, the narrator establishes association with black domesticity and grief by referring to “shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick and other objects insignificant to sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read” on the gravesite for blacks (129). Edward Clough links this decoration with Molly’s yard-sweeping in “The Fire and the Hearth,” which produces “curving intricate patterns among the flower-beds outlined with broken brick and bottles and shards of china and colored glass” (GDM 48), and seeing a “black domestic warmth” there, Clough states that “it offers models of domesticity and femininity that are not simply nurturing but generative and creative” (406). Certainly, that “no white man could have read” the objects which delineate Mannie’s grave suggests the black prerogative of acknowledging grief. However, most critics have overlooked the fact that they are “fatal to touch” not only for white people but for anyone. The black and feminine space is not simply nurturing and generative but can be destructive when unmanageable grief cached in it is unleashed through touching the fatal object, the reminder of the irrevocable loss.
Mannie, now the figure of the absolute loss of home as the source of Rider’s masculine identity, therefore does not function as a proper objet a that settles Rider in a repetitive melancholic pattern of the Faulknerian man’s adult world. Then, throughout the first section of “Pantaloons in Black,” he tries to escape the allure of the dysfunctional objet a by giving himself up to the body’s will to live beyond thinking, so that he can “stop needing to invent to himself reasons for his breathing,” or breathe without thinking about breathing (GDM 138). The “silver solid wall of air he breasted” suggests the materiality of air and Rider’s body, and he, unable to find space to breathe inside of the house’s walls, gulps “the silver air into his throat” together with whiskey “until he could breathe again” as if to identify himself with the outside silvery materiality (141). The repeated reference to his shadow also emphasizes his body’s materiality, in contrast with the spiritual buck that “can’t cast a shadow” in “The Old People.” Thus, when his aunt’s husband says to the drunken Rider, “Come home son. Dat ar cant help you,” he answers: “Hit done awready hope me. . . Ah’m awready home” (141). Rider seeks for the sense of home in the body’s materiality outside the family structure, and for the time being it seems to be working. And then he adds: “Ah’m snakebit now and pizen cant hawm me” (141). Calvin S. Brown paraphrases this passage as “I am already doomed and consequently immune to anything further that may happen to me” (181). More specifically, it can mean that Rider momentarily accepts the death of his subjecthood and identity within the discourse of property-as-identity and claims his immunity to it in order to seek for an alternative possibility for survival. While his physical performances seem to be almost suicidal, he thus actually tries to base his life on the body’s will to live, which is remindful of Charles Bon’s letter in Absalom, in
which he announces his belief in the body’s will to live after he stops “thinking, remembering . . . to become once more for a period without boundaries or location in time” (AA 104).

Judith L. Sensibar argues that “Rider’s rage and grief at Mannie’s death is beyond his control” and because “[n]o language can express it . . . his body speaks” (“Who” 117). In so doing, “[m]ourning the lost maternal, he returns to the presymbolic” and thereby resists containment (117). Yet as Peter Brooks observes, while the body “often presents us with a fall from language, a return to an infantile presymbolic space,” it is widely accepted in contemporary thought that “the body is a social and linguistic construct, the creation of specific discursive practices,” and even bodily sensations are implicated in the “construction of a symbolic order” (Body 7). Thus, it is necessary to add a few reservations to Sensibar’s interpretation. First of all, Rider is more in melancholia than in mourning, and that is why he is trying to quit thinking; that impossibility to mourn is the very problem for him. Besides, the presymbolic is, just as is the maternal, a product of the very symbolic order that disables him from expressing his emotions verbally, and it is produced as eternally lost and unattainable. Rider’s appeal to the materiality of his body is indeed an expression of longing for the presymbolic, and that futile longing again makes him trapped in a repetitive melancholic pattern that supports the white supremacist society. The presymbolic body is therefore another objet a that substitutes for the totally lost maternal.

Sandra Lee Kleppe directs our attention to the title’s reference to Pantaloon, a clownish stock character of the Italian Commedia dell’Arte, and parallels its “function of criticizing the social structure” and Rider’s role in the story (217). Yet what Rider realizes in his exile is first of
all the difficulty of ripping off the black mask as their inherited property imposed by the white-dominated society. Indeed, Rider’s attempts to leave himself to his body’s sheer materiality and physical force to quit thinking eventually reveal that the body is ultimately inseparable from the current socioeconomic configuration and not free from the discourse of property-as-identity. His acts after Mannie’s death follow the conventional pattern of the single black man he himself once was—laboring, drinking, and gambling—and this black man with outstanding physicality outside the family structure proves to be objectified property within the discourse of property-as-identity despite his intention to escape from it. At the craps, Rider, now following the pattern of the life he was leading before his marriage, is pertinently identified as “one who was called Rider and was Rider” (GDM 145), for the name emblematizes his physical excellence in terms of labor and sexuality during his singlehood: it was “the men he worked with and the bright dark nameless women he had taken in course and forgotten until he saw Mannie that day and said, ‘Ah’m thu wid all dat,’” that “began to call him Rider” (144). But as his trajectory after Mannie’s death amply shows, this identity as Rider the single black man which he rediscovers as an alternative to the supposedly mature one lost upon Mannie’s death also forces him to be an efficient laborer who buys an appropriate amount of whiskey from the white seller at an appropriate time and loses most of his pay at the craps in which the white “boss-man” Birdsong uses “miss-out dice” (145, 149). The single black man cannot have a sense of adult male subjecthood, nor can he obliterate the dominant discourses of the existent socioeconomic configuration which inescapably objectify his material powerful body as economically useful for

70 As for the association between the name Rider and physicality, see also N. Taylor 74.
Consequently, Rider’s emphasis of the sheer materiality of the body after Mannie’s death entails demands for fairness and equality to liberate his body from objectification and utilization by whites. Thus, after showing off his physical labor power and ignoring the white foreman at the mill, he tries to get a jug of whiskey in exchange for money necessary for it, or “four silver dollars,” while the white seller attempts to reject to sell it with an authoritative and racist demand, “Put that jug down, nigger” (140). Rider claims the fairness of trade and his right for possession: “Look out, white folks. . . . Hit’s mine. Ah done paid you” (140). Though he succeeds in obtaining whiskey, he is risking his life here, as the reference to the white man’s “gun” in the room suggests (140). It comes as no surprise then that though whiskey is for Rider at first “something . . . dat kin whup” his sense of oppressive containment, the drink itself soon comes to seem complicit with the unfair economic system and becomes an opponent that he has to defy. Thus while “gulping the silver air” with whiskey, he speaks to the jug as if to defy the white man: “Come on now. You always claim you’s a better man den me. Come on now. Prove it” (141). Drinking and breathing, he perceives freedom for a while, but then he becomes unable to drink anymore, and because he “misread de sign wrong,” a “solid and unmoving column” of whiskey springs out of his throat and mouth, “silvering, glinting, shivering” (142). Whiskey is not just what lets him quit thinking and attain sheer materiality; on the contrary, he has to interpret the sign his body shows while his is drinking and negotiate with it. Moreover, the silver color of whiskey and the air evokes the silver dollars he paid for his purchase as well as the “bright cascade of silver dollars” he brought to Mannie (132). The silvery materiality is
reabsorbed into the racially unequal socioeconomic system which dispossesses blacks.

The desperate attempts to surrender himself to sheer materiality thus give Rider a full realization of impossibility to escape from containment by the discourse of property-as-identity and the presymbolic body turns out to be a fundamentally impossible ideal as long as he is alive. He then confesses to his aunt that the sense of home which he found in the body’s materiality was a lie. Significantly, he says it without grief: “Then he said it. It was his own voice, without either grief or amazement, speaking quietly out of the tremendous panting of his chest which in a moment now would begin to strain at the walls of this room too” (143). This is remindful of Eunice’s repudiation of grief during her suicide, and in fact, now that the black home is lost and it is clear to Rider that there is no available way for him to give expression to his sense of loss, to express grief as grievance, within the existent discourses, he carries out the act which cannot fail to bring him death, that is, killing Birdsong for the fairness of the game, breaking the present pattern of identity and “crossing the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan” (145). This suicidal act incomprehensible and implausible to whites points, as does Eunice’s suicide, to traces of the unexpressed, inexpressible emotions.

In a sense, it is also a deadly attainment of the presymbolic body as the objet a. When he enters the tool-room where the craps is held, he again says: “Ah’m snakebit and bound to die”; “Ah’m snakebit and de pizen cant hawm me” (145). Thus he again accepts the death of his subjecthood within the discourse of property-as-identity, but this time he knows that claiming immunity to further dispossession is synonymous with his material death, for even his material body is exploited and under white men’s control as long as he is alive. The murder of the
cheating white man is Rider’s claim to equality and fairness, to the body free from containment by oppressive discourses, and what is left is the dead body which even whites cannot utilize.

Still, the murder of Rider serves as the recovery of order, the relocation of the deviant black man within the black home. Charmaine Eddy points out that the “lynched black body operates as the sign of the ‘truth’ of racial difference, the wounds themselves the material evidence of the successful policing of racial boundaries” (58). The fair and equal subjecthood and identity is unlivable in this community centered on the unequal socioeconomic system. The resistance to the system or the refusal of the objectification of the body is fatal, and ironically leads to complete objectification—this is the contradiction of the symbolic order which the attainment of the prohibited but desired objet a reveals. The Birdsongs must kill Rider to regain the white-dominated order of the system and makes him nothing but “the body” (GDM 147), and they send Rider to the Christian home of his aunt.

However, this process also allows Rider to take the Pantaloon’s function of criticizing the social structure, thanks to the double implication of black in the title— as Kleppe points out, it “refers” not only to “Rider’s skin color” but also “to his mourning” (217). Despite his exile, he keeps carrying the burden of blackness, the black domesticity and materiality associated with unmanageable grief, and his trajectory eloquently speaks of this aspect of the black life which must remain a secret. The process of objectification and transfer to home serves as the proof of this trajectory inscribed on the body which is supposed to be totally objectified and devoid of meaning.

Thus, even as the deputy compares “niggers” to “a damn herd of wild buffaloes” without
“human feelings and sentiments” (GDM 147), which were objects to be hunted to the extent that nearly caused the extinction of the species, he cannot but notice traces of some feelings and sentiments that are not regarded as “human” nor are given any definition in this community. The body refuses to be securely objectified and accommodated in the community’s discourses, and incites the deputy to engage in the impossible task of constructing a coherent narrative about Rider only to reveal the limitations of the existent discourses. The deputy’s narrative takes Rider out of home again and invites him into the domestic space of the white family, so that the deputy’s wife has to say, “Take him out of my kitchen” (148). Rider finds that black domesticity is in a respect as oppressive as the outside world dominated by whites, and in the end he mixes up the black domestic space with the white space, proving that they are continuous and both of them are vulnerable to grief, just as the exile and homecoming of Tennie’s Jim makes Ike find the black home in the space supposedly structured like the extended family’s home safely reigned by the white master.

“Pantaloon in Black” shows that the repudiated grief has effects even on those without blood relation. Ike’s stories then clarify why the repudiation of grief which the dead body of Rider suggests is so confusing and threatening for the white man—it disrupts the structure of the white family on which the white male identity depends. The discovery of the repudiated grief frustrates the conception of the community founded on consanguinity or the ever-unachieved dream of transhistorical fraternity, which ultimately must deny death and loss. Faulkner then goes back to the dead black body in the last chapter of the novel, “Go Down, Moses,” this time further exploring the relationship between the community and grief implied by the body.
“Go Down, Moses” deals with the death and funeral of the last known descendant of Eunice and Tomasina, Samuel Worsham (Butch) Beauchamp. The brief exchange between a census-taker and Butch described in the first section of the story shows that the latter is now imprisoned for killing a policeman in Chicago. Eventually we know that he first broke into the commissary store, the “solar-plexus” of the Edmonds plantation as called in “The Bear” (242), and Roth Edmonds drove him out of the plantation and sent to Jefferson. In the town, Butch “spent a year in and out of jail for gambling and fighting” (354), and again broke into a store, then broke out of jail and ended up in Chicago. There he made money in “a business called numbers,” a kind of gambling game (357).

Though he is a grandson of Lucas, who owns a great amount of money he received as a legacy of old Carothers McCaslin, it seems that Butch has never benefited from his grandfather’s wealth, and he has no sense of genealogical continuity with him. In the conversation with the census-taker, he only mentions his grandmother, Mollie Worsham Beauchamp, Lucas’s wife. And unlike Rider, who is an efficient laborer, Butch cannot establish the home of his own nuclear family and thereby find, if only momentarily, his place in the community founded on the ideology of property-as-identity. As a result, he violently challenges the law and order of the community. As Carl Rollyson observes, the commissary is the “symbol and the concrete manifestation of a social and economic system dominated by whites” (171) and indeed of the ideology of property-as-identity, for it is where the ledgers which function as the source of the construction of the genealogical history centered on whites’ ownership and inheritance told in
“The Bear” are preserved, and also where Mannie buys weekly supplies with Rider’s salary and store the rest of it in Edmonds’s safe in “Pantaloop in Black.” Butch then refuses to fall an easy prey to cheating white men in gambling, and instead becomes rich by joining the exploiters’ side in the North. The narrator reports that his voice is “anything under the sun but a southern voice or even a negro voice” (GDM 351). His clothes and coiffure are better and more expensive than those of the census-taker; he seems to have succeeded in economic self-realization in the Northern capitalism and gone beyond the racial barrier, getting out of the confinement of blackness as defined in the South.

Nevertheless, Butch’s present situation proves that economic self-realization is after all illusory. His appearances—clothes, coiffure, and the sound of his voice—shows his overcoming of the imposed inferiority of his race at least economically, but he is still a black man who had to engage in an underground business to make money, was reduced to killing a policeman, and has been sentenced to death under the law. It is highly ironical that his head resembles “a bronze head, imperishable and enduring” (351), while he is to die shortly and be sent to the South, his “home” (352), where the black man cannot entertain the illusion of perpetuity and the black race is forced to endure the fate of oppression and the burden of materiality.

Butch goes back home as a dead black body which ostentatiously recalls the irrevocability of loss to townspeople; the black race is supposed to endure, but this individual black man is forever dead without hope for resurrection at the end of the history of patriarchal inheritance. Mollie’s wish not only to bring him home but also to give him a decent funeral makes the dead body circulate among the public. The descriptions of Butch in the first section
emphasize the excessiveness of Butch—“the eyes had seen too much,” his sports costumes “had cost too much and draped too much, with too many pleats” (351), and he got “rich too fast” (352). This excessiveness implies the convoluted historical conditions that allow him to reach home only as a dead body and foreshadows the excessiveness of that body that prevents it from simply coming “home right” and makes it serve as the letter in Judith’s speech, the perishable object which occasions dis/inheritance (365).

Though the shortest and often marginalized chapter in the novel, “Go Down, Moses” thus gives a pertinent ending to Faulkner’s genealogical deconstruction of the Southern patriarchy. Moreover, it illuminates that the driving force of that deconstruction has always been females and blacks, those victimized in the history in which the dominant are always white males. The second section of “Go Down, Moses,” as does that of “Pantaloons in Black,” describes how white men fail to comprehend black people’s reactions to the death of a family member. Butch’s body is retrieved through the efforts of the lawyer Gavin Stevens upon the request of the old white lady Miss Belle Worsham, who acts to grant Mollie’s wish. Whereas Miss Worsham, who “grew up together” with Mollie “as sisters would” (357), announces that the black family’s grief is “our grief” (363), Stevens, unable to share that sentiment, feels suffocated when he witnesses the black family’s grieving chanting. This sisterhood beyond the racial boundaries is in sharp contrast with the white men’s inability to establish brotherhood with blacks as exemplified by the relationship between Roth Edmonds and his black foster brother Henry Beauchamp as well as that between their fathers depicted in “The Fire and the Hearth.”

Yet the white man’s inability to confront grief and the familial bond between the white
and black women fostered in the black and feminine space of home are different aspects of the same ideological system of the community. As I argued above, the Southern slavery required the ideological codes called paternalism to justify and secure the economic and sexual exploitation of blacks, while too much intimacy among the extended family threatened the more fundamental patriarchal imperative of the racial divide. Paternalism was therefore at once a cover-up and symptom of the contradiction in the Southern socioeconomic system, in which the slaves were both dehumanized as labor power and humanized as members of the extended family. Moreover, the paternalistic care for white ladies can be construed as a similar subterfuge to smooth over the instrumentation of women as reproducers of the white male subject. Both Miss Worsham’s bond with members of the extended family and Stevens’ care for the white lady are versions of paternalism; the difference lies in how sincerely they believe in the appearance of the reality that the paternalist ideology creates.

In *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, Diane Roberts explores how the ideal image of the chaste and brave southern lady was constructed both before and after the Civil War. As Roberts convincingly shows, the reinforcement of the stereotypical images of the Old South embodied by the southern ladyhood is an expression of nostalgia for what is lost. Since the “social role of the lady both illustrates and defines an interlocking system of class, gender, and race relations through which the South defines itself” (Roberts 2), people long for the ideal lady when the traditional social system is jeopardized. Faulkner is well aware of such dynamics, and I agree with Roberts when she says that “Faulkner’s reactivation of the most cherished of white southern stereotypes, especially in the 1930s, both reinscribes and destabilizes the myth of the
planted plantation South, which had been given a new lease on life by the Depression” (2). Yet the question is how he does so.

By Faulkner’s time, the ideal of the “Southern Belle” had been well established. According to Roberts, the Belle was the heiress of the “lady” in the Old South, and the “body of the Belle was inscribed with the integrity and glamour of the South itself. Her sexual purity translated her into the emblem of racial purity” (102), while the increasing admiration of the ideal Belle was simultaneous with its crisis caused by the social advancement of women that resulted from their acquirement of suffrage and more working opportunities and social associations, which meant their emancipation from strict domestic confinement and more chances to contact with men both black and white. Faulkner’s young female characters reflect this anxiety about young women’s sexuality as is typically expressed in Caddy in The Sound and the Fury.

However, the shift from The Sound and the Fury to Absalom, Absalom!, or from Caddy to Rosa, indicates that what gives a finishing stroke to the symbolic order of the Old South is not the unrestrained young women but the old ladies who cling to the old values. For, whereas deviation from or failure to embody the ideal does not destroy the ideal itself, radical efforts to attain the ideal reveal its fundamental contradictions and impossibility, as Absalom demonstrates. Faulkner’s works, therefore, while describing the contemporary social sensibility of the idealization of the past and anxiety about the disorderly present, reach a point where even nostalgia becomes impossible by focusing on those old ladies who have survived until the modern world. And Belle Worsham in “Go Down, Moses” is one of them; she believes in the
ideology that created the ideal image of the Belle but ultimately highlights its flaws.

Miss Worsham is a spinster who lives in an old decaying house her father left her, without any family or kin except black servants, giving “lessons in china-painting” (GDM 356). Elderly virgins, who drop out of what Mr. Compson calls the “three sharp divisions” of women in the South (AA 87), cannot have any stable identity without any position prepared for them in the community’s system. As a result, they try to keep the community’s traditions all the more rigorously as if to claim that they are still a respectable lady of a respectable family. In Faulkner’s works, on the other hand, most men in the modern world recognize the decline of the old system and yet superficially preserve the old moral values. In so doing, they gloss over the contradictions inherent in the community’s system. In order to retain the integrity of the community, men are forced to protect the anachronistic women’s delusion, aiding them in financial and other respects while helping them remain unaware of the fact of aiding; that is exactly what townspeople in “Go Down, Moses” do.

In The Sublime Object of Ideology, Slavoj Žižek suggests that in contemporary societies the ruling ideology is supported by cynicism, while those who literally believe in the ideology threaten it. He argues that “the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask” (25), and that “[w]hat they ‘do not know,’ what they misrecognize, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity . . . they are guided by the fetishistic illusion” (28). This kind of illusion, or the ideological fantasy, is not demystified by “symptomatic reading” that discloses a distance between the ideological mask and the real state of things, for cynics already take that
distance into account. The belief that supports the fantasy is “always materialized in our effective social activity,” in the ritualistic gesture of a certain “as if” (33). The matter is not a psychological belief as in literal believing, but a belief materialized in the effective functioning of the social field. Therefore, the appearance of the ritualistic gesture is important: “nobody believes in the ruling ideology, every individual preserves a cynical distance from it and everybody knows that nobody believes in it, but still, the appearance is to be maintained at any price” (225). The inconsistency of the ideological system then must not be pronounced “publicly” (225).

This tension between literal believing and cynicism is not limited to “Go Down, Moses” but everywhere in Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” being exemplary in this respect. In that story, white males in Jefferson collaborate to preserve the appearance of respectability for Emily Grierson, a spinster who, like Miss Worsham, gives “lessons in china-painting” and is left alone with a black servant in a decaying house (CS 138). They know that she cannot pay her taxes, so that the mayor Colonel Sartoris decides to remit her taxes without letting her notice that it is charity on townspeople’s part by telling her a “involved tale” which “[o]nly a man of Colonel Sartoris’ generation and thought could have invented . . . and only a woman could have believed” (120). Although men of the next generation “with its more modern ideas” try to make her pay taxes (120), Emily rejects the request by appealing to the tale Colonel Sartoris told her many decades ago. She keeps on clinging to the ideology of her father’s generation, and there is nothing that townspeople can do but keep her under paternalistic care, performing as if the old moral values were still working well in the present society.
The narrator of “A Rose for Emily,” who speaks in the first-person plural as if he were a representative of the community if not its collective consciousness, demonstrates how the community establishes its integrity by inheriting the obligation to take care of Emily while taking a cynical distance from her and objectifying her as an anachronistic survival of the old age. The narrator calls her “a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town” (119). By making her a tradition to be conveyed from generation to generation, they sustain their own integrity through time. Although the story abounds in episodes that show gaps between generations, the narrator even makes use of them to claim the coherence of the community. Thus, even as the fuss over the tax remission explicitly shows the change of views between the two generations, by presenting Emily as an inherited burden which forces the newer generation to take over the paternalistic gesture, the episode rather emphasizes continuity between the two generations. The stink incident told in the next section also involves an example of generation gap: a younger man makes a suggestion to tell her about the smell outright, whereas then mayor Judge Stevens objects to it in terms of politeness to a lady. The narrator, nevertheless, connects through these episodes the different generations, positing Emily as their common bother: “So she vanquished them [the newer generation that tried to persuade her into paying taxes], horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell” (121). Though people’s sensibility change over time and some feel offended by her uppity attitude and suggest forcing her to abide by the law, the narrator carefully distances “we” from those who are too antagonistic or critical to Emily: the latter are always “older people” (124), people in the “next,” “rising,” or “newer generation” (120, 122, 130), “ladies” (126), or simply “they” (121). The
narrator thereby strives to convince the reader that “we,” who are decent, arguably white male members of the community, consolidate their integrity beyond generation gaps by retaining the traditional paternalistic morality at least on the surface, treating Emily as if she were a respectable lady. Throughout the story, the narrative voice observes and reports events which span over generations as if to claim that “we” were the transhistorical fraternity united through inheriting the traditional burden of the town.

However, it is notable that since the time of Colonel Sartoris, they have needed to bend the law to allow Emily to survive in the primarily patriarchal economy, in which a spinster without any kin, devoid of any social role to play, cannot have a substantial income except by marrying. As long as she is within the framework of that tradition, she, failing to take the path that a Southern lady is supposed to take, cannot attain a stable identity nor is there any proper position for her in the legal, moral, economic and social systems of the community. As many spinsters in Faulkner’s works exemplify, such situation as Emily’s was not uncommon in the postbellum South, and therefore her being itself as well as the troubles she makes implies abiding defects of the systems. While Emily literally believes in the tradition, cynical male members of the community have to make compromises in many ways, bending its law and telling lies under the guise of paternalistic generosity, while they exclude those who do not comply with it from the transhistorical entity of “we,” in order to preserve the fantasy that the community’s systems are properly working even as they know the distance between the social reality and the ideological mask. Thus, Colonel Sartoris, the mayor of the older generation, in order to have Emily accept the extralegal remission of her taxes after her father’s death, needs to tell a lie,
fabricate a story that does not mar her respectability as a descendant of an aristocratic family.

Emily becomes an instrument to assure the integrity of the community by being kept at a distance from townspeople, whereas the public eye must pretend not to recognize that distance. In brief, this woman is a symptom of the defects of the society and such a nuisance to the town that the narrator even hints at the madness of the Griersons when he mentions her anachronism. The big decaying house of the Griersons, “set on what had once been our most select street,” but now encroached by “garages and cotton gins” (119), symbolizes Emily’s anachronism, and her confinement in the house is, for the narrator, a result of her father’s power over her and her own attachment to the father—townspeople imagine: “We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door” (123). Just before this passage the narrator tells us that Emily’s great-aunt “had gone completely mad” (123). Then, when her father dies, Emily denies the fact of death. The narrator says, “we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will,” but again just before this, the narrator makes a highly equivocal remark: “We did not say she was crazy then” (124).

Still, the town cannot forsake Emily, precisely because she is within the ideological codes which cynical men also need. In fact, townspeople are ready to seize an opportunity to witness her falling out of ladyhood as when her father died though the narrator again subtly distinguishes those people from “we”: “When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a
pauper, she had become humanized” (123). Yet she did not become a pitiable person and kept her head high. She even refused to admit her father’s death for a while even though what plunged her into the unstable position of spinsterhood was first of all the overprotection of her purity and chastity by her father, who “had driven away” “all the young men” (124). As the narrator says, she had to “cling to that which had robbed her, as people will,” and she actually keeps doing so until she dies.

The real problem for townspeople is that Emily’s pride and attachment to the tradition deprives them of even a chance to categorize her as a pitiable person “fallen” out of the tradition, a person for whom they do not have to keep the appearance of respectability. When Emily begins to associate with Homer Barron, “a Yankee” riding “the glittering buggy” in public (124, 126), it seems as if her repressed desire were released from the confinement of the old tradition after her father’s death. But even then, her pride persists and even seems more fortified: “She carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness” (125). Her literal persistence in the community’s values disturbs the cynical distance from the ruling ideology that townspeople retain, and although “we” exploit Emily to ascertain their integrity, her imperviousness and unstableness also function as a threatening symptom of the community’s traditional systems. The only way they can take is precariously distancing and objectifying but not forsaking Emily as an anachronistic woman close to madness, the town’s traditional care, “dear” and “perverse” (128).

Nevertheless, “we” always fail to take care of, pity, and objectify Emily properly. They
inevitably cannot perfect the task, as there is no fundamental solution for the unstableness of Emily’s position within their social framework. In a sense this problem is one thing townspeople in all generations do have in common. That is why “we” think that suicide is “the best thing” (126) for her when they notice that Homer will not marry her, and are “glad” when they expect that Emily and Homer are going to marry at last (127). Though the narrator claims that “we” are “really glad” because it will exorcise the two cousins of Emily who have come to take care of her and are “even more Grierson than Miss Emily” has ever been (127), it can be surmised that they are glad because Emily’s position would become less problematic, and also more pitiable, fallen at last by marrying a Northern day laborer who is suggestively said to “[like] men” (126) and is admitted to the Grierson house by the servant “at the kitchen door at dusk” (127). It would be far beyond “noblesse oblige,” beyond what is expected for “a real lady” (124).

Although the true motivation of Emily’s alleged murder of Homer is unknown, it suggests that she is literally still entrapped in the traditional values even while associating with him. It is notable that she confines his corpse in her house, which symbolizes her father’s moral tradition. Then, in killing Homer, Emily takes the father’s role, protecting her own virginity and respectability, keeping herself in the house; but at the same time, confining Homer’s corpse in the house can also mean confining him in the tradition as an unattained object of desire. Now dead, he can no longer leave her nor threaten her virginity and respectability. It is as if her love and desire could be expressed, if not consummated, as per the traditional morality only in this way. Or more precisely, in order to preserve the patriarchal ideal of ladyhood to which she clings, she, now without any opportunities to marry a respectable man, needed to create the objet a
within her father’s house through murder and confinement. This reflects the tensions caused by
Emily’s unstable position in the patriarchal economy and the paternalistic morality.

The narrator occasionally insinuates that townspeople have been blinking at the murder
and confinement while they must know that besides suicide it is the only measure Emily can take
to assume to be a respectable lady. As they sprinkle lime around Emily’s house, they know that
the smell is the stench of death though they say that it is from killed rats or snakes, and the
presence of the forbidden room in her house is also known: “Already we knew that there was one
room in that region above the stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have
to be forced” (129). It seems that townspeople are almost aware of what happened in Emily’s
house but keep repressing the knowledge all along. And the narrator stops the story at the point
of the divulgence of the secret, not investigating into its meaning any further.

Renée R. Curry rightly discusses as follows:

Evidence of the murder indicts the community as accessories to the murder of
Homer Barron. This murder occurs in the white space of the text, behind the word
“lady” and many other such words. No one dares to investigate because a
definition would have to be dismantled as well as an entire ideology. (399)

But it is not just because Emily’s behavior is not lady-like that the ideology is jeopardized; in
that case, townspeople would have only to say she was mad or was not a lady after all, fallen out
of the tradition. Rather, it is because her behavior is a result of persistently abiding by the
community’s tradition that it is essentially subversive.

Even before the ending the narrator hints that Emily’s presence can be dangerous against
the community. At one point he says: “Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows . . . like the carven torso of an idol on a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which” (128). She remains an impervious, objectified idol, and yet here is also expressed a certain anxiety: do “we” look at her or does she look at “us”? Significantly, this is one of the only two occasions in which the narrator uses the objective “us” instead of the subjective “we” or the possessive “our.” Even though townspeople objectify and distance Emily from them and thereby try to conceal the defects of the community, her “perversity” always reflects those acts back, objectifying “us” and forcing them to look at what they are doing, what their illusion of paternalistic morality produces. The other occasion the narrator uses “us” (though, ambiguously, in the subject phrase) is justifiably the last sentence of the story where townspeople finds a trace of Emily’s “pervasive” act within the house of anachronistic tradition, an unignorable outcome of the community’s collaborative preservation of the long-dead morality: “One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair” (130, emphasis mine).

“A Rose for Emily” thus dramatizes the tension between cynicism and literal believing, and shows how the latter ultimately forces the former to confront the concealed contradictions at the core of the ideology; anachronistic women make men consummate the hunting which men ritualize to keep at a distance the object of pursuit, the dangerous truth, the objet a—in this case, the dead body of Homer as the truth concealed behind Emily’s impervious façade. This structure is taken over by Absalom, Absalom!, in which Rosa, another anachronistic woman who sticks to the literal terms of the traditional values and the illusory image of respectability even in the
impoverished status after the Civil War, urges Quentin to get over Mr. Compson’s cynical interpretation of the Sutpens’ story and break into the house to confront the concealed truth.

Without any relatives to feed her, Rosa has to rely on the charity of her neighbors who leave “baskets of food on her doorstep at night,” but with “that calm incorrigible insistence that that which all incontrovertible evidence tells her is so does not exist, as women can,” she never admits the fact (AA 171). Quentin, recalling his father’s words, thinks that “[i]n very breathing they [women] draw meat and drink from some beautiful attenuation of unreality in which the shades and shapes of facts—of birth and bereavement, of suffering and bewilderment and despair—move with the substanceless decorum of lawn party charades, perfect in gesture and without significance or any ability to hurt” (171). Men, while aware of the meaninglessness of those gestures, then cooperate not to break women’s illusions, for, as I argued above, they need the ideological fantasy of whiteness, for which ladies are indispensable even though the female existence is regarded as a necessary evil and compromise. Nevertheless, by complying with Rosa’s request to retain the appearance of respectability, Quentin is made to realize the fundamental impossibility of that fantasy; he can no longer preserve it even in nostalgia.

“Go Down, Moses” again adopts this structure. Miss Worsham lives much in the same way as Rosa and Emily and has the same function to make cynical men to confront the truth inconvenient to them, this time concerning grief, not love, whereas Gavin Stevens, most likely a relative or direct descendant of Judge Stevens in “A Rose for Emily,” serves as a representative figure of cynical townspeople. Miss Worsham offers what little money she can afford to bring Butch’s dead body back home and buy a decent coffin for him, but since it is far from sufficient,
in order to keep up her appearances, Stevens lies to her about the expenses of Butch’s funeral, glossing over the real state of things, and he calls for townspeople’s donation, saying “It’s for Miss Worsham” (*GDM* 360). Stevens’ cynicism is obvious here: not only does he lie to Miss Worsham, but he is well aware of the meaninglessness of bringing the “dead nigger home” for the community as well as for him (360). The “dead nigger” is for Stevens nothing more nor less than “[t]he body,” an object useless and worthless in the Southern economy (358).

Stevens calls Butch “a bad son of a bad father” (357), reducing all the complexities involved in that incident into a mere biologically inherited vice, without so much as considering how “economic exploitation and racial oppression” (Matthews, “Touching” 25) in the South drove Butch into breaking into the commissary and leaving for the North, and how this course of Butch’s life incites grief, which Stevens cannot confront even with the help of his cynicism. Richard C. Moreland is right when he says that “Stevens is ready to admit ironic doubts about these strict limits to his sympathy, but that irony, typically, tends only to invoke that limit not yet in order to try to understand but in order to try to ward off what remains the undifferentiated unknown, articulated only in denial” (189).

Jay Watson claims that Stevens should be commended at least in that, though he is no relation to the Beauchamps or the Worshams, he helps to bring Butch home, involving the community, “willing to put his rekindled sense of moral responsibility ahead of his county attorney business, to the ire of some of his cohorts” (102). In Watson’s view, Stevens’ usage of the first-person plural in his remark to his collaborator, the editor of the newspaper, “We’re bringing him home” (*GDM* 359), signals his resolution to reinstate the integrity of the
community. Certainly, the acts of Stevens, who regards himself as a representative of “the great public” (356), do contribute to the construction of the communal “we,” but it is notable that “we” take a cynical distance from the emotions the ritual should arouse. By appealing to townspeople’s paternalistic morality, Stevens succeeds in collecting money for the funeral ritual, while the ritual is profoundly devoid of significance, at least for cynical men. They fail to share what Miss Worsham calls “our grief,” which should be confined within the private domain of the female and the black.

Stevens’ reaction to grief in Miss Worsham’s house suggests townspeople’s limitations in sympathy. When Stevens sees Mollie, her brother Hamp, and his wife chanting and mourning, he feels embarrassed and says, “I should have known. I shouldn’t have come” (363). He should have known that in that private space of the black home he would witness the grief he could not share or even recognize, and he should not have come because he should not witness it. A white male subject, Stevens must separate himself from the “old, timeless, female affinity for blood and grief” (358). White males sublimate grief for their dream of fraternal, immortal identification; grief is only permitted in the segregated realm of the female as well as the black, those who are excluded from the white males’ fraternity, exploited and made instrumental to the sustainment of the patriarchal white family.

For cynical men, therefore, the ritual for mourning the dead has only a semblance of significance, as prefigured in the wind into Stevens’ office described at the beginning of the second section: “On that same hot, bright July morning the same hot bright wind which shook the mulberry leaves just outside Gavin Stevens’ window blew into the office too, contriving a
semblance of coolness from what was merely motion” (353). This semblance, this “as if,” is the structure of the ideological fantasy. The empty ritualistic gesture is also suggested in Stevens’ unfinished translation. It is said that his “serious vocation” is “a twenty-two-year-old unfinished translation of the Old Testament back into classic Greek” (353). Since classic Greek is not the original language of the Old Testament, he is not aiming to regain the original meaning; what matters for him is continuing the ritualistic gesture of translation, just like the hunting ritual of Ike that conceals the impossibility to reach the original state by not being consummated.

As I have repeatedly stated, the ability to grieve in itself does not mean moral superiority and political goodness. John T. Matthews points out that not only “Stevens’ accommodation of Butch’s life through the ideology of paternalistic blood superiority” but also “Miss Worsham’s assurance that the grief belongs only to the family . . . segregates a story that deserves freer circulation” (“Touching” 23). Practically in collusion with Stevens’ cynical paternalism, she confines the grief in the private domestic space where the literal practice of paternalistic morality can be tolerated. This space is a part of the structure of the extended family and depends on the father’s authority, as Miss Worsham mentions her grandfather and father when she explains to Stevens her familial bond with Mollie and her relatives. In her Lacanian analysis, Doreen Fowler interprets the childhood home of Butch to which Miss Worsham and Mollie bring his dead body figures a presymbolic domain, “the original inchoate state before the advent of the father and the law that ordains loss” (Faulkner 164). Naturally, then, Stevens, the representative of cynical men whom Mollie calls “the Law” (GDM 353), cannot follow them beyond the sign of “Corporate Limit.” (364), which appears when the cars containing them and
the dead body drive past the edge of the town as if to signal the limit of the community’s integrity or the discrepancy between cynicism and literal believing. But then, the presymbolic domain beyond the sign belongs to the Edmonds plantation, and is again constituted as such by the South’s symbolic order itself. In other words, the “original inchoate state before the advent of the father and the law” is itself an effect of the advent of the father and the law, and only retrospectively discovered as the original.

Moreover, Butch’s homecoming is itself enabled by the legacy of slavery, and it is virtually the incarceration of his body in the Southern ideology which suffocates such young black men as Rider and Butch himself. Thadious Davis sees the funeral as “a homecoming and a reunification of the parts of the black body (a body figured both communally and familially in the text)” (233), and Mollie’s wish to put Butch’s story into the newspaper as “a desire for the acknowledgement of the homecoming, a memorialization of the reunion of the black body, and an indictment of the legacy of enslavement” (234). Yet Miss Worsham is motivated by a paternalistic obligation to give Butch a proper funeral as a member of the extended family since the parents of Mollie and her brother Hamp were slaves of Miss Worsham’s grandfather, and Butch’s proper name was taken from her father Samuel Worsham. Accordingly, the black body reunified at home would be the body defined as part of the extended family in the Southern ideology of paternalism. Thus, Davis has a better point when she says:

Faulkner exploits Butch’s failed migration as an opportunity to celebrate the traditional ties of blacks to the South and to create an elegy to the old paternalistic virtues. Faulkner’s production of the narrative of Butch’s life and, especially, his
death and burial underscores a desire for a particular type of remembered past to force shape and articulate meaning into an otherwise unpredictable and chaotic present. (236)

Davis’s reading practically supports Philip Weinstein’s interpretation that while the “portrait” of Butch “is suffused in disapproval,” his homecoming “sends . . . the following sinister message: Stay at home, grow up by accepting your overwhelming inheritance, by way of endurance” (Faulkner’s 64). Without patrimony, what blacks inevitably inherit is the destiny of suffering and endurance as in Ike’s version of the history of the South. If we took this as the conclusion of the story, certainly its sentimentality would “undercut the seriousness of the book as a whole” (Early 104).

However, that paternalistic desire is Mollie and Miss Worsham’s, and it is indeed highly problematic to consider this as Faulkner’s message through the story when we read Butch’s homecoming in the context of the whole book which, particularly through Ike’s trilogy, deconstructs the white supremacist historiography and depicts the troubled and troubling genealogy concealed by it of which Butch is the upshot, or even in the context of the first section of this story, in which is described—not necessarily disapprovingly in my view—Butch’s attempt to escape from the South, refusing the stereotypical image of the Southern negro. After all, even though he cannot find his place in the North, he does not wish to go back home, and claims that he has “[n]o family” (GDM 351). Even as the disclosure of his real name and information about his birth place and his grandmother may indicate his surreptitious desire to go home, answering the census-taker’s question “how do you expect to get home?,” Butch says,
“What will that matter to me?” (352). To confine his dead body in the paternalistic familial circle is a violent reduction of his life as Stevens’ definition of Butch as “a bad son of a bad father” is, and that is the very point the story tries to make.

At first glance, the ending of the story may suggest that “Go Down, Moses” as well as the whole novel Go Down, Moses shows Faulkner’s proclaimed resignation to the communal cynicism. After the funeral, Miss Worsham, Mollie, and Butch’s dead body return to the private space where they can safely express grief, and Stevens to his office, the place where he practices the law. In the last passage of the story, after he has heard of Mollie’s wish to have the details of Butch’s story put in the newspaper, Stevens thinks that the funeral was significant only for Mollie and that everything was settled right after all:

Yes, he thought. It doesn’t matter to her now. Since it had to be and she couldn’t stop it, and now that it’s all over and done and finished, she doesn’t care how he died. She just wanted him home but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town behind it in a car. “Come on,” he said. “Let’s get back to town. I haven’t seen my desk in two days.” (365)

Thus, he seems to regain a cynical distance from the dangerous grieving of the Beauchamps and the Worshams.

However, it is important that the funeral publicly exposes this cynical distance by making people confront the grief they cannot share as Stevens experiences in the Worshams’ house. Mollie succeeds in giving Butch what Davis calls a “proper burial” (232), and since Butch’s dead
body is an object of grief for Miss Worsham and Mollie, it is certainly proper for them. Yet that ritual to have a “dead nigger,” a “bad son of a bad father,” or an executed black murderer, come home right is at the same time improper for other townspeople. Thus people, both black and white, gather for the homecoming of Butch, seemingly joined together at this occasion of public ritual, but all of them watch just “quietly,” unable to share the grief (GDM 363, 364). Matthews correctly argues that Butch “remains a cipher to both Stevens and the reader” (“Touching” 24). His dead body on which is inscribed the passion of materiality is not the reunified body of the black family and remains to be undefinable in this at once proper and improper ritual which is a “form without widespread grief” (Schleifer 353) at the traumatic intersection of the cynical and literal versions of paternalism. In this homecoming after exile, Butch’s body cannot be safely settled in his home.

The circulation of Butch’s dead body through the town and further on the newspaper therefore allows it to function as Judith’s letter, the reminder of perishability and grievability handed to strangers beyond the confinement of the family and home. In Faulkner’s works, the house, the private and maternal place produced under the paternal authority where the literal believing of the terms of the ideological codes is tolerated, can be a menacing place which should not be penetrated into by men both black and white such as Quentin, Rider, townspeople in “A Rose for Emily,” and Stevens because there lies the desired but prohibited objet a, which, if attained, discloses the fundamental contradictions within the ideology that sustains their identity and subjecthood and therefore nullifies even desires and prohibitions produced by that ideology together with the demarcation between black and white. Particularly in “Go Down,
Moses,” the house is most pertinently associated with grief, for, as I have argued, the control of grievability is central for the South’s ideological system. The male dream of transhistorical, immortal fraternity that supports the idea of pure whiteness, the compromising practice of patrimonial inheritance in the white family, the discourse of property-as-identity derivative from it, and the construction of the legitimate forms of love necessary to maintain these all depend on the founding foreclosures, the most primary of which is that of grief, which is synonymous with the acknowledgement of irrevocable loss, of the impossibility of immortal fraternity and hence pure whiteness. The circulated dead body of Butch, which should be stored in the house, then mingles the private space with the public, or literal believing with cynicism, and thereby promulgates the unacknowledgeable grief.

We can say that Butch’s dead body becomes an embodiment of what is called “the sublime object” in Lacanian psychoanalysis. By Žižek’s account, Lacan defines the sublime object as “an object raised to the level of the (impossible-real) Thing” (229). The sublime object is “an ordinary vulgar object” if it is approached too closely: “it can persist only in an interspace, in an intermediate state, viewed from a certain perspective, half-seen . . . precisely because in itself it is nothing at all” (192). In “Go Down, Moses,” the body of a “dead nigger” insignificant for townspeople appears as the sublime object in the interspace between literal and cynical versions of paternalism and disrupts the racial boundaries through the presentation of grievability.

Since there is no ground for subjecthood in this interspace, it is reasonable that Minrose Gwin argues the matter of race in Faulkner’s works, particularly in *Go Down, Moses*, in terms of
trauma as the “profound wound” whose voice is distanced from any individual subjects (“Racial” 25). Gwin regards the voice of the wound as the “middle voice,” which is neither active nor passive, and therefore the “middle-voiced function eludes and might even elide subjectivity, proffering subjectivity onto the wound itself” (27). Because of this, “the middle voice dissolves the distinction between victim and perpetrator” (27). In the context of my argument, this is a denial of Ike’s version of history in which the whites are always the perpetrators (and redeemers) while the blacks are always the victims. As I argued above, the traumatic event is an advent of something beyond the subject’s representational system, a new signification that retroactively disturbs history, and therefore is an occasion for dis/inheritance, the reaffirmation of what comes before us. In “Go Down, Moses,” it is Butch’s body as the sublime object that brings about a traumatic event for townspeople, as a result of which the racial distinction, the basis of identity and subjecthood, collapses. Thus, Gwin is right when she says: “Butch’s death is certainly Mollie’s wounding, but that wound . . . is contagious and vocal. It cries out, involving everyone and becoming so potent in its middle-voiced function” and “because it is the wound that cries out, always linking the one who holds the sword to the one the sword enters, the crying-out does not cease in these texts; instead, it blocks the departure of racial trauma into history, keeping its impossibility alive—and the wound open” (32).

Gwin’s argument is insightful especially when we consider the agency of the crying-out that leaves the wound open and thereby urges people to dis/inherit the legacy of the white supremacist patriarchal community that relies on the melancholic concept of history in which the original past is expected to resurrect in the future that will never come. The agency is the wound
itself inherent in but cloaked by the community’s ideological system, and in “Go Down, Moses,” Butch’s body exposes the wound by becoming the sublime object which even Stevens’ cynical gesture cannot cancel out. We could say, as Richard Godden does, that this reflects the difficulty for the South to sustain the conventional racial relations particularly after the region’s modernization at the time of the New Deal, which loosened ties in labor between blacks and whites while the persistent ideological codes deprived blacks of social and economic positions in which they could settle in the South.

Yet it is also notable that, as discussed above, it is those who are marginalized and therefore literally believe in the terms of the ideology’s moral codes that bring about the public display of the opening wound and make cynical men to confront the inconvenient truth, and in “Go Down, Moses,” Mollie and Miss Worsham play that role and become the driving force to create the interspace where the sublime object emerges. In other words, Faulkner discovers the inherent limitations of the Southern community by presenting the marginalized females and blacks as both victims and advocates of literal paternalism, because of which they can be some sort of agency, or embodiments of the middle-voiced wound, as it were; in so doing, he frees them from mere victimhood.

What involves Stevens in the project to bring Butch back home is Mollie’s visiting his office. There she calls him “the Law,” and asks him to retrieve Butch (GDM 353). She compares her grandson’s situation to the biblical story of the hostage in Egypt, and places Stevens in the position of Moses implied in the title of the story, the emancipator of the slaves and the lawmaker, or more precisely, the mediator, the transcriber, the translator who delivers God’s Law
to his people. Indeed, in this story Stevens successfully, though inadvertently, serves as a mediator who represents the working of the community’s Law and moral codes, bringing the private, literal version of paternalism into the cynical, public realm. In so doing, he cannot but publicly reveal the Law’s lack of substance, for the funeral emphasizes the public’s ritualistic empty gestures in contrast with Mollie’s grief.

In order to conceal the fact that the Law does not grant the oppressed the justice and equality which Mollie seeks in It, Stevens’ actual task would have been not to consummate translation or complete the hunting of what is called “the slain wolf” (364). However, Miss Worsham enforces Mollie’s wish with her literal believing in the paternalistic codes, and Stevens’ paternalism orders him to comply with her requests to keep up the community’s ideological mask. As a result, Stevens ends up consummating translation only to realize the fraudulent discrepancies of the original Law and bring the foreclosed grief back into the public realm. It seems that Faulkner is well aware of this function of Miss Worsham as agency, the wound, for she is later renamed as Eunice Habersham in Intruder in the Dust and The Town, and as Emily Habersham in some editions of The Town.71 As argued above, she is similar to Emily in “A Rose for Emily” in that both of them are a burden of the town that symptomatically embodies its inconvenient truth, and considering that that truth is in “Go Down, Moses” the repudiation or foreclosure of grief from the public male realm, it is pertinent to connect Miss Worsham with Eunice in “The Bear.” Whereas in the penultimate story “Delta Autumn” Eunice’s grief returns to the individual heir of the white redemptive history, Ike, through his encounter with the

71 As for the process of the remaining of Miss Worsham, see Fargnoli, Golay, and Hamblin 321.
descendant of Eunice, “Go Down, Moses” last describes how that grief encroaches upon the communal, cynical “we” when the dead body of Butch, the last descendant of Eunice in the town, circulates through it as a result of the actions of Miss Worsham and Mollie, who thus take revenge for the sake of Eunice, not deliberately but because of the positions the community’s system forces upon them.

Speaking of name changes, Faulkner first named the executed black man in “Go Down, Moses” Henry Coldfield Sutpen, supposing him to be a son of Thomas Sutpen and his black slave named Rosa, and thereby linked the story to Absalom, “to miscegenation and incest, slavery and fratricide” (Davis 229). Next he tried the name Carothers Edmonds Beauchamp, and in so doing, as Davis observes, “connected him directly to Roth Edmonds, his conflicted relation to ownership and money, the farm and the bank, and the system of tenancy and black subjugation” (229). Whereas the family name Beauchamp makes him the heir of Eunice and thus shifts the emphasis of the story from love to grief, this connection to Roth would have foregrounded the theme of property-as-identity already explored in “Pantaloon in Black” again. The name Faulkner finally adopted, Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, however, makes “Go Down, Moses” a story of an attempt to accommodate his dead body in the female and black private space where the repudiated grief is ensconced and hidden from the public eye, only to reveal the excessiveness of the body in which is inscribed the repudiation of grief and thereby disrupt both the public white male cynicism and the private female and black familial intimacy that is, even though issuing from sincere goodwill, nevertheless another legacy of slavery.

According to James Early, Faulkner seems to have come up with the idea of putting
several short stories together to produce a single novel after the completion of “Go Down, Moses” and started revising the other stories, expanding episodes and changing characters’ names to relate them to the three main families (100-01). This proves that while Ike’s claim on his version of history occupies a great part of the novel, the repudiated grief concealed within that history which females and blacks carry penetrates the novel, and that grief, rather than Ike’s moral vision, functions as the novel’s true organizing principle.

Indeed, Faulkner completed the novel’s first story, “Was,” approximately at the same time as “Go Down, Moses,” and that story already suggests how females and blacks undermine the ideological mask white males cherish and predicts the eventual opening of the wound through their agency. On the other hand, “The Fire and the Hearth,” a story whose plots had been established before the composition of “Go Down, Moses,” suggests the difficulty for Faulkner to imagine an identity of a black male beyond the conventional racial and gender hierarchical distinctions. Actually both “Was” and “The Fire and the Hearth” also end with the return of a black man who ran away from their home, and it does not lead to the opening of the wound. What distinguishes the exile and homecoming in these stories from those in “Pantaloons in Black” and “Go Down, Moses” is, first of all, that the black men are not dead. Indeed, black men must be dead—and, incidentally, white anachronistic women old and close to dead—to open the wound as is the case in Absalom; that is how they can reveal perishability and grievability to disrupt the white male dream of fraternity. This is, I would argue, the limit to Faulkner’s imagination concerning the blacks. These points I will examine more closely in the next chapter.

286
Chapter 8

The Black Home and Black Confinement in “Was” and “The Fire and the Hearth”

The first two chapters of Go Down, Moses, “Was” and “The Fire and the Hearth,” are rather comical in tone, compared to the subsequent chapters. These chapters, too, depict a black man’s exile and homecoming, which is in another viewpoint the “hunting” of the black man or attempt to bring him back home by white men. But this time the black men are not caught, outwitting white men with their almost stereotypical comical slyness, and they voluntarily go back home, constituting the repetitive pattern of exile and homecoming, or of hunting from whites’ point of view, without the fatal touch between black and white men. Since the black home is the domain of blackness and femininity as later chapters illuminate, by getting out of home the black men obtain a certain amount of masculinity, mastery and even whiteness, but not too much, because they eventually go back home again. This can mean that they, with their comical slyness that outwits whites, sustain the repetitive structure of the white men’s “adult world,” in complicit with the society’s gender and racial ideology. The fleeing black man’s partial whiteness can thus paradoxically contribute to maintaining the racial divide; the white man hunting after him gains and retains an identity as hunter by not catching the black man though he thereby remains not efficient enough nor completely white, whiteness undermined by the unconsummated pursuit. This suggests that just as Ike must not reach the ideal wilderness
and even needs to be partially blackened to preserve his white manhood and the hope for
fraternal identification, which is ultimately the self-relation of the immortal, purely white father,
whiteness must be partially undermined by blackness in order to sustain itself even though it
makes the boundaries unstable.

As I will examine hereafter, in both “Was” and “The Fire and the Hearth,” the black men
who get out of home outwit whites and avoid being caught and touched by white men, and
escaping from fraternal identification in this way is the way for them to survive. But it is a
survival in compliance with the society’s norms. By surviving, they exempt whites from
confrontation with death and grief, helping establish the black home as the place to cache grief,
while women, not anachronistic and old yet and therefore not too faithful to the ideological
norms to be satisfied with the melancholic repetitive failures, function as protectors of the
family system.

The first story of the novel, “Was,” introduces the repetitive structure of Ike’s
unconsummated hunting through its unending, recurrent races. The second section of the story
begins with a “good race” between a fox and dogs (GDM 6), which foreshadows the McCaslin
twins’ pursuit of the fleeing slave, Tomey’s Turl, juxtaposed and paralleled with the fox: “‘Damn
the fox,’ Uncle Buck said. ‘Tomey’s Turl has broke out again.’” (7). When the race of the fox
and the dogs recurs at the end of the story, it reveals the impotence of the dog named Old Moses,
which breaks the crate to confine the fox and instead wears “most of the crate around his neck”
(30), as if to emblematize the inability for the lawgiver to regulate those who should be
controlled and confined within their due places. Yet this inability is an indispensable condition of a “fine race” because it is fine “while it last[s]” (30). As in Ike’s game hunting, the pursuer almost gets hold of the pursued but must not really do so in order to retain his identity as the pursuer. It is not accidental that the story was originally titled “Almost,” for it points to the melancholic structure with which the Faulknerian man barely preserves his identity and ideals. If one consummates the pursuit, as when Gavin Stevens, who plays the role of Moses in “Go Down, Moses,” brings Butch’s dead body back home, it jeopardizes the principle that founds the white male identity—such is the logic of Go Down, Moses. It is no wonder then that the McCaslin twins are reluctant to put a decisive stop to the fleeing of Tomey’s Turl and let him break out of the confinement of the McCaslin plantation over and again. The first story “Was” already suggests that the failure to end the race is required for the preservation of black-white boundaries, or the concept of race.

At first glance, Tomey’s Turl’s repetitive fleeing seems to destabilize the boundaries, for it gives the slave some quality of whiteness: “maybe Tomey’s Turl had been running off from Uncle Buck for so long that he had even got used to running away like a white man would do it” (10). Indeed, the twins’ letting Tomey’s Turl run away so many times suggests their generosity that undermines the hierarchical relationship between the white masters and the black slave. It seems that this results from a fact which the twins do not want to remember: Tomey’s Turl is a son of old Carothers and hence their half-brother. Although this fact is not directly stated in this story, Hubert Beauchamp sees Tomey’s Turl as “that damn white half-McCaslin” (7), and notices the ambiguous, strange color of his skin, which mars even the whiteness of his shirt: “Tomey’s
Turl’s arms . . . were supposed to be black but were not quite white” and “his Sunday shirt . . .
was supposed to be white but wasn’t quite either” (29).

Being neither black nor white, Tomey’s Turl gains a privileged position because of which
Buck and Buddy cannot prevent the race from occurring “about twice a year” (7). If they could
decisively make him either black or white, by taking some measure such as giving him a severe
punishment and depriving him of any freedom, or by accepting him as their brother and granting
him the right to do anything he wants to, the race would never happen. However, while
whitening is out of question as long as they abide by the society’s racial ideology, it would also
be difficult for the twins to simply blacken their half-brother, considering what Ike discovers in
later stories. Facing squarely and settling the ambiguous color of Tomey’s Turl cannot but evoke
their father’s sin and even the repudiated grief of Eunice, which they supposedly know and
repress. Therefore, Buck the pursuer regards Tomey’s Turl as nothing but “my nigger” while he
fails as the master to control the slave rigorously (11). As I have argued, the uncovering of the
grief can be fatal to the white male identity, so that, even as the recurrent race unsettles the
boundaries between black and white to some extent, it is better for them than the end of the race,
or the abrogation of the pursuit and the racial demarcation.

Although at the end of the story it is expected that the race will never happen again, it is
not the true ending of the race. The masters never catch the fleeing slave—Tomey’s Turl keeps
on escaping, and that becomes the cause of the card game between the McCaslin twins and
Hubert, as a result of which the pursuit plot slips into the marriage plots: the unsuccessful one
between Buck and Sophonsiba and the successful one between Tomey’s Turl and Tennie, a slave
girl in the Beauchamp plantation. Since Tennie is the object of his fleeing, this is a happy ending for Tomey’s Turl. Still, it is not the end of the race but rather a suspension or continuation of it. For, marriage was not legally permitted to the slaves in those days, and granting Tomey’s Turl a right to marry can be another form of the master’s paternalistic compromise that humanizes the dehumanized slave to some extent. As I will examine more closely later, it just leaves the color of Tomey’s Turl undecided and even obfuscates the black family’s true genealogy.

Thus, everyone in “Was” tries to postpone the ending of the race and the revelation of its serious racial implications, obscuring them with the comical and idyllic narrative tone. And I would argue that even the comically depicted but marginalized and oppressed blacks and women can be complicit, their comicalness possible only during the postponement and practically chosen by them to contribute to the postponement. In the following, I will examine Ike’s views on race and family and his mother Sophonsiba’s significance in relation to them, and then analyze the cunning plot contrived by Tomey’s Turl and Tennie, which have attracted little critical attention, in order to illuminate the ambivalent roles as accomplices and resistant agency that black people and women play in the society dominated by white males.

As in the case of Henry and Bon in Absalom or in the hunting of Old Ben, the touch between the black and white brothers at the end of some pursuit destroys the concept of whiteness and blackness, because it is a fatal identification across the racial boundaries. Therefore, the white man must postpone the ending perpetually, and when he finally cannot avoid putting an end to it, he often forces the task upon someone else, as Sutpen does on Henry in his refusal/acknowledgment of Bon and Ike does on Boon in the hunting of Old Ben. And it is
Ike who eventually has to take the full burden of the postponement when the obscured past catches up with him at last and makes him say to a descendant of Tomey’s Turl, “You’re a nigger!” (343), but he tries to delay the confrontation as much as possible.

The opening section of “Was” suggests Ike’s reluctance to end the race, decide Tomey’s Turl’s color and face the tragic side of the episode. It states the present situation of Ike, who is now “past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated anymore, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one” (5), and in so doing hints at some connection between it and the episode of the race, which actually shows how he was not born then. Yet the connection is not yet clear to the reader as the opening section emphasizes Ike’s inheritance of and distance from the memory of the race. According to it, while Ike refuses to be either “the inheritor” or “the bequestor” of his patrimony because he denies the concept of ownership (5), the event told in “Was” which he “had not participated in” is one thing that Ike inherits from his predecessors by means of “the hearing, the listening” which had “come to him through and from his cousin McCaslin born in 1850 and sixteen years his senior and hence . . . rather his brother than cousin and rather his father than either” (6). Thus, despite his refusal to be the inheritor, Ike in a sense remains to be an inheritor of “the old time, the old days” (6). The unilateral hearing here foretells not only the relationship of Sam and Ike in “The Old People” but also Ike’s inability to speak in the fourth section of “The Bear”: he cannot tell Cass what happened to Eunice and Tomasina. It could uncover the grief concealed in the history of the white family and thereby disrupt the very basis of fraternal identification, which presupposes the timeless and deathless domain. Ike cannot pursue what he has inherited too much; otherwise he must face the
repressed racial injustice and the dangerous grief it has engendered. In like manner Ike does not speak about the race and remains to be a passive listener. As a result, he inherits the race episode only as a comical one, and this comicalness itself is also a symptom of the melancholic structure in which white males are suspended between “was”—the pastness of the past—and “almost”—the false hope for its attainability, haunted by the isness of the past in the Sartrean sense: the past never safely lies in a desiringly distant locus but people incessantly look back at it and try to reach it in vain, or, they keep pursuing it but should not do so too much.

Because the unusual style of the opening section—the usage of single quotation marks instead of double quotation marks and the lowercase letters at the beginning of the paragraphs—is later again used in the fourth section of “The Bear,” the reader retrospectively associates the comical episode of “Was” with the troublesome genealogy revealed in later stories. And the full implications of Tomey’s Turl’s race becomes exposed only when Ike is forced to confront the repressed grief involved in the black and white McCaslins’ genealogies in the fourth section of “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn.” Until then, the race does not end.

Thus, the white men in “Was” sustain the melancholic structure of the dominant ideology, and the entire story does not seriously undermine it. Instead, it reveals how everyone including blacks and women, the bearer of an alternative history, can be complicit in supporting the white male view of history, gender and race. Tomey’s Turl, an almost stereotypically comical slave, and Sophonsiba, a nearly anachronistic woman who is not very young but not old enough either to resign marriage, can remain to be comical and even fortify the dominant ideology when they succeed in outwitting the McCaslin twins and altering the terms and goals of the game not only
because it contributes to postponing the ending of the race but also because the altered goals themselves are within the dominant ideology. What they try to acquire is normative masculinity and femininity through a heterosexual marriage with someone of the same race, which leads to strengthen the traditional definitions of gender and race, even though later stories open up a possibility that they nevertheless play subversive roles.

It is Sophonsiba who creates the direct cause of the suspension of the race by luring Buck into her bedroom and changing the game from the race between Tomey’s Turl the fox and Buck and Cass the dogs to the abortive pursuit between Buck the hunter and Sophonsiba the bear. She is almost another anachronistic woman who used to be a “fine-looking woman once” but is now hilariously disgusting and grotesque in every aspect with her “roan-colored tooth” and relentlessly seductive words and acts toward Buck (12). Just like other anachronistic women, she has a desperate desire to be a true “Mississippi lady” through marriage, and Buck is the last hope for her to attain that goal. Her comically rendered predicament is particularly evident in her calling the decaying Beauchamp estate Warwick and thereby giving it a romantic image of earldom so stubbornly that “it would sound like she and Mr Hubert owned two separate plantations covering the same area of ground, one on top of the other” (11). As Elisabeth Muhlenfeld points out, “she adopts the language and values of romantic literature, the medieval pageantry of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, to mask the dreariness of her life” (“Distaff” 201), and yet the visible duality of the plantation’s image discloses the unbridgeable gap between her ideal and the reality. She thus functions as a symptom of this gap that represents the dysfunction of the Southern community in which a woman who fails to fulfill the role expected of a Southern
lady through marriage cannot have any social position. She then tries to get out of this state by tricking Buck the hunter, who, though in “bear-country,” is unwilling to get Sophonsiba the “bear,” into crawling into the “den” as Hubert puts it (GDM 23), and competing to “win” the prize, Sophonsiba, as a bride (24).

Although Sophonsiba, leading Buck to climbing into the virgin’s bed, appeals to the “rules of chivalry” to corner him into making a proposal to her (Muhlenfeld, “Distaff” 201), it seems that the bachelor is also ready for courtship with his tie and shirt, having expected to see her at the Beauchamp plantation. Still, he avoids marrying her with the help of his twin brother Buddy, who “didn’t own a necktie at all” and “wouldn’t take that chance” to wear a tie in pursuing Tomey’s Turl “even in a section like theirs, where ladies were so damn seldom thank God that a man could ride for days in a straight line without having to dodge a single one” (9), and who is more thorough in his misogyny. As Thadious Davis argues, it would be reasonable to surmise that their knowledge of what happened to Eunice and Tomasina has caused the twins’ decision to “live differently from their father: to remain outside the bounds of adult sexuality and to avoid women—white or black” (51). Just as Tomey’s Turl is a “constant reminder” of the past they want to forget (51), women including Sophonsiba can metonymically remind them of sinful sexuality. As a result, she approximates a desired but prohibited object. The red ribbon like “a little water moccasin” which Sophonsiba gives to Buck represents that (GDM 17): like the accursed snake in the woods which Ike calls “Grandfather” (314), she is not to be touched.

Yet unlike Tomey’s Turl the fox or Old Ben, Sophonsiba the bear, who lures the hunter into her den, is not a proper objet a. Being a white woman, she desperately wants to be hunted to
become a Southern lady, and it does not fatally undermine the white male ideology even though
she is remindful of sinful sexuality. Accordingly, she can serve as a disguise for the true goal of
the race, the capture of Tomey’s Turl; it is safer for Buck to catch Sophonsiba, and in a sense, she
needs to be eventually caught in order to fulfil her role as a disguise. For, unlike Tomey’s Turl,
whose comicalness derives from the white masters’ failure to catch him, Sophonsiba is comical
because Buck eventually gets her. She is almost anachronistic but actually does get out of that
state later as Ike’s existence proves, by which she contributes to the sustainment of the
melancholic repetition of the white patriarchal family as well as the inconclusiveness of the race;
otherwise she would become a burdensome anachronistic woman who, a reminder of the
society’s contradictions, is not funny at all. Her comicalness thus correlates with the repetitive
structure of the unending race just as the comicalness of Tomey’s Turl and of the story itself
does. The comical tone does not simply obscure the serious ideological problems; it depends on
specific strategies of that obscuring.

The reader will more clearly know through the later hunting trilogy why the white male
subject who leads the womanless bachelor life needs Sophonsiba. Particularly the fourth section
of “The Bear” shows threats which the womanless life can pose to the patriarchal family. While
the twins cannot totally cancel out the white-black hierarchy, they abandon the big house which
their father built but did not complete to domicile all the slaves in it, and move to a log cabin.
The big uncompleted house then becomes the “tremendous abortive edifice scarcely out of
embryo, as if even old Carothers McCaslin had paused aghast at the concrete indication of his
own vanity’s boundless conceiving” (248). The twins furthermore do not lock its back door
during the night and give the slaves freedom to “visit other plantations” as long as they come back by daybreak (249). This “unspoken gentlemen’s agreement between the two white and the two dozen black ones” humanizes the slaves to a certain degree (249), and the homosocial family life of the twins even produces an ominous image of the sterile embryonic house that gives birth not to white heirs but to uncontrolled black slaves that secretly fill night roads and rove around.

Right after this image, Ike recalls the entries in the family ledgers about a slave named Percival Brownlee. This part of the text is put in parentheses, as if it were an irrelevant digression or postponement before proceeding to the fatal moment of discovering Eunice and Tomasina’s “specific tragedy.” Yet as Richard Godden and Noel Polk argue, the Brownlee entries can be even more problematic for Ike than his grandfather’s incestuous miscegenation, so that he, while unable to ignore the entries in the ledgers, “obfuscates the radical potential of what through inference he might hear and see, encrypting and secreting his father’s story within an altogether more tellable fiction about his grandfather” (154), that is, the plausible reasoning that Brownlee’s “homosexuality stands as an available reason for why Isaac’s father purchased him” (121).

Indeed, there is no obvious reason why Buck has to buy that “anomaly” (GDM 249), and does so at a much cheaper price than the average price of a slave at that time (N. Taylor 150). Then, even after Buddy, noticing that Brownlee is useless at any tasks, urges his brother to free the slave, Buck insists that Brownlee earn his freedom through his own labor. Only after Brownlee has damaged a mule does Buck decide to part with him, but the manumitted slave stays at the farm. The twins are annoyed and wish their father were there; the present masters cannot assert their authority. In the meantime, Buddy renames the manumitted slave Spintrius, which comes from
“spintriae,” “Roman perverts” (N. Taylor 151), as if to insinuate his sexuality.

Although the sexuality and gender identity of the “anomaly calling itself Brownlee” is dubious from the moment he is mentioned for the first time (GDM 249, emphasis mine), Ike closes the parentheses with the episode of renaming without exploring its possible implications, and only about thirty pages later does he return to Brownlee and clarify them a little more. Ike describes Brownlee’s reappearance in Jefferson after the Civil War—Buck sees him in a surrey with a “travelling Army paymaster,” “giving an illusion of flight and illicit holiday like a man on an excursion during his wife’s absence with his wife’s personal maid” (278). Along with his “high sweet soprano voice” and “defiant female glance” (278), these descriptions suggest Brownlee’s femininity and homosexuality. Whether or not there might have been a sexual relationship between Buck and Brownlee, it would not be surprising that Ike, reading the ledgers, falls on that possibility but avoids facing it. The twins’ womanless homosocial fraternal life, which issues from their revulsion against their father’s racial injustice and their generosity towards slaves as its result, may entail interracial homosexuality, which is anathema to the white male identity that they (or at least Buck), and Ike also, cannot resign.

Nevertheless, this possibility of his father’s interracial homosexuality does not cause grave damage to Ike because Buck came back to normative heterosexuality after all, thanks to his wife Sophonsiba. Indeed, the chronological sequence of the events justifies some association between the existence and disappearance of Brownlee and Buck’s belated marriage with Sophonsiba. According to the ledger entries, Buck bought Brownlee in 1856, and the race and the card game depicted in “Was” occurred in 1859, when Brownlee was still a McCaslin slave.
He remained in the McCaslin plantation at least until 1862, when he was freed, though he came back to the plantation from time to time even after his manumission. It is not clear when Buck married Sophonsiba, but Ike was born one year after his father for the last time saw in Jefferson Brownlee, who jumped out of the surrey and vanished when he noticed that his “late co-master” was seeing him (278). Thus Buck, after exorcizing his interracial homosexuality, finally became a legitimate white plantation owner with a wife and an heir, completing the plantation house with his wife’s dowry.

If Ike senses from the ledger entries the possibility of his father’s interracial homosexuality before marriage, it is understandable that while he renounces his patrimony to keep the black-white relationship in a modified way, he espouses a desire to have a son through marriage with a white woman to avoid too much affinity with blacks, taking advantage of women’s desire to be a lady as his father did. At the very end of the fourth section of “The Bear,” he recalls how he, like “the Nazarene,” chose carpentering as the job “good for the life and ends” of the redeemer (294), and yet—unlike “the Nazarene”—married a daughter of his partner in carpentry. At first he excuses himself by thinking that his new family is subsumed into the comprehensive history of the earth beyond blood kinship, assuming that their marriage “was the new country, his heritage too as it was the heritage of all, out of the earth, beyond the earth yet of the earth because his too was of the earth’s long chronicle, his too because each must share with another in order to come into it and in the sharing they become one” (296). Thus, Ike tries to see a domain of identification in their marriage, but this turns out to be impossible. For, as the former half of the section amply shows, that domain, ultimately emblematized by the wilderness, is only
for men, and identification only fraternal. While in a more traditional patriarchal history, too, a white woman is marginalized, expected to be a wife and mother, a necessary compromise to the sustainment of the white family that have not yet reached the timeless domain, in the history of the earth, or actually of redemption for Ike, the exclusion of women from the ideal fraternal domain is far more obvious. After all, in Ike’s vision of history, whereas white men are sinners and redeemers and blacks are victims, there is no position assigned to white women. Therefore, Ike’s nameless wife refuses to accept his view of history, desperately wanting to be the mistress of the McCaslin plantation, and for that purpose takes advantage of his implicit patriarchal desire to have a son—she presses her husband to promise that he will inherit the plantation if they have a son through the last intercourse she offers. Yet Ike can easily bring his wife’s persistence in his patrimony back to his version of history; her patriarchal desire can be placed within the redemptive history, which, as I examined above, needs white men’s crimes. Thus, he thinks: “She was born lost” and also “We were all born lost” (299). While he seems to resign to be the white father by renouncing his patrimony, his lost wife tethers him to the sinful logic of the white family, suspending him between his redemptive mission to save the lost and his patriarchal desire to be the father and not to conclude the mission, and thereby enabling him to preserve his white male identity barely and melancholically. Because of this, as Davis observes, Ike is able to hold “their sexual union in a romantic remembrance that only vaguely infers their conflict” (170), as described in “The Fire and the Hearth”: “that one long-ago instant at least out of the long and shabby stretch of their human lives, even though they knew at the time it wouldn't and couldn't last, they had touched and become as God when they voluntarily and in advance forgave one
another for all that each knew the other could never be” (GDM 104). Because of this, he “could ask her forgiveness as loudly thus as if he had shouted, express his pity and grief” but did not (104). In his strategy of the preservation of the ideal through the melancholic logic of failure and suspension, this grief is of course not actual mourning grief for something absolutely irretrievable.

In the fourth section of “The Bear,” after Ike concludes his argument with his cousin by claiming his inheritance from Sam Fathers which “set [him] free,” the narration once again reminds the reader that Isaac McCaslin will become “Uncle Ike,” “uncle to half a county and still father to none” (285). Then it introduces a “legacy” from Uncle Hubert Beauchamp, a “bright tin coffee-pot,” which he keeps in his boarding-house room in Jefferson among daily necessities.

This episode also emphasizes the importance of Sophonsiba, the wife and mother faithful to the ideology’s terms, for the McCaslins to sustain the melancholic family structure.

Since Ike tells Cass that he will renounce his patrimony after he discovers what this legacy is on his twenty-first birthday and this episode preludes the explanation as to how he becomes “father to no one” through the transaction between Ike and his wife I examined above, it is possible that this legacy, rather than Sam or his father, influenced Ike the most to make the decision of marriage and renunciation. Indeed, in the latter part of this episode about the legacy, Ike, “looking at the bright rustless unstained tin,” thinks “not for the first time how much it takes to compound a man (Isaac McCaslin for instance) and of the devious intricate choosing yet unerring path that man’s (Isaac McCaslin’s for instance) spirit takes among all that mass to make him at last what he is to be” (293-94).
The pattern that the sterile bachelor life deteriorates the white house, authority, and masculinity, and instead produces black posterity persists here, and it is again Sophonsiba who corroborates the patriarchal logic by planting anxiety over this threat on the white family in Ike. In remembering this “legacy, from his Uncle Hubert Beauchamp, his god father, that bluff burly roaring childlike man” (285), Ike turns his thoughts to his experience of witnessing his mother’s rage at her brother’s affair with a black cook in her own dress in the more and more decaying Beauchamp house now without any white women. The sensuality of the light-colored black woman impresses the little Ike and her “apparition rapid and tawdry and illicit yet somehow even to the child, the infant still almost, breathless and exciting and evocative” even urges him to identify with the immature uncle: “like two limpid and pellucid streams meeting, the child which he still was had made serene and absolute and perfect rapport and contact through that glimpsed nameless illicit hybrid female flesh with the boy which had existed at that stage of inviolable and immortal adolescence in his uncle for almost sixty years” (288). Hubert’s adolescent innocence allows him to say “They are free now! They’re folks too just like we are!” (288), nullifying the racial boundaries (and ignoring the latent power imbalance between the white planter and the black cook). Yet in Ike’s memory this revelation as well as near identification with his uncle is coupled with his mother’s rage and he cannot but associate the hybrid female flesh with illicitness and defilement, and therefore with the deterioration of whiteness and possibly even the sexual exploitation of still-bound black people, rather than with their alleged postbellum freedom. It denounces Hubert’s naïve egalitarianism; also, it once more asserts the distinction between black and white, and drives Ike out of the “inviolable and immortal” domain without the
racial boundaries—one similar to the wilderness—in which all men become one in fraternal identification.\textsuperscript{72}

The McCaslins witnessed this scene when they went to see Hubert’s legacy, a sealed burlap which used to contain gold pieces in a silver cup that Hubert replaced little by little with copper coins and signed IOUs in a tin coffee-pot. After the black woman vanished, Uncle Hubert, which title already shows his partial blackness as discussed above, “lived, cooked and slept in one single room” in the empty ruined house with Tennie’s great-grandfather, leading a black and white pseudo-conjugal—if not homosexual—life, until one day the house “burst into peaceful conflagration, a tranquil instantaneous sourceless unanimity of combustion, walls floors and roof” (290). Now even without the confinement of the old plantation house, all they have are a fox-horn and the legacy, the “tawny wax-dubbed shapeless lump” (290), which the two men bring to the McCaslin house. What are produced out of this deformed womb-like object—“a collection of minutely-folded scraps of paper sufficient almost for a rat’s nest, of good linen bond, of the crude ruled paper such as negroes use, of raggedly-torn ledger-pages and the margin of newspapers and once the paper label from a new pair of overalls” (291)—are material evidence of the fall of the former plantation owner without a wife and heirs, the loss of his white superiority, and even the mixture of blackness and whiteness.

The memories of the legacy teach Ike the danger of the bachelor life in a less perturbing way than his father’s possible interracial homosexuality. And noticeable is that it is his mother

\textsuperscript{72} And it is suggestive that here again, immortality and the guiltless, innocent state in which males identify with each other are associated with dangerous interracial love and the destruction of whiteness.
Sophonsiba who first instills the imperative to divide black and white into Ike’s heart through this episode. Sophonsiba, desperate to be a Southern lady, is instrumental to Buck’s recuperation of the white male identity, and moreover hinders her son from simply renouncing his white heritage including the tin coffee-pot, a reminder of the dangerous integration of black and white to make him hold himself in the melancholic suspension between marriage and renunciation, the continuation and interruption of the white family. Sophonsiba persists in the terms of the white patriarchal ideology because of her anxiety over becoming a spinster, and Ike refuses to inherit the defilement of old Carothers, who sexually exploited his slaves, and yet marries a white woman to risk the inheritance he wants to avoid, both for the same reason, that is, the racial and gender ideology he imbibed from his mother in his childhood. Thus, both Ike’s mother and wife, white women who have fear of being marginalized by failing to be a lady, play vital roles in sustaining that racial and gender ideology across generations in the McCaslins.

In “Was,” it is Tomey’s Turl, another symptom of the contradictory social system, or the objet a par excellence, who contributes to that sustainment, helping Sophonsiba seduce Buck not only by sneaking into the Beauchamp plantation for his own purpose but probably by instructing her on how to trick her future husband in exchange for her promising to use her influence to ensure the marriage of Tennie and him. When Cass meets Tomey’s Turl outside the Beauchamp house, the latter is “watching the house, peering around the bush at the back door and the upstairs windows,” where we know Sophonsiba is supposed to be, judging from the “more light-sounding snoring coming from upstairs” after a while (15). Then he says: “I got protection now. All I needs to do is to keep old Buck from ketching me unto I gets the word” (14). He does not
tell Cass what word or from whom it is, but he goes on to say: “I got more protection than whut Mr Hubert got even. . . . I gonter tell you something to remember: anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just get the womenfolks to working at it. Then all you needs to do is set down and wait” (14). Clearly Tomey’s Turl is here referring to Sophonsiba, and waiting for someone, possibly Tennie, Sophonsiba’s maid who “is accorded no speech, no scene, no identity” in the story (Muhlenfeld “Distaff” 205), to extract from her and convey to him “the word.”

But then, what are the terms of “the word”? Circumstantial evidence suggests that they have to do with Sophonsiba’s trickery to lead Buck into her bed. Tomey’s Turl keeps on fleeing until Buck and Cass hear the mad sound of “a fox-horn” which it is unknown who is blowing (GDM 19). All Cass can recognize is that it is not the “nigger boy” who usually blows that horn (11, 19). Then, it could be the signal—possibly even the unarticulated voice of Tennie, who is otherwise silenced throughout the novel—to tell Tomey’s Turl either that “the word” is now acquired, or further that Sophonsiba is now ready. Indeed, soon after that, Tomey’s Turl appears in front of them to conclude the day’s race, though he does not yet let them catch him, and when Buck and Cass go back to the Beauchamp house, they are lured into Sophonsiba’s room, because they do not hear “anything from upstairs” (21), which suggests that she is not in that room—otherwise they must hear her snoring. (They hear Hubert snoring in his room now, and heard Sophonsiba herself snoring during the daytime nap.) Obviously, she keeps herself silent on purpose, but it is not likely that she came up with this crafty trick by herself, considering that she is not careful about what other people will think or feel, as when she embarrasses Buck by her
seductive words and actions. If Tomey’s Turl and Tennie gave her the plan, there is one thing that Sophonsiba can give them back in return: a promise to take Tennie to the McCaslin plantation as part of her dowry. It will be easy for her to do so since Hubert would tell Buck “how many more head of niggers and acres of land he would add to what he would give Miss Sophonsiba when she married” (8).

In order to avoid marriage, Buck makes use of the betting between him and Hubert over whether he can catch Tomey’s Turl in Tennie’s cabin midnight—he has won the betting by failing to catch Tomey’s Turl, and proposes a card game to bet his marriage against the five hundred dollars Hubert now owes him, as a result of which the marriage of Sophonsiba and Buck is cancelled for the time being while the twins purchase Tennie. This card game, which makes blacks and women objects of exchange and prizes for gambling, rather obscures the agency of Tomey’s Turl as well as of Sophonsiba and Tennie to control the game in “Was.” Since Tomey’s Turl becomes the dealer in the last game of poker, Davis sees him as an “agent capable of influencing the outcome of a game between white card players” who “understands the necessity of intervening in the game of chance” to secure “his future with Tennie” (65). However, this is not accurate; for, if we carefully follow the complicated terms of the wager, we know that at the beginning of this second game the twins are supposed to buy Tennie whether they may win or not.73 Since Hubert passes considering who the dealer was, Tomey’s Turl does function as a tool

73 As a result of the first game, the twins have to buy Tennie for three hundred dollars, and even if Buddy wins in the second game, this condition does not change, as Hubert makes sure: “If you beat me, you get ’Filus. But I still get the three hundred dollars ’Filus owes me for Tennie” (GDM 27). It is possible, however, that Faulkner himself was confused by the complicated process of wagering. In a question and answer session held at the University of Virginia in 1957, he gave an explanation about what was at stake in the last game which contradicted the novel’s
for winning the game; Uncle Buddy makes him so by taking advantage of the situation and leading Hubert into suspecting the possibility of cheating in order to obtain the result he wants, that is, the continuation of the twin’s womanless life. But Tomey’s Turl can hardly be said to be an agent capable of influencing the outcome concerning Tennie’s status, for Buddy raises the bet and gets the slaves involved in the terms of the game only after all the cards have been dealt, when Tomey’s Turl cannot intervene anymore.

Still, Tomey’s Turl causes this card game through his fleeing and co-plotting with Tennie and Sophonsiba, and Davis has a point when she regards Tomey’s Turl as a “subject struggling to assert the rights denied him by his material condition as property,” particularly through gaining the rights to marriage and the expression of his mature sexuality and masculinity (19). While slaves are devoid of those rights, “Tomey’s Turl’s run, . . . in the marriage plot, constitutes the willful institution of a legally recognized black family with an economic stake in the social order and with a traceable genealogy” (70).

However, whereas this construction of the black family confounds the racial boundaries to some extent, it also confirms the traditional gender and family system. As Tracey Bealer argues, the pattern seen in “Tomey’s Turl’s radical courtship of Tennie and Lucas Beauchamp’s refusal to accept a divorce from Molly” in “The Fire and the Hearth” shows that in order “for black men to create an identity independent from racist assumptions, they must conform to a gendered identity that establishes them as mature sexual beings or married men under white law” (117). The slave may be a little more humanized through marriage, but it is still the white legal descriptions, and admitted that Tomey’s Turl stacked the deck because “he wanted Tennie and he wanted to go back home and take Tennie with him” (FU 40).
and social system that defines humanity, and even though Tomey’s Turl gains a certain amount of masculinity, it is also still within the white-centered definition of masculinity.

Though Davis pays particular attention to the fact that Tomey’s Turl wins a right to marry, which were legally denied to the slaves, the McCaslins actually have granted them that right since the time of Carothers McCaslin, who married Eunice to Thucydus. And as Eunice’s marriage suggests, the semi-humanization—the master’s sanction for the construction of the black family and its traceable genealogy—is a compensation for or worse a concealment of the white master’s cruelty, compatible with the paternalistic balancing of the humanization and dehumanization of the slaves I discussed above.

In this respect, Tennie may also be a proof of the white master’s crime to be concealed. The narration first introduces her as “Mr Hubert’s girl,” not Miss Sophonsiba’s girl or a slave of the Beauchamps (GDM 7). Since Hubert lives with Tennie’s great-grandfather until his death, we can surmise that he has a particular attachment to the old loyal slave and his kin, and “Mr Hubert’s girl” can mean that Tennie is his daughter, or his lover, or even both. Actually we do not know who her parents are and what her skin color is like, but considering her “inscrutable face” which impresses Ike when they witness Hubert’s light-colored mistress (288), it is possible to assume that there was some special relationship between her and Hubert. Nevertheless, her marriage with Tomey’s Turl relocates her in a more traditional and safer family system and leaves this issue undecidable. Likewise, as a result of the marriage, her husband avoids fatal confrontation with his half-brothers. The traceable genealogy of the black family obfuscates who

74 As for the slaves’ legal rights in Mississippi, see Davis 28-36.
the fathers (of Tomasina and Tennie, for instance) really are. If Tomey’s Turl asserts his rights and is a little more humanized—and therefore a little more whitened—through marriage, it does not radically change his ambiguous status wavering between blackness and whiteness, humanization and dehumanization, or his being a “damn white half-McCaslin” who becomes a little whitened—but not too much—by being granted the right to flee from the McCaslin plantation to meet his lover. His marriage is therefore the continuation, not the ending, of the race, in which the pursuer is the white McCaslins and the pursued their black half-brother, and whose true goal is the capture of this dangerous dual existence, the pinning down of his color. Tomey’s Turl thus remains yet to be conclusively settled either as black or white, and so does Tennie.

This inconclusiveness suggests that Tomey’s Turl is a symptom, a point of concealment and disclosure, of the contradictions of the society’s racial, gender and familial ideology, as is Sophonsiba. It corresponds to the preservation of the white male ideals through failures; not trying to draw a decisive line between black and white conceals that it is fundamentally impossible. The marriage of Tennie and Tomey’s Turl—as well as the eventual marriage of Sophonsiba and Buck, which is not actualized but presupposed in the story—contributes to this melancholic structure of repetitive failures, which the unending race in “Was” represents.

If it can be subversive, then, it is not because Tomey’s Turl outwits his white half-brothers through his tactful plots, but because repetitions are also opportunities in which attainment can eventually occur, causing the return of the repressed. If we look beyond “Was,” it is possible that Tomey’s Turl is well aware of this structure. As a slave, he is not totally
humanized, nor is he totally masculinized even after marriage, as his mother’s name in his own name suggests. Moreover, the name of Tomasina does not simply represent femininity; it is also a reminder of the white hypocrisy of allowing black marriage. If what Ike imagines is correct, the marriage of her parents was old Carothers’s attempt to camouflage his relationship with Eunice or his paternity of Tomasina. The traceable genealogy of the black family established through marriage can be the white man’s strategy to disguise its true genealogy. That the granddaughter of Tennie’s Jim in “Delta Autumn” seems to know what happened to Eunice and Tomasina suggests that the memories of those women victimized by the white master—which may include Tennie—have been conveyed to descendants by Tomey’s Turl and his son Tennie’s Jim in his turn. It would not be accidental that the two men bear those women’s names. If they convey the memories of the victimized black women, then they must be aware of the deceptiveness of the institution of marriage. Those memories plainly show why black men cannot gain masculinity, which is inseparable from whiteness after all, through marriage, and point to what is at the core of the repetitive failures and therefore must be kept concealed. Thus, when those memories handed down among the black family join up with Ike’s almost purposeful repetitive failures to establish his white male identity, to achieve his ideals represented by the wilderness, through the figure of Tennie’s Jim’s granddaughter in “Delta Autumn,” they evoke the repressed history of the repudiated grief, which is fatal to the concept of whiteness.

Tomey’s Turl says, “get the womenfolks to working at it,” and indeed it points to the novel’s dramatic principle. It is mostly men who openly act, but women teamed with blacks always function as the driving force, as is typically seen in “Go Down, Moses.” “Was” already
shows that women and blacks make white men experience critical moments, and function as the central agency either to sustain the melancholic repetitive white familial structure or to disrupt it. This is because they are the points where the contradictions of the white male supremacist society converge, and through this novel, Faulkner demonstrates how blacks and women, the dominated, can turn themselves into subversive power while investigating into the conditions that regulate their lives in this society.

A problem that arises then is that Faulkner cannot offer a viable means that a black man can take for at once resisting and surviving the white dominance. *Go Down, Moses* is not simply about the white families, but it also reveals how the black families are confined within the white people’s ideology of family and identity. On the one hand, the unending race of Tomey’s Turl in “Was” introduces the novel’s pattern of white men’s unconsummated hunting especially if we focus on the whites’ side; on the other, it is also an archetype of black men’s exile and homecoming, in which the fleeing black man is granted a certain amount of rights and humanization (but not too much) on the condition that he regularly flees from and comes back to his home, the black and female locus produced within the white supremacist ideology. As “Pantaloon in Black” and “Go Down, Moses” show, the subversive homecoming occurs only when the black man is caught and killed, and forcibly taken back to his home as a dead body—in other words, only through the fatal touching of black and white in which the black man literally loses his life.

While “Was” ends with the acquirement of a wife and family of Tomey’s Turl as a result
of the repetitive race, in “The Fire and the Hearth,” the second chapter of *Go Down, Moses*, his youngest son Lucas Beauchamp repeats the pattern of exile and homecoming even though he already has a wife and family. This emphasizes that a black man remains to be trapped in the melancholic repetitive pattern even after the race has seemingly ceased to recur, that marriage is for the black man not the ending of the race but its continuation. The story of Lucas then also serves as a bridge between “Was” and “Pantaloon in Black,” for Lucas’s comical fleeing from the confinement of home, after which he eventually chooses to regain his wife and family, is put in sharp contrast with the tragic exile of Rider, who maintains the fire and the hearth in imitation of Lucas until the death of his wife. Indeed, Rider is another Lucas who loses his wife and family, extinguishes the fire of the hearth, kills a white man, and is caught and killed as its result. While the fire and the hearth emblematize the endurance of the black family, Rider’s story, along with Ike’s later stories, reveals its ephemerality and even the fact that the concept of endurance itself is one of the burdens forced upon the black family by the whites’ dominant ideology, in which the blacks, without patrimony, are forever victims to endure without any hope for the transcendence of time. Placed before “Pantaloon in Black,” then, “The Fire and the Hearth” already shows the difficulty for a black man to imagine the outside of the existent system without losing his beloved ones and risking his own life, and poses a question that remains even after the Southern familial and racial ideology is thoroughly deconstructed at the end of the novel.

Lucas is an exceptional black male character in the novel in that only he in the black McCaslins inherits old Carothers’s legacy and shows his awareness of that genealogy. Because of this, though a black man, he feels affinity to Cass Edmonds, an descendant of old Carothers on
the distaff side, and does so all the more for the “paradox” they bear—“old Cass a McCaslin only on his mother’s side and so bearing his father’s name though he possessed the land and its benefits and responsibilities; Lucas a McCaslin on his father’s side though bearing his mother’s name and possessing the use and benefit of the land with none of the responsibilities” (43-44). Moreover, in “The Fire and the Hearth,” Lucas seems to exceed the mere genealogical continuity with the powerful father figure and embody something of the ideal of the timeless wilderness, while the repetitive pattern of exile and homecoming he is also engaged in suggests that he is after all entrapped in the chronological time of the dominant history.

Though a mere sharecropper in the Edmonds plantation, Lucas has a privileged position, almost authoritative and autonomous, refusing to address the white planters as other blacks do. His attitude is implicitly endorsed by a nearly fatal experience he had when he was young: a confrontation with his foster brother, Zack Edmonds, in this white man’s bed room, in which he almost established a fraternal bond with the white planter across racial division. In that episode, as Zack’s wife has died after giving birth to a child, Lucas’s wife Molly stays in the landowner’s mansion to take care of the baby. Lucas then feels as if his wife were stolen by Zack and even suspects her of sexual relationship with the white man. After half a year, he at last makes a protest against Zack, saying “I’m a nigger. . . . But I’m a man too. I’m more than just a man. The same thing made my pappy that made your grandpaw [old Carothers]” (46). That evening Lucas notices that Molly is back at home, holding the white man’s baby. Then he thinks that Zack, finding that his child is gone with Molly, will or should venture into his house to take the baby back; and yet Zack does not. For Zack, Lucas is not a “peer” enough to pose a threat to him.

313
Lucas, exasperated, then goes to Zack’s house, not just to kill him but to make the white man recognize him as his “peer.” Thus, he tells Zack to take a pistol, and tries to fight with the white man with the fatal arm on equal terms. They then vie for the pistol; this fight on equal terms makes the pistol’s bullet into the fatal acknowledging touch similar to Henry’s bullet which killed Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*. It seems that whether Lucas kills or is killed by Zack does not matter to him, for either way the fight itself grants him manhood and brotherhood with his foster brother Zack, and either way he is doomed: he must be killed in the end, if not by Zack, then by other lynching white men because of his black blood. It is only by accident that Lucas survives—he grabs the pistol, but it ends up in misfire. He thus barely avoids becoming another Rider while this implicitly homoerotic bed scene almost makes Lucas an embodiment of the interracial brotherhood, especially to the Edmondse’s eyes.

Neal Watson, referring to Eve Sedgwick, says that “homo/heterosexual definitional panic, in a culture where . . . all significant exchange takes place between men, naturally comes about due to the shifting boundaries of prescribed male homosocial bonding and proscribed homosexuality,” and that the “inevitable tension that arises between these two contradictory goals of patriarchal society results in the most rigorous enforcement of taboos against homoeroticism” (209). Watson sees an exact reflection of this structure in explicitly or implicitly homoerotic scenes in *Go Down, Moses*, including that between Lucas and Zack, and argues that strict “celibacy seems the only viable alternative” in this novel (209). But we should also take notice of the fact that, in *Go Down, Moses*, homoeroticism is also an ideal form of love though it becomes subversive when one actually attains the object of desire, identifying with his brother.
And as I have argued, patriarchal ideals rather take advantage of those shifting boundaries, ambiguity serving as a cover for their contradictions, and therefore “[r]igorous enforcement of these dualities [of black/white, male/female, gay/straight]” (210) is not working in this novel. Rather, ambiguity or failure to impose rigor is expedient for the patriarchal society to survive. In this situation, Lucas becomes an almost ideal figure that almost achieves the dream of fraternal identification but barely retains ambiguity and stays within the ideological norms.  

This is why Lucas seems to acquire the timeless quality similar to that of the wilderness. Zack’s son, Roth, first thinks that Lucas’ face is “shaped . . . in expression in the pattern of his great-grandfather McCaslin’s face” (GDM 68), and later he imagines that Lucas’s face even exceeds old Carothers’s image: “It was not at all the face of their grandfather, Carothers McCaslin. It was the face of the generation which had just preceded them: the composite tintype face of ten thousand undefeated Confederate soldiers almost indistinguishably caricatured, composed, cold, colder than his, more ruthless than his, with more bottom than he had” (104). Though it must be ironical and irritable for Roth that the black man’s face assumes the indomitable brotherhood of the old time and therefore it appears as a caricatured tintype, he cannot but admit it. Later again he sees in Lucas’s face the timeless quality which even makes

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75 Philip Weinstein points out that this “failed male bonding” between Lucas and Zack is performed thoroughly in accordance with the white male principle: “It is a male scene; it is also a white one. . . . We white male critics have been lauding this scene for decades now. Is it because it sublimate eros into principle, turns the stickiness of a self-altering exchange into the ritual of a self-affirming one, and finally locates in the male-male encounter and the struggle with the white male grandfather the sources of Lucas’s indestructible dignity?” (Faulkner’s 73). Then Weinstein points out that Lucas “attains a genealogical memory” and “humanity,” which is in this society always white humanity (74). I argue that Lucas is not totally whitened or humanized, and this semi-whitening and semi-humanization only makes him a safe enough existence for other members of the society.
the black man an originary being that, like the Southern land or the wilderness itself, encompasses myriad anonymous people and thereby nullifies division:

Impervious to time too. It seemed to Edmonds . . . that he could actually see Lucas standing there in the room before him . . .—the face which was not at all a replica even in caricature of his grandfather McCaslin’s but which had heired and now reproduced with absolute and shocking fidelity the old ancestor’s entire generation and thought—the face which, as old Isaac McCaslin had seen it that morning forty-five years ago, was a composite of a whole generation of fierce and undefeated young Confederate soldiers, embalmed and slightly mummified—and he thought with amazement and something very like horror: *He’s more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together, including old Carothers. He is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers and all the rest of us and our kind, myriad, countless, faceless, even nameless now except himself who fathered himself, intact and complete, contemptuous, as old Carothers must have been, of all blood black white yellow or red, including his own.*76 (113-14)

He has no longer to be bothered by the chronological precedence of old Carothers, and instead he emblematizes the timeless miscegenous fraternity like the wilderness by affirming his manhood against the white planter and establishing the interracial brotherhood which should overcome the

76 In “The Bear,” too, it is told that Lucas has become, instead of simply a descendant of the powerful planter, an originary father figure comparable to “old Carothers himself,” “selfprogenitive” and “by himself ancestored,” by changing the first part of his original given name Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin into Lucas (GDM 268).
limitations of filiation. Hence Roth thinks that Lucas “resisted [his McCaslin blood] simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, nonconductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another, seetheless, unrumored in the outside air” (101).

However, if Lucas’s exceptionality is undeniable within the oedipal psychological family drama of Lucas and the Edmondsses, it is not socially effective; it becomes invalid once exposed to “the outside air.” As his expectation of lynching shows, he himself recognizes that he is nothing but a petty sharecropper of an inferior race in the society’s code. He is well aware of his social “paradox”—he cannot be the powerful father figure that his paternal blood qualifies him to be because of dispossession in which his black blood confines him, and this awareness itself implicates his desire for powerful manhood. He now knows that he does not own the land, that this fact prevents him from actually standing on an equal footing with white landowners who have power to intervene in his family and labor matters despite the psychological complexes.

Thus, Lucas repeatedly sneaks out of his home and tries to outwit white people in his enterprise of moonshining or hunting for buried gold coins, inciting whites to pursue him, creating the pattern of repetitive race as his father did. His seeming timelessness and his eventual returning to the black home then only emphasize the ultimate impossibility for the dispossessed black man to overcome the chronological time of the white patriarchal and paternalistic history unless he becomes a dead black body to be circulated as do Rider and Butch.

Referring to “[l]iterary and popular meditations on the significance of whiteness as property [which] were widespread during the post-bellum period and early twentieth century”
and actual legal cases in those days, Ross Bullen points out that “during Lucas Beauchamp’s lifetime . . . whiteness—which has always been socially and legally ‘privileged identity’—was legally codified as a kind of property in which an individual could hold pecuniary interest,” and that “Lucas’s interest in his grandfather’s coins is a logical corollary of his desire to preserve (however unsuccessfully) his property interest in his ‘white’ identity” (196). Bullen mainly focuses on Lucas’s attempts “to reify his nebulous racial identity by fetishizing (and hoarding) a particular form of money (gold coins, in this case) that he associates with his white, McCaslin ancestry, substituting the material properties of golden money for the immaterial whiteness that has such a strong significance for his personal identity” (195). In his view, Lucas’s gold money and whiteness “need to be hoarded and kept out of circulation” because of his black ancestry (210)—in short, Lucas’s legal and social status as a black man supersedes his fantasy of the acquisition of whiteness through material property. Bullen’s discussion then correctly implies that inheriting and saving the white ancestor’s money alone is not enough to give one a socially valid form of whiteness. The unstableness of his identity urges Lucas to get more money through moonshining or hunting for the buried treasure while wandering outside home and outwitting whites, even though he has a substantial fortune—“more money . . . than he would ever spend” and possibly “more than Carothers Edmonds” (GDM 33)—and a family that is supposed to give him manhood as father and husband.

Importantly, what matters to Lucas is not simply whiteness but manhood implicated in it, and his performances demonstrate his acceptance of the dominant gender ideology in which manhood relates to the ownership and mastery of the land. Indeed, throughout the story Lucas
shows an obsession with the inheritance of patrimony, particularly the land. Lucas thinks that the field lent from the Edmondses on which he grows crops is “his own field, though he neither owned it nor wanted to nor even needed to” (35). Despite the Edmondses’ titular ownership of the land, he is its master who administers it and freely uses it, “plowing and planting and working it when and how he saw fit” (35). He believes that he has manhood that bears comparison even with old Carothers, who acquired the land and bequeathed it to his descendants; he is “not only the oldest man but the oldest living person on the Edmonds plantation, the oldest McCaslin descendant, even though in the world’s eye he descended not from McCaslins but from McCaslin slaves,” and “almost as old as old Isaac, almost, as old Isaac was, coeval with old Buck and Buddy McCaslin who had been alive when their father, Carothers McCaslin, got the land from the Indians back in the old time when men black and white were men” (36). Aligning himself with the white McCaslins, Lucas is deeply soaked in the ideology of property-as-identity that connects patrimony with male identity, and fails in this way, too, to be a true embodiment of the ideal brotherhood that transcends the diachronic time of inheritance by not owning but belonging to the land.

Consequently, he puts himself into a repetitive pattern similar to white men’s hunting or racing, his position not the hunted but the hunter, and the desired but unattained object the land as the guarantee of white manhood. Thus, despite the denial of his need to own the field, his moonshining, or “making and selling whisky right there in Edmonds’ back yard for twenty years” (63), can be considered as an attempt to appropriate the mastery of the land beyond the crop field; and hunting for buried treasure is not only a matter of the inheritance of money but of
the practical ownership of the land in which the gold coins are buried. Indeed, Lucas keeps on behaving as the master of the land and his house during the search for gold and thereby claims his own manhood. He again aligns himself with the white patriarchs and asserts that he is the “man” who has the patriarchal power to decide everything about “his” land and house when his wife Molly remonstrates him and Roth Edmonds tells him to give it up: “I’m a man,” Lucas said. ‘I’m the man here. I’m the one to say in my house, like you and your paw and his paw were the ones to say in his’” (116).

However, it eventually turns out that Lucas is not the hunter engaged in the repetitive pursuit but the self-exiled black man to be brought back home, because of the very fact that the land and the house are not his after all, of which Roth reminds him from time to time as in the following exchange:

[Lucas said,] “You mean every year I keep on farming my land.”

“I mean every damned year you stay on my place. Just what I said.”

“Cass Edmonds give me that land to be mine long as I—”

“You heard me,” Edmonds said. (121, emphasis mine)

Both in moonshining and searching for gold, as with the cases of Rider in “Pantaloon in Black” and Butch in “Go Down, Moses,” his family members and white people in the community get in the way and try to take him back home. In the former, fearing that George Wilkins, the inattentive newcomer in the trade who happens to be his daughter’s lover, is going to make it difficult for him to continue his business as it has been, Lucas tries to frame him. Yet his business means nothing to his daughter Nat, and she devises a plan to make her father admit her marriage
with George, only to cause Lucas to be arrested. Lucas then bluff’s his way out of the indictment by fabricating a marital relationship between George and Nat, for the law provides that “a man’s kinfolks cant tell on him in court” (65). Thus, while he succeeds in protecting his business by appealing to the legal familial bond with his “kinfolks,” at the end of this episode he is relocated in his home.

But in the latter half of the story, Lucas becomes a hunter/exile again; he soon starts wandering outside home again in search for the buried gold coins. In so doing, he risks divorce. For, in Molly’s view, Lucas is to incur the “curse of God” (118), because “God say, ‘What’s rendered to My earth, it belong to Me unto I resurrect it. And let him or her touch it, and beware’” (99). Lucas at first persists in his search for gold, saying that he is the man in his house, but when the matter is brought to court again, he decides to maintain the family, giving up the buried coins. Otherwise he would lose what little manhood he is allowed to possess through marriage. Thus, Lucas is eventually accommodated in the black home, again succumbing to legal and familial interventions, and recovers the appropriate balance of blackness and whiteness in Southern paternalism. Significantly, in court he calls Roth “Mister Roth Edmonds” for the first time (124), acting as a servile black man which he has been refusing to be. While the general critical reception of Lucas’s final decision to be accommodated in the black home has been negative, Karl F. Zender sticks up for him, interpreting his strategy as a kind of what Henry Louis Gates Jr. calls “signifying” or Homi Bhabha calls “hybridity,” a strategic appropriation of an authoritative language for “black insistence on being heard in white terms by white audience” (134). Zender claims that “Lucas’s appropriation of Old Carothers’s voice” makes the abusive
white master into a “spokesperson for black self-affirmation and for the integrity of the black family” (133). However, even though we can regard it as a strategy for survival, it cannot be a strategy for resistance; after all, Lucas plays no role in conveying the repressed grief hidden behind the integrity of the black family to subvert the dominant racial and gender ideology. Lucas’s homecoming then marks the limitations of the pseudo-identification between the black and white brothers through misfire, showing that even he cannot get out of the policing of the race through the repetitive pattern of race, or of exile and homecoming.

Then Molly, at least in “The Fire and the Hearth,” embodies the integrity of the black family safely located in the Southern social system. Her wish to be “free” from the “curse of the God” by not possessing His property, the coins buried in the land, is close to Ike’s paternalistic view of history, in which black people are considered to be better because they are always dispossessed and destined to suffer, endure and survive till the end of the history. As Thadious Davis argues, “Molly becomes the instrument that will tie Lucas to a reality he longs to subvert” and she serves as “a tool of white society” (138). She embodies the image of the black woman and the black home favorable to the whites as do many black female characters in Faulkner’s works, and as many critics have discussed, she particularly reflects the writer’s memory of his black “mammy” Caroline Barr, to whom the novel is dedicated. Judith L. Sensibar points out that Faulkner uses part of Barr’s eulogy he had written upon her death just before he began writing the novel in Roth’s recollection of his relationship with Molly in his childhood (Faulkner 108), and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Roth’s and Faulkner’s love for their black mammy. At the same time, “The Fire and the Hearth” reveals how the white man’s racial and
gender ideology needs, produces and makes use of the beloved figure of the black mammy and the black home as something to be renounced in order for the white man to acquire manhood.\textsuperscript{77} For Roth, Molly was “the only mother he . . . ever knew” (GDM 113) and her son Henry was his best friend with whom he played, ate and slept. But he severed his affective bond with them, by which “he entered his heritage” (110). As Joseph Adamson points out, “[t]here is an Oedipal aspect” in this, for “Roth’s loss of social innocence in his relations with Henry is also the beginning of his dis-identification with an inviting world of feminine affection and family warmth” (21). This loss of the black mother and brother is “a loss that cannot be acknowledged. . . . Thus it cannot be mourned, and it cannot be overcome” (Bockting, “Whiteness” 208). It thus concisely shows the centrality of the ungrievable interracial love, whether it is maternal or fraternal, in the formation of the white male subject, and the black mother or the black home is a necessary constitutive outside for the white man’s melancholic genealogy.

For the black man, on the other hand, the home always is a place to flee from and eventually return to. The seemingly privileged status of Lucas only emphasizes the difficulty for a black man to get out of the unending race prescribed by the paternalistic and patriarchal ideology without losing his life. As “Pantaloons in Black” and “Go Down, Moses” demonstrate, a black man who seeks for masculinity and notices the fundamental impossibility for him to acquire it in the society he dwells in can disrupt that system only by becoming a dead body. Circulated as an undeniable proof of the wound and grief he bears, he becomes instrumental in

\textsuperscript{77} For a detailed analysis of the white male subject’s psychology over the black mammy, see Hiraishi, “‘Mammy.’”
the destabilization of the dominant white History that represses grief, and thereby lets white men
to dis/inherit the past, establishing the structure of the future anterior, in which the past and the
present are open to retrospective changes through interventions from the future. Go Down,
Moses, however, shows no possibility for a black person, male or female, to live the future
anterior time of dis/inheritance.

The first two chapters of the novel, “Was” and “The Fire and the Hearth,” describe the
precarious establishment and sustainment of the black family. Their affective ties are comical and
warm, but later chapters reveal that the black family is destined to be ephemeral within the
Southern social system on which it depends. In such historical views as Ike’s, black people,
without anything to inherit and bequeath, have no genealogy from the beginning, and though the
novel’s genealogical deconstruction performed through Ike’s (and the Beauchamps’) stories
suggests a possibility of the genealogical inheritance of the memory of wound and grief among
the black family, what the novel mainly explores is the impact of the revelation of that memory
on white people, and Faulkner never clarifies how it can affect black people’s lives.

Édouard Glissant compares this Faulknerian time to the flow of the river which “does not
follow the rules of linear thought; here, one can step in the same water twice” (Faulkner 152).
He goes on to say: “it proceeds not in long loops but in a circularity that seeks and rediscovers
itself, endlessly. It comes and goes in time, deviating and turning time around, in a stationary
drift” (152). In Faulkner’s works, however, black men who, whether alive or dead, are to be
accommodated in the black home can hardly keep on drifting on this flow. Indeed, Glissant
admits that “[o]ne can deplore that Faulkner’s work has tended to treat Blacks as things” (163).
Yet he asserts that it was not Faulkner’s task to describe the black man’s dis/inheritance, for 
“[o]ne cannot write or reveal for others; it is fitting, simply, that they enter their own history, and 
that all these histories ultimately connect. Each person must go to the end of his or her legitimacy 
(even illusory), so that later on he or she may participate fully in the transcendence that will be 
required of all” (163). And Glissant believes that Faulkner’s writing has shown the basis of the 
connection of those histories:

Faulkner’s work—and the holes it rips open in the traditional fabric of 
narrative—will be decisive, because it is an effort to give account to the real, 
going from the deferred to the given inscribed in it. And the given (the original sin 
of the county), in turn, quietly opens gaps in the act of writing, again and again. 

The result is a fluid construction. This is work that has entered into 
conversation with many other works, in many different languages, yet allied in 
their versions of the “scream of the world.” (163-64)

Even though Faulkner cannot show a viable way for black characters to survive in the 
time of dis/inheritance, his writing already contains the germ of the dis/inheritance of other 
histories including African Americans in later writers’ works. Therefore, Glissant says:

The time that Faulkner was asking [Blacks] to have the patience to wait for, this 
same time he had already traced backward into the past of the Compsons and the 
McCaslins. He does not, however, go back as far as the trauma of the slave trade, 
which, for Blacks, is the source of everything. It is as though, suffering object of 
the South's neglect, the Blacks had no need for ancestors, ancestry being deemed
unsuitable for them. It certainly was not up to Faulkner to do this work — but the work he did do would not have reached its fullness if it had not asked that one day others would take up this task from their own point of view. (171)

I would say that this means that Faulkner’s work itself has become a heritage for later writers, and even for us, together with and through them, to reappropriate and dis/inherit.


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341


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