

**ABSENT COMPANY:  
ELEGIAC CHARACTER IN THE NOVELS OF FAULKNER AND WOOLF**

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Erin Kay Penner

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Erin Kay Penner, Ph.D.

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This dissertation examines the work of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf through a formal lens that allows us to look beyond their differences in culture and nationality to what I argue is their shared fascination with the elegy. In taking up the elegy Faulkner and Woolf also rewrite the genre, using the novel to offer pointed critiques of the poetic tradition in three distinct stages of elegiac reinvention. In the first, Faulkner and Woolf abandon the pastoral elegy's single narrative in favor of several competing narratives; in this they use to their advantage what Bakhtin calls the novel's heteroglossic capacity. In the second stage, the authors foreground the voices of the dead and thus draw attention to the way the traditional elegy silences the elegiac subject. In a final manipulation of elegiac convention, Faulkner and Woolf blur the distinction between the elegist and the elegiac subject through a series of character doublings, and in doing so they renegotiate the terms of the protagonist's position in the modernist novel.

Like the subject of the first chapter, *The Sound and the Fury*, which revels in the different voices of its elegists, Woolf's *The Waves*, the subject of Chapter Two, stresses both the harmony and the dissonance in the mourning hymn of its six speaking characters. In the third chapter, I analyze the surprising eruption of the voices of the dead in *Jacob's Room* and *As I Lay Dying*, voices that challenge the eulogies of the other characters. In the final chapters of the project I shift from the novel's contribution to the elegy to the way in which elegy rewrites the terms of the modern novel. Woolf's and Faulkner's use of the elegy in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Go Down, Moses*, respectively, enables the authors to change the dynamic between protagonists and minor characters, keeping the elegiac subject at the center of the story, but attending to the voices of the elegists who remain, warily, on the margins of the narrative.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erin Kay Penner was born and raised in Iowa. She registered to major in English before setting foot on campus at Yale University, from which she received her Bachelor of Arts in 2005, *magna cum laude*. Graduate study in the Department of English at Cornell University followed immediately afterward.

First to my parents, later to Katherine and Nathaniel, and always to Sydney

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My literary interests can be traced directly back to my mother, whose own reading addiction keeps her up too late at night, but my fixation on modernism's unruly texts stems from a handful of courses in my undergraduate education, in particular Lee Patterson's seminar on *Ulysses* and Vera Kutzinski's on Faulkner. Lloyd Pratt then patiently led me through my first major research project, a senior thesis on Faulkner, and got me to start asking the right questions. My interest in Woolf is somewhat more recent. My thanks to my graduate committee chair, Molly Hite, for encouraging my new interest all the way through papers, exams, and now a dissertation. She regularly urged me to mess up my tidy arguments in order to get somewhere interesting: precisely the nudge I needed.

My committee members considerably assumed different roles in guiding me through the program. Roger Gilbert allowed me to keep pursuing my poetry interests through his seminars in modern American poetry; I learned much about reading fiction from the close readings of poetry in his classroom. Kevin Attell gamely took on the task of keeping me honest in my argumentation. Although I doubt that the arguments in the following work are up to snuff, I am keeping his notes at hand as I consider revisions, and I hope to do better. I was only at Cornell two years before Doug Mao moved to Johns Hopkins, but his meticulous notes on the papers I submitted doomed him to remain on my committee for the rest of my graduate work. My thanks to him for making room for one more student, for his judicious comments on every draft I sent him, and for his generosity in sharing potential paths for developing the material I have produced. Lastly, my thanks to Jim Adams, now of Columbia University, for his patience; he was a member of my graduate committee for nearly all of my time at Cornell, as well as the Director of Graduate Studies, and he fielded a number of questions from me in those years.

As I began work on the dissertation, I was awarded the Shin Yong-Jin Graduate Fellowship by the Department of English at Cornell. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to teach formally

complex narratives to undergraduates. I learned a great deal from my students about the variety of approaches to non-linear narratives, and about the texts I assigned, which included works by Faulkner and Woolf. My thanks to those students for their hard work and for our rewarding classroom conversations. In addition to the teaching opportunity, the Shin fellowship provided me with an additional semester of research support, which gave me the time necessary to develop a strong foundation for the project as I found my way through the early chapters.

My work at Cornell was aided immeasurably by my classmates, who manifested good teaching and engaged research in all their variety. My particular thanks to Corey Wronski-Mayersak for her support as we shared an office, exams, and life. Two Ithaca friends, Kate Klein and Stephanie Gehring, both creative writers, read through drafts of my dissertation, engaged in long conversations with me about the ideas in it, and, most importantly, showed me how to develop a sense of ownership about my work as coursework gave way to independent research. In watching them write when no one made them, I learned much about setting my own pace and my own pleasure with the work at hand. That proved particularly helpful when I moved to England in my final year of graduate study and wrote the second half of my dissertation in a cold garret on Holywell Street in Oxford.

My final thanks to my family for their patience with me throughout this project. It has been a constant—and demanding—presence in my life for several years, and they gamely accepted the additional company. My parents continued their cheerful support of my academic endeavors from afar, swooping in to offer help at key times. Sydney was a model of partnership, offering academic companionship, reading drafts, and, perhaps most importantly, giving me the time I needed to work as first Katherine and then Nathaniel appeared. My thanks to these last two for allowing me to move continually between work and play, so that this project remains fresh and interesting to me yet.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### William Faulkner

<i>AILD</i>	<i>As I Lay Dying</i>
<i>GDM</i>	<i>Go Down, Moses</i>
<i>SF</i>	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>

### Virginia Woolf

<i>CSF</i>	<i>Complete Shorter Fiction</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Jacob's Room</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>
<i>TW</i>	<i>The Waves</i>

## Beauty Reduced to Telling: An Introduction to Modern Grief Work

*Oh the dead! she murmured, one pitied them, one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at our mercy.*

– Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Caddy Compson, the absent central figure of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, is a magnet for attention in Faulkner's work. In his own estimation she is "the beautiful one . . . my heart's darling" (*Faulkner in the University* 6). His desire to preserve that beauty, however, compels Faulkner to keep her at a distance from the storytelling; when asked why Caddy was not one of the novel's narrators, Faulkner responded: "That's a good question. That—the explanation of the whole book is in that. . . . Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on" (1).<sup>1</sup> Faulkner's description may surprise some readers, since it is not only beauty but also muddy drawers that we come to associate with Caddy, a sign of the rebellious streak that will fill her brothers with sorrow and drive her from home. She is one of Faulkner's most enduring figures of loss.

Although Faulkner's characterizations of Caddy repeatedly return to the fixed image of her sitting in a tree, high above the heads of her brothers, such a view closes off some of the most significant perspectival elements of that early scene. Caddy's brothers all look up, which is why her muddy drawers loom large in their memories and in the text. But Caddy looks into a window in her

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<sup>1</sup> Faulkner's treatment of Caddy is part of his general policy of withholding information from the reader when something significant is at stake. When he was asked in an interview to describe his ideal woman, he hedged: "Well, I couldn't describe her by color of hair, color of eyes, because once she is described, then somehow she vanishes. That the ideal woman which is in every man's mind is evoked by a word or phrase or the shape of her wrist, her hand. Just like the most beautiful description of anyone, a woman, since we are speaking of women, is by understatement. Remember, all Tolstoy said about Anna Karenina was that she was beautiful and could see in the dark like a cat. That's all he ever said to describe her. And every man has a different idea of what's beautiful. And it's best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree" (*Lion* 127-128).

house, observing (without understanding) her grandmother's funeral as it takes place before her. She is not only a figure to be mourned, but also an observer of mourning who is not given room in the narrative to tell all that she sees.

Caddy's perspective, limited as it is, enables Faulkner to render a sidelong look at grief. As he described the novel's genesis:

That began as a short story, it was a story without plot, of some children being sent away from the house during the grandmother's funeral. They were too young to be told what was going on and they saw things only incidentally to the childish games they were playing. (*Lion* 146)

Although Faulkner renders Caddy in idealistic terms, terms that keep her at a distance from the narrative voices of the novel, she is also the means by which he begins to reconsider standard characterizations of mourning, grief, and loss. Caddy insists to the other children that the funeral is in fact a party, mistaking grief for celebration, and her curiosity about the adults' secretive behavior transforms the discovery of the funeral into a child's game.

In Caddy might be seen the beginning of Faulkner's re-imagining of modernist mourning, a mourning filled with confusion, glimpses through trees and windows, mistaken impressions, and indications that the characters most distant from narrative voice may yet have the best view. Caddy is a character "hushed" by the other narratives, much as, in that early scene, she and the other children are hushed by the adults out of respect for the dead. But in her subsequent attempts to take charge and hush the other children she draws attention to the struggles for power that lie behind such silencing at the death of a loved one, and thus performs her most important role in a novel that is, largely, about her own silencing.

Faulkner may have begun his career by setting beauty and intimacy at odds with one another,

but this project attends to the many ways in which he closed the space between the two, bringing the voice of the subject back to elegiac literature. In many of the best-known novels by Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, the central characters are absent, dead, or dying, a notable recurrence given that both authors strove for reinvention with each new novel. As Malcolm Cowley wrote rather dramatically of Faulkner, “It was writing another book by the same formula—something he never did—that would have been a sin against the religion of art” (157). Woolf tried on several different genres in the course of her writing: biography in *Flush*, *Orlando*, and *Roger Fry*; memoir in the essays later collected as *Moments of Being*; drama in *Freshwater*; literary criticism in the *Common Reader* and in her essays for the *Times Literary Supplement*; and what she described as a “playpoem” in *The Waves* (*Diary* 3:203). Both Faulkner and Woolf wrote impressive short stories and integrated drama with essay, Faulkner in *Requiem for a Nun* and Woolf in *The Pargiters*, which she later reworked and published under the title *The Years*. Throughout their experimentations, they repeatedly turned to the elegiac tradition, both to reinvent the genres in which they were working and to connect their work to the elegy’s long literary tradition.

Woolf’s and Faulkner’s novels, like those of other modernists, push the boundaries of the genre, de-emphasizing plot, turning to non-linearity, and offering several characters who vie for the position of the protagonist. In my reading of the authors’ works, the scattered fragments of the novel gather around the absent central figure and thus take on the appearance of the bereaved at a funeral, like the one that Caddy Compson witnesses but does not describe in *The Sound and the Fury*. To draw on a quotation that Toni Morrison, herself a scholar of both Faulkner and Woolf, chose as the opening of her essay, “Memory, Creation, and Writing”:

It is not enough for a work of art to have ordered planes and lines. If a stone is tossed at a group of children, they hasten to scatter. A regrouping, an action, has

been accomplished. This is composition. This regrouping, presented by means of color, lines, and planes, is an artistic and painterly motif. (213)

Although the author of the quotation, Edvard Munch, is a painter, rather than a writer, his characterization of regrouping as an artistic method describes the technique employed by Woolf and Faulkner in their novels. Rather than a stone that scatters the children, their absent central figures draw the novels' disparate characters together, both in terms of story, as the childhood friends gather for meals in Woolf's *The Waves* to remember their dead friend, Percival, and in terms of discourse, as the narratives of Caddy Compson's three brothers return, again and again, to musings about their lost sister.

Although I argue for a formal resemblance between Woolf and Faulkner, they share few biographical ties. Both Faulkner and Woolf were tremendous readers, but there is no evidence that they even owned each other's books, though the available bibliographies of their libraries are, admittedly, incomplete.<sup>2</sup> The obvious biographical differences that strike one, those of gender and nationality, are only two of the many indications that they represent very different literary worlds. For Faulkner was not only an American writer, but also one who was at pains to distinguish his writing from "American writers who were primarily European, not American" in style and literary inheritance (*Lion* 95).

What few glimpses we have of a connection between the two do little to further the

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<sup>2</sup> Nothing of Faulkner's appears in the *Catalogue of Books from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf*, which includes the couple's books from Monk's House, Sussex, and 24 Victoria Square, London. The editors note that "The combined total of books in Monks House and Victoria Square at the time of Leonard's death was probably about 9,000 volumes. There is reason to believe however that at one time the library was considerably larger" (1), something in the range of 15,000 volumes. The most significant loss might be attributed to the bombing of their house at 37 Mecklenburg Square in 1941: "Leonard's account of the damage leaves little doubt that many books were destroyed and others damaged beyond repair" (2). Faulkner's library, as accounted for in *William Faulkner's Library: A Catalogue*, edited by Joseph Blotner, also holds no Woolf works. Faulkner's library is notably scarce on twentieth-century literature in general, particularly women writers. Significant exceptions to that tendency include nearly all of Joseph Conrad's oeuvre, Vita Sackville-West's *The Edwardians* (published by The Literary Guild of America, rather than by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press), D. H. Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Lytton Strachey's *Books and Characters*.

discussion of influence. In a footnote to *Helen: A Courtship and Mississippi Poems*, a collection of Faulkner's poems, Carvel Collins, who provided a biographical essay for the slim volume, offers a puzzling anecdote:

Faulkner's grandaunt, Mrs. Walter B. McLean, said in August, 1951, that once when she was reading Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and told Faulkner she was finding it difficult, he urged her to put it aside because there was no reason to struggle over difficult reading, that some works are for some people and others for others. He then added, she told me, that people should not try to read books which do not appeal to them almost at once. (Collins 102)

Collins notes that this was an odd remark, given that Faulkner was prone to reciting Shakespeare's *The Phoenix and the Turtle* in the middle of discussions in which only clear and straightforward poetry was praised (70). *Orlando* is also perhaps the least likely of Woolf's works to be rejected on grounds of difficulty.

For her part, Woolf makes a single diary reference to "Faulkner" on the first of June, 1937:

By the way, I have been sharply abused in Scrutiny, wh., L. says, calls me a cheat in The Waves & The Years; most intelligently (& highly) praised by Faulkner in America--& thats all. I mean thats all I need I think write about reviews now . . .  
(*Diary* 5:91)

Although she is widely assumed to be referring to William Faulkner, neither the editors of her diaries nor subsequent scholars have been able to trace the reference.

The most notable conjunction of Woolf's and Faulkner's work has come belatedly, in a master's thesis at Cornell University by Chloe Ardellia Wofford, better known under the name she later adopted: Toni Morrison. Morrison's 1955 thesis, in which she explores the theme of alienation

in Faulkner's and Woolf's novels, remains the only major criticism to explore the two writers' connections in detail.<sup>3</sup> Whereas Morrison uses Faulkner and Woolf as representatives of two different approaches to a theme that she also identifies in the works of Joyce, Eliot, Wolfe, and Huxley, this project concerns Faulkner and Woolf exclusively, not as representatives of twentieth-century literature, but as individual writers whose use of the elegy is strikingly similar. It is a critical commonplace to observe that modernist literature is stamped with elegiac longing, but Woolf and Faulkner set themselves apart from their contemporaries by not only drawing on elegiac themes but also repeatedly challenging elegiac conventions—and rewriting them.

One of the most striking similarities, biographically speaking, between Faulkner and Woolf is the way in which both place themselves outside the university-educated elite. When Faulkner felt cornered by questions about literature in interviews he repeatedly asserted that he was not “a literary man,” but instead a farmer who associated with other farmers.<sup>4</sup> As he sums up in a letter to his publishers, “All my writing life I have been a poet without education” (*Selected Letters* 188). For all his late association with the University of Virginia, Faulkner remained wary of universities, critics, and contemporary writers throughout his life.

Woolf turned her lack of university education to her advantage, theorizing the advantages to be had from the position of an “outsider” when the English education system seemed to lead straight to war. Although Woolf speaks directly to these concerns in her works of social criticism, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, her most powerful argument for the outsider may lie in her

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<sup>3</sup> In Morrison's thesis, “Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated,” she identifies alienation as the defining conviction of the twentieth century. Although she considers alienation in both Faulkner's and Woolf's works, it is worth noting that Morrison emphasizes the differences between the two authors. Morrison's study draws on *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Sound and the Fury* to argue that Faulkner's approach to alienation is the “antithesis” of Woolf's (4).

<sup>4</sup> “I am not really a writer in the sense you mean—my life was established before I began to write. I'm a countryman. My life is farmland and horses and the raising of grain and feed. I took up writing simply because I liked it—it was something very fine . . . but just to be a writer is not my life; my life is a farmer, so in that sense, I'm not a writer because that doesn't come first” (*Lion* 169). He claims a similar kinship with farmers and hunters when asked about Freud's influence on literary scholarship (*University* 65).

fiction, particularly in *Jacob's Room*. There she juxtaposes an intelligent, knowledgeable, female narrator with the somewhat hapless, but educated, Jacob, contrasting the narrator's inability to venture further into college than the courtyard with Jacob's unwillingness to consider life outside his window.

Although the biographical links between Faulkner and Woolf are slim, their unusual educations offered them an opportunity to think about the ramifications of writing from the margins of literary culture,<sup>5</sup> an opportunity that may well explain their exploration of alternative perspectives in the relationship between the elegist and the elegiac subject. Both writers exhibit a tendency that Peter Sacks identifies as a characteristic of American elegists: being "explicitly on the margins, dislocated, vagrant, or expelled," reflecting "a marked distance from the comforts of community itself" (313).

With the exception of Morrison's thesis, scholarly discussions about the two authors have failed to take into account such connections. As with biography, Faulkner's and Woolf's critical followings have taken different paths. Dominant strands of Faulkner criticism pursue questions of race, Southern identity, masculinity, and the role of rural spaces in the American literary imagination. Woolf criticism, on the other hand, attends to her relationship with the Bloomsbury artists, issues of gender and sexuality, and cosmopolitanism. Not to put too fine a point on it, advocates of Woolf's feminism frequently grow impatient when faced with Faulkner's rapturous, idealized characterizations of women.

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<sup>5</sup> Both writers have, of course, been identified as canonical writers by critics fighting for recognition of more marginalized authors. The Bloomsbury Group, to which Woolf belonged, and the Hogarth Press, which she ran with her husband, Leonard, have become icons for literary establishment in the modernist period. Likewise, Faulkner has emerged as the Southern writer to beat, particularly for female authors. In the words of Flannery O'Connor: "The presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down" (45). I will not attempt to establish that Woolf and Faulkner should be regarded as marginalized writers. Instead, my point is simply that they did, at times, regard themselves as such, and that this self-characterization influenced their own theories of perspective in their writing.



Occasionally, however, Faulkner and Woolf come under fire for similar flaws and are drafted for the same critical efforts. In Hugh Kenner's essay, "The Making of the Modernist Canon," he deems both Faulkner and Woolf "provincial":

She is not part of International Modernism; she is an English novelist of manners, writing village gossip from a village called Bloomsbury for her English readers (though cultivated readers; that distinction had become operative between Dickens's time and hers, and Bloomsbury was a village with a good library.) She and they share shrewd awarenesses difficult to specify; that is always the provincial writer's strength. And she pertains to the English province, as Faulkner and Dr. Williams to the American. (57)

This 1984 argument for Woolf's provincialism has been roundly routed in recent scholarship, notably by that of Jessica Berman and Rebecca Walkowitz, and even Faulkner has been liberated, by critics like Jolene Hubbs, from country-bumpkin caricature. Much of current criticism emphasizes both authors' cognizance of world events, argues for their place in the roster of cosmopolitan modernists, and reads their work as both politically and socially engaged.

Although this project may be the first to consider Woolf's and Faulkner's elegies in conjunction with one another, I am not the first to notice the elegiac themes in each author's works. Nehama Baker has recently completed a dissertation at Tel-Aviv University in which she argues for the elegy's role in shaping the character of Faulkner's major works. In deeming Faulkner's elegy "an instrument of healing," she follows earlier critics' lead in regarding elegies as substitutes for the lost individual or ideal, artistic surrogates that facilitate mourning and restore subjectivity to the mourner (56). The late André Bleikasten consistently read Faulkner's work as literature of mourning, and regarded *The Sound and the Fury* as a work "about lack and loss" that also "sprung out of a deep sense

of lack and loss” (*Ink of Melancholy* 47). Gail Mortimer also argues for Faulkner’s novels as substitutions: “words do not simply fill lacks in people’s lives; they *replace* them” (89). John T. Matthews does more to link the theme of mourning to Faulkner’s style, employing Derrida to argue for “Faulkner’s belief that writing is a kind of mourning” (10). This dissertation is designed as a contribution to the long-standing focus on mourning in Faulkner scholarship, but also poses some challenges to the tendency to rely on psychoanalytic and biographical readings to the exclusion of other historical and formal considerations.

Critical attention to the mourning in Faulkner’s novels has remained somewhat amorphous in scope, but similar consideration in Woolf’s work is focused by comments that Woolf herself made on the subject. Her famous diary remark, “I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant ‘novel’. A new---by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?” has opened the door to several readings of individual Woolf novels as elegiac (*Diary* 3:34). In his provocatively titled *Virginia Woolf’s Quarrel with Grieving*, Mark Spilka responds to Woolf’s generic proposal, offering instead the term “abortive elegies for our time”:

since she refuses in these books to deal with death and grieving in any direct or open way, and her elegiac impulse—by which writer and reader alike may normally work out grief through formal measures—is delayed, disguised, or thwarted—at best only partially appeased. Her refusal seems to me characteristic of our times. (15-16)

Spilka turns away from a lengthier consideration of Woolf’s elegies on grounds that doing so “would be to dwell on the evasions of a writer who is not wholly engaged with her inmost problems” (10). Those “evasions” are precisely what Rebecca Walkowitz has recently argued form the core of Woolf’s most acute social engagement (*Cosmopolitan Style*), and thus it seems that in these elegiac evasions, these “abortive elegies,” lie some of her most fertile literary and critical work. Recent

monographs by Tammy Clewell and Christine Froula have given sustained attention to Woolf's elegy, and form the core of what appears to be renewed interest in the role of Woolf's elegy in the shaping of her oeuvre.

The study of elegy in Woolf is somewhat richer in material than that of Faulkner, particularly because critics have so much biographical material from which to draw. Faulkner's grandmother's death when he was ten—approximately the same age as the young Quentin Compson—offers a biographical source for the funeral in *The Sound and the Fury* (Bleikasten, *Ink* 367), but Faulkner himself seemed more preoccupied by what his characters might say about lacks in his life and losses in his future than anything from his childhood. As he concludes in the introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, written more than a dozen years after the novel's publication, "I, who had never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl" (*SF* 227-228). Such allusions to lacks and losses seem unusually revealing for an author who at other times simply said that he wrote some of his best novels when "beset with personal problems" and left it at that (Bleikasten, *Ink* 53). But there is something a bit too quick about such links between person and fiction. Faulkner's comments about Caddy filling in for sister and daughter seem to occur to him well after the writing and publication of the novel. Faulkner's tendency to rewrite, in retrospect, the facts of his life to suit the themes of his novels undermines any attempts to claim personal loss as the motivation for his elegiac novels. Woolf, on the other hand, experienced enough losses in her youth to make her feel as if she were playing a part in a Greek tragedy.<sup>6</sup> In scholarly criticism, the loss of Woolf's mother, half-sister, brother, and nephew have overshadowed what seems to me her equally significant literary interest in the practice and poetry of mourning. Woolf addresses the deaths of her parents in her 1927 novel, *To the Lighthouse*, the novel that has

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<sup>6</sup> See Lee for an eloquent interpretation of Woolf's reactions to these family deaths (169).

prompted the most work on Woolf and elegy.<sup>7</sup>

*The Sound and the Fury* and *To the Lighthouse* are the starting points for any study of Faulkner and Woolf and elegy. But they are also, unfortunately, where the critical discussion seems to have remained. Since I intend to analyze the role of elegy beyond the obviously biographical, these two novels will haunt this project while the critical work on them serves as the foundation for my current endeavors. That said, *To the Lighthouse* is more than a way for Woolf to reimagine her parents, both of whom died long before its publication; it is also a formal exploration of the links between the novel and the elegy: “*To the Lighthouse* is in this way a supplanting of the traditional novel, and a kind of enactive elegy for it: a recognition of its death, in the war if not before, and a movement towards possibilities and pastures new” (Stevenson and Goldman 177). Mrs. Ramsay’s death is, Jane Goldman observes, the “transition between two sets of priorities, almost two literary periods” (177).

In claiming Faulkner and Woolf as elegists I hope to contribute to the continued reclamation of the authors from “provinciality,” at least in the dismissive way in which Kenner used the term, though I will not do so by immediately turning to their credentials as socially engaged artists, as has been the focus in recent work. Woolf’s and Faulkner’s experimentations with form and genre through the elegy show them to be using the “good library” that Kenner grudgingly grants them, and they do so for the purpose of engaging tradition and reshaping the modernist novel to better respond to the kinds of grief that their modern milieu demands. Woolf’s rewriting of the elegy enables her to cast a judicious eye on the role of the literary hero in supporting the institutions that lead to a militarized society and suppress critical thinking. She is critical both of the novelistic hero and of the eulogized subject in elegy, and her work does much to extricate literature from its

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<sup>7</sup> See Greenwald, Knox-Shaw, and Stevenson and Goldman.

relationship with such a problematic reliance on heroes and the poets who sing their praises.

Faulkner, for his part, uses the elegy to reconsider the costs of preserving the idealized figure at the expense of its voice, a scenario that aligns the flawed beauty of Caddy Compson with the impenetrable faces of the black servants in his contemporary Mississippi and poses significant challenges to the South's discomfort with intimacy, whether sexual or racial.

My focus on these two authors arises in part because they share so few obvious biographical, social, and critical connections, differences that only make the formal similarities of their projects more intriguing. They approach the elegy differently with each novel, in what I identify as three distinct modes of elegiac reinvention: critiques of its generic limitations, development of the elegiac subject's voice, and expansion of the protagonist's role in the novel through the incorporation of the elegy. This study thus unfolds not chronologically, but rather in pursuit of Woolf's and Faulkner's contributions to each of these three aspects of the modernist elegy.

### **War-Stricken Freud**

A discussion of grief and elegy might well begin with Freud, as much because of the role his "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) has played in recent decades of elegy scholarship as for his characterization of grief work. Peter Sacks's *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (1985), the cornerstone of modern criticism of the elegy, relies on Freud's characterization of mourning and melancholia to motivate the elegist's project. In Sacks's psychoanalytic reading the elegy serves as a substitute for the loved one who was lost, enabling the poet to conclude the process of mourning (4-7). Poetry here replaces the individual, and indeed might be seen as in competition with its subject for the affections of the mourning poet.

Jahan Ramazani's more recent work on the elegy, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from*

*Hardy to Heaney* (1994), considers elegy and mourning through a wider historical and social lens as he characterizes a poetic period after that of Sacks' subjects, but his argument is still wedded to Sacks's psychoanalytic framework. Whereas Sacks represents elegy as a compensatory act, Ramazani sees modern elegists as mounting a resistance to the tradition of elegiac consolation (xi). He argues that modern elegists rewrite the elegy by becoming anti-consolatory, marking a major division in the elegiac tradition between Sacks's subjects and Ramazani's own (1-3). In the course of his analysis, Ramazani redefines melancholia as a type of mourning, and thus does some work to get out from under the longstanding Freudian division between (appropriate) mourning and (pathological) melancholia.

Both Sacks and Ramazani limit their studies to poet elegists, but here I suggest a turn to prose to further the study of modern elegy and to raise concerns about the traditional elegiac dynamic. Woolf's and Faulkner's elegiac novels, though not bound by poetic conventions of elegy, frequently allude to them and challenge them, as if the authors assume a place for their work within the poetic dialogue. Their texts make room for a nuanced treatment of mourning that does not hang on either consolation or the First World War poets' sharp rejection of it. They also tacitly criticize the narcissistic underpinnings of Freud's analysis by incorporating the elegiac subject as well as the elegist into their novels. In considering works by Faulkner and Woolf part of the elegiac tradition, I hope to move the discussion of elegy toward a reading of the genre that is less tightly bound by Freudian characterizations of mourning and that, instead, considers the dialogue of characters and narrators within novels as fodder for re-characterizing modern mourning.

Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" has received a number of criticisms, the most prominent of which is the extent to which successful mourning is underpinned by narcissism. Tammy Clewell, a scholar of both Freudian psychoanalysis and its relation to elegy, summarizes the

underlying Freudian assumptions quite nicely: “What ensures that mourning will culminate in the triumph of life over death is the subject’s narcissism”; “the loss of a love object is understood as a temporary disruption of the mourner’s narcissism” (“Mourning Beyond Melancholia” 46). As Clewell notes, “Mourning and Melancholia” was written shortly after Freud’s early work on narcissism, and thus reflects the conception of subjectivity posed in the earlier analysis. By the time of *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Clewell argues, Freud had developed a much more sophisticated theory of mourning (47).<sup>8</sup> Significantly, the change in Freud’s theory occurs during the First World War, an event that played a major role in shaping the elegiac work of both Faulkner and Woolf. Sacks and other scholars of elegy, however, seem to attend only to Freud’s early work. Such scholarship thus perpetuates the problems of Freud’s early conceptualization of mourning; as Clewell notes of Peter Sacks, “That the traditional elegy transforms the lost other into the writer’s own aesthetic gain raises certain political and ethical suspicions” (50); “his model of compensatory mourning depends on a denial of otherness, a denial that occurs exactly at the moment the other is represented and memorialized” (52).

Such concerns resonate with Faulkner and Woolf, as we see in the wariness with which both approach the traditional forms of grieving—from flower catalogues to Scripture—even as they eschew the anti-consolatory aggression of the war poets. Both authors seem concerned by what the mourner has to gain from capitalizing on their bereavement; Woolf considers this in terms of artistic achievement in Bernard of *The Waves*, while Faulkner puts such gains in commercial terms when the Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* exchange their matriarch’s body for false teeth and bananas from town. Equally problematic to both authors is the modern rejection of consolation in favor of perpetual grief. As with many of the modern elegists Ramazani draws on, Faulkner and Woolf take the

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<sup>8</sup> See Freud’s “On Transience” (1916) for the beginning of such changes, and Clewell’s “Mourning Beyond Melancholia” for an analysis of this change (57-59). Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” was written in 1915, though it was not published until 1917.

opportunity to criticize the dead, distinguishing elegy from eulogy, but that is not the dominant refrain of their hymns of mourning. No elegist, it might be argued, loses farther or faster—to echo Ramazani, who is, in turn, echoing Elizabeth Bishop—than Quentin Compson, but Faulkner’s treatment of his elegist captures the horrors of such headlong mourning as well as its fascination.

In tracing Freud’s changing account of mourning between “Mourning and Melancholia” and *The Ego and the Id*, Clewell creates an interpretation of Freud that is neither, as with Sacks, bound to the limitations of narcissistic mourning nor, as with Ramazani, mired in melancholic rejection of consolation. She follows Freud through his “autodeconstructive” permutations (63), noting that he defines subject formation in terms of the infant’s loss of the mother. Though he goes on to interpret subject formation as a consequence of Oedipal rivalry, he ultimately abandons that avenue, thus, in Clewell’s reading, inviting us:

to return to the notion of identification with a lost loved object to explain the dual dynamic of ego formation and mourning . . . Consequently, Freud’s text raises the possibility for thinking about mourning as an affirmative and loving internalization of the lost other. (64)

By considering Freud intertextually we emerge with a reading of mourning that does not require substitution, that need not incite a pattern of melancholic violence toward oneself or the other, and that accounts for sustained grief without deeming it pathological.

Clewell’s analysis suggests that current interpretations of grief work in elegiac literature leave unexplored many of the avenues that lie between and beyond narcissistic mourning and pathological melancholia. If, as others scholars have done, I were to position my project in relation to Freud’s writing, I would do so not through “Mourning and Melancholia” or even *The Ego and the Id*, but rather through the essays that Freud wrote six months after the outbreak of the First World War,



collectively known as “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death.”<sup>9</sup> Freud may be best known for his psychoanalysis, but it is as a keen observer of the intersection of psychology and social change that he is most valuable for this discussion.

Early in “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud acknowledges, “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 243). Though he quickly moves on from this point, noting only that mourning and melancholia both stem from these “same influences” (243), the relationship between these two kinds of losses—the person and the abstraction—may have more to do with the difference between what he sees as productive mourning and pathological melancholia than he considers here. The relationship resurfaces, however, in his later essays, and assumes a more prominent role in his analysis.

Freud laments both the dead and the lost ideals of the pre-war era in “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” implicitly acknowledging that with the loss of the individual there is often the loss of an ideal, that the two are often bound together. This is something that Faulkner and Woolf take up in their novels; the source of the grief in *The Sound and the Fury* is, precisely, the distance between Caddy’s significance to each of her brothers and her own desires and actions as an individual. “Thoughts for the Times” is Freud’s opportunity to redress the first flaw he acknowledges in “Mourning and Melancholia,” that is, a lack of empirical evidence for the theories that follow. In his reflections on the war psychoanalysis meets historical reality, and the subsequent reconsiderations prove far more significant as a map of modern mourning than those early

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<sup>9</sup> Clewell mentions the essay in her attempts to work beyond “Mourning and Melancholia,” noting that in the later essay Freud registers a growing awareness of aggression, an element that plays a major role in his analysis of ego development in *The Ego and the Id* (58-59).

hypotheses.<sup>10</sup>

In “Our Attitude Towards Death,” the latter of the two essays, Freud offers an unusual characterization of public attitudes towards death both before and after the war. The prewar “sensitiveness” towards death, avoiding the mention of it, not allowing one to think of it, he describes as having a negative effect on daily life: “Life is impoverished, it loses in interest, when the highest stake in the game of living, life itself, may not be risked” (290). Freud sees as “an inevitable result” of this impoverishment that:

we should seek in the world of fiction, in literature and in the theatre compensation for what has been lost in life. There we still find people who know how to die—who, indeed, even manage to kill someone else. There alone too the condition can be fulfilled which makes it possible for us to reconcile ourselves with death: namely, that behind all the vicissitudes of life we should still be able to preserve a life intact. For it is really too sad that in life it should be as it is in chess, where one false move may force us to resign the game, but with the difference that we can start no second game, no return-match. In the realm of fiction we find the plurality of lives which we need. We die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves; yet we survive him, and are ready to die again just as safely with another hero. (291)

Freud’s sketch of the pre-war role of literature is a common one: fiction’s profusion of lives makes it possible to access experiences that lie beyond prudence. Literature complements life, the former expanding the experiential range of the latter. This attention to fiction immediately precedes Freud’s abrupt shift to a view of life altered by war:

Death will no longer be denied; we are forced to believe in it. People really die; and

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<sup>10</sup> This hesitation returns later in the essay, when Freud is forced to acknowledge that he has not seen evidence of his theory’s conclusion, namely that the disposition to melancholia “lies in the predominance of the narcissistic type of object-choice” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 250).

no longer one by one, but many, often tens of thousands, in a single day. And death is no longer a chance event. To be sure, it still seems a matter of chance whether a bullet hits this man or that; but a second bullet may well hit the survivor; and the accumulation of deaths puts an end to the impression of chance. Life has, indeed, become interesting again; it has recovered its full content. (291)

The terms of the analogy have altered. Freud describes a nightmare in which the diverting perils of literature have now encroached on life and in which the succession of fictional deaths swells into a suffocating mass of casualties in reality. Reality is now filled with the characters formerly of fiction: those who die, those who kill. But the question lingers, unasked: what, then, is the role of literature in the war-stricken world? Has fiction simply been replaced by a life lived in “full content,” or might it yet make a contribution in a world in which “we are unable to maintain our former attitude towards death, and have not yet found a new one” (292)? If pre-war literature extended the boundaries of man’s life experience beyond those set by his fear, then post-war literature might well turn to consider those boundaries, that fear, and the terrible nature of loss that is, unlike the losses of fiction, both permanent and real.

In reading Faulkner’s and Woolf’s texts, we continue to find “the plurality of lives we need” (“Thoughts for the Times” 291), but now, rather than identify with the heroes, we find our place among the bereaved. Caddy Compson’s brothers, Percival’s friends: Woolf’s and Faulkner’s characters surround the absent individual like mourners gathered at a funeral. The losses occur early, often unexpectedly, in the novels, leaving the remaining characters to find their way through the broken world that remains. Like Freud’s own text, in which he speaks from the position of the noncombatant, rather than the soldier, whose psychology he acknowledges as “interesting, no doubt . . . but I know too little about it” (291), Faulkner and Woolf position their speakers around the

dead, rather than as the hero who dies. Their novels address a world in which war may well have made it impossible for post-war writers or readers to feel safe from death, even in literature, and they begin, instead, to learn to mourn.

If the old role of literature was to extend the limits of one's careful life, in a postwar world the literature seems best positioned to offer, in multiple voices, the songs of mourning that society has not yet found the words to sing. Although Freud ultimately concludes that the war "compels us once more to be heroes who cannot believe in their own death" (299), Woolf's and Faulkner's emphasis on the mourner, rather than the dead, calls to mind an observation that Freud makes much earlier in the essay: "It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators" (289). The spectator's position links the individual both to a loved one's death and to the spectator's imagination of his or her own death. By positioning their characters not as "heroes" but as spectators, mourners, Faulkner and Woolf insist on the presence of death in the post-war novel and explore just what, of death or mourning, might be learned from it. Indeed, the approach to life as a hero is one that Woolf, in particular, saw as dangerously flawed:

The reason why it is easy to kill another person must be that one's imagination is too sluggish to conceive what his life means to him—the infinite possibilities of a succession of days which are furled in him, & have already been spent. (*Diary* 1:186 [27 August 1918])<sup>11</sup>

As she noted in comparing her memoirs with the fictional lives she created: "A real life has no crisis. . . . It must lack centre. It must amble on" (*Diary* 5:335). This, then, lies behind Woolf's desire to see the ordinariness in the other that heroism—and, I would add, eulogy—can only obscure. Faulkner's

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<sup>11</sup> Froula also reads this comment as an indicator of Woolf's aesthetic project. In her reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, she claims that Woolf creates "an elegiac act of imagination that intrinsically opposes violence" (*Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* 96).

attitude toward heroism is more ambivalent, and yet he, too, refrains from making the larger-than-life Sutpens and McCaslins the centers of his texts, focusing instead on the wreckage left behind by such characters.

In *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Waves*, the authors use multiple voices to approach grief, generating questions about the limitations of traditional mourning language and the elegist's opportunity to benefit by speaking for the dead. In *As I Lay Dying* and *Jacob's Room*, Faulkner and Woolf use fiction to give voice to the dead, enabling the lost characters' account to stand against the words of the elegists, and thus raise a concern about the significance of that central position and the silence that seems to be required along with it. Finally, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Go Down, Moses* set the protagonist on the margins of the text, making another character's death the story's focus, and thus separate into two characters the roles that are often united in one. Doing so enables the authors to create texts in which both the mourner and the dead are present, spectators in the authors' ongoing struggle to determine death's place in the shaping of life and narrative. The mourners' marginality offers an opportunity to consider modern mourning and death critically, to make of the elegy something more than a replacement for the lost loved one. Faulkner and Woolf defamiliarize the act of mourning so that it can be addressed anew. Rather than, as Freud does, consider the outsider perspective a sign of imaginative failure in overcoming the unconscious belief in one's own immortality, Faulkner and Woolf use such marginality to insist on the multiplicity of voices singing elegy, voices that insist on their own limitations and those of the dead.

### **Poetic Inclinations**

Although they write in prose, Faulkner and Woolf are as interested in the formal components of the elegiac tradition as they are in the thematic ones. Peter Sacks notes in his study

of the genre that the elegy was originally defined by its form, rather than its content; only in the sixteenth century did the elegy come to be allied with poems of mourning and loss (3). In their reflections on their own writing, Woolf and Faulkner repeatedly link form and mourning. Although Faulkner often explained his unwieldy sentences as the result of “the compulsion to say everything in one sentence,” in one version he adds the rationale: “because you may not live long enough to have two sentences” (*Lion* 141). Even the genre in which he writes is tightly linked to his own mortality:

35-45 is the best age for writing novels, fire not used up, author knows more. This type of writing is slower, the fire lasts longer. 17-26 is the best age for writing poetry. Writing poetry is like a sky rocket—all the fire condensed in one rocket. Most outstanding poetry is written by young men. (*Lion* 56)

In the turn from poetry to prose, clearly drawn from his own experience, Faulkner inscribes a lament for the loss of the “fire” that poetic form’s restrictions only enhance. Thus his repeated characterization of himself as a “failed poet,” rather than a novelist, makes synonymous the successful novelist and the waning poet. But in observing that loss Faulkner does not relinquish all claims to poetry. He claims in another interview, “My prose is really poetry” (56), indicating that he has not, as Freud encourages mourners to do, severed all ties with the lost object. Instead, Faulkner’s characterization of himself as a “failed poet” encompasses both his role as a former poet and also his later work, in which he was still, in a sense, writing poetry.

Faulkner’s inclination to link himself to the poetic tradition allows him to distinguish his writing from the dominant American literary culture of New England. When asked if some novelists use the techniques of poetry, he acknowledges:

Conrad has done it at times. Almost every writer of the Mississippi Valley has used

it, Sherwood Anderson; the Americans east of the mountains more tend to the European and they don't need to resort to lyricism. They have a more expressive, a more precise, rational concept of the material they use, so their kinship is more to the French writers. But the so-called primitive, which would be the uncouth or middle westerner, is more prone to resort to lyricism. (*Lion* 186)

In a backhanded compliment to his Eastern comrades Faulkner links the “uncouth” with the lyrical, something that must be “resorted to” when rational precision is not at one’s command. This distinction between rational and lyrical American literature has repercussions for his larger views on literature, tradition, and audience. When asked to characterize American literature, Faulkner breaks up writers by surprising means:

Well, with Eliot there is this difference—Poe [96] dealt in prose, while the poet deals with something which is so pure and so esoteric that you cannot say he is English or Japanese—he deals in something that is universal. That’s the distinction I make between the prose writer and the poet, the novelist and the poet—that the poet deals in something universal, while the novelist deals in his own traditions. (*Lion* 95-96)

In a characteristic sleight-of-hand, Faulkner’s designation of most modern American writers as “rational” becomes the means by which he renders them provincial, whereas the “primitive” lyricism of his own literature is precisely what links him to a larger pool of literary traditions.

Faulkner’s dismissal of “rational” writers, however seemingly complimentary, echoes Woolf’s criticisms of Edwardian writers in her essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” when she takes Arnold Bennett to task for “telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines,” rather than conveying the voice of the character herself (*Essays* 3:430). Both authors see a kind of narrowness in fellow writers’ analysis, however capacious it appears. As Woolf complains, “They

have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature” (*Essays* 3:430). In the series of statements I quoted above, Faulkner offers a glimpse of what is at stake for him in claiming poetic ties. Although he is often characterized as a Mississippi writer whose meticulous characterization of a “postage stamp”-sized piece of fictional land not only establishes his place in literature but also binds him to it (*Lion* 255), Faulkner himself seems much less concerned with those geographical ties: “I’m inclined to think that my material, the South, is not very important to me. I just happen to know it, and don’t have time in one life to learn another one and write at the same time (*Letters* 185). Being a poet, even a failed one, allows Faulkner to think beyond the boundaries of Southern and even American writing to a deeper literary tradition.

Woolf also distinguishes between rational and poetic frames of mind, and she admires what she sees as examples of their successful union. In her 1929 essay, “Phases of Fiction,” Woolf praises Proust for balancing the demands of poetry, which offers vision and space, and novelistic realism, which provides memorable details through which to fix the individual nature of the story. “The mind of Proust,” she asserts, “lies open with the sympathy of a poet and the detachment of a scientist” (*Essays* 5:67):

As a consequence of the union of the thinker and the poet, often, on the heel of some fanatically precise observation, we come upon a flight of imagery – beautiful, coloured, visual, as if the mind, having carried its powers as far as possible in analysis, suddenly rose in the air and from a station high up gave us a different view of the same subject in terms of metaphor. This dual vision makes the great characters in Proust and the whole world from which they spring more like a globe, of which one side is always hidden, than a scene laid flat before us, the whole of



which we can take in at one glance. (*Essays* 5:68)

The additional dimension that is derived from the union of poetry and analysis is something that Woolf herself strives for, and it results, crucially, in some part of the literature remaining hidden. For Woolf, characterization is not the laying bare of the character, but rather the developing of a sense in a reader that there is more to the character than either narrator or reader can see at all times. Her tendency to, like Proust, create characters with “one side . . . always hidden” is most evident in her absent central characters.

One of Woolf’s contemporaries, E. M. Forster, proves a keen observer of the competing poetic and novelistic tendencies in Woolf’s work. In his 1941 Rede Lecture on Woolf at Cambridge, itself an interesting study in elegy, Forster outlines Woolf’s writing career, emphasizing her poetic inclinations throughout. In moving quickly from the early “Kew Gardens” and “The Mark on the Wall” to *Jacob’s Room*, Forster pauses: “The improbable has occurred: a method essentially poetic and apparently trifling has been applied to fiction” (255). Of *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*: “These successful works are all suffused with poetry and enclosed in it” (255). But his approbation is mixed with concern:

What wraiths, apart from their context, are the wind-sextet from *The Waves*, or Jacob away from *Jacob’s Room*! They speak no more to us or to one another as soon as the page is turned. And this is her great difficulty. Holding on with one hand to poetry, she stretches and stretches to grasp things which are best gained by letting go of poetry. She would not let go, and I think she was quite right, though critics who like a novel to be a novel will disagree. She was quite right to cling to her specific gift, even if this entailed sacrificing something else vital to her art. And she did not always have to sacrifice; Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay do remain with the reader afterwards,

and so perhaps do Rachel from *The Voyage Out*, and Clarissa Dalloway. (258)

He offers in sum, “So that is her problem. She is a poet, who wants to write something as near to a novel as possible” (259). Woolf chafed at critics’ suggestions that her characters were “ghosts”—a term used by her own husband upon reading *Jacob’s Room* (*Diary* 2:186)—but it is worth noting that the ghost-like qualities of her characters seem to come from her writing’s poetry.

### The Modern Elegy in Prose

*As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror . . . And the novelists in future will realise more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number.*

— Woolf, “The Mark on the Wall”

*I’m convinced that every writer is influenced by every word he ever read anywhere, from the telephone directory up, or down. The advertisements, the newspapers, the books; and he probably can’t say with any truth, ‘This influenced me more than another.’ He doesn’t know, but everything he ever read has influenced him.*

— Faulkner, *Lion in the Garden*

The elegy holds a particular allure for both Woolf and Faulkner. Faulkner’s consistently presented his relationship with poetry in elegiac terms, as if poetry and elegy were synonymous; when Woolf was asked for the poem to which she could return “unsated,” she named Milton’s “Lycidas,” a hallmark of English pastoral elegy (*Diary* 3:330). By aligning themselves with poetry, Woolf and Faulkner distinguish their work from the novelistic traditions that precede them, both British and American. As I explore further in the final chapter of this study, Faulkner consistently ranked the novel last in his list of literary forms, behind poetry and the short story, disparaging it as

the “clumsy method of Mark Twain and Dreiser” (*University* 145). Woolf, for her part, delivered some of her most formidable criticism against the “materialist” novels by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, writers concerned “not with the spirit but with the body” (“Modern Fiction” 147).

Although Jahan Ramazani cites an earlier version of this very Woolf essay as evidence of the “popular myth of that modern” that “posits that in 1900 or 1910 or 1916 literature broke free from the past and, as a corollary, from the chains of generic affiliation” (23-24), I would employ both Woolf and Faulkner in seconding Ramazani’s larger claim: “Because the relation of the modern elegy to literary tradition is one neither of seamless continuity nor of complete rupture, genre analysis helps to focus both departures and inheritances” (24-25).<sup>12</sup> For all their admiration of poetry and their use of the elegy in particular, both Faulkner and Woolf chose to write elegies in prose, bringing to the poetic genre some of the strengths of the novel that they were so anxious to reinvent.

In a description of the modern novel in her essay, “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” Woolf emphasizes the new form’s indirection, the “sweeps and circles” with which it will dominate the literary world:

So, then, this unnamed variety of the novel will be written standing back from life . . . will be written in prose . . . prose thus treated will show itself capable of rising high from the ground, not in one dart, but in sweeps and circles. (*Essays* 3:438)

Robert Penn Warren’s description of Faulkner’s work echoes this play with direction and elevation: “His movement has not been linear, but spiral, passing over the same point again and again, but at different altitudes” (257). Although Woolf’s characterization captures her admiration for the new novel’s versatility, Faulkner is perhaps just as accurate, if less flattering, in summing up the qualities

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<sup>12</sup> Ramazani offers a great deal of evidence first for the common attitude that genre was abandoned in the modern era and then, just as strongly, of critics and theorists who recognizes the significance of a turning away from genre as itself a genre-affirming activity. Ramazani’s catalogue concludes with the following quotation from Derrida: “Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text” (25).

of the new novelist when he claimed that, if reincarnated, he would like to return as a buzzard (*Lion* 243).

Both authors' emphasis on versatility in writing, their perspectival agility, makes clear how much they rely on the novel's heteroglossic possibilities. The dialogue of voices within the novel, each character or narrator approaching the subject from different social or emotional positions, enables the authors to explore the "division between or within mourning voices" that Peter Sacks identifies as a key trope in the elegiac tradition (34-35). "[E]ven in elegies that call themselves 'monodies,' such as 'Lycidas,'" Sacks notes, "the voice of the elegist seems to work through several moments of extreme divisiveness or multiplicity" (35). As I shall argue in the subsequent chapters, the antiphonal choruses in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* find their counterparts in the call and response of a grief-stricken black woman and her brother in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*; the vacillations of the mourning poet in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* are mirrored by the paranoid, often suicidal, thoughts of Septimus Smith in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Sacks explains the preponderance of divided mourning voices in elegy as a means of confronting death, making it difficult to hide behind denial:

A separation of voices thus reflects and carries forward the necessarily dialectical movement of the work of mourning, not merely in the process of recognition but for the entire project of withdrawal and reattachment of affections. (36)

Woolf's and Faulkner's novels take the dialogue further, using the spaciousness of the novel and its community of characters to engage the division of voices as a social, as well as psychological, phenomenon. The call and response of *Go Down, Moses* is narrated through the eyes of a white lawyer whose elite education still leaves him ill-prepared to recognize or understand the mourning tradition he witnesses. Regard for Woolf's Septimus Smith as an elegist becomes more complex

when his suicide makes him the subject of another's fleeting elegy, his death a news item in a novel about another person, *Clarissa Dalloway*. Faulkner may make the heteroglossic stakes of novelistic elegy clearest in *The Sound and the Fury*, when the elegy is staged four times, each piece incomplete and in need of the other narrative sections to offer the reader a reasonably clear picture of the character and ideals being mourned.

If there is a sense in which literary mourning can be completed, it can do so only dialogically, as Woolf and Faulkner do through the crowd of mourners in their novels. Rather than offer a single elegist who is critical, inchoate, and eulogistic in turns, the novelists distribute these different approaches among various characters who are then forced to interact with one another's modes of grieving. Through such interaction mourning and elegy are in conversation with a larger set of social influences. Although the traditional elegist often professes to offer only a pure outpouring of emotion, Woolf's and Faulkner's works reframe the scene of mourning to include the elegist's audience, his or her social and educational position, and the various other influences that have shaped such emotions. As Mikhail Bakhtin observed of traditional grief:

The dead are loved in a different way. They are removed from the sphere of contact, one can and indeed must speak of them in a different style. Language about the dead is stylistically quite distinct from language about the living. (20)

By addressing the elegy in the novel Woolf and Faulkner challenge this distinction, approaching the dead from a variety of perspectives, and in doing so they return the dead to "the sphere of contact." When Woolf writes of her mother's death, it is the distancing, the making "unreal" of the dead, that she finds most disturbing: "The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn, and self-conscious. . . . It obscured, it dulled" ("A Sketch of the Past" 95). The novel offers a way of re-personalizing or re-

characterizing the elegiac subject so only the loved one is lost, and not the bereaved's understanding of who that person was when alive.

Unlike the Freudian emphasis on reconstructing the ego after loss, Bakhtin's heteroglossic approach makes the most of what he sees as the naturally decentralizing predilections of the novel:

These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (263)

In Bakhtinian language, Woolf and Faulkner write “novelized” elegy, elegies that:

become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the ‘novelistic’ layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally—this is the most important thing—the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present). (7)

This openendedness, attention to historical specificity over storytelling resolution, is precisely what Faulkner and Woolf require to rewrite the terms of mourning after a war that has, for them and for other writers of the period, changed the way that mourning can and should be done. The “presentness” of the novel aids Faulkner in unmooring the past from its antebellum mystique, “all magnolias and crinoline and Grecian portals and things like that” (*University* 131). But the self-critical language of the novel allows him to do that without inscribing a new, fixed vision of the South, an element to which Faulkner alludes in his repeated emphasis on his “failure” as a writer, and which Bakhtin sees as an essential component of the novel: “Novelistic discourse is always

criticizing itself. In this consists the categorical distinction between the novel and all straightforward genres—the epic poem, the lyric and the drama” (49).

Although Bakhtin emphasizes the way in which heteroglossic dialogue occurs at the level of the narrator in novels, in many of Faulkner’s and Woolf’s novels the characters take on the narrator’s role, perhaps most comprehensively so in *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Waves*, and *As I Lay Dying*. In my reading of this attention to character, the authors insist on the heteroglossia within the story—the conversation among friends and family—in order to thematize the dialogic interactions that shape the elegy.

Recent work by Alex Woloch, in which he offers a new theorization of character, also emphasizes the role of characters in these dialogic negotiations, reinforcing my sense that the characters do more of the work of social criticism and engagement than is often assumed in literary studies. In *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, Woloch considers the suite of characters in nineteenth-century novels in terms of “character-space,” which he defines as “the *intersection* of an implied human personality . . . with the definitively circumscribed form of a narrative” (13). These character-spaces are, in turn, considered as parts of a “character-system,” “the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces . . . into a unified narrative structure” (14).

In Bakhtin’s most influential essay, “Discourse in the Novel,” he outlines five “compositional-stylistic unities” (262) that make up the novel. Bakhtin’s analysis emphasizes the role of the narrator in enacting the heteroglossic dialogue within the novel, but Woloch’s analysis focuses on the role of the characters as, through their own speech and through the narrative attention given to them, they play out the competition for space within the novel. Both theorists attend to the social dimensions of the novel, but Bakhtin does so largely through the ways in which

language reflects historical “openendedness” in the novel and Woloch does so largely through the jockeying of various bodies within the novel for narrative and, by extension, social, control.

The strength of Woloch’s theory is his attention to the relationship between the individual character’s significance as considered both within the novel’s fictional world and as that role is played out in narrative space, the negotiation between the social and the formal that takes place in narrative. Moving between story and discourse, Woloch argues that “Narrative meaning takes shape in the dynamic flux of attention and neglect toward the various characters who are locked within the same story but have radically different positions within the narrative” (2). This analysis of a formal dialectic has a social dimension, as well:

all character-space inevitably point us toward the character-system . . . the space of a particular character emerges only vis-à-vis the other characters who crowd him out or potentially revolve around him. It is precisely here that the social dimension of form emerges. (18)

The focus of Woloch’s study and mine differ in that he is particularly motivated by the “competing pull of inequality and democracy within the nineteenth-century bourgeois imagination” (31), with specific attention to Marx’s influence. He focuses thus on minor characters, rather than protagonists, as these minor characters make us aware of the constriction that is enacted by narrative on the “space” of a character, the tension that results from reconciling the two competing roles of the character: their narrative function and the extent to which they represent a unique personality.

Woloch is interested in “the relationship between one central individual who dominates the story and a host of subordinate figures who jostle for, and within, the limited space that remains” (2). That jostling, the bursting out of minor characters within the narrative limitations, takes precedence in his analysis. In my reading of twentieth-century novels, the focus is different:



Faulkner and Woolf challenge the significance of that central figure's position, particularly in the elegy, when the elegiac subject's centrality to the "story" of mourning takes a backseat to the elegist's discourse. This formal change occurs in the shadow of the First World War, when the sheer number of casualties overwhelmed the stories of individual heroes, and the responsibility for speaking to such losses may seem beyond any single elegist's abilities.

## Two Responses to Grief Work

Although much of the correspondence that I emphasize between Faulkner's work and Woolf's is formal in nature, they themselves might protest so much emphasis on form. In response to interview questions that focused on form or style, Faulkner responded that he was too busy "writing about men and women, human beings, the human heart in conflict with itself, with its fellows, or with its environment" to attend to such matters (*University* 88):

whenever my imaginaton [sic] and the bounds of that pattern conflicted, it was the pattern that bulged . . . that gave. When something had to give it wasn't the imagination, the pattern shifted and gave. That may be the reason that man has to rewrite and rewrite—to reconcile the imagination and pattern. (51-52)

Faulkner also wrote and spoke in terms of characters, rather than in finished books. When he was confronted about discrepancies of dates and details between the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* and the *Compson Appendix*, he argued, "[A]t the age of 30 I did not know these people as at 45 I now do; that I was even wrong now and then in the very conclusions I drew from watching them, and the information in which I once believed" (*Letters* 222).

Woolf was quite sensitive to the criticism that her novels lacked well-rounded characters. She confronted those critics who accused her of prioritizing form over character in her introduction

to *Mrs. Dalloway*, which I consider in further detail in Chapter Four. In her attack on Arnold Bennett she takes care to agree on the importance of characters before going on to critique the way he built his:

I believe that all novels . . . deal with character, and that it is to express character – not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved. (*Essays* 3:425)

A key element in both Faulkner's and Woolf's work is the craft of character-making, and it is in their emphasis on character that they offer their most significant challenges to elegiac precedence. In shifting the elegiac relationship from poetry to prose, they make both the elegist and the elegiac subject characters within a larger narrative field. The shift from a lyric "I" to a narrating character is a radical one, and it enables Faulkner and Woolf to explore the relationship between the individual qualities of a character and the limitations of what and how he or she sees. By making the elegiac subject a character, the authors also undermine the tendency to treat the elegiac subject from a distance, as if he or she did not have individual qualities or flaws. Both Faulkner and Woolf were, ironically enough, criticized for the implausibility of their characters, Faulkner for creating caricatures rather than characters, and Woolf for making her characters with all the substance of wraiths. But the profusion of spectral saints and heroes in their novels is a nod to the social and literary convention of speaking of the dead in unreal terms; their engagement with the conventions of the elegy does much to call into question the wisdom of such detachment.

Psychoanalytic theories of mourning and traditional elegy emphasize the elegist's voice, the restorative work to be done by speaking of the dead: repeating his or her name, creating a volume of words to mark and replace that lost one, and, in some versions, crafting a prayer in which the elegist

offers up the dead to the care of a deity. There is, however, little attention to the lost voice of the elegiac subject, particularly in Freudian readings that rely on a narcissistic view of the bereaved individual that ignores the subjectivity of the dead. Faulkner's and Woolf's concern with character makes them sensitive to the ways in which such practices limit the range of elegiac attitudes and expressions and fail to acknowledge the subjectivity of the lost individual. In their novels they do much to restore the voices of the elegist and the elegiac subject, using the novel as a means of renegotiating the character-space of what was originally a poetic relationship between mourner and the dead.

They begin by multiplying the elegists in their work, creating a contest of mourning voices that draws attention to the stakes of the elegist's position and models a community of mourning in which not all mourners speak with the same words or the same voice. Unlike the poetic elegists Sacks considers, Woolf's and Faulkner's divided voices need not act in direct competition or succession, but instead remain juxtaposed with one another in a dialogue about modes of grief. In their attention to characters' voices Faulkner and Woolf facilitate a kind of novel-writing in which the protagonist does not take the lion's share of discursive and story space, as is the case with the majority of the nineteenth-century texts Woloch studies. Instead, by creating an absent center in their novels, a figure who is both significant and silenced, Woolf and Faulkner retain the form of the novel while renegotiating the role of peripheral figures, establishing a dialectical relationship between the absent figures at the center and the peripheral figures who attempt to speak for them.

Woolf's and Faulkner's attention to character voice does not stop at the elegist, however. They offer the voices of the dead themselves, raising questions about the truth of the elegist's story and also, intriguingly, about the dead person's own ability to represent him- or herself to the reader. Here, too, there is a poetic parallel, what Diana Fuss has called the "corpse poem," in which the

dead speak for themselves, a genre I explore further in Chapter Three. In Fuss's estimation:

Corpse poems, unlike elegies, strive to reconstitute death, not to compensate for it. . . . The corpse poem thus illustrates a more complicated and contradictory relation to loss than the elegy, which continues to rely heavily upon a binary of consolation and refusal that the corpse poem views as suspect in a world that hardly knows how to calculate its losses. (25-26)

I read the corpse poem as a sub-genre of elegy, but in other ways Fuss's work provides a useful set of terms for considering the novels in which Woolf's and Faulkner's elegiac subjects break out of their silent roles, challenging the stories that are being told about them.

In a second, equally significant, challenge to the elegy, Faulkner and Woolf revisit the goal of mourning, challenging the "grief work" that is at the core of psychoanalytically inflected readings of elegy. For Peter Sacks, dialogue is a way to for elegists to "intensify and indicate their own 'work' as survivors" (35). The mourning of the elegist is, in his reading, full of action, a process that the elegy enacts through a set of rituals. The work of art becomes a work of mourning. But much of Faulkner's and Woolf's work seems designed to get out from underneath the burden of "grief work" (*Trauerarbeit*) that Freud lays on mourners. Productive grief, grief as a means of re-establishing the ego, and disregard for the other all come under fire in their novels.

The "grief work" of which Freud writes is used to distance the living from the dead, to reclaim all that the mourner has invested in the dead, and to do so through labor. The work of mourning occurs:

bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged . . . Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily

painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. (“Mourning and Melancholia” 245)

Julia Kristeva has most openly addressed the violence that such mourning does to the other in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. That very violence to the other is, however, what Faulkner and Woolf reject in their novel elegies. They work, instead, to acknowledge the lingering traces of the dead: challenging eulogy, bringing back the voice of the living through variations on the “corpse poem,” and dethroning the elegist’s unique claim to speak for the dead. Mourning is insistently incomplete in these works.

In his own criticisms of Freud’s “grief work,” Jacques Derrida puts pressure on the implied “success” of such processes: “In the era of psychoanalysis, we all of course speak, and we can always go on speaking, about the ‘successful’ work of mourning—or, inversely; as if it were precisely the contrary, about a ‘melancholia’ that would signal the failure of such work” (174). He goes on to speak of Louis Marin’s work as:

a work without force, a work that would have to work at failure, and thus at mourning and getting over force, a work working at its own unproductivity, absolutely, working to absolve or to absolve itself of whatever might be absolute about ‘force.’ (174)

He resists the terms of success: the violence implicit in Freud’s formulation. As Derrida considers the space of alternative models of grief, he suggests that something might be done with “virtual work,” “a virtual space, of an *opus*, an *opus operatum*, that would accomplish the possible *as such* without effacing it or even enacting it in reality. The thought of a spectral power of the virtual work” (175). These reflections, coming several years after his earlier problematizing of “successful”

grief in *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, suggest that Freud's grief work must be, in some ways, gotten out of in order that the work of grief can occur. Work is employed here only in order to undo the demands of grief work, to unravel the restrictions of "successful" mourning.

In addition to the ways that Faulkner and Woolf take on the challenges of character voice in elegy, their emphasis on novels as sites of character-making lead them to protect the elegiac subject from becoming an object subsumed in the course of grief work. Both Septimus Smith and Rider, subjects erupting from within the texts of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Go Down, Moses*, respectively, are characters in mourning and, at their deaths, potential subjects of elegy. Although neither would be called his novel's protagonist, both characters challenge the expectations of productive mourning. Woolf uses Septimus's persistent grief to explore the fissure between veterans and noncombatants, as the latter turn perhaps too readily to diagnoses of mental illness to silence the poetic voices of those who witnessed the war on the front. Faulkner's character, Rider, refuses to engage in mourning in a way that perpetuates the linking of black bodies with labor, a stain from the days of slavery. Like Benjy Compson, of *The Sound and the Fury*, who knows neither past nor future, but only an unrelenting present, these characters insist on loss as a matter of the present; their silencing comes only at the loss of their lives, a marker of the tension between their expressions of grief and the communities around them.

In the subsequent chapters, the novels of Faulkner and Woolf are placed in dialogue with one another, both within a single chapter, as with Chapter Three, and across chapters, as with the other four, so as to facilitate both readings of their individual novels and intertextual interpretation. This project is chiasmic in nature: Faulkner begins and ends the dissertation, but Woolf forms its core. Most significantly, the arrangement shifts the attention from chronology to what we might think of as three stages of elegy-making: the multiplication of the elegist's perspective, inviting

criticism of the individual elegist's limits and the social forces at work in shaping the words of mourning; the revivification of the voice of the elegiac subject, defying the disengagement from the dead that is Freud's legacy to mourning; and the subsequent questioning of the nature of successful mourning through the bodies of those who are both mourners and the mourned.

Like *The Sound and the Fury*, which revels in the different voices of its elegists, Woolf's *The Waves*, the subject of Chapter Two, explores both the harmony and the dissonance in the mourning hymn of its six speaking characters. Unlike Faulkner's novel, however, the competition between the mourning voices is acute in Woolf's work, and there is pathos as well as satisfaction in the final pages when only a single mourner speaks and readers 'hear' the silence of the other voices. In the third chapter I explore the surprising eruption of the voices of the dead in *Jacob's Room* and *As I Lay Dying*, voices that challenge the eulogies of the other characters and insist on the dead's individuality. In the final chapters of the project I shift from the novel's contribution to the elegy to the way in which elegy rewrites the terms of the modern novel. Woolf's and Faulkner's use of the elegy enables them to change the dynamic between protagonists and minor characters, keeping the elegiac subject at the center of the story, but attending to the voices of the elegists who remain, warily, on the margins of the narrative. Lucas Beauchamp and Clarissa Dalloway do, to some extent, dominate their novels, *Go Down, Moses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, respectively, and both characters flirt with death, but the dying is done by another in both books, leaving both characters free to engage their social and narrative positions in new, peripheral ways. Although there may still be "people who know how to die" in fiction, as Freud put it, the reader stays behind, standing with the characters who live to grieve.

## II

### Monopolizing Mourning: Competitive Elegy and the Fragmented Subject in *The Waves*

As early as 1925, Virginia Woolf's diary entries show her casting about for an adequate description of her work: "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new—by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (*Diary* 3:34). It is something of a critical commonplace to begin with this quotation, using it as a point of departure for discussions of Woolf's formal experimentation or the family deaths that haunted her youth. I begin with it, and will remain with it, because elegy not only captures the spirit of her novels, but is indeed frequently the subject under examination in them. Many of Woolf's novels bear out the choice of elegy: she performs a hymn of mourning for the war in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), for her parents in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and for the elegiac tradition itself in *The Waves* (1931).<sup>1</sup> Woolf's relationship with the elegy in this last work is a complex one, as she both uses the elegy to draw together her fragmented work and criticizes the genre for its limitations.

A closer look at Woolf's engagement with elegy in *The Waves* makes it easier to see more than simply biographical elegiac threads in those earlier novels, thus my attention to it first of Woolf's works. It is also the novel in which Woolf offers her clearest criticisms of the elegy, criticisms that generated the elegiac reinventions one sees in the other novels. By making the character Bernard the elegist of *The Waves*, Woolf demonstrates the unifying power of the elegy, as he speaks for the five other mourning characters. But in doing so she also reveals the flaws of such a form: the nuances of those other perspectives are lost, the representation of the dead lies vulnerable to manipulation for the poet's benefit, and other, perhaps worthier, elegiac subjects are

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<sup>1</sup> For a sense of the growing body of work on Woolf and elegy, see Zwerdling, "*Jacob's Room*"; Froula, "Mrs. Dalloway's Post-War Elegy"; Clewell, "Consolation Refused"; Bradshaw, "Vanished, Like Leaves"; Smythe; and Low.



ignored—all in order to fit the demands of a genre that is circumscribed by the traditions of British schoolboy life.

As “an educated man’s daughter” (*Three Guineas* 17), Woolf stands to inherit those traditions, though, inasmuch as being a daughter and not a son kept her from formal education, she also remains outside them. Since the elegy is a genre concerned as much with inheritance as it is with mourning, a consideration of Woolf’s treatment of the elegy enables one to understand how she navigates her dual position as the daughter of Leslie Stephen, a prominent figure of Victorian intellectual life, and as a major player in modernist reinvention. Genre provides her with intellectual engagement without requiring a baccalaureate degree. Identifying herself as part of an established literary tradition also makes it difficult for others to lump her work in with that of the female sentimental fiction writers of the time. And in claiming the elegy she leverages its rich tradition against the weight of the nineteenth-century novel, using the former to wrench her work away from the triple-deckers that were so close in time and yet so far in aesthetics. In reaching back to the elegy, Woolf bypasses a direct confrontation with her immediate predecessors—one that she made elsewhere, in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1923)—by drawing from a literary tradition that is of another time and another genre.

As I indicated in the introduction, Woolf respected Proust for his marriage of scientific detachment and poetic sympathy, and it was poetry that E. M. Forster later identified as the defining feature of her own oeuvre. In her essays and diary entries, however, she envisions a modern convergence of styles in which poetry gives ground before prose, even as prose becomes more liltingly poetic. In the essay “Poetry, Fiction and the Future” (1927), better known as “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” she predicts the course of literature, a prediction that prefigures the turn her own writing will take in subsequent years:

[W]e may guess that we are going in the direction of prose and that in ten or fifteen years' time prose will be used for purposes for which prose has never been used before. That cannibal, the novel, which has devoured so many forms of art will by then have devoured even more. We shall be forced to invent new names for the different books which masquerade under this one heading. And it is possible that there will be among the so-called novels one which we shall scarcely know how to christen. It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted. By what name we are to call it is not a matter of very great importance. What is important is that this book which we see on the horizon may serve to express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them. (*Essays* 4:434-435)

A form that expresses what poetry and plays no longer can: one year later she calls *The Waves* her "playpoem" (*Diary* 3:203) and writes, "I will never write a novel again. Little bits of rhyme come in" (3:177). Although in "The Narrow Bridge of Art" Woolf ostensibly forecasts a change in the literary future, she conveniently makes the catalogue of genres more hospitable to the writing she is already producing.

In her description of the novel as a "cannibal" that eats up the other forms, one hears a precursor of Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel":

[The novel] sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness. It draws them ineluctably into its orbit precisely

because this orbit coincides with the basic direction of the development of literature as a whole. (7)

If one senses Woolf chafing at the limitations of the available genres, one also hears a note of exultation at the opportunities to be had when poetry will be, as Bakhtin might call it, “novelized.”

Woolf’s claim that “it is not a matter of very great importance” what the new work is called flies in the face of her interest, expressed elsewhere, in finding a name for her work that links it to traditional forms. In her diaries she repeatedly demonstrates a desire to place her work in its literary context, even as she remains concerned that making it fit will inhibit the more experimental aspects of her writing. In a 1929 entry, speaking of what will later become *The Waves*, she writes:

But there must be more unity between each scene than I can find at present.

Autobiography it might be called. How am I to make one lap, or act . . . more intense than another; if there are only scenes? One must get the sense that this is the beginning; this the middle; that the climax. (*Diary* 3:229)

Generic conventions offer a formal restraint that Woolf finds necessary to her work—“[E]verything in a work of art should be mastered and ordered” (*Essays* 4:439)—even as she struggles to find the form that will fit her own vision.

What Woolf calls poetry’s tendency to “balk” before the mess of the modern world makes it seem as though the elegy would be a part of the poetic world that modern writing has left behind. But in “The Narrow Bridge of Art” Woolf confesses to a longing for the beauty of that world, suggesting that she has not fully abandoned it:

But can prose . . . chant the elegy? . . . I think not. This is the penalty it pays for having dispensed with the incantation and the mystery, with rhyme and metre. . . . one has always a feeling of discomfort in the presence of the purple patch of the

prose poem. The objection to the purple patch, however, is not that it is purple but that it is a patch. (*Essays* 4:436-4377)

In putting the writing of elegy at the heart of *The Waves*, Woolf makes room for the beauty of poetry and the elegiac tradition in her modern and experimental prose work. But the critical distance she achieves by making Bernard the elegist allows her to fault the elegy for encouraging one to “take refuge in the past” (*Essays* 4:434).

Distance, Jahan Ramazani argues, is the mark of the modern elegist, and it is that distance from one’s subject that enables the modern elegist to refashion the profile of the elegy even as he or she employs it (46). In Ramazani’s estimation, the pursuit of mourning is only one half of the modern elegist’s work. The other half is his or her contention with the mantle of the elegiac tradition: “the modern elegy more radically violates previous generic norms than did earlier phases of elegy: it becomes anti-consolatory and anti-encomiastic, anti-romantic and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary” (2). Although the question Woolf poses in her 1925 diary entry, whether or not to call her work “elegy,” appears to be casual speculation, I argue that by 1931, with the publication of *The Waves*, Woolf has made elegy the backbone of her work, using her six speaking characters’ search for order to dramatize her own search for novelistic form.<sup>2</sup> In the end, elegy dominates the scene, with Bernard’s voice drowning out the other characters in his lament for the absent center, Percival.<sup>3</sup> But the novel begins with six voices, rather than one. Bernard’s concluding soliloquy carries traces of the other five voices that were lost, a loss that Woolf makes present in her rewriting of the elegy and that carries her critique of the traditional elegist’s monopoly

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<sup>2</sup> Although it becomes clear early in *The Waves* that the soliloquies by Jinny, Neville, Bernard, Rhoda, Susan, and Louis are not spoken aloud, the turn from one character’s thoughts to another’s is prefaced by “x said.” I will follow critical tradition in referring to the words attributed to them as if the characters had spoken aloud.

<sup>3</sup> André Bleikasten uses the term and defines it, “to borrow a phrase from Wallace Stevens—as a ‘center on the horizon,’ insofar as it represents at once the novel’s origin and its *telos*” (*The Most Splendid Failure* 51). Bernard uses a similar trope in *The Waves*: “he sat there in the centre. Now I go to that spot no longer. The place is empty” (110).

on mourning.

### Performing Victorian Mourning

*We have no ceremonies, only private dirges and no conclusions, only violent sensations, each separate. Nothing that has been said meets our case.*

– Bernard, *The Waves*

Any longing for the past that appears in Woolf's work is certainly not a longing for the pageantry of Victorian mourning. The private, individual grief of the characters in *The Waves* is a powerful alternative to the public mourning rituals Woolf experienced in her Victorian childhood. We might turn again to Woolf's comments on her mother's death, and her resentment at the way in which the conventions of mourning usurped the place of grief and stifled the emotions of the mourners:

The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn, and self-conscious. We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. It made one hypocritical and immeshed in the conventions of sorrow. (*Moments of Being* 95)

Woolf's misgivings regarding public mourning later found their way into her lengthy analysis of the Victorian period, *The Years* (1937), in which she examines the shift from Victorian to modern society through several generations of the Pargiter family.

*The Years* opens with the death of the matriarch, all appropriate Victorian funeral rites in place. At each stage of the mourning process, however, Woolf is ready to undermine the solemnity of the occasion and the communal quality of the rituals. The shades of the neighbor's house are

drawn with respect, “but a servant peeped” (*Years* 84). Men on the street remove their hats out of respect, “but by the time [the second] carriage passed, the hats were on again. The men walked briskly and unconcernedly along the pavement” (84). Observers fulfill their roles, “but” something occurs to expose these actions qua roles, thereby mitigating the consolation that such public solidarity offers the bereaved. Although Woolf abandoned her initial plan to alternate chapters of the story in *The Years* with essays of social criticism, she clearly retained elements of that criticism in the narrative itself.<sup>4</sup>

As one learns more of the grieving Pargiter family, he or she sees from the inside the strain required to maintain an appropriate public pose of grief, since, for it to be successful, all mourners must act in concert. The young girl, Delia, struggles to conform her feelings to those that she knows are expected of her at the burial of her mother. Only generalized, moderate feelings, she learns, suit the occasion; strong emotions, be they laughter or deeper grief, have no place at the graveside. Realizing that the coffin is being covered and she has only a moment left to muster her sense of loss, Delia feels her emotions welling up, only to be interrupted by the minister’s words: “What a lie! she cried to herself. What a damnable lie! He had robbed her of the one feeling that was genuine; he had spoilt her one moment of understanding ” (87). “None of us feeling anything at all,” she concludes, “we’re all pretending” (87). This performance, as Woolf so effectively portrays it, is not limited to public scenes. Even when they are alone together the family members adopt a nearly silent formality, “as if they were already taking part in the ceremony” (84).

Woolf is not alone in abandoning Victorian conventions and turning to the elegy for new words of mourning. She takes part in a larger cultural shift that Ramazani outlines in his discussion of the modern elegy:

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<sup>4</sup> See Lee for an account of the textual transformation (628).

As warfare was industrialized and mass death augmented, as mourning rites were weakened and the 'funeral director' professionalized, as the dying were shut away in hospitals and death itself made a taboo subject, poetry increasingly became an important cultural space for mourning the dead. (1)

The elegy need not, however, simply replace the previous conventions, one public ceremony for another. Woolf uses the elegy to criticize, rather than to dictate the terms of modern mourning. In doing so she joins a long tradition of elegists who, as Laura Cowan reminds us, exploit the elegy's potential for public protest:

Theocritus, for example, protested the negligence of the nymphs who allowed Daphnis to die. Milton takes the occasion of the death of Edward King to attack the corrupted clergy . . . In 'Adonais,' Shelley attacks the cruel reviewers whom he blamed for Keats' death . . . Modernist writers exploited this elegiac convention to attack imperialism, materialism, the bourgeois, the capitalists, the older generation – all that they felt responsible for the war and the death of civilization. (46-47)

But modernist writers also, as Ramazani observes, acknowledge the embedded nature of their writing. Drawing on Adorno, Ramazani asserts that modern elegies are both apart from and a part of their environment:

Modern elegies betray in their difficult, melancholic mourning the impossibility of preserving a pristine space apart, of grieving for the dead amid the speed and pressure of modern life. . . . they provide a special place for mourning yet mock and ironize it. (14)

It is in this muddled space that Woolf writes *The Waves*, achieving through the mix of the six speaking characters a multi-faceted portrayal of modern grief that is critical of elegy through the

means that are available: by offering, in dramatized narrative, the private voices of grief.

### **Education and Tradition: Public School and University**

If the elegy is to be used to illustrate modern mourning, it must be revised to permit a multiplicity of feelings and perspectives—the opposite of the Victorians’ monolithic mourning, which emphasized ceremony. Woolf differs from the modern elegists in Ramazani’s study not primarily in her use of prose, but rather in her attention to the relationship of mourning that takes place among mourners instead of that which links the speaker and the dead.

In insisting on the multiplicity of her mourners, Woolf attends to a kind of mourning that has gendered, as well as generic, repercussions. Even as he traces strong male poets of the twentieth century, Ramazani acknowledges that participation in the elegiac tradition was particularly fraught for women: “For them, the genre was doubly problematic in gender terms—‘masculine’ as an elite literary form yet ‘feminine’ as a popular cultural form and simulation of mourning” (21). The elegy belongs to a highly allusive literary tradition that male poets would learn in school, and that would manifest itself in writing and not in crying; women, on the other hand, traditionally manifested mourning in their person (dress, posture, emotional expression), and in writing that was deemed sentimental. For any female writer who desired to engage the former literature, the latter always existed in the background as a genre to be resisted. By placing the elegy in *The Waves* in the mouth of Bernard, Woolf minimizes the risk of being taken for a woman writing sentimental literature. Her knowledge of such an education as Bernard would be expected to have, however, must come from her observations on the margins of that system.

Such outside positions are ones with which Woolf is intimately familiar. What became known as the Bloomsbury Group, of which Woolf was a member, began as a gathering of Thoby



Stephen's Cambridge friends, at which his sisters, Vanessa and Virginia, were often quiet observers.

As Leonard Woolf remembers of the group:

Our roots and the roots of our friendship were in the University of Cambridge. Of the 13 persons mentioned above three are women and ten men; of the ten men nine had been at Cambridge, and all of us, except Roger, had been more or less contemporaries at Trinity and King's. (*Beginning Again* 23)

Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf's nephew and biographer, speculates that it was through Thoby's death that the famously informal relations between the men and women of the group came about; by forging a relationship in their loss of Thoby, in gathering around an absence, their identity was no longer solely bound up in "their" years at Cambridge (118).<sup>5</sup>

Critics tend to look to Thoby Stephen, Virginia Woolf's favorite brother, as the inspiration for the character Percival in *The Waves*. Upon writing the last words of the novel on February 7, 1931, Woolf considers dedicating the book to her deceased brother, but then refrains.<sup>6</sup> *The Waves* is, clearly, tied to Woolf's personal loss, but Thoby's contribution may not lie only in the character of Percival and the overall tone of mourning that Thoby inspires, but also in Woolf's interest in elegy and other forms of literary mourning. Upon his death Woolf attempted to acquire a written record of him from those who knew him best:

There was therefore much of his private and intellectual life which remained mysterious and could now never be discovered unless, perhaps, one of his

Cambridge friends would write something. She addressed herself to Lytton Strachey

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<sup>5</sup> In considering what would have happened had Thoby Stephen lived, Bell speculates that "if he had lived, he would have tended to strengthen rather than to weaken those barriers of speech and thought and custom which were soon to be overthrown amongst his friends. It was his death which began to work their destruction . . . in her distress Virginia wanted to see no one save them . . . Thoby's Cambridge friends. . . . As a result of Thoby's death Bloomsbury was refounded upon the solid base of deep mutual understanding" (118).

<sup>6</sup> "I must record, heaven be praised, the end of *The Waves*. . . . I have been sitting these 15 minutes in a state of glory, & calm, & some tears, thinking of Thoby & if I could write Stephen 1881-1906 on the first page. I suppose not" (*Diary* 4: 10). It was, however, something she allowed herself upon finishing *Jacob's Room*, nine years earlier.

who, after a year, had to confess that he found the task too difficult. Clive refused it also and she talked to Saxon Sydney-Turner, who applied to Leonard Woolf in Ceylon, but he too was unable to help. (Q. Bell 117)

Bell goes on to surmise, “That unknown part of Thoby was important to her partly . . . [for] an amused yet resentful curiosity about the privileged masculine society of Cambridge” (117). Just as Thoby’s absence engenders the Bloomsbury Group, thereby bringing Cambridge to his sister, his death might be seen to prompt Woolf’s investigation of the elegy.

The majority of the male members of the Bloomsbury Group were also members of The Apostles, the famous Cambridge society, which has a particularly strong tradition of elegiac work.<sup>7</sup> It was, to begin with, through the work of two young Apostles that Shelley’s “Adonais” was published in England:

Despite his unpopularity in England, Shelley impressed them and their intellectual club, The Apostles, as having been one of the greatest poets of the preceding decades, and the club was soon to defend this estimate in a debate against the Oxford admirers of Wordsworth. (Sacks 166)

In turn, one of those two Shelley admirers, Arthur Hallam, became the subject of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* when Hallam died at the age of twenty-two. By bringing his Cambridge friends to his sisters, Thoby Stephen shared with Woolf a peculiar intimacy with the elegiac tradition.

The link between Apostles and the elegy did not die out with Tennyson. In his 1931 *Portraits*, Desmond MacCarthy offers a prose elegy to J. K. Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s cousin, suggesting he replace Thomas Gray, a poet best known for his “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” as the school bard of Eton. In the final lines of his portrait MacCarthy argues that

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<sup>7</sup> Though Thoby Stephen was not an Apostle, his and Virginia’s uncle was: James Fitzjames Stephen, father of J. K. Stephen (Q. Bell 8). Leonard Woolf also noticed the strong Apostle presence in the group: “Of the ten men of Old Bloomsbury only Clive, Adrian and Duncan were not Apostles” (*Beginning* 24).

“The Byron group had their Matthews . . . the Tennyson group, their Hallam . . . J. K. S. belongs to those dim, romantic figures, who have loomed much greater in intimacy than in performance” (254).

In her oft-cited essay, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*,” Jane Marcus argues that J. K. Stephen may be as much in the background of *The Waves* as Thoby Stephen, given the former’s early death after a fall from a horse, the same fate as Woolf’s Percival. Marcus focuses on Stephen as a man of violence elegized as a hero, thereby perpetuating the imperial myths of England (137, 142), but I see the connection between J. K. Stephen’s memory and Percival somewhat differently. When MacCarthy argues for Stephen’s institution as the poet of Eton, he does so on the grounds that “when he wrote about the school, he recalled the scenes and places which already rose in our minds in absence, places we knew would be some day remembered more poignantly” (251). MacCarthy characterizes the institution as a site already inscribed with nostalgia, one in which relationships with an individual are also already relationships with a site of loss. In MacCarthy’s portrayal, Stephen is worthy of elegy because he links the living to a place and to a time that cannot be recovered. Like Percival, whom Bernard uses to recall the schoolboy days during which his own talents promised much, MacCarthy, often seen as a model for Bernard, uses Stephen as a portal to the time of boyish camaraderie.

There is in Woolf’s writing a tension between competing interpretations of England’s investment in the public school system, out of which arise the young (male) leaders of the empire. She was certainly familiar with her husband’s view of the matter:

The public school was the nursery of British philistinism. To work, to use the mind, to be a ‘swot’ . . . was to be an untouchable (except for the purposes of bullying) in the hierarchy of the public school caste system. (*Sowing* 88)

Leonard has similar things to say of the anti-intellectual environment in British empire outposts like

the one he manned in Ceylon: “The atmosphere was terribly masculine and public school” (*Growing* 135). It is perhaps not surprising that Percival, hero of the public-school yard in *The Waves*, is also the novel’s link to the British presence in India.

Virginia Woolf was disdainful of public school’s propensity for limiting an individual’s promise and over-inflating the egos of young men. When several male members of the Bloomsbury group produced a collection of poetry under the title *Euphrosyne* in 1905, she wrote a scathing commentary on the work which began:

[T]here is much to be said surely for that respectable custom which allows the daughter to educate herself at home, while the son is educated by others abroad. At least I am fain to think that system beneficial which preserves her from the omniscience, the early satiety, the melancholy self satisfaction which a training at either of our great universities produces in her brothers. (qtd. in Q. Bell 212)

These feelings are given their fullest expression much later, in *Three Guineas*, when Woolf calls on women to make the most of their “outsider” position by keeping themselves free from “unreal loyalties” such as the “pride of nationality,” followed by “college pride, school pride,” and so on (80).

And yet there is a counter-current to this derision of the male school culture. After mocking the Bloomsbury men for their high-minded poetry, she claims the name of their volume for the boat on which Rachel Vinrace sails away in *The Voyage Out*, her first novel. As Christine Froula argues, this might be taken as a sign that Woolf was “putting on the writer’s mantle her beloved brother had laid down” after his unexpected death (*Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* 21). In some of Woolf’s more thoughtful reflections on education, she admits to a longing for the social opportunities of formal education, as much as she does the access to professors and vocations. Gillian Beer notes this

phenomenon:

Woolf suggests that she has missed therefore, not learning, but the slapstick of ordinary experience: “But then think how I was brought up; mooning about alone among my father’s books; never any chance to pick up all that goes on in school – throwing ball; ragging; slang; vulgarity; scenes; jealousy.” (140)

Given Woolf’s delight at the gatherings of Thoby’s friends at 46 Gordon Square, gatherings in which she was able to glimpse the social, as well as intellectual, fruits of Cambridge, it would be rash to characterize her as a woman violently opposed to the masculine enclaves of university life. In *The Waves*, Woolf has the means with which to express her criticisms of the narrowness of the elegiac tradition, as it is handed down through the male education system. But she also conveys the warmth and familiarity that such a system provides in a modern world that seems to lack such shared institutional experiences—or the perception of shared experiences when one perceives them, as Woolf did, from the outside.

### **Order in the Schoolyard: Bernard, Louis, Neville**

The characters of *The Waves* divide neatly along gender lines: three boys, three girls. While they are children, the six share games and fears, speaking in voices that weave seamlessly together. But as they grow, differences between the two genders emerge. Through their education, the boys are given the means with which to order the world, seeing it in terms of the books on which they were raised. Louis and Neville, a businessman and an academic, respectively, cling to texts as a means of seeing order in their lives and the world around them. Bernard’s text, however, seems to elude him for much of the novel. Although he plays at writing, his novel is never written. But the order he eventually adopts, despite these failures—or red herrings—is one that comes as clearly

from the schoolroom as the classic works Louis and Neville brandish.

For the male characters of *The Waves*, to find their place in the world they must rewrite their world, using the language they learned in their schoolboy days. That shared school experience is something that separates them from Rhoda, Jinny, and Susan. Bernard is relieved to end the “ceremony” of leaving his family for school (*The Waves* 20), Neville notes that “a noble Roman air hangs over these austere quadrangles” (21), and Louis observes that “now we march, two by two . . . . orderly, processional, into chapel . . . I like the orderly progress . . . We put off our distinctions as we enter” (23). All three boys acknowledge the formality, the inheritance, of their education, and it is something that they will take with them when they leave; Louis notes, “Life will divide us. But we have formed certain ties. Our boyish, our irresponsible years are over. But we have forged certain links. Above all, we have inherited traditions” (41).

The girls, by contrast, chafe under the assimilation that comes with school. Rhoda says, “Here I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity” (22). Susan tears the days off the calendar as they pass, hating that “they have made all the days of June . . . shiny and orderly, with gongs, with lessons, with orders to wash, to change, to eat” (28). And even Jinny protests the ugly frocks and looks forward to the day when she “shall leave school and wear long skirts” (38). For each of them, school is merely to be endured, and it leaves little impression on them after they are permitted to move on.

This difference in schooling between the two sets of children is one that affects their sense of life’s order for the rest of the book. Taught to embrace the tradition they inherit, the three boys seek to make sense of their subsequent lives through the terms set out by their education. Although they frequently attempt to distinguish themselves from each other, they share not only a desire for order but also a common perception of where it might be found. Even though Bernard contrasts

Neville's desire for order with his own "Byronic untidiness" (*TW* 64), both ground their view of life in the books and genres of their public school and university days. The girls have no such framework on which to map their world, and thus their assessments form a counterpoint to those of the boys.

When the rest of the world presses in too closely, Louis recalls the words of dead poets, Neville reaches for his scholarly credentials, and Bernard flirts with biography and novel-writing—all as a means of reordering the world so that they are at its center. But even in their rewriting they struggle, and it is only when he defines himself as Percival's elegist that Bernard finds a framework that fits.

Bernard's prominence in the text is difficult to ignore, given that his voice opens seven of the nine sections of the novel. By the time the novel concludes, he has enveloped the narrative; although he speaks frequently of the other characters, Bernard is the only speaker in the novel's final section. Other characters' personalities may dazzle more than Bernard's, but he sets the tone of the discussion. He is the novel's story-teller and also, as the references to his as-yet-unwritten novel remind the reader, the figure of promise.

Such attributes generally incline one to think of the character as an artist-figure, perhaps even a stand-in for the author herself. Space speaks loudly in a novel, and Bernard is given far more than his share. But regard for Bernard turns in a very different direction when one realizes how much of that space is devoted to his insecurities about language and design:

I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, Are there stories? . . . [W]hy impose my arbitrary design? Why stress this and shape that and

twist up little figures like the toys men sell in trays in the street? Why select this, out of all that,—one detail? (*TW* 136-137)

This passage comes late in the novel, when the promise that Bernard shows, his “fertility” of description and his gift of conversation, has come to naught (85). He has admitted that he cannot guide the reader through the story that he is in or any story of which he is the teller. But in his dominance of the page, with his perpetual focus on phrases and his elusive novel, Bernard keeps readers’ attention focused on the relationship between language and control throughout the novel. Bernard then serves as a complex authorial vessel. His self-conscious use of language, as he adopts other personalities and narrates his actions from the outside, infuses the novel with a particular sensitivity to language and control. His anxiety about mastering language and concern for “arbitrary design” heightens one’s attention to the other characters’ abilities to control themselves and others, placing issues of control at the very center of the novel.

Throughout the novel, Louis’s refrain, “My father is a banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent” (12), reminds readers that he sees English life from the outside. Although his own social limitations torment Louis, they do not keep him from appreciating social boundaries elsewhere: “‘Now we march, two by two,’ said Louis, ‘orderly, processional, into chapel. I like the dimness that falls as we enter the sacred building. I like the orderly progress’” (23).

The search for order continues into Louis’s adulthood. As he watches the customers and waitresses in the eating-house around him, Louis thinks, “Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again. Yet I am not included” (67). When confronting such an alienating scene, he brandishes his literary credentials:

I will reduce you to order. . . . What the dead poet said, you have forgotten. And I cannot translate it to you so that its binding power ropes you in, and makes it clear to



you that you are aimless; and the rhythm is cheap and worthless . . . To translate that poem so that it is easily read is to be my endeavor. . . . I will not submit to this aimless passing of billycock hats and Homburg hats and all the plumed and variegated head-dresses of women. . . . I will reduce you to order. (67-68)

Conscious of his accent, his class, and his intellect, Louis is unable to conform to the rhythm he finds around him: “I, who would wish to feel close over me the protective waves of the ordinary” (67). He attempts to institute a textual rigidity in its stead, positioning himself as “the companion of Plato, of Virgil” (68), determined to reshape the system to fit his needs. He will “reduce” the people to order, whatever the loss that that verb implies.

When Louis next tries to impose order, he exchanges poetry for international trade and colonialism, investing in a very different kind of text: his signature. So many papers bear his mark and thus affirm his role as the one who sets an order for others: “I have helped by my assiduity and decision to score those lines on the map there by which the different parts of the world are laced together” (121). “Those” lines on the map “there” are a visual affirmation that this Australian son is making his mark on the world.

Louis’s enthusiasm cannot hide the shift that has occurred in his conception of success. The map on the wall and the papers to sign are the new, affirming texts in Louis’s life. Plato and literature, his old tools for changing the world, are now pushed aside: “If we blink or look aside, or turn back to finger what Plato said or remember Napoleon and his conquests, we inflict on the world the injury of some obliquity” (122). Such affirmations of his self-importance take on a bitter tone as he confronts the way that they have circumscribed his future: “The weight of the world is on our shoulders. This is life. If I press on, I shall inherit a chair and a rug; a place in Surrey with glass houses, and some rare conifer, melon, or flowering tree which other merchants will envy” (123).

Rather than transform the rhythm of the ordinary world, Louis has become ensnared by the splendors of colonialism. As he is himself a colonial, such fruits can only come at a cost to his personal identity, even as they offer evidence of his new social position. Although his new textual order offers him success, it is of a very limited, and limiting, kind.

In an echo of Louis's account, Neville turns to books to prove his worth to the world:

I am merely 'Neville' to you, who see the narrow limits of my life and the line it cannot pass. But to myself I am immeasurable . . . I detect, I perceive. Beneath my eyes opens—a book; I see to the bottom; the heart—I see to the depths. (157)

And yet these sentiments form a sharp contrast to Neville's speech just prior to this section, as he nervously feels for "my credentials—what I carry to prove my superiority" (155). Neville's identity wavers between the piece of paper that he carries and his faith in his acuity. There is a slippage between the book and his ability to read all things like a book, and neither stands up to the fierce stare of Susan, leaving Neville to ask, "What then remains, when I cannot pull out my papers and make you believe by reading aloud my credentials that I have passed?" (155). In Neville and Louis the reader sees the male characters struggle to maintain both a hold on the busy city rhythms around them and their own sense of control over that life. Louis and Neville cling not just to words, but also to books, contracts, maps, and credentials in their attempts to order their world, even though such means prove inadequate to allay their anxieties.

### **Jinny's Response to George Eliot**

Without the guidance of a narrator, one struggles to understand whether such systems of order as those portrayed by the men of *The Waves*, though flawed, deserve approbation. One would not have to work through such uncertainties if Woolf took a more Victorian approach. When

George Eliot, for example, offers an image of a character's ordering of the world in *Middlemarch*, her narrator leaves little doubt as to how the scene should be interpreted:

An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass of extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a center of illumination, and lo! The scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example. (248)<sup>8</sup>

The order created by an individual may well be merely a “flattering illusion” that ignores the multidirectional life around her. One cannot forget that Louis's business, Neville's books, and Bernard's phrases all place the character at the center of a network that connects all things to him. Even though Louis detects a rhythm in the world around him, he cannot let it rest because he is not orchestrating it.

Although Woolf does not employ an imposing Victorian narrator, she does reveal the internal thoughts of these three characters in such a way that one begins to question their self-knowledge and their methods. Glimpses into their insecurities enable the reader to adopt a more

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Kermode cites Eliot's candle and looking-glass as a representation of the author's balance between contingency and form, a means of answering the questions, “How to do justice to a chaotic, viscously continent reality, and yet redeem it? How to justify the fictive beginnings, crises, ends; the atavism of character, which we cannot prevent from growing, in Yeats's figure, like ash on a burning stick?” (146).

sympathetic view toward them than that of Eliot's narrator, but it also just as effectively undermines the sense of order that they attempt to fashion for themselves. When viewed from the outside, Louis and Neville might well uphold the image of prosperity and success. It is only because Woolf gives the reader access to their inner worries that such views of them are destabilized.<sup>9</sup> When one does happen to see a character primarily from the outside, the effects are quite different:

“There is Jinny,” said Susan. “She stands in the door. Everything seems stayed. The waiter stops. The diners at the table by the door look. She seems to center everything; round her tables, lines of doors, windows, ceilings, ray themselves, like rays round the star in the middle of a smashed window-pane. She brings things to a point, to order.” (*TW* 87)

Jinny's portrait, unlike those of Louis and Neville, includes no intellectual battle motivated by feelings of personal inferiority. Instead, she creates order around her by offering her body as an aesthetic object, an order that allows for a fluidity neither Neville nor Louis can match: “Now she sees us, and moves, and all the rays ripple and flow and waver over us, bringing in new tides of sensation” (87). Rather than demean others by asserting her superiority over them, as Neville does, Jinny's system is one that rewards her viewers for their attentions. First she is seen, and all stops, and then she sees, and all around her changes. Her body is an instrument, the center for a system that relies not on dictation but on attraction. When she recounts the scene later on, she notes: “When I came in just now everything stood still in a pattern. . . I can imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body. My body goes before me, like a lantern down a dark lane, bringing one thing

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<sup>9</sup> James Naremore argues that Woolf's narrator lacks “that tone of certainty that one finds, for example, in George Eliot” (126). Richard Pearce responds that Woolf rather gains in the change, opening her novel to “the differences and conflicts among the different subjects, including the narrator, which makes the ‘multipersonal subjectivity’ truly multiple, heterogenous, polylogic” (134-135). I place my claim somewhere between the two: by denying the reader an authoritative narrative voice, Woolf preserves conflicting voices even as she reveals a different kind of unity in the group's shared desire for a central order.

after another out of darkness into a ring of light. I dazzle you; I make you believe that this is all” (93).

Jinny achieves success in focusing her attention not on ordering the universe, but on making a momentary effect on the scene around her. She is successful because she seems to see herself from the outside, removing herself from the scene and handing off agency to “my body” and what it achieves as it “goes before” her. She, like Susan, is an observer in the scene. Unlike Bernard, Jinny does not grant the reader access to any artistic agony that might be required for the effect she produces. The reader is removed, along with Jinny and her friends, to a position of observation; Susan reports the scene from the stance of a “ray” surrounding Jinny’s star. The view from the outside allows Jinny’s charisma to take on an almost mystical quality. Although the image of Jinny bears an extraordinary resemblance to that of Eliot’s character, without the framing capacity of a narrator or indications of an internal struggle Jinny remains a mystery at the center of the order she creates.

Here one finds a tantalizing figure for order in the novel, one that does not come loaded with personal insecurity of the sort that plagues all three of the male characters. One cannot, however, overlook the violence of the image: Jinny is, after all, at the center of the smashed window-pane. She is the point of impact. As such, the order she provides is a temporary one: “beauty must be broken daily to remain beautiful,” she observes (126). When she reappears later, a glass once again brings all to a halt for her. Standing in the Tube station, she catches sight of herself in a looking glass and is surprised: “How solitary, how shrunk, how aged!” (141). She chastises herself for quailing at the sight, assuring herself that she responded only because she was “catching sight of myself before I had time to prepare myself as I always prepare myself for the sight of myself” (141).

Jinny’s recovery from the shock is as important as the shock itself. She regains her

confidence by thinking of “the superb omnibuses, red and yellow, stopping and starting, punctually in order” (141). When her own power to create order fails, she turns to the order of civilization, of city life: “This [the omnibuses, cars, and men and women] is the triumphant procession; this is the army of victory with banners and brass eagles and heads crowned with laurel-leaves won in battle” (141). Woolf here deftly links fashion, urban life, and military victory in indicating all that can be achieved—and lost—by emphasizing control above all else.

The effect Jinny creates at the dinner party is one for which only her own powers are required. Later, she must reach out to signs of British order and progress to regain the sense of control she desires. She is not, then, an enduring figure of order, but that is precisely the point. For a moment, and a moment only, Jinny reveals an image of order in the novel that is outside the order of the schoolyard and its emphasis on enduring traditions, pointing one toward a new kind of order in *The Waves*.

### **The Character of Violence**

Although Jinny does not go on to develop the order that she imposes in the scene at the restaurant, another character does take up the trope. At the center of the novel lies the elusive figure of Percival. His role is quite different from those of the six characters whose narratives collaboratively form the novel, but he creates an effect that is felt by each of them. He is an incomparable persona: “[H]e flicks his hand to the back of his neck. . . . Dalton, Jones, Edgar and Bateman flick their hands to the backs of their necks likewise. But they do not succeed” (24). Because Percival is peerless, he imposes an order on those around him. All six of the friends rest secure in the knowledge of their appropriate roles in relation to Percival and to each other precisely because they cannot hope to unseat him. As Bernard wittily observes:

[T]he little boys trooped after him across the playing-fields. They blew their noses as he blew his nose, but unsuccessfully, for he is Percival. . . . We who yelped like jackals biting at each other's heels now assume the sober and confident air of soldiers in the presence of their captain. (89)

Bernard then goes on to liken them to “eager birds” that now “love each other and believe in our own endurance” (89). Percival's presence offers a security and a stability of identity for those around him that surpasses anything they can create on their own.

But Percival's position is also, largely, an empty one. His is not a personality that overwhelms the novel, but rather something far closer to a blank slate; he slides easily into the novel and out again, leaving behind a yearning for his presence, but without any clear understanding of what qualities, precisely, one longs for. Percival does not speak. Thus the others, through whose speeches we come to learn of Percival's existence and the power of his presence in their circle, are free to interpret him as they choose:

His blue, and oddly inexpressive eyes, are fixed with pagan indifference upon the pillar opposite. He would make an admirable churchwarden. He should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours. He is allied with the Latin phrases on the memorial brasses. He sees nothing; he hears nothing. He is remote from us all in a pagan universe. (24)

Neville's description of Percival struggles to hold onto the figure in front of him; first pagan and then churchwarden, Percival fails to impose any limit on the other's representation. It is in the difference between those two descriptions that one begins to see the vast potential that this figure represents to those around him. His is a personality upon which much can be mapped. The image of the churchwarden beating little boys with a birch switch lingers in the eye of the reader even

when Neville returns to describing the blank gaze of the boy in front of him, the former far more suggestive than the latter. Neville makes Percival both more and less than human, using him to bridge the gap between the current world, with all of the elements that make Neville feel judged, and the world of his books: history and literature, Greek and Latin. Neville's description suggests that, when aligned with the Latin phrases on memorial brasses, Percival can breathe new life into the schoolboy language that Louis and Neville have abandoned in favor of contracts and credentials. Because he is more of a blank canvas than a particular character, one need not be bound even to a single, coherent interpretation: pagan or churchwarden, the blank canvas that is Percival can hold it all.

Because Percival is silent, Bernard's words, more than any other character's, insert themselves between the person of Percival and the reader. In shaping Percival's effect on the reader, Bernard finds a logic for drawing together those scraps of language that he jotted down in his notebooks. Although he may fail to write his autobiography, Bernard finds his role in the writing of an elegy.

In being made the occasion for elegy, the central figure must "[bring] things to a point," as Jinny does with her smashed window-pane, and thus the violence of that image returns for further consideration. Woolf describes the prevailing sound of the modern age as "smashing and crashing," "the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction" as old literary forms are thrown out (*Essays* 3:433-434). This violence might well be traced back to the war, when descriptions of the rift between pre- and post-war life evoke Jinny's smashed window-pane. In Freud's "Thoughts for the Times," after he writes eloquently of the sense of "disappointment" in the state and in the wartime abandonment of civilization, he draws up suddenly, noting that there is a sense of betrayal only because one has invested, emotionally, in things that have been exposed as illusions: "We must not



complain, then, if now and again they come into collision with some portion of reality, and are shattered against it” (280). Woolf echoes this vision in her critique of post-war novels that treated only pre-war society. As Hermione Lee notes in her biography, Woolf felt that such works were “reflecting a world which ‘the war had done nothing to change’; but those mirrors had been ‘smashed to pieces’” (372).

Such images of violence commemorate the casualties of the war, both human and ideal, but they also facilitate the re-creation of character in modernist fiction. Toni Morrison, an author whose Woolf influence garners less comment than her debt to Faulkner, describes her use of memory for character creation in terms of fragmented pieces:

That’s not much, I know: half-closed eyes, an absence of hostility, skin powdered in lilac dust. But it was more than enough to evoke a character—in fact, any more detail would have prevented (for me) the emergence of a fictional character at all.  
(214)

Like Morrison, the speakers of Woolf’s novels select particular traits from Percival in making him the center of their story, fragmenting him for their own purposes. Storytelling and ordering thus rely on the splintering of an individual; the fragment is extracted, mused over, remembered and relived, and the integrity of the individual is sacrificed for the birth of the story. But in fragmentation there comes an opportunity for rewriting the individual so that he is more like a globe than a mirror, to paraphrase Woolf’s comments on Proust, with “one side . . . always hidden” (*Essays* 5:68), and thus may well liberate character in both poetry and prose from its pretense of capturing the individual in his or her entirety.

The violence done to character both reflects the violence of the war and develops a new characterization of the novel’s subject out of it, one that relies on fragmentation and characters

made up of glimpses and shadows. In what might be read as a play on “remember” and “remember,” Morrison speaks of turning “pieces” of memory into “parts” through the creative process (214): “I then tried to distinguish between a piece and a part—in the sense that a piece of a human body is different from a part of a human body” (216). But she never fully reconstitutes the body that forms the center of her narrative. Only by being shattered or dismembered can the central character hold all together. This is a practice Bernard seems to recognize in Woolf’s novel: “[I]t is the shattering and piecing together—this is the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit” (*TW* 200).

In “Character and Modernism: Reading Woolf Writing Woolf,” H. Porter Abbott draws attention to Woolf’s fear of “character,” which she understands to be an assigned shape that precedes one and that is wielded by others; for Woolf, “personality” indicates something emanating from within, something so powerful that it seems to need the presence of others to keep it in bounds, to give it form. Layer upon layer of “character” can be created while leaving “personality” untouched. Variety of perspectives does not, it seems, ensure that one’s identity, or one’s perception of oneself, will be uncovered. At the beginning of her attack on Arnold Bennett in “Character in Fiction,” better known as “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf acknowledges that

men and women write novels because they are lured on to create some character which has thus imposed itself upon them . . . spending the best years of their lives in the pursuit . . . Few catch the phantom; most have to be content with a scrap of her dress or a wisp of her hair. (*Essays* 3:421)

Character is a phantom, rather than the thing itself. Woolf’s elegy is a formal recognition of the personality that remains beyond the grasp of fiction. Although Bernard boldly attempts to pin down Percival’s character by asserting, “He is a hero. Oh yes, that is not to be denied” (*TW* 89), Bernard

quickly slides into metaphors that disturb the heroic image. Thus the yelping jackals that are transformed into soldiers, the birds that now manifest love toward each other. Each image is uprooted by the one that precedes it, manifesting Percival's utility as a fragment, a piece of broken glass, with which the other characters' imaginations might play.

### **Bernard's Creation**

Percival offers a refuge to the other characters in the novel. Rather than strive to carve out their own attempts at an order that places them at the center, they find, in Percival's presence, a more comfortable place on the perimeter. It is, ultimately, the ordering through the person of Percival, a sustained version of Jinny's smashed-window-pane effect, that proves strongest of those ordering endeavors presented in the novel. But unlike the mutable Jinny, who is "volatile for one, rigid for another, angular as an icicle in silver, or voluptuous as a candle flame in gold" for each of her lovers (*TW* 162-163), Percival remains unaffected by audience. Jinny offers too many personalities to permit the reader to seize hold of any one, but Percival fails to offer even the one the reader needs to class him as a character like the six others in the novel. Thus one may begin to wonder how it is that Percival's order comes to enter the novel. Jinny's image relied on Susan's observation, but what about Percival's? Though all six friends, particularly the love-stricken Neville, contribute to Percival's eulogy, Bernard is the only character who takes up the system of order that Percival offers to the reader and to his followers, carrying it through to the final pages of the novel.

Bernard's engagement with Percival's elegy is only the final step in what appears to be a lifelong rivalry of sorts. One cannot forget that Bernard struggles to keep the attention of his friends from the very beginning. Percival's yawn in the midst of Bernard's storytelling breaks the spell of Bernard's voice: "Yes, the appalling moment has come when Bernard's power fails him and

there is no longer any sequence and he sags and twiddles a bit of string and falls silent, gaping as if about to burst into tears” (26). Percival, we are told, “is always the first to detect insincerity” (26), a charge that undermines Bernard’s storytelling authority in such a way that he never fully recovers. This early incident is a sign of the unwritten novel that haunts the adult Bernard as a mark of his unfulfilled promise, the talent that remains unrealized in text.

Were it not for Percival, we are given to understand, Bernard might have been sufficient to hold the attention of his peers. Watching Bernard arrive at the farewell dinner, yet waiting for Percival to appear, Neville remarks that, “if it were not for Percival, who turns all this to vapour, one would feel, as the others already feel: Now is our festival; now we are together. But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily without a background” (87-88). In this moment we see what might have been for Bernard had Percival not existed, a reality that makes the other characters look beyond Bernard for Percival’s arrival. In assuming the place of Percival’s elegist, Bernard effectively reworks the dynamics of their rivalry, containing the dynamic within a record of which he is the sole author.

In his final speech, even as he begins with the audacious “Now to sum up,” Bernard asks his listener to enter into the “illusion . . . that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed” (176). This illusion is the order that Percival created while still alive, and that Bernard now revives for his own purposes. Though the dead Percival can no longer be part of the schema, Bernard maintains the form and positions himself as one of the many threads in the web that centers on the absent Percival. Such positioning make possible the kind of identity ambiguities that proliferate in Bernard’s final speech:

[W]hen I meet an unknown person, and try to break off, here at this table, what I call ‘my life,’ it is no one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many

people; I do not altogether know who I am—Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis:  
or how to distinguish my life from theirs. (205)

Bernard repeats this sentiment just a few pages later in gendered terms: “For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny or Rhoda—so strange is the contact of one with another” (208). Bernard’s attempts to include the voices of the others may reflect the traditional elegists’ anxiety about the “guilty thought that they reap aesthetic profit from loss, that death is the fuel of poetic mourning” (Ramazani 6). Or he may be taking advantage of the elegist’s dual position: both a mourner and the one who speaks for a community of mourners.

As Percival’s elegist, Bernard enjoys the radiance of that central position, speaking for the dead, but he also speaks for the other figures that surround Percival. In what Bakhtin would have condemned as monologism, Bernard’s concluding elegy unifies the novel at the cost of the other mourners’ voices. As Gabrielle McIntire puts it, Bernard’s dominance in the final section of the novel “performatively enacts heteroglossia’s failure” (33). In his final soliloquy Bernard performs traditional elegy, in which the elegist speaks for others, both the living and the dead, and the voices of the five other mourners are silenced.

Bernard uses generic convention to unify an otherwise divided set of voices—and in so doing claims the position of chief mourner. Peter Sacks notes that the elegy has a longstanding tradition of uniting mourning and competition:

The connection between mourning and inheritance has remained a close one throughout history. Most interesting for any reader of the elegy is the fact that in Greece the right to mourn was from earliest times legally connected to the right to inherit . . . the heir apparent must demonstrate a greater strength or proximity to the

dead than any rival may claim, but he must also wrest his inheritance *from* the dead.

(37; italics in original)

By claiming the position of Percival's chief mourner, Bernard both gains a more vocal position than his former rival and enters into a mourning relationship with the other five speakers, speaking both for them and to them. But just as his speaking of Percival fails to reach what Woolf would call the lost one's "personality," so, too, Bernard's attempts to speak for the other mourners only reflect his own preoccupations: he ignores "the existence of parts of the others' personalities which are not linked with his own" (Leach 62).

*The Waves* is filled with the characters' tumultuous friendships, but Woolf carefully excludes most traces of the characters' families from her novel. Such a reliance on peer relations seems surprising when one recalls that in novels like *The Years* and *To the Lighthouse* Woolf focus on familial relations over multiple generations. By creating a world of peers in *The Waves*, Woolf emphasizes the ties formed by words and not by blood, those in which comparison and competition form a continual undercurrent of the characters' interactions with one another. When Percival dies, an opportunity arises for a reshuffling of the hierarchy, and it is no surprise that Bernard, the persuasive one, rewrites the relations to his advantage.

In Alex Woloch's study of character space, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, he explores a number of narratives in which the temporary absence of the central figure offers surprising fluctuations in narrative attention, disoriented as all are by the absence of a leader. In his study of the *Iliad*, he reads in Achilles' temporary departure the sudden emergence of a "disruptive" minor character, a vision of the masses of nameless soldiers and ships, and a carefully-defined group of elite who hold the narrative space during Achilles' absence. These vacillations in narrative scope and attention are, Woloch indicates, a creative burst that only occurs

because Achilles has left, “since his exalted status and distinctive superiority renders comparative judgments . . . obsolete” (6). In the absence of a leader, in other words, the narrative eye wanders.

In *Bernard*, Woolf creates a character who seizes on such opportunity. Although Woloch explores a number of scenarios in classical and nineteenth-century literature, in no part of his study of nineteenth-century novels does a character so methodically, or so comprehensively, eliminate competitors for discursive space. But why is Bernard’s control figured in such a complex manner, relying on the shadow of Percival to create such order? Why does he not strike out with a more aggressive approach, one that would place him unquestionably at the center of the novel? He does, after all, seem invigorated by attention:

I need eyes on me to draw out these frills and furbelows. To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people’s eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self. The authentics, like Louis, like Rhoda, exist most completely in solitude. They resent illumination, reduplication. (*TW* 83)

Without a crowd, Bernard is enervated. And yet, perhaps remembering how easily Percival dissipated his storytelling magic in childhood, he chooses the position of elegist, rather than hero. It is, after all, a more flexible position, one that allows Bernard perpetual play among the mourners. The elegy leaves Bernard, like the other five characters, with a position on the periphery, as one who mourns Percival’s loss. That peripheral position is a refuge: rather than strive to carve out their own position in and against the world, the other characters may find a more comfortable place on the perimeter of Percival’s influence.

There is something in the central position that makes the characters prefer a peripheral position, one that shields them from observation. In a 1937 letter, Woolf observed, “I think action generally unreal. Its the thing we do in the dark that is more real; the thing we do because people’s

eyes are on us seems to me histrionic, small boyish” (*Letters* 6:122). In her novel, it is the characters’ actions in childhood that indicate a preference for shadow. Although he is intelligent, Louis hides his Latin knowledge from the others: “I do not wish to come to the top and live in the light of this great clock” (12). Even Jinny desires a place “out of this sun, into this shadow” (6). In one’s first view of the characters, they play children’s games, hiding and seeking one another, each dismayed when found. As he hides from the others, Louis says:

But they cannot see me. . . . Oh, Lord, let them pass. . . . let me be unseen.. . . Now something pink passes the eyehole. Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. She has found me. . . . All is shattered. (6-7)

He is a boy in a flannel suit only when seen, forming a fixed identity only upon necessity. The game of hiding and seeking, seeing and being seen, continues as Susan sees Jinny kiss Louis, and then she herself runs away to hide, but Bernard finds her. These games are not simply indications of the characters’ youth, but also beginning steps in the very game that occupies them for the rest of the novel. If seen, they must interpose something, usually a text, between themselves and the rest of the world, so as to avoid the character-making that, in Woolf’s terms, is so alien from their ‘personality.’ Echoing Louis, Bernard cries, “Now the awful portals of the station gape; ‘the moon-faced clock regards me.’ I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces” (20).

The lurking dread of the central position occupies nearly all of the characters. Jinny, the notable exception, insists on interposing her body between herself and the world; she merely “follows” it. She maintains a fluid relationship with her public self, using the body to draw the looks that order the world. Throughout *The Waves*, characters struggle with exclusion and inclusion,



insistently comparing themselves with the others. Taking a role as Percival's mourner relieves them of this battle. Part of the reason this position is so comfortable is that it is steeped in nostalgia: Percival is aligned with Latin memorials not only because he dies, but also because he represents their shared school days, before their exposure to the pressures of the world began.

## Woolf's Revision of the Elegy

### A Problematic Genre

As with traditional poetic elegy, *The Waves* emphasizes the role of the speaking subject in defining an absent object. This elegy, however, has not one speaker but six. This is where the novel form brings something to the elegiac tradition: a heteroglossic dialogue that both creates and critiques an elegiac hymn.<sup>10</sup> Woolf does not merely write elegy in prose, but rather uses a cast of characters one might expect of a nineteenth-century realist novel to diffuse the responsibility of the narrative throughout a wider range of views and voices than in traditional elegy. Doing so allows her to explore in greater detail the limitations of any single observer's perspective; with six characters' views, there are grounds upon which to challenge the representations of the elegized hero that are not present when one must rely on a single speaker.

Traditionally, a poet used the elegiac form to announce his own literary emergence through the mourning of a lost comrade, thus binding himself to the tradition of the elegy and the community of poets it represents. But Woolf's use of multiple speakers causes one to consider the cost of such community-building: does one need the body of a Percival to facilitate such communion? must one deny him the ability to speak in order to make him the occasion for the gathering of friends and the writing of the novel as a whole? Such questions put a great deal of

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<sup>10</sup> "Novelistic discourse is always criticizing itself. In this consists the categorical distinction between the novel and all straightforward genres—the epic poem, the lyric and the drama" (Bakhtin 49).

pressure on the “occasional” nature of the elegy, making what is ostensibly an act of mourning appear more like the practice of opportunism.

In revealing Percival’s role as something of a shield for the other characters, protecting them from the glare of the world and offering them identities as mourners, Woolf also makes quite clear that Percival must become, as Neville makes him, both more and less of a character than he was before he died. By introducing his death halfway through the novel, she provides readers the opportunity to see the mourners change the nature of their characterizations of Percival to fit the role he must fulfill for them in his death. When concluding his final soliloquy Bernard calls on the portrait of Percival the hero to fulfill his own attempt at courage:

It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man’s, like Percival’s, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse.

Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death! (*TW* 220)

Percival’s figure is meant to bolster Bernard’s, but in calling on this image Bernard must forget the other half of the equation he formulates earlier in the novel: “He is conventional; he is a hero” (88). It is precisely his conventionality that makes Percival appropriate for the position of “hero.” At numerous points throughout the novel the other characters recognize this connection and Percival’s fitness for it. Louis, prefiguring Bernard’s formulation, says “I adore his magnificence . . . I despise his slovenly accents.” Percival is “heavy,” “walks clumsily down the field” (25), he “blunders off” (27), and yet, says Louis, “it is Percival I need; for it is Percival who inspires poetry” (27). Even Neville, most in love with him, acknowledges that “I could not live with him and suffer his stupidity” (33).

If Percival is a perfect elegiac figure, it is only inasmuch as he fulfills both elements of Bernard’s equation. Although traditionally the subject of elegy was a figure of promise, perhaps a

burgeoning poet, the subject of Bernard's elegy is the elegiac subject as Woolf sees it in the twentieth century. What is upheld as a model of greatness and promise is not a poet, but rather a figure with the "magnificence . . . of some mediaeval commander" (25) who will ride a "flea-bitten mare" and solve the "Oriental problem" with "the violent language that is natural to him" (98). And for that he will be considered "a God" (98). Jane Marcus attributes the incongruity of a poetic nature like Bernard's or Neville's or even Louis's celebrating a bully of both the schoolyard and the British empire to the modern poet's "collusion in keeping alive the myth of individualism and selfhood that fuels English patriotism and nationalism" (137). Percival dies not in a valiant rush to defend the homeland, but because his horse tripped while he kept up the British presence in India (*TW* 109).

Although the tone of Rhoda's characterization is perfectly bare of irony, her description of Percival's great role reveals that England's poets will get their hands dirty in attempting to elegize figures such as this:

[W]e see muddy roads, twisted jungle, swarms of men, and the vulture that feeds on some bloated carcass as within our scope, part of our proud and splendid province, since Percival, riding alone on a flea-bitten mare, advances down a solitary path, has his camp pitched among desolate trees, and sits alone, looking at the enormous mountains. (99)

She picks up language from Bernard, Percival riding a flea-bitten mare and not a gallant steed, and exposes the desolation of the gain to be had by sending the "hero" out alone. The repeated indications of his isolation suggest a medieval quest, but the proximity of the vulture to "our proud and splendid province" suggests that what is gained is closer to a carcass than a promising treasure.

The difference between the way in which a hero should die and the way that, as best we can determine, Percival did die, is one the characters have a difficult time remembering. In the first

moments of his grief, as he holds the telegram in his hand, Neville repeats the facts to himself: “He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown. . . . This is the fact. His horse stumbled; he was thrown” (109). But Neville cannot keep the desire for recuperation from creeping in. After the first iteration he inserts his own reaction: “The sails of the world have swung round and caught me on the head. All is over” (109). By the second time, he imagines Percival’s death in details that are clearly not drawn from the telegram: “The flashing trees and white rails went up in a shower. There was a surge; a drumming in his ears. Then the blow; the world crashed” (109). Soon he sees Percival’s death as part of a larger pattern: “there is a subterfuge. There is something sneering behind our backs. Percival fell; was killed; is buried,” echoing the “was crucified, died, and was buried” of the Apostle’s Creed. Within a single page Percival’s individual death, conveyed in the terse language of the telegram, is transformed into the sign of an evil presence in the world and also, with the echoes of the cross, a symbol of victory over that sinister force.

Even Bernard, who vows that he should “be able to place him in trifling and ridiculous situations, so that he may not feel himself absurd, perched on a great horse” (111), performs the latter when placing the image of Percival between himself and death at the end. The Percival who rides, as Bernard imagines, “a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet” (98) is made to fill the much more grand role of the national hero and the poet’s subject.

If this is the modern elegiac subject, the elegy must undergo serious revision before it can be useful to Woolf.

*The Waves* deconstructs the politics of the elegy as an instrument of social control. In the process of inventing a new name for her fictions, Woolf thought ‘elegy’ might do. But in exploring its function, she revealed the ethical problems to be faced in using this patriarchal genre. (Marcus 143)

*The Waves* is not an instance of elegy, but rather an exploration of the gains and losses of elegy as it is traditionally understood. Woolf recognizes the limitations of the genre, but she also engages it by setting the elegy within the confines of her novel. She leaves room around the edges of the traditional elegy, introducing the elegiac subject before his death and drawing attention to the way in which education introduces divisions between the characters and barriers to what and how they perceive. In short, Woolf makes use of the larger span of time and character in the novel to her advantage in framing the elegy that forms the core of the work. The elegist, after all, is Bernard and not Woolf herself, and Woolf loses no opportunity in suggesting to the reader that Percival is as much a clod as he is a poet. Thus one sees his flaws even as he or she is made to see the hero-worship lavished on him by others. By denying absolute loss and absence, offering the reader glimpses of the everydayness of Percival, Woolf denies the reader the chance to participate fully in the mourning process, forcing him or her, instead, to focus on the process of elegy-making. By shifting the elegizing voice from a lyric “I” to a cast of characters of whom Bernard is the most prominent, Woolf casts the elegy as a literary form that is far from a universal cry of mourning. It is, instead, one that is tied to the public school culture, with all of its limitations.

### **A Return to Rhoda and Jinny**

Although the majority of Woolf’s novel cultivates Bernard’s elegy, using it to criticize the opportunistic and narrow perspective of the elegist, she also offers the beginnings of an alternative elegy, using the novel’s scope to suggest alternative figures for elegiac lament. Just as Bernard’s verbosity fails to cover the absence of the other five speakers in the final section, so, too, Percival’s ill fit as an elegiac subject sends the reader looking for a better one. When Bernard embraces Percival as an elegiac subject, he ignores what may be a more suitable subject in the figure of Rhoda.

Unlike many traditional figures of elegy, Percival is not a burgeoning poet, but Rhoda, so steeped in poetry throughout the book, dies with little fanfare. If, as Rhoda suggests, Percival opens up their world by bringing India into their purview (99), she herself “looks far away over our heads, beyond India” (100). By making Bernard ignore Rhoda’s death, that of a potential poet, and embrace that of Percival, the tool of the British Empire, Woolf explores the elegy as a form that is not immune to issues of gender, nor to changing evaluations of the nature of youths who need elegizing. Although it may seem more natural to compare Percival to his fellow school chums, the male characters in *The Waves*, his role becomes clearer if one recognizes the subtle comparisons Woolf draws between Percival and Rhoda, who also dies but is not elegized, and Jinny, who also exerts a charismatic force on her friends but whose power fades with her beauty. After all, that great elegiac trope, the sun, is present in the interludes of *The Waves*, but only in the figure of a woman.

What is it, then, that Jinny and Rhoda lack that Percival has? One answer would be the ties to the public school and the elegiac tradition that have traditionally remained among the men of England. As Marcus argues, Woolf “exposes the cult of the hero and the complicity of the poet in the making of culture as he exudes cultural glue (in the form of a an elegy for the dead hero) as a source of social cohesion” (142-143). Percival fits, or can be made to fit, both the traditional role of the hero and also the familiarity of the schoolroom in which the poet learned the language for his craft. There is an incestuousness of the poetic project here: subject and poet rubbing shoulders in the same schoolroom as they learn their separate crafts, leadership and poetry, respectively.

But there are other, perhaps less disquieting, elements at work here. Percival serves as a figure that roots the friends in their past. When they are not bemoaning the loss of Percival, Woolf’s characters speak both of and in the present tense, recording impressions as they occur. As Susan Dick observes:

The use of the present tense focuses our attention, like that of the speakers, on the present moment. Yet the speaker responds to the present as part of a continuum. In various ways and with varying degrees of success, they relate one moment to another and thus develop an identity which is shaped in part by memories of the past. (38)

The absent center, Percival, is their primary link to that past, and they rely on it more and more as the narrative progresses because old age prompts a deepening desire to recall their youth. Because his youthful death fixes him at a moment in the past Percival can, unlike Jinny, anchor them in that time.

Jinny and Rhoda also seem to be “inappropriate” elegiac subjects in that their significance is that of a moment, and not a classical history. Jinny, as I have already argued, offers a shining figure for organization for just a moment when she enters a restaurant, but then the control dissolves, immobility giving way to ripples of movement that Jinny transfers to those around her. Rhoda, too, speaks to the moment, rather than to the narrative:

I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate; and if I fall under the shock of the leap of the moment you will be on me, tearing me to pieces. I have no end in view. I do not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life. (94)

Jinny’s and Rhoda’s perspective is one that allies them with Faulkner’s Caddy, a figure who is herself the locus of the narrative’s concentrated attention, if only for the moment she remains perched in the pear tree.

Rhoda’s approach to each moment, receiving them as individual shocks, sets her at odds

with Bernard and his historian tendencies. Although he claims “to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words” (176), the design that Bernard eventually weaves is one that is much grander in both drama and duration. Unlike the “events” that Jinny and Rhoda create and observe, Bernard’s elegy relies on a major event—that of Percival’s death—and a narrative of mourning that unfolds from that point. Although Bernard contemplates the “rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights” that are “nothing one can call an event” (189), he chooses, ultimately, to make much of an event that fits more easily into traditional literary forms, and thereby becomes part of the even larger narrative that is the elegiac tradition. In doing so, the emphasis on the moment that Jinny and Rhoda broach is left behind.

Woolf makes painfully clear how much of Percival is written and rewritten only after his death, so that reader feels not only the loss of the hero (blown up into quite grandiose terms by the final line), but also the loss of the individual, who remains largely unknown to the reader. In the writing of a traditional elegy, Woolf reminds us, the poet necessarily replaces the lost figure with the text of the elegy itself. In this she seems to acknowledge the characterization of elegy that Sacks offers:

Only the object *as lost*, and not the object itself, enters into the substitutive sign, and the latter is accepted only by a turning away from the actual identity of what was lost. Consolation thus depends on a trope that remains at an essential remove from what it replaces. As Freud wrote to Binswanger regarding the question of substitution in the case of mourning, “No matter what fills the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. (6-7)

Woolf builds into this novel, which is so intensely about and within the minds of her characters, a



void, indicating all that the intervention of the literary can do to erase character. Rhoda says of Percival, in what turns out to be an eerily accurate analysis of his role, “Unknown, with or without a secret, it does not matter . . . he is like a stone fallen into a pond round which minnows swarm” (*TW* 99).

Through the elegy Bernard preserves what Jinny calls “this globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again” (105). Although Jinny only asks to hold that globe for “a moment,” Bernard freezes what he calls:

the swelling and splendid moment created by us from Percival. . We have proved . . .  
that we can add to the treasury of moments. . . . We are creators. We too have made  
something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too . . .  
stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make  
part of the illumined and everlasting road. (106)

The artifice of the elegy, rather than the mourning in it, emerges as the genre’s most prominent feature when placed in Bernard’s hands. In Woolf’s critical rendering of the traditional elegy, the losses she conveys are surprising ones: the loss of the conventional young man as he is rewritten into the role of the elegiac subject, the sudden silencing of the other mourners when the elegist seizes his chance, and the lost opportunities for recognizing the marginal characters whose elegiac qualities remain unexamined. Even as Bernard gallops toward the conclusion, Woolf’s careful orchestration leaves the reader wondering after the Jinnys and Rhodas whom tradition left behind.

### III

#### When the Dead Write Their Own Elegy: *As I Lay Dying* and *Jacob's Room*

*The Sound and the Fury* (1929) establishes the novel's heteroglossic contributions to the elegy, as the speaking characters offer a succession of elegies for the absent Caddy. In *The Waves* (1931), that multiplicity is harnessed by a single character, Bernard, who speaks not only for the dead but also for the other mourners in the novel. Competition for the elegist's position thus comes to the foreground as Faulkner and Woolf highlight an element that has always lain beneath the elegiac tradition, but that is rarely acknowledged within it. When the authors' novels are considered separately, as they are in my first two chapters, they suggest the modern elegy's range of voices and effects. But when they are considered together, as they will be here, they also suggest the consonance of their authors' critical concerns about the genre. Although Addie of *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and Jacob of *Jacob's Room* (1922) share with Caddy and Percival a measure of absent centrality, their voices irrupt into the text in ways that are unknown to the silence-shrouded central figures of *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Waves*. The sudden intrusion of the absent characters' voices challenges the unilateral relationship between elegist and elegiac subject. The reader is offered not simply a range of elegiac hymns, but rather a clear confrontation between the characterizations given by the subject and by the observer, by the dead and by the living.

Faulkner and Woolf approach the elegiac subject from opposite directions. *As I Lay Dying* is dogged by the presence of a corpse that appears early in the novel and that intrudes upon the narrative until its end; *Jacob's Room*, on the other hand, is notable for the absence of the soldier's body at the novel's end, an absence underscored by the empty shoes he leaves behind. Although Woolf removes the body of the dead from her novel, she fills the book with a narrator who draws attention to herself and whose personality makes her a rival for the attention normally granted the

protagonist. Faulkner, on the other hand, ostentatiously erases the narrator from his novel, encouraging the reader to think of the book as entirely comprised of the voices of individual characters and of the conspicuous corpse. By making the narrator-central character relationship a choice between one presence and another, both authors encourage readers to bear in mind the tension between competing presences in the novel.

Although both novels are predicated on the deaths of their central characters, Faulkner and Woolf also thread their novels with images that make it difficult to take for granted that the dead are fully at rest. One of the earliest scenes in *As I Lay Dying* registers the tension behind motionlessness as Jewel attempts to control his half-wild horse:

Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific, the horse back-thrust on stiffened, quivering legs, with lowered head; Jewel with dug heels, shutting off the horse's wind with one hand, with the other patting the horse's neck in short strokes myriad and caressing, cursing the horse with obscene ferocity. (*As I Lay Dying* 12)<sup>1</sup>

Woolf, in her turn, makes the struggles of London traffic reverberate in the body of the policeman who directs it:

. . . men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policeman at Ludgate Circus. But you will observe that far from being padded to rotundity his face is stiff from force of will, and lean from the effort of keeping it so. When his right arm rises, all the force in his veins flows straight from shoulder to finger-tips; not an ounce is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions. The buses

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<sup>1</sup> See also Darl's impression of the buzzards that begin to follow Addie's coffin, "motionless in tall and soaring circles, they diminish and disappear" (104), or his characterization of Addie's body on her deathbed: "[The face] is like a casting of fading bronze upon the pillow, the hands alone still with any semblance of life: a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not yet departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest" (51). The "still" that suspends the sentence, before it goes on to stress the persistence of animation, captures quite neatly the dual focus on rest and vigor in Faulkner's and Woolf's novels.

punctually stop. (*Jacob's Room* 125)<sup>2</sup>

In each of these scenes stillness and effort are bound up together. As the late André Bleikasten observes, “In Faulkner . . . immobility is scarcely ever absolute or final. Stillness is almost always throbbing with latent motion; it is movement beginning or ending, energy dying or gathering force, a tense interval like the lull before the storm” (*Ink* 165).

These images counter those that underscore the novels’ signal refrain: the statues in *Jacob's Room* and the descriptions of Jacob as himself marmoreal, or the frequent analogies between Cash’s carpentry in *As I Lay Dying* and the body of Addie Bundren, lying like “a bundle of rotten sticks” (*AILD* 44), images that manifest the characters’ and narrators’ inclination to objectify the dead even before they have died. I begin with images that insist on the force behind immobility because they speak to the fact that, in these two novels, Faulkner and Woolf resist the temptation to treat the dead as objects when they are recalled in memory, insisting on the vitality of the dead—strange as it sounds—at every opportunity. With the recurrence of these images they create an opportunity for the dead to cut through the objectification that lies at the heart of the elegiac tradition.

### Speaking for the Dead

The elegiac convention of speaking for the dead brings with it a number of opportunities for personal gain, some of which Woolf explores in *The Waves*. Becoming Percival’s elegist allows Bernard to lay claim to a poetic identity, to rein in his diffusiveness through an established literary form, and to secure for himself an audience. His gains are similar to those of any traditional poetic elegist who uses the elegy as a means of establishing himself in literary tradition. But in *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner formulates the mourner’s gains in coarser terms. Although Addie’s husband and

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<sup>2</sup> See also Jacob’s observations about the statues of the Parthenon: “‘And the Greeks, like sensible men, never bothered to finish the backs of their statues,’ said Jacob, shading his eyes and observing that the side of the figure which is turned away from view is left in the rough” (119). Here, captured in stone, is the enduring mark of workmanship and of effort.

children claim to honor the wishes of the dead by taking her body to Jefferson to be buried, forty miles from home, her request is simply the pretext for their own motivations for going to town: to acquire bananas, an abortion, a set of false teeth, and a new wife.<sup>3</sup>

Anse, Addie's husband, whose rain-wet face looks like "a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement" (*AILD* 78), makes the most of his new widowerhood. He enjoys being able to "look folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed" (86). His new status gives him leverage even within the bereaved family, as when he takes ten dollars from his daughter, Dewey Dell, quelling her protests with a rebuke: "my own daughter, the daughter of my dead wife, calls me a thief over her mother's grave" (256). Anse is the most cynical rendering of the opportunistic mourner that one sees in either Faulkner's or Woolf's works, a character who uses the gravity of the event to silence well-earned criticism from his neighbors and his own family. When Anse claims, "But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will" (111), he parodies other mourners' search for consolation, which is also the traditional elegist's motive for writing the elegy.

Although Anse's opportunism is quite different in style from Bernard's, he is simply a "burlesque" of a very real social opportunity. The character Doc Peabody, in an un-medical musing, says that he used to think death a function of the body, but "now I know it to be merely a function of the mind—and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement" (43). As a character with an unerring nose for detecting advantage in social situations, Anse has merely taken up what is an established code of mourning that persists into the twentieth century, one that transforms the social position of an individual when he or she is bereaved. Faulkner has, in effect, discredited the elegist's relationship to the dead by making commerce, rather than emotion or even poetic ambition, the foundation of elegiac relations within his novel. From Cash's careful carpentry measurements to

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<sup>3</sup> More disturbing than the ending, when Anse suddenly appears with a new wife, is, ironically, its very predictability. As if she is reading through the lens of a literary genre, Vernon Tull's daughter, Kate, prophesies that, if Addie does indeed die, "he'll get another one before cotton-picking" (*AILD* 34).

Addie's cool explanation that she gave her husband two children to "negative" or "replace" the children she took from him (176), Faulkner's novel renders social and familial obligations in terms of bald calculation.

Addie's family's motivations—both stated and genuine—matter a great deal in a novel that is almost entirely comprised of their voices. Like Woolf's *The Waves*, *As I Lay Dying* is comprised of a succession of character monologues, with little or no narrator intrusion. Unlike Woolf, however, who elides the characters' families from the text, Faulkner makes family the crux of his characters' relations with one another. By giving the majority of the text over to the Bundrens, Faulkner tacitly acknowledges the right of the family to speak for the dead, though he does so with some criticism. In this his form echoes the principles of mourning and elegy: the closer the relationship between the speaker and the dead, the greater the authority with which he or she may be said to speak for the dead. Such amplification of an individual speaker's voice might be seen as an echo of Reverend Whitfield's as he begins Addie's eulogy in *As I Lay Dying*:

Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad. (91)

Whitfield speaks from his clerical office, but he also, as we discover later in the book, speaks as Addie's former lover, and thus himself a mourner. In his person he unites the resonance of the voice of the elegist with that of the clergy: in each role he speaks as the representative of one who does not otherwise speak for him- or herself. The Bundrens' journey to Jefferson, which provides the novel with its story, does not begin until more than a third of the book has passed because the novel is less an odyssey than an exercise in calculating the power of the voice of the bereaved.

Thus when Addie speaks, much to the surprise of the reader, more than halfway through the

novel, the question is whether her voice is sufficiently powerful to contradict the portrait that has been painted by her neighbors and family members. Their voices, coming first in the novel and speaking with the power of grief, come up against the voice of the dead, an unusual confrontation in literature of mourning. Although Addie speaks with the authority of the dead, the voices that precede her prove to be a test of that power: with what authority do the dead speak? If we consider the question in narrative terms, what room is there for a central figure who comes so late to the story?

Although *As I Lay Dying* represents a new stage in Faulkner's treatment of the elegy, it, like the other Faulkner and Woolf novels under consideration in this project, focuses as much on the figures who mourn the dead and their conception of loss as it does on the lost character herself. The words of the dead have a strange power, coming as they are from a peculiar narrative and ontological space, and the majority of Faulkner critics read Addie's monologue as authoritative.<sup>4</sup> But Faulkner's attention to the voices of the mourners earlier in the novel equip the reader to reject Addie's character as she represents it in her monologue. Faulkner's text, one in which the central character is largely denied the opportunity to define her own subjectivity, challenges the conventions of the novel. But in giving Addie the opportunity to speak it also challenges the conventions of the elegy, using the unique space of the fictional world to set the words of the dead against the words of the living.

Much of what Addie says can be read as an attempt to unravel the story that precedes her. She fights the objectification that the other characters insist on enacting even before she is dead. A mourning process that proceeds smoothly, that uses the comforts of funeral rites to work through loss, is precisely what Addie hopes to prevent. Her only recourse seems to be to delay the moment of burial; her request that her body be transported to Jefferson for burial relies on the difficulty of

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph W. Reed is a notable exception to this tendency; he also concludes that the reader is encouraged to reject Addie's words.

the journey to unravel the unity of the family—unity that would enable the Bundrens to share the burden of death and mourning and thus move past the loss.<sup>5</sup> The experience she hopes for is similar to that she describes from her days as a schoolteacher, when she enjoyed whipping her students: “I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever” (*AILD* 170). Everything from the smell of her decaying corpse to the trials of the family’s slow journey to Jefferson contribute to her impressing herself on her family even as they prepare to dispose of her. Addie’s desire to leave her mark on others, which infuses her teaching, her childbearing, her sexual relations, and her preparations for death, finally manifests itself in her attempt to offer a narrative voice that can combat the strength of the mourning voices and the funeral traditions that would ease her passing from life and from others’ memories.

### Addie’s Poetic Voice

I am not, of course, alone in reading Addie’s monologue as poetic. In his 1973 article, “Caddy and Addie: Speakers of Faulkner’s Impeccable Language,” Paul Lilly links Faulkner’s two most prominent absent female central figures to the author’s poetic enterprise. In Lilly’s reading, Addie’s monologue is:

a special dramatization of a theory about the nature of language, one that Faulkner had been developing as far back as his earliest poetry, but which reached a new level of complexity with the narrative role of Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury* . . . Their role

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<sup>5</sup> When he was asked about the “villain” of *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner replied, “If there is a villain in that story it’s the convention in which people have to live, in which in that case insisted that because this woman had said, I want to be buried twenty miles away, that people would go to any trouble and anguish to get her there. The simplest thing would have been to bury her where she was in any pleasant place. If they wanted to be sentimental about it they could have buried her in some place that she would like to go and sit by herself for awhile. Or if they wanted to be practical they could have taken her out to the back yard and burned her. So if there was a villain it was the convention which gave them no out except to carry her through fire and flood twenty miles in order to follow the dying wish, which by that time to her meant nothing” (*University* 112).



is to demonstrate that the act of utterance somehow cheapens language's possibilities—especially its potential poetic life—and that silence represents a purer stratagem than the act of speech . . . Caddy and Addie are narrators of so high an order that they are—in the special way Faulkner used the term—poets. (171)

Lilly cites Faulkner's first published poem, "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" (1919), as evidence of Faulkner's indebtedness to Mallarmé and the latter's obsession with the purity of poetic speech. Lilly argues, however, that what Faulkner brings to poetry is "the paradoxical sense of its own impossibility" (171-172). That sense enables Faulkner to create the language needed to indicate the perfection that lies beyond speech without concluding that silence is the best means of achieving such perfection. Lilly reads in Addie's position an echo of Caddy's: "Each imparts to the two novels a center of pure silence around which radiate the voices of those speakers further down on the pyramid, less fortunate with words" (173). That reading forces him to interpret Addie's monologue as coming "from a point outside process itself" in which Faulkner attempts to sustain the illusion of Addie speaking "the impeccable language because it is at last free of words" (175). In Lilly's interpretation, Addie's speech can only occur because it does so from a position that is detached from story and narrative.

Rather than follow Lilly into such interpretive contortions, I place my reading of Addie squarely against the silence of Caddy. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the body of the dead grandmother lies beyond the view of any of the speaking characters, something Caddy glimpses from her perch in the tree, but that she cannot interpret or convey to her brothers or to the reader. In *As I Lay Dying*, however, the reader is brought into the room of mourners; or, rather, since Addie's decaying body is towed across Mississippi in an open wagon, the process of mourning is exposed to full view—and in full voice.

Addie's words carry the power of the dead speaking from a position of knowledge far above

that available either to the other characters or to the reader. But what she says undercuts the very material of the fiction in which she appears: “I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at” (*AILD* 171). Her position is one of antagonism to the book itself, an antagonism that is not, as Lilly suggests, “outside process,” but rather very much in tension with it.

The majority of critics follow what Benjamin Widiss has called “the implicit drift of Addie’s pronouncement (and its pugnacious closing preposition) to focus on what appear to be words’ intended objects” (100). They argue for particular subjects like “motherhood” and “death” with which to replace Addie’s cryptic indexicals. Instead of following in such a line, I would call attention to the fact that it is precisely because Addie’s use of language is so lyrical that critics find her denial of language’s power so compelling. Widiss concurs:

To read Addie’s section and to come away feeling that words are fundamentally lacking, or to conclude that it expresses the novel’s views regarding language, as so many critics do, is to fall prey to the most forceful statement in the novel without acknowledging its very force. (114)

Although much critical discussion attempts to follow her into the erasure of language, it is precisely the violent inventiveness of her language that warrants attention. Unlike the monologues of the other characters, whose narratives propel the plot and follow a roughly chronological order in their subject matter, Addie’s section abandons chronology for a narrative of recurring images and shifting moods. Indeed, although critical discussion seems to have given the role of the “poet” to Addie’s son, Darl, she speaks in the poetic voice that one might more readily expect from the elegiac mourners, and she thwarts readers’ hopes for a post-mortem summing up of her life by offering

instead a monologue that is shaped by a series of emotional shifts and recurring images.<sup>6</sup> As Faulkner indicated in his early images of Jewel and the horse, there is an emotional intensity that lies behind stillness, and it is found even here, in the restive speech of the dead.

Much of Addie's monologue rewrites other characters' views of her, a project whose genesis can be found in her recurring attention to her father's description of life: "my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (*AILD* 169). Addie refers to her father's view numerous times within her short monologue. When she finds herself pregnant for the second time, she concludes, "And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong" (173). At least twice more in the middle of the text Addie appears to make implicit references to her father's language. Upon learning of her first pregnancy she concludes, "I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it" (171). Later, upon deciding that her husband "died" and that she would take up an affair with Whitfield, she explains, "I believe that I had found it. I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive" (174). Although Addie's monologue offers numerous points of entry, none so precisely captures her conflicts with language and blood relations as her struggle to understand, and ultimately to challenge, her father's pronouncement.

Criticism of the novel has focused on her critique of motherhood and of spousal relations: she is deemed either a new voice for the complexities of motherhood or a victim of established gender roles. But the ambiguous description of family that she gives Anse during their courtship makes clear that Addie's struggles with family relations extend well beyond such gender roles:

Later he told me, "I aint got no people. So that wont be no worry to you. I dont

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<sup>6</sup> Bleikasten points out that Addie's monologue undercuts the idea, expressed by Benjamin, that an individual's life can become narratable after death: "Her words reach us from the far side of death, with the authority of death. But her posthumous summing up provides no final illumination" (*Ink* 204-205). I argue that Addie's narrative deliberately flouts the terms on which the dead are allowed to speak and calls into question the very "authority" conveyed upon them.

reckon you can say the same.”

“No. I have people. In Jefferson.”

His face fell a little. “Well, I got a little property. I’m forehanded; I got a good honest name. I know how town folks are, but maybe when they talk to me. . . . .”

“They might listen,” I said. “But they’ll be hard to talk to.” He was watching my face. “They’re in the cemetery.”

“But your living kin,” he said. “They’ll be different.”

“Will they?” I said. “I don’t know. I never had any other kind.” (171)

Addie insists on the existence of family connections, even beginning her monologue with memories of her father’s voice, but she puts equal emphasis on their being always already relations with the dead. Although such convolutions can serve no plot function, they do serve a rhetorical one: her contradictory descriptions make her father’s voice to be, just as impossibly as her own monologue, the voice of the dead. Thus Addie makes the corpse poem something of an inherited narrative position, a rather unusual literary creation, and one that allows her to criticize the voice of the dead even as she herself speaks from such a position.

Addie’s acute awareness of the voices of both the living and the dead underlies her concerns with language and pregnancy, since only through those other voices can she still be present after she can no longer punish her students, bear her children, or engage a lover. Challenging the telling of her story is the final means by which she can impress her presence on others and feel that “Now you are aware of me!” (170). When Addie turns again to her father’s declaration about death at the close of her monologue, she acknowledges its formal use to her, as she shapes her own conception of life’s purpose, but she reworks it to fit her own emphasis on the legacy of the dead to the living:

My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a

man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward. And so I have cleaned my house. (175)

Even as she acknowledges the pull of her dead father's words, Addie lays claim to the ability of the living—of women, in particular—to empty out those words and reinfuse them with different meaning, a capacity that comes with “cleaning up the house” of the dead and taking up his or her burdens.

As she empties out and refills her father's words, Addie makes clear her reason for rejecting words as “just a shape to fill a lack” (172), and her resistance to substitution more generally. Just as her children learn that she will not tolerate deceit, Addie will not, in her own narration, tolerate others' speaking for her even if she is dead. Addie's narrative does not substitute wordlessness for language; as is only too clear from the critical interest in her monologue, her words prove quite effective in drawing the reader's interest. Her language itself, saturated with terms of violation and filled vessels, is lyrical, vivid; indeed, one might say rather that she is interested in finding, as most poets are, a new way to say something about motherhood and love, than that she rejects language outright.

Addie's concern that she not empty out the significance of a thing by naming it makes explicit a problem that Woolf and Faulkner stage in several of their novels. Voiceless characters that are central to the novels develop a certain mystique: Percival of *The Waves*, or Caddy of *The Sound and the Fury*. Without self-representation these characters can be made into whatever their loved ones desire, usually something far more illustrious than they might have been. But, as Addie demonstrates, it is also possible to make of the person something far less than they were:

Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and

motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. (173)

Having eliminated Anse's name and, through it, the individual that it signifies, she moves on to a discussion of Whitfield, her lover, whom she carefully does not name. In eliding his name she protects him from the kind of erasure that she enacts on her own husband, the kind of erasure that she fears is being enacted upon her by her family and neighbors.

### **Framing the Voice of the Dead in Generic Terms**

Although I have characterized Faulkner's and Woolf's novels as part of the elegiac tradition, Addie's monologue in *As I Lay Dying* might also be considered in the vein of what Diana Fuss has called the "corpse poem." Such a poem is, she explains, "poetry not about the dead but spoken by the dead" (1), and serves as "a counter or corrective to the ageing elegy" (22). In a description that addresses the major issues of Addie's monologue, Fuss observes that the elegy and the corpse poem share:

a concern with the certitude of death and a faith in the reanimating powers of language. But, unlike the elegy, the corpse poem rarely presumes to console the living for losses so profound they transcend the compensation of mourning. . . . in the corpse poem, the dead are present, if only to themselves. The loss in the poem is merely the loss of life's monopoly on presence. . . . the world of the modern dead is neither demonized nor idealized; it is simply poetically realized as a space well beyond the recuperative reach of the elegy. (21-24)

Poetry is, Fuss argues, an apt medium for such endeavors because of poetry's "isolated, fragmented, and unnatural form"; the "broken physicality of verse aligns poetry, more than any other literary genre, with corporeal disintegration" (27). Although I do not wish to blur generic boundaries too

readily, Faulkner's novel, a work that moves abruptly between voices and has large textual gaps and embedded images,<sup>7</sup> certainly qualifies as "fragmented, unnatural form," and may be read as unusual, but apt, quarters for the modern corpse poem.

In establishing the corpse poem as a form distinct from both elegy and epitaph, Fuss turns to the poems of Emily Dickinson, which ring with female voices with "spirited personalities: gruff, overbearing, peevish" (7-8), a description that also suits Faulkner's Addie Bundren. The similarity between Dickinson's voices and Faulkner's suggests Dickinson's influence on the later author, and may explain why Faulkner chose for his speaking corpse the figure of a woman when so many of his other female characters are silent.<sup>8</sup> The links between the poet and the novelist might be worth considering further: David Minter sees in some of Faulkner's early poems a voice that is, like Dickinson's, "distinctly post-mortem" (21). But whereas Minter reads such voices as indicative of the young writer's fear of "the threat of extinction" (21), one might, in light of Fuss's "corpse poems" and my argument about the revivification of the elegiac voice, read them as a part of Faulkner's exploration of the limits of voice in literature even in his earliest works.

If one reads Addie's monologue as something akin to the corpse poems that Fuss analyzes, the Addie section of *As I Lay Dying* takes on a form of its own: a prose poem within a novel, or a corpse poem embedded within an elegy. Given the roughly chronological sequence of the other

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<sup>7</sup> Faulkner famously includes a picture of a coffin in Vernon Tull's narrative description of Addie's coffin (*AILD* 88).

<sup>8</sup> Although the resemblance between Faulkner's cadaverous voice and those that appear in Dickinson's poetry is striking, it is not clear how much, if any, opportunity Faulkner had to read Dickinson's poetry. He did not own any of her books or mention her in speeches or interviews and, as he admits in a 1926 letter to Anita Loos, the author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, "I am still rather Victorian in my prejudices regarding the intelligence of women, despite Elinor Wylie and Willa Cather and all the balance of them" (*Letters* 32). But Faulkner was well-read in English and American poetry, and in 1924, Conrad Aiken, of whom Faulkner frequently spoke with great admiration, published *The Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. In an essay that answers its title question, "Who is Faulkner's Emily?" Peter Hays makes a strong claim for the relationship between the two writers, reading "A Rose for Emily" as modeled after Emily Dickinson herself, or at least a popular interpretation of her life: an overprotective father, a reclusive lifestyle, and a fascination with death. See Rebecca Rowley's entry on Emily Dickinson in *The Faulkner Encyclopedia* for a fuller summary of the possible links between Dickinson and Faulkner.

narratives, it is difficult to simply read Addie's narrative as taking place before her death.<sup>9</sup>

Considering Addie's monologue as a resistant form that irrupts from within Faulkner's parade of living mourners offers one an opportunity to reassess the role of the elegy in formal terms, as it is challenged by the corpse poem. But the textual similarity between Addie's monologue and the others of *As I Lay Dying* works against too easy of a division between the two sets of voices. By making Addie's section appear in the same form as that of the other characters, Faulkner underscores the relationship between the two worlds, encouraging comparisons between the narratives that run "side-by-side" like the horses of Reverend Whitfield's voice.

In Addie's monologue, Faulkner "rehumanize[s] the dead through the agency of voice" (15), as Fuss claims the corpse poem enables the poet to do. But by situating the corpse poem within his elegiac novel he shows a reluctance to take the speaking dead as figures of unquestioned authority in narrating their own characterization. Coming as a response to early depictions of Addie's dying body in terms of inanimate objects—"a bundle of rotten sticks" (*AILD* 44)—the monologue reinvigorates a character who was written off as dead well before her physical death, and who was only given space through others' descriptions. Addie's monologue is an opportunity to resist the authority of the elegist, or elegists, but it is not simply a substitution of one authority for another. It continues the critique of authoritative voices, rather than replacing them.

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<sup>9</sup> Some critics follow Olga Vickery in reading the monologue as "Addie's dying thoughts" (55), which requires that one ignore the largely chronological movement of the novel. Others, including Paul Lilly, argue that Faulkner abandoned verisimilitude by placing Addie's voice somewhere outside the time-bounded monologues of the other characters; such readings, however, ignore the relation of Addie's monologue to those that precede and follow hers—particularly that of her lover, Reverend Whitfield—and the textual similarity between her monologue and the others of the book. Rather than enter into such discussions in more detail, I would note only two things: the reader is set up by Darl's clairvoyance to expect more elements that flirt with the supernatural, and thus Addie's monologue appears only after Faulkner has prepared the ground. In addition, Addie's narrative suddenly appears when, narratively speaking, she has been a corpse for five days. The presence of her decaying body, marked by the increasing presence of the buzzards, remains in tension with her speech. Such tensions do not permit resolution for Faulkner's readers, much as the tension between Addie's family members' characterizations of her and her own narrative do not permit either elegy or corpse poem to gain the upper hand.



## Individual Flashes of Color

Although not quite as supernaturally startling as Addie's corpse poem, a similar surprise awaits the reader of *Jacob's Room* when Jacob, who had been observed primarily from the outside, suddenly wonders in annoyance, "But this service in King's College Chapel—why allow women to take part in it? . . . No one would think of bringing a dog into church" (JR 23-24). It is in such expressions of pettiness that Alex Zwerdling's reading of *Jacob's Room* as a satirical elegy<sup>10</sup> and Judy Little's claim that the novel is a parody of the *Bildungsroman* seem most promising.<sup>11 12</sup> As Addie's does hers, Jacob's self-representation undermines his suitability for the lead role he is to play. And yet such moments allow Jacob to be a character and not a mythical figure like Percival, enabling Woolf to explore, in this much earlier work, the conflict between myth and individual.<sup>13</sup>

But the elegiac subject does not necessarily wrench his or her portrait from others, offering a truer accounting of him- or herself than is possible from others' narration. It is notable that Faulkner and Woolf both withhold their main characters' voices until the reader is well into the book.<sup>14</sup> In doing so they encourage the reader to become invested in the portraits of the central

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<sup>10</sup> Zwerdling offers two explanations for Woolf's decision to limit Jacob's voice throughout the novel: 1) his words would give too much shape to Woolf's sketch of the directionlessness of youth, a time full of promise but one that lacks definition 2) internal access tends to produce sympathy, working against the satirical or critical intentions of the writer that Zwerdling reads as dominating Woolf's narrative here ("*Jacob's Room*").

<sup>11</sup> Little argues that Woolf works within something of a tradition, having read parodies of *Bildungsromane* by Meredith, Wells, Richardson, and Huxley (106-107). Her argument dovetails nicely with one made by Alex Woloch in his study of narrative space and the minor character. If Woloch is right in characterizing the *Bildungsroman* as facilitating the hero's progress through the help of delimited—often exaggerated or allegorized—minor characters (29), then a parody of such a structure might well be seen as an attempt to draw attention to the delimited minor characters Jacob finds so rudely "individual" here.

<sup>12</sup> *Jacob's Room* has garnered a good deal of critical attention for its links to the elegy on a number of formal and thematic levels. See Froula, "War, Civilization, and the Conscience of Modernity"; Smythe; Wall; Walsh; and Zwerdling's essay. The majority of these articles read *Jacob's Room* as, at least in part, an elegy for Woolf's older brother, Toby, and for the soldiers of World War I. Kathleen Wall's work is notable in that she reads the novel as an elegy for literary techniques that are no longer appropriate; Woolf's narrator is, in her interpretation, something of "an elegiac gesture," a holdover from the dominance of omniscient narration in Victorian realist fiction: "it evokes an earlier, more authoritative and confident world view not imbued with loss and change" (312).

<sup>13</sup> See Froula's "War, Civilization, and the Conscience of Modernity" for a detailed argument about the role of the myth of Greece in *Jacob's Room*. Froula argues that Woolf's narrator "points to the dangerous effects of myth and story—and especially of the classical heritage, the Greek myth—upon the modern world" (281).

<sup>14</sup> Although Woolf's early critics felt that she failed to fully develop her character, Alex Zwerdling points out that the manuscript shows Woolf including a great deal of internal monologue for Jacob's character—before repeatedly stripping

figure that are sketched by others, a job made easier because the exterior portraits fit recognizable social molds. Anse's version of Addie is a familiar figure of maternal sacrifice; Jacob's portrait, as sketched by admiring females, is of a promising young man who follows the familiar trek of privilege and power. His being described repeatedly as "distinguished" should be read as a bit of Woolfian mockery, since it is precisely that he is indistinguishable from other young Cambridge men that makes Mrs. Norman, for example, so satisfied with her assessment of him.<sup>15</sup> Her portrait, early in *Jacob's Room*, is an exercise in making the figure in front of one fit a mold. Jacob is initially threatening to her because he does not yet seem to fit a familiar form. Although he "seemed so out of place, somehow, alone with an elderly lady" (21), he is soon made part of a suitable crowd, swallowed up in the "young men all day long" that Mrs. Norman sees when the train stops in Cambridge (22). It is only on the train, as he moves between settings that might allow her to place him more readily, that Jacob could be "distinguished," since once he is given a familiar environment he becomes indistinguishable from that setting.

By the time the protagonists speak for themselves their words are, in some sense, no longer "needed," nor—given the acerbity of their comments—are they even desired. As Woolf and Faulkner rewrite the elegy they encourage the reader to recognize the loss of beauty or myth that may accompany the exchange of the elegist for the elegiac subject's own words. Addie methodically dismantles the collective portrait of her as an unstinting wife and mother, and Jacob's comment about women in chapel places him squarely against the narrator of the novel in which he appears, since she makes a point of noting that between her and Jacob there is "ten years' seniority and a

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away evidence of Jacob's internal life in her revisions ("*Jacob's Room*" 900). The characterization is, clearly, the effect of careful revision and not inability to imagine the character fully.

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Norman wonders whether Jacob might be "nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy" (JR 22). The word is taken up later, by the narrator, who echoes an earlier comment by a different character: "Distinction"—Mrs. Durrant said that Jacob Flanders was 'distinguished-looking.' 'Extremely awkward,' she said, 'but so distinguished-looking.' Seeing him for the first time that no doubt is the word for him" (54-55). The adjective then reverberates in general gossip: "That young man, Jacob Flanders, they would say, 'so distinguished looking—and yet so awkward'" (124). Sandra Wentworth Williams comes to the same conclusion, independently, near the end of the novel: "but he is very distinguished looking," Sandra decided" (116).

difference of sex” (74).

Jacob’s comment about the women in chapel may be jarring to the reader, but it should be jarring for more than its misogyny. When he compares the women to a dog Jacob is protesting not just their exhibition of femininity, but also, more tellingly, their insistence on asserting themselves as individuals:

Surely, if the mind wanders . . . it is because several hat shops and cupboards upon cupboards of colored dresses are displayed upon rush-bottomed chairs. Though heads and bodies may be devout enough, one has a sense of individuals—some like blue, others brown; some feathers, others pansies and forget-me-nots. . . . though separately devout, distinguished, and vouched for by the theology, mathematics, Latin, and Greek of their husbands. (33)

The women’s sartorial distinction is, in Jacob’s eyes, a mark of their unsuitability in an environment that is marked by the uniformity of academic gowns. And such distinction is, in many ways, opposed to the kind of “distinction” to which he refers at the end of the passage, when he acknowledges the women’s respectability. This latter kind of distinction is one that Jacob shares with the Cambridge wives; it is what enables him to carry off his shabby attire and awkwardness in other settings, the good breeding that obscures individual quirks.

In the reverberations of “distinction” throughout her novel Woolf captures a particularly dangerous form of social hypocrisy: although English culture may rely on particular class and educational institutions to produce young men who are intended for “distinguished” careers, it does so only while encouraging the compliant, rather than the individual, aspects of those young men. It should not be surprising if, like Jacob, those young men firmly embrace the conformity in which they were nurtured and disparage the emergence of new groups—like women in university settings, or modern literature—that might threaten such conformity.

Jacob's protest against signs of individuality may raise an eyebrow in a novel in which the description of war casualties as an undistinguished mass has such a chilling effect. Jacob eventually becomes a soldier, one of the "dozen young men in the prime of life" or part of the "blocks of tin soldiers" that fall flat on the battlefield; the only individuation comes when most have been wiped out and "one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of broken match-stick" (125).<sup>16</sup> The novel's elegiac echoes are particularly poignant at such moments, since the elegy can only remind the reader of the difficulty—perhaps even impossibility—of mourning a particular individual in the context of such mass death. Thus when Jacob judges that a woman in chapel, like a dog, "makes the blood run cold in horror," that, though "separately devout," the women ruin a communal service, Woolf draws a clear connection between the voice of complacent conformity and the war to come (23).

It is in this moment of self-revelation that Jacob's novel takes on some of the horror of Faulkner's more overtly macabre story in *As I Lay Dying*.<sup>17</sup> Addie's chapter is sensational in that she speaks from the coffin even as her corpse remains insistently present throughout, and in that she speaks with such fierceness against the other characters and their stories. The horror of *Jacob's Room* comes from Jacob's using his irruption into the text to register his discontent with those who do not conform. The convention of the English *Bildungsroman*, in which a boy's future blossoms for him and him alone, is shown to be at fault here; when a boy's youth is filled with one institution after another, Woolf seems to ask, why would one expect that, when it is his time to speak, he should say

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<sup>16</sup> The brevity of battlefield description in *Jacob's Room* led early reviewers to ignore the role of the war in Woolf's novel; as Karen Levenback records observes, it was not until Winifred Holtby's book in 1932, a full decade after the novel was published, that *Jacob's Room* was called a "war book" (*Virginia Woolf* 44). But we might think of the narrative compression of the war as a narrative echo of the violence that is being enacted upon the soldiers. As Alex Woloch records of Achilles' sudden killing of a dozen nameless men in the *Iliad*, "the compression of so many figures into one line is crucial to our sense of the violence that Achilles is here enacting" (9). Such narrative violence, while perhaps underscoring the violence of the battlefield, is in stark contrast to the prolonged meditation on death that is the norm in elegiac literature.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that, although *As I Lay Dying*'s publication followed that of *The Sound and the Fury*, it did so only after Faulkner wrote the first version of *Sanctuary*. His capacity for the grotesque, it seems, got a thorough stretch before he turned to Addie's novel.

anything other than that which encourages a group mentality? *Jacob's Room* is, certainly, an elegy for a lost young man,<sup>18</sup> for a generation of lost young men, and even the prewar perspective of progressive civilization. But Woolf's elegy is a pointed one. She draws a stark connection between the conformity of the young men who are bred for "distinction" and the conformity of their dead bodies on the battlefield.

Even as Woolf acknowledges the biography's and *Bildungsroman*'s tendencies to narrate a life in order to explain the end result, she uses the elegy's reflective perspective to criticize such teleological storytelling. In *Jacob's Room* Woolf approaches social concerns through a critique of literary genre, exposing the assumptions that underlie the genres: that the experiences of an individual's life explain the greatness that followed, or that all early signs pointed toward a great future before it was cut short.

In light of her criticisms of traditional literary genres, it is not surprising that Woolf would suggest the need, as she does again in *The Waves* a decade later, for new forms of organization, both social and narrative. Just before Jacob makes his surprising comparison of women in chapel and dogs, the narrator offers two images of order whose contrast is itself something of an elegy for the possibilities that Jacob loses when throwing in his lot with conformity. The first image is that of worshippers filing into chapel: "What sculptured faces, what certainty, authority controlled by piety, although great boots march under the gowns. In what orderly procession they advance . . . inside the Chapel all was orderly" (23). The chapel is compared to the sides of a lantern, which "protect

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<sup>18</sup> Certainly the death of Woolf's brother, Thoby, played a role in shaping the elegiac tone of this novel. Thoby, two years Woolf's senior, intended to study law, was educated at Cambridge, and exhibited a love of Greece. He contracted typhoid while on a trip to Greece with his sister, and died shortly thereafter. Woolf even wrote an epigraph across the final page of her draft of *Jacob's Room*:

Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale  
Julian Thoby Stephen  
(1880-1906)

Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale. (Lee 277)

But the epigraph was not included in the final draft and Woolf displaces the death in the novel to wartime, when Jacob is only a part of the "blocks of tin soldiers" who die on the battlefield (JR 125). She thus invites both social and biographical readings of a novel that exhibits the tension between the individual and the group to which he may belong.

the flame so that it burns steady even in the wildest night” (23).

The second system is of a very different order outside that protective lantern, the wild night itself, a prefiguration of the order that makes Jinny so mesmerizing in *The Waves*:

If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it—a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose—something senseless inspires them.  
(23)

Although the forest scene echoes an earlier one in which Jacob does indeed see such things while catching butterflies, his comments on women in chapel suggest a shift in loyalty to the order of the regimented chapel. Whereas it was precisely the spots of color that he looked for in lepidoptery, as he hunted the elusive brilliant flash of the red underwing or spied the “pale clouded yellows,” “blues,” (16), and “painted ladies and peacocks” (17), in the later scene the women’s distinctive colors are merely distracting.<sup>19</sup>

What Jacob chooses instead of the flash of color is disturbing. Changes from the manuscript version show that Woolf highlighted the martial tone of the chapel procession as she revised, underscoring the ominousness of the “great boots [that] march under the gowns” as they

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<sup>19</sup> Jacob’s espousal of community is undercut by his obvious lack of attention to the service; Woolf adds to the manuscript the parenthetical observation “(and Jacob looked extraordinarily vacant, his head thrown back, his hymn-book open at the wrong place),” singling him out, making it clear that he might use being “one of a congregation” for censorial purposes, but not for true participation and devotion (JR 23). The dynamics of this scene are replayed late in the novel, when Jacob, on a visit to Greece,

began. . . to write a note upon the importance of history—upon democracy—one of those scribbles upon which the work of a lifetime may be based; or again, it falls out of a book twenty years later, and one can’t remember a word of it. It is a little painful. It had better be burnt. (121)

Jacob drifts from drafting a text to drawing “a straight nose,” showing the kind of inattention to his task that the unsympathetic narrator was quick to point out in the chapel scene (121). After his inattention is established, he is further distracted by “all the French ladies opening and shutting their umbrellas just beneath him,” and then, when he tries again to focus, this time on statues in the Erechtheum, by another woman with a camera. Thinking of his romantic entanglements as much as any woman present, he still vents his frustration with “Damn these women—damn these women! . . . How they spoil things” (121). The problem is not with the women present, but with there being a particular woman—this time it is Sandra Wentworth Williams—who stands out in his mind.

“advance” (23).<sup>20</sup> Not only will Jacob not live up to the “distinguished” future that is expected of him, he participates in a kind of seeing that, Woolf indicates, makes it easier to imagine how culture has changed such that war casualties can be compared to match-sticks. He is part of the war not only as a victim but also as one who cultivates the conformist environment that led to it. Woolf’s attempts to implicate English patriarchal culture in the Great War are, of course, well known. What is striking here is her unwillingness to spare even the war victim his place in the lineup of culpable people.<sup>21</sup>

### Shades of a Different Cambridge

Jacob’s dismissal of the women in chapel is indicative of a greater institutional exclusion that Woolf addresses most directly in the novel’s manuscript: her narrator editorializes that the chapel keeps out more than snow and summer, “Indeed it has shut out a great deal” (Bishop, *Holograph* 27). It may not, however, any longer shut out female students, despite Jacob’s confident assertion that the women in chapel are the wives of Cambridge men. He may well be mistaken: Woolf’s manuscript includes a parallel story, that of Angela, a female Cambridge undergraduate. Angela’s story offers an intriguing contrast with Jacob’s, one that echoes the dynamic of Rhoda and Percival in *The Waves*. In both novels the message is clear: the elegy of the promising young man is shadowed by the story of a potentially promising young woman.

In her revisions Woolf removed nearly all traces of Angela, allowing Jacob’s exclusion of women except as romantic partners to limit the scope of her novel. Alex Zwerdling speculates that

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<sup>20</sup> In the manuscript Woolf wavers between “march” and “tramp,” and initially writes that “they enter” before editing the text to the more martial “advance” (Bishop, *Holograph* 27).

<sup>21</sup> In her study of modernist poetic elegy, Gilbert reads the identity of those who suffer and those who share in the guilt as a significant shift in elegiac writing: “what gives special anguish to some of the antipastoral elegies that evolved out of World War I is the paradoxical status of the mourner as *himself a murderer*” (190). Ruddick is particularly blunt when she reaches a similar conclusion about *Jacob’s Room*: “Jacob is killed in a war which Woolf believed to be the effect of institutionalized hierarchies of class, sex and intelligence: he is himself in part a killer. As a child he catches a crab and lets it die in his bucket. As a grown boy he hunts butterflies” (192). The last activity is one to which Woolf and her brother Thoby were partial.

the change was made “to underline the fact that the university was still a young man’s world, despite the presence of a few female interlopers” (“*Jacob’s Room*” 905). Even as her changes from manuscript to finished novel show Woolf to be slowly paring away the interiority of her main character, she allows his perspectival limitations to come to the fore. As Addie does with Anse, Woolf has made of her character “an empty door frame,” but here it is Jacob’s very emptiness that enables Woolf to make her strongest social critique. Jacob’s centrality to the novel is, I would argue, contingent upon the lack of competition for his role. By tracing the vestiges of Angela’s presence in the novel back to the manuscript, one gains some understanding of what Woolf might conceive Jacob’s competition to be.

As is the case with many of Woolf’s novels, the short stories that she composed during the writing of *Jacob’s Room* offer an effective counterpoint to the novel. Although Woolf eventually removed Angela’s Cambridge experience from *Jacob’s Room*, she published the sketch in *Atalanta’s Garland* in 1926 as “A Woman’s College from Outside.”<sup>22</sup> Even in the published story Woolf retains the language that invites intertextual comparisons between Angela’s story and Jacob’s; both his room at Trinity College and hers at Newnham are introduced with a sentence that begins, “The feathery white moon never let the sky grow dark . . .” (Bishop, *Holograph* 50-53; Woolf, *CSF* 145; *JR* 28). After thus signaling the comparison, however, Woolf permits the remaining elements of her story to highlight the contrast between the two university students. Although Jacob’s room is empty, Angela stands in hers like a beacon: “A double light one might figure in Angela’s room, seeing how bright Angela herself was, and how bright came back the reflection of herself from the square glass” (*CSF* 145). Unlike Jacob’s shadowy form, which is always slipping between darkness and light, distinction and anonymity, “[t]he whole of her was perfectly delineated—perhaps the soul” (145).

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<sup>22</sup> In her annotations to Woolf’s short fiction, Dick notes that, in addition to the version of the story in the *Jacob’s Room* holograph, there is also an undated typescript of the story, with holograph revisions, that has the novel’s title written at the top and then cancelled out. Chapter and pagination on the typescript suggest that Woolf was, even at that later stage, still planning to use the short story in the novel (Woolf, *CSF* 301).



Although Woolf initially describes Angela as if the latter is returning from a ball, her subsequent elaboration not only dispels such assumptions but explains a great deal about what causes Jacob to remain undefined when Angela is so “perfectly delineated”:

Angela Williams was at Newnham for the purpose of earning her living, and could not forget even in moments of impassioned adoration the cheques of her father at Swansea; her mother washing in the scullery: pink frocks out to dry on the line; tokens that even the lily no longer floats flawless upon the pool, but has a name on a card like another. (145)

Angela’s sex and situation make her Cambridge experience very unlike that of Jacob, and reveal Cambridge at a watershed moment in which the lives of women and men run parallel to one another. Parallel, of course, because, as Woolf makes clear, the women are sequestered from the male students: the narrator notes Newnham’s resemblance “to a dairy or nunnery, a place of seclusion or discipline” (146). The reminder that “none but women’s faces could meet [the moon’s] face” in the garden of Newnham (145), as well as the late hour in which the story takes place, suggest that Angela’s Cambridge takes place on the edge of the university man’s experience and even the waking hours. Although criticism on this short story is slim, the liminal status of Angela’s experience has not gone unnoticed. Krystyna Colburn, in “The Lesbian Intertext of Woolf’s Short Fiction,” claims that Angela’s cry at the end of the story, as she watches the sunrise over the college garden, comes forth because “the women’s world is giving way to the everyday; life is returning to ‘normal,’ and that is to be mourned” (78). Although much has been said about Woolf’s view of women’s education, the point of interest here is the layering of exclusion that occurs at every level of the narrative, as Jacob excludes the women from chapel and Woolf eliminates the challenge to Jacob’s centrality that Angela offers in her perfectly delineated—but not distinguished—figure.

Angela’s presence, both in the early drafts of *Jacob’s Room* and in the published short story, is

less a direct challenge to Jacob's centrality than a reminder of the narrowness of the world he inhabits. When Woolf imagines an ideal university for women, she instructs, "It must be built not of carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetuate traditions. Do not have chapels" (*Three Guineas* 143). As with the chapel that appears in *Jacob's Room*, on which her narrator dwells at length, Woolf links the architecture of the ideal university to the perspectives that might be generated within it. What she wants for women's education is something more flexible than the enduring stone of Cambridge and Oxford. Kate Flint observes that the inclusion of Angela's experience "would have weakened the presentation of Cambridge as a bastion of male social and educational privilege, since it stresses the possibilities of the future, with women's companionship 'pouring forth'" (365). When Jacob misreads signs that that world is slowly being opened up he confirms a suspicion that Woolf voices only much later, in the lectures she delivered at Newnham and Girton Colleges in 1928: "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (*A Room of One's Own* 24). Through the narrator's roving eye and figures like Angela, Woolf makes clear that Jacob's being locked in is a result of his way of seeing as much as anything else.<sup>23</sup>

## Uprooting the Dead

*her hands laying on the quilt like two of them roots dug up and tried to wash and you  
couldn't get them clean*

— William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

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<sup>23</sup> Although most traces of Angela are removed from the novel, Woolf does include other explicit comparisons between men and women in the novel that suggest criticisms of the academy's insularity. When comparing Professor Erasmus Cowan with "old Miss Umphelby," Woolf makes a point of noting the ways in which the latter combines knowledge of Virgil with curiosity about the world around her. Although Professor Cowan attempts to emanate forth in his person the essence of Virgil, turning ever inward in his scholarship and teaching, Miss Umphelby brings the knowledge of such figures into the modern world. But because the university culture favors the former we are left, as occurs so often in Jacob's world, wondering about "the thing she might have said" if her voice had not been pushed to the margins and her lectures poorly attended (*JR* 31).

Part of the appeal of *Jacob's Room* and *As I Lay Dying* is the way in which the protagonists' absence renders them vulnerable to the characterizations of more minor figures, capricious narrators, and readerly desires; character-making becomes the dominant sport in these novels. But though Jacob's and Addie's voices may register as isolated protests against the novels' dominant characterizations of them, both authors support such protests by subtly challenging the elegiac conventions that entitle others to speak for the dead.

In the opening pages of Woolf's novel, Jacob's father is offered as a caution to those who would rewrite Jacob's character for didactic purposes. Seabrook Flanders is a presence in his son's life only through the carefully constructed role that his widow has created for him in his absence:

“Merchant of this city,” the tombstone said; though why Betty Flanders had chosen so to call him when, as many still remembered, he had only sat behind an office window for three months, and before that had broken horses, ridden to hounds, farmed a few fields, and run a little wild—well, she had to call him something. An example for the boys. (*JR* 9-10)<sup>24</sup>

In making her husband an “example for the boys” Betty Flanders has entered into a fiction, one that does not go unremarked by the narrator. In this brief scene Woolf both acknowledges the tendency to rewrite the dead for the purposes of the living, and also uses her own novel as a platform for recording the gap between truth and fiction. Freud speaks to this urge to rewrite the lives of the dead in his essay, “Thoughts for the Times”:

Towards the actual person who has died we adopt a special attitude—something almost like admiration for someone who has accomplished a very difficult task. We

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<sup>24</sup> Although in the published version Seabrook is a man of the outdoors, Woolf's early sketch aligns him more clearly with the interests of his son: he “had practised medicine, trod the stage, read many Greek, some said been in the East” (Bishop, *Holograph* 6). The final version does much more to distance the son from the father, quite likely in order to shift the focus from familial responsibility for Jacob's death to a larger, social participation in the practices which led up to the war.

suspend criticism of him, overlook his possible misdeeds, declare that '*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*', and think it justifiable to set out all that is most favourable to his memory in the funeral oration and upon the tombstone. Consideration for the dead, who, after all, no longer need it, is more important to us than the truth, and certainly, for most of us, than consideration for the living. (290)

What Woolf's scene captures, however, is that consideration for the dead is often performed in service of the considerations of the living, neither of which have anything to do with the truth. It is for the future generation that Betty chooses such an inscription, one that is intended to guide her sons toward a more stable, bourgeois life than the one her husband actually lived. As the reader sees in Jacob, however, such rewritings do not necessarily prevent the son from enjoying the same activities as his father.

After foregrounding the way in which mourning practices perpetuate particular social ideals, Woolf proceeds to uproot such practices. Seabrook's tombstone, "a solid piece of work" that lends gravitas to Betty's chosen epitaph (*JR* 9), gives way to "a mason's van with newly lettered tombstones recording how some one loved some one who is buried at Putney" (89-90). Here Woolf undermines both the fixity of the tombstones and the particularity of the epitaphs that offer comfort to the bereaved. The identities of the dead are blurred both by multiplicity and by movement: "Then the motor car in front jerks forward, and the tombstones pass too quick for you to read more" (90). It is a chilling foreshadowing of World War I, during which individual deaths give way to mass casualties and the bodies of the dead are not be brought back to England—forcing mourners to abandon funeral practices that relied on putting the body of the dead to rest in English soil.<sup>25</sup> By putting the tombstones on a truck and rendering them illegible Woolf denies them the

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<sup>25</sup> See Trumpener and Booth for further details about Britain's burial policies during WWI. Booth also notes Woolf's use of the traveling tombstones, reading in them a caution against using even Jacob's room as a fixed marker for his life: the room is, after all, being dismantled when we last see it.

capacity to “speak” for the dead, since they are ultimately created for the comfort of the living. Both the signs of mourning and the identities of the dead are in motion here, an uprooting that contributes to her larger project of challenging the role of contemporary mourning practices.<sup>26</sup>

Faulkner, of course, puts both coffin and corpse on a wagon after Addie’s corpse has lain at home for three days, an echo of Christian resurrection that anticipates the animated character Addie’s body takes on after her death. Although as she dies Addie is aligned with inanimate objects, “her eyes like two candles,” her body making “no more of a hump than a rail would” (*AILD* 8), upon her death the descriptions of both body and coffin challenge the assumption that Addie has been put to rest. As the men carry the coffin into the house they speak of it “as though, complete, it now slumbered lightly alive, waiting to come awake” (79-80). After the coffin has been carefully pieced together it takes on the qualities of the body that is, in contrast, now decomposing, as if the one gained from the other’s loss. By making Addie’s death the beginning, rather than the end, of the Bundren story, focusing on the journey instead of the burial, Faulkner appears to entertain Anse’s theory that:

the Lord put roads for travelling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man. (35-36)

If coffins were meant to be stationary, then they would be placed in the ground vertically, as Leopold Bloom proposes in Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Such theories emphasize the conventionality of all that

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<sup>26</sup> Fuss nicely distinguishes between the role of the corpse poem and that of the traditional epitaph: “Abandoning the literary convention of the epitaph, a form of writing that can only be read from outside the tomb, the corpse poem undertakes to bring us inside the tomb, where speech survives the finitude of writing. . . . the speaking corpse poem differs in kind from the literary epitaph chiefly in its treatment of voice. While the epitaph reflects what Debra Fried has identified as an awareness ‘of its divorce from voice, of its condition as a distant trace of a voice now stilled,’ the corpse poem betrays a desire to wed itself eternally to voice, a voice capable of surviving death, a voice that conveys not a distant trace but a proximate presence. . . . While some epitaphs translate the voices of the dead, others convey the thoughts of the living” (2).

has to do with the public treatment of the dead, conventions that can easily be replaced within an author's fictional world.

As the novel progresses the coffin's animation is frequently figured in ways that align it with particular characters, resulting in rather peculiar metaphors that nonetheless serve as useful reminders of the relationship between the dead body and the mourners' perspectives. When Jewel interacts with the coffin it takes on the qualities of a horse, much like the one he sells so that the family can continue their journey to Jefferson: "This time Jewel is riding upon it, clinging to it," as he saves the coffin from the burning barn (222). And Vardaman, narrating the overturning of the wagon as the family tries to cross the flooded river, describes the coffin as a slippery fish: "she fought to stay under the water . . . in the water she could go faster than a man or a woman" (151). If, as the novel's shortest chapter famously asserts, Vardaman's mother is a fish and, subsequently, Jewel's mother is a horse, it appears that Addie has not died so much as been metamorphosed into figures that reflect the needs and desires of the remaining family members.

The coffin only takes on such qualities, of course, because the journey to Jefferson so laboriously precedes her burial. Faulkner alters the regard for the body of the dead merely by keeping the corpse around for so long. As André Bleikasten describes it:

Coming thus to impinge on the banality of everyday concerns, death loses much of its portentousness. For the Bundrens, the cadaver is not so much a source of horror and revulsion as a nuisance. . . . the cadaver, treated here like a mere object to be handled, is desacralized. (*Ink* 169-170)

In a sense, Faulkner does nothing more to call into question the nature of the mourning process than keep the body present for longer than is usual, revealing by such means that an essential element in the funeral process is that it be a particular event in time, rather than an extended trial that must inevitably take on the mundane qualities of everyday life. It is not surprising that

Faulkner's characters cannot bring themselves to dwell on the burial when it does eventually take place. Cash merely reports, "But when we got it filled and covered and drove out the gate and turned into the lane where them fellows was waiting . . ." (*AILD* 237). Buried in a subordinate clause, Addie's burial barely registers on the level of narrative, important as it was for the novel's plot, an indication of the extent to which this novel is about the affect of grief rather than the inherent significance of the cultural practices.

Faulkner's and Woolf's most substantial challenge to the conventions of grieving comes in their refusal to pinpoint their characters' moment of death. We learn that Betty Flanders's sons are "fighting for their country" only one paragraph before the final chapter of the novel, when she is left to contend with the belongings Jacob leaves behind (*JR* 143); Jacob's death occurs in the yawning gap between the two chapters. By depriving her readers of the battlefield and the final moments of Jacob's death, Woolf withholds the elegiac identification of the lost individual with the circumstances of his death.

Whereas Woolf denies us the event of Jacob's death by simply omitting it, Faulkner makes Addie's moment of death uncertain by offering the reader too many options. The eyes that "gutter down into the sockets" finally "go out as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them" (*AILD* 48). But the metaphor reverberates among several different characters, all of whom seem to speak of different moments in time. The clearest rendering of the moment of death comes through the voice of Addie's son, Darl, who is not present to witness the event and who thus must be taken as clairvoyant if his words are to have any weight with the reader. Even Peabody, the doctor, begins his very un-clinical ruminations on Addie with "When we enter she turns her head and looks at us. She has been dead these ten days" (43). Without a clear moment of loss the family members struggle to move past a death that is, it seems, always in process. Addie's youngest son, Vardaman, conceives of his mother's experience in the coffin in terms of his own nightmarish memory of being

trapped in his crib (65). Vardaman's sense of suffocation, his identification with his mother as a corpse rather than through his memories of her as a living being, contributes to the pervasive sense that Addie is arrested in the act of dying, as the grammar of the novel's title would suggest. The perpetuation of the act of dying undermines the elegiac emphasis on death as the moment from which poetic mourning is born, and in which consolation might be found. Instead, Addie's dying state is recorded and reimagined in an endless loop throughout the novel.

By denying the reader and the bereaved characters a clear portrayal of the moment of death, Woolf and Faulkner withhold the moment that allows one to "sum up" a character, to begin recasting his or her life in terms of familiar narrative arcs. The rather sudden, bewildering ending to *Jacob's Room* and Addie's simultaneous presence as both voice and corpse in *As I Lay Dying* serve can only frustrate those looking for culmination—in the sense of both climax and conclusion. Although storytelling may be consoling to the bereaved, it is also, importantly, a means by which the fullness of life may be exchanged for a more limited story that suits the needs of the storytellers. In treating mourning as a messier, more multi-faceted "process" than that of either traditional elegy or Freud's characterization of grief work, Faulkner and Woolf challenge Freud's assumption that mourning follows the arc of storytelling, with a clear beginning and end.

In challenging the literary qualities of characterizations of mourning, Woolf and Faulkner draw, interestingly enough, on literary allusions for support. Faulkner draws his title from Book XI of the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus' descent into Hades gives the dead the opportunity to tell their own stories, a desire that, like Addie's, persists beyond the grave. In *Jacob's Room* Woolf draws from the same *Macbeth* soliloquy that provided Faulkner with the title of *The Sound and the Fury*, a passage that speaks to the unraveling of story and significance. The "tale / Told by an idiot" that drew Faulkner is immediately preceded by the declaration, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" (Shakespeare V.v.24-28). Or, as



Woolf rewrites the lines, “In any case life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows” (*JR* 56). In each case, Faulkner and Woolf draw upon literary precedence to underscore the disarray of life and mourning, undermining readings that would have their characters’ deaths fitting a larger narrative.

### Theatrical Elegy

*Alas! that all we loved of him should be,  
But for our grief, as if it had not been,  
And grief itself be mortal! Woe is me!  
Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene  
The actors or spectators?*

– Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Adonais”

The stage is a particularly useful lens through which to examine Faulkner’s and Woolf’s critiques of the elegy, since by recasting as theatrical the social conventions of mourning they skirt the assumption that such practices always and only show respect for the dead and offer comfort to the bereaved. Instead, invocation of the theatre draws attention to the relationship between the actor and the audience, the mourner and society, and the way that that relationship affects the authenticity of elegiac representation.<sup>27</sup>

In *As I Lay Dying* the most obvious piece of theatricality is the decaying corpse in the wagon, which makes a spectacle of the Bundren family as they ride into Jefferson. Although Addie’s family is carrying out her burial wishes, their actions generate only horror and disgust in the town

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<sup>27</sup> Bleikasten observes that even the voices of the monologues themselves offer “the improvised quality, the changes in tone and tempo, and the many redundancies of a talking voice . . . in *As I Lay Dying* the characters’ voices tend from the outset to arise from and to reverberate in a public space and hence to imply a social context” (*Ink* 153). Their voices are already engaged with an audience that the reader must create throughout the course of the novel.

onlookers, indicating that the wishes of the dead are not the prevailing consideration in determining the acceptability of particular mourning practices. Addie's dead body highlights the relationship between the death of an individual and social regard for the remaining family. In *Jacob's Room* Betty Flanders is given an additional measure of respect upon visiting her late-husband's tombstone: "Hats were raised higher than usual; wives tugged their husbands' arms" (JR 9). Faulkner's Bundren family merely invite public censure when they keep her above-ground, making of them a spectacle very different from the one that Mrs. Flanders and her boys make on the way to the cemetery. But both the Bundren and Flanders families, the authors are at pains to make clear, create spectacle out of the death of their loved ones and are themselves made into a spectacle of mourning.

Woolf scrupulously denies the reader the spectacle of Jacob's dead body, and instead puts the home of spectacle itself on display by making room in her short novel for an extended narrative exploration of the city's opera house. Before the narrator approaches the opera itself she<sup>28</sup> undercuts its significance by touting the theatricality of London's streets, pausing "on the banks of the Thames, where the great streets join and St. Paul's Cathedral, like the volute on the top of the snail shell, finishes it off" (JR 50). The narrator seems to gloat about her access to the city in all its layers, couching it in terms of an exclusivity that surpasses that of the opera house: "few, it seems, are *admitted* to that degree. Of all the carriages that leave the arch of the Opera House, not one turns eastward" (52; italics mine).

Only after ranging over the city streets does the narrator turn to the Opera House: "nature

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<sup>28</sup> The narrator's perspective is a matter of extended discussion in Woolf scholarship. I follow critical tradition in referring to the narrator as "she," since Woolf goes out of her way to mark the difference in sex—and, consequently, access to education—that distances the narrator from her subject. I do not join some critics in linking the narrator closely to Woolf herself, but am instead partial to Little's argument that "There are in a sense two narrators, or one narrator who insists on giving us a twofold vision of Jacob, a vision that shows the conventional pattern which he 'should' follow [in a *Bildungsroman*], and almost simultaneously points out that he is not following the pattern" (114). Such a reading of the narrator has Woolf bringing the multiplicity of viewpoints that is of such note in her plot to the level of narration itself—a correspondence that seems more than coincidental. See Handley's discussion for an interesting link between Woolf's narrator and Bakhtin (111). My concern about referring to the narrator as "she," then, lies not in the gendering of such a pronoun, but rather in the number.

and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. The moulds are filled nightly. There is no need to distinguish details” (53). Her description echoes that of the college chapel in which Jacob so surprisingly voiced his disapproval of distinctively dressed women. But here the narrator, after speaking in the voice of social conformity, moves beyond the social boundaries between boxes and gallery to linger on one individual after another in the audience. Here one sees dramatized the tensions that Alex Woloch analyzes in *The One vs. the Many*, between the major character and the minor players, narrative space and character function. These tensions are perhaps most explicit in Woolf’s manuscript of *Jacob’s Room*: “To be ~~Both~~ nobody, if by so being I might be everybody would suit me but But no. We must choose; ~~or happier submit to the choice made for us.~~ Never was – there a ~~more~~ harsher necessity!” (Bishop, *Holograph* 77). Dissolving her own particularity, whether through multiplicity or through non-entity, would allow the narrator great range.<sup>29</sup> But in such aspirations she draws attention to the fact that she has a delimited social position. Her fascination with the “massive fronts of the respectable” which “conceal after all their secret code; or why so impermeable?” reveals that she speaks from a social position in which such sights are not to be taken for granted (JR 53).

Through her wandering gaze the narrator makes the order of the opera house akin to the games of hide-and-seek that the children play in *The Waves*, published nearly a decade later. The observer is free to roam, and in doing so she transforms the orderly audience of the opera house into a crowd much like that of the streets from which she has just come. Gustave Le Bon’s rather theatrical 1895 observation that “the old pillars of society are giving way one by one . . . the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the

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<sup>29</sup> We might compare Woolf’s narrator, who attempts to shed her particularity, with what Bleikasten calls the “extradiegetic voice” that is apparent in the monologues of *As I Lay Dying*: it “blends again and again with the characters’ voices and sometimes even eclipses them. . . . the novelist is both nowhere and everywhere” (153).

rise” (xiv-xv), is given credence not by what Woolf’s narrator says, as she sets out the social parameters of the opera house, but by what she does, roaming through the boxes at will. The pillars that give way “one by one” are replaced by a force who identifies herself only negatively, in her distance from the “impermeable” fronts of the respectable, the “difference of sex” that distinguishes her from Jacob, and her desire to be a “nobody” who need not choose a particular seat in the house.

Current Woolf scholarship is replete with links between Benjamin’s flâneur and the roving narrators and characters of Woolf’s novels.<sup>30</sup> And indeed the narrator of *Jacob’s Room* demonstrates an ease among the people of the streets that warrants Edward Bishop’s claims that “*Jacob’s Room* is more a city novel than is *Mrs. Dalloway*” (“Subject” 161). Bishop notes that Seymour Chatman’s characterization of modern city life, one “filled with empty busyness, distraction, and lack of commitment,” is an apt description of a novel that has so many narrative breaks and such an elusive protagonist.<sup>31</sup> In linking the street crowds to the opera audience Woolf reimagines the space of the opera house as a spectacle that has little to do with the audience’s attention to the stage. Even here, in effect, her narrator notices what Jacob misses, and in linking the audience to the dynamic of a crowd Woolf attends to the ways in which Jacob’s search for culture and order belies the more intriguing disintegration of social barriers.

There are, however, important distinctions to be made between the street crowd and the opera audience. William Egginton locates the origins of the modern crowd in the theater audiences of early-modern Europe, when the fear of being “submerged by chaos,” as Woolf puts it, was assuaged by instituting social barriers among audience members (97). The audience is thus a crowd

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<sup>30</sup> See Caughie, Bowlby, and Tseng.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson links Woolf’s work to Georg Simmel and to Benjamin, drawing on Woolf’s diaries, in which the author writes, “London itself perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives me a play & a poem” (*Diary* 3:186). We might read here a link between Woolf’s love of the city, which gives her “a play & a poem,” and the structure of *The Waves*, her “playpoem.” The city and literary form are, for Woolf, closely linked, something that is apparent in many of the novels that do not, as with *Mrs. Dalloway*, the subject of the next chapter, feature London. The description in *Jacob’s Room* of St. Paul’s as the “volute” on the snail’s shell is a precursor for her discussion, in the novel’s introduction, of the form of *Mrs. Dalloway* as like a snail’s shell.

onto which an order has been mapped, an order that Woolf's narrator undermines in her easy progress from street to opera house, gallery to boxes. In the movement from street to theatre Woolf's narrator shows the reader Jacob's choice, the theater over the street, just as he elsewhere chooses classic Greek texts over the world outside his window, but she does not limit herself to it.

Only belatedly, after a break in the chapter, does the narrator tell us where Jacob sat, in a "seven-and-six-penny seat" (JR 53), and remark on his aloofness from the crowd as he remains "under the influence of the music" (53). It is this influence, noted in Jacob but ignored by the narrator, that marks the difference between these two ways of seeing. The influence under which Jacob finds himself makes him part of the theater audience whose potential for chaos has been tamed. He has folded his own identity into that of the performance, just as his earlier experience in the college chapel suggested a desire to lose himself in the ceremony rather than be disturbed by the presence of individuals. Egginton's historical work puts the effects of such "seeing" in perspective:

[I]f the early modern state, its functionaries, and its theoreticians were concerned with the chaotic potential of individuals when they came together as masses, the primary concern of nineteenth- and twentieth-century political theorists is with the possibility of crowds acting nonchaotically, as a unified force. (97)

Jacob's part in the upcoming war, full of orderly assemblies of soldiers, is foreshadowed by his earlier participation in the chapel and in the opera.

Woolf's narrator, however, continually diverts the reader's attention from both Jacob and the spectacle on the stage.<sup>32</sup> The deaths of Tristan and Isolde onstage, like those in Faulkner's and

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<sup>32</sup> In what may be the most explicit tie between the war and the worlds of the street crowd and the opera house, Woolf's diary entries for Peace Day (19 July 1919) show that her attention is, as with the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, on the observers of the parade, rather than the patriotic spectacle itself. As Levenback reads the diary entries, "Woolf was looking less at the actors ('[g]enerals & soldiers & tanks & bands took 2 hours in passing') than at the audience of spectators (*Virginia Woolf* 28). Woolf's initial sketch of the celebrations begins with her firmly planted outside the festivities: "I'm desolate, dusty, & disillusioned. Of course we did not see the procession. We have only marked the rim of refuse on the outskirts" (*Diary* 1: 292), and goes on to echo the fear of "fraud" that she often felt at funerals, and that was finally given expression in *The Years*. As she considers her reaction to the Peace Day celebrations she wonders, "I

Woolf's novels, are muted by the narrative interest in those watching such events unfold. Among the watchers, the emphasis is on the social arrangement of the audience; the disembodied presence of a "Royal hand attached to an invisible body," emerging from the curtains of a box, prefigures the motor car that gives order and purpose to the crowded streets in *Mrs. Dalloway* (JR 52). In both novels, the presence of royalty—and the emphasis in both cases is on the partial presence<sup>33</sup>—is sufficient to signal for the reader an underlying order well before the narrator mentions the "system of classification" arranged in order to prevent one's being submerged by chaos (53). Putting the social engagement in a political perspective, William Handley observes that the narrator is first tempted by the queen's authority, but then rejects it: "Her difficult renunciation of a godlike role at the opera house becomes a democratic act. . . . Woolf's narrator wants to repoliticize the opera house's structured aesthetic" (128).

The opera house recasts Jacob's individual comments about the intrusiveness of women in college chapel in a social light. In all of the critical discussion of the ways in which Woolf foregrounds the unknowableness of the individual in her narratives,<sup>34</sup> it is easy to lose sight of the extent to which Jacob's character is captured in his unthinking acceptance of his seat in the opera

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can't deny that I feel a little mean at writing so lugubriously; since we're all supposed to keep up the belief that we're glad & enjoying ourselves. . . . if, years later, these docile herds will own up that they too saw through it, & will have no more of it—well—should I be more cheerful?" (293). She wavers between routing her husband out of the house to see some of the fireworks ("What herd animals we are after all—even the most disillusioned" (294)) and distancing herself from the festivities: "it seems to me a servants festival; some thing got up to pacify & placate 'the people'—& now the rain's spoiling it" (292).

<sup>33</sup> The holograph shows Woolf gradually changing the position of the narration, from identification with the Queen, "~~to~~ ~~be~~ Queen of England seemed ~~& something~~ <sup>one</sup> to die for" (Bishop, *Holograph* 76), to speaking from the position of the patriotic observer, for whom not only the Queen but even the "name" of the Queen seemed "worth dying for" (JR 52).

<sup>34</sup> Egginton has an interesting discussion of the individual's "intimate core" as itself a theatrical act, part of his discussion of the evolving relationship between anonymity and intimacy in European theater history:

[one's] intimate core is a treasure to be protected, to be sure, but it is also a powerful tool to be used in navigating the perilous public world . . . *Persona* is externalized spirit; it is intimacy extruded from public anonymity and worn on an actor's sleeve; it is the secret self that we strive to represent in public, and that we desire to know and ultimately to be like when—as public, as audience—we momentarily extinguish our own characters in order to better take in those of the stage. (102)

In *Jacob's Room* Woolf inverts this schema, working from the outside to show how a persona is imposed upon one by the narrator's and other characters' quests to know the "real" Jacob Flanders. His own comments are deflationary, melting him into the audience rather than justifying the "distinction" that is imposed on him.

house. The life struggles that shape the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* are not formative events for Jacob.<sup>35</sup> He is, instead, more clearly responding to the Althusserian subject-hailing that Edward Bishop notes in his most recent work on the novel, “The Subject in *Jacob’s Room*”: “Jacob is ‘recruited’ by ideology, from that first shout by his brother . . . which recruits him for the family” (147). Jacob’s belated appearance, particularly after an opening that focuses on the private thoughts of his mother, shows him emerging from the fabric of the world in which he exists, rather than declaring his individual status. Bishop also emphasizes the role of theatre in interpreting Woolf’s novel, though he does so by linking it to Bertolt Brecht’s alienation effect:

The methods of the new theater were to break the spell; to make the spectator use his or her critical sense. . . . Brecht’s stated aim was to foreground the ideological . . . [Woolf was] exposing the unnaturalness of these institutions that seem so natural (and so naturally lead to war) that the causes seem to lie elsewhere. (“Subject” 156-159)<sup>36</sup>

In her narrator, whose personality emerges most forcefully in her survey of the opera house, Woolf forces the reader to reconsider the stalls and booths of the opera house, and Jacob’s unthinking acceptance of a place in them.

In Egginton’s sketch of the modern crowd and early-modern theater’s attempts to shape an order in that crowd, there is a tension between intimacy and anonymity. He notes that, in the theater, “those other souls that surround us provide us with a screen of anonymity against which to

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<sup>35</sup> Little lists the death of Jacob’s father, his move from the provinces to London, his education, and his romances with women as events that, in any normal *Bildungsroman*, would cause him to reflect and develop as a character. In “A Sketch of the Past” Woolf puts the events of life in what she sees as their proper place: “Here I come to one of the memoir writer’s difficulties—one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: ‘This is what happened’; but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened. And the events mean very little unless we know first to whom they happened” (*Moments of Being* 65).

<sup>36</sup> Faulkner, too, is aligned with Brecht: “the novel’s montage creates an almost Brechtian distance between the characters and ourselves. We watch them and listen to them, but we never cease to be part of the audience. *As I Lay Dying* offers us a *spectacle of voice* (Bleikasten, *Ink* 158).

act out and hence fall slave to our most irrational impulses” (195). Fellow spectators to keep one in line via a kind of intimacy: “in a well-lit, comfortable theater space, there I and my fellow spectators may be seated in such a way that we both see the stage and each other (and are seen by each other)” (105). In Woolf’s choice of the opera house there is not simply the tension between anonymity and intimacy, but also the means to see how both play a role in furthering the social conformity that Jacob assumes as his inheritance. The shared affective response to what occurs onstage may bind the audience together, but, in the narrator’s pulling away from that aspect of the opera experience, Woolf focuses on the intensely conspicuous nature of being part of the audience, in which the individuals that the narrator picks out—particularly those with well-known names and positions—also contribute, in their very public identifiability, to the making of boxes, stalls, gallery and amphitheatre, among which “[t]here is no need to distinguish details (JR 53).

Both Faulkner and Woolf struggled to define and redefine anonymity and intimacy in their own writing lives. Julia Briggs has written about a passage at the end of Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* that reads, “The truth is, I often like women. I like their unconventionality. I like their subtlety. I like their anonymity” (122). Of course, as Briggs points out, Woolf exchanged “subtlety” for “completeness” in the second British impression of the book, which “counteracts the marginalising implications of the neighbouring terms” (Briggs 145). But it is marginalization that Woolf so frequently celebrates. She may be an “outsider,” as her narrator in *Jacob’s Room* so often is, but such a vantage point also affords her a variety of possible seats in the opera house. There is, in the narrator’s posturing of choosing a seat, an indication of a “choice” that Jacob does not have, he in his seven-and-sixpenny seat.<sup>37</sup> To be “both” or “nobody” in the opera house—such a longing exists in the holograph, and it is a longing that Woolf continues to voice throughout her writing

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<sup>37</sup> Such outsider status is not, in Woolf’s conception, limited to women. As Karen Levenback argues, Woolf regarded her brother-in-law, Philip Woolf, as always now “an outsider, a spectator” after he returned from the war (*Virginia Woolf* 35; the Woolf quotation is from her *Diary* 1:248). The war survivors’ difficulties when returning to civilian life are featured in Woolf’s next novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, in the character of Septimus Smith.



career. Hermione Lee, in her 1996 biography, *Virginia Woolf*, declares “anonymity” to be “a favorite word” of Woolf’s around the time that the latter turned fifty—a full decade after *Jacob’s Room* was published (625). Lee cites the end of *Flush*, 1933: “To be nothing—is that not, after all, the most satisfactory state in the whole world?” (135).

For Faulkner, the ideal scenario would be a life lived entirely apart from his books, to have no public presence:

It is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books; I wish I had had enough sense to see ahead thirty years ago and, like some of the Elizabethans, not signed them. It is my aim, and every effort bent, that the sum and history of my life, which in the same sentence is my obit and epitaph too, shall be them both: He made the books and he died. (*Letters* 285 [11 February 1949])

Faulkner’s reticence results from a larger set of concerns that sets the ability to speak as one individual-among-many against the power of speaking as a representative or figure of authority. Such concerns come to the fore in political situations, such as when he was asked to speak at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, to be held in Denver in Oct. 1959. In his reply to the request, Faulkner’s unease is not with appearing at the conference, but with appearing as an “officially delegated mouthpiece”:

If I will have any value here (the Denver Conference) I believe it will [be] negatived, maybe destroyed if I am more than present. I mean, to be the official speaker delegate. Because I would go there having no confidence whatever in the idea of me being that officially delegated mouthpiece. For the reason that I believe that speech is mankind’s curse, all evil and grief of this world stems from the fact that man talks. I mean, in the sense of one man speaking to a captive audience. Except for that, and

its concomitants of communication—radio, newspapers, such organs—there would have been no Hitler and Mussolini. I believe that in the case of the speaker and his captive audience, whatever the reason for the captivity of the audience, the worst of both is inevitably brought out—the worst of the individual, compounded by the affinity for evil inherent in people compelled or persuaded to be a mass, an audience, which in my opinion is another mob. (*Letters* 424 [4 March 1959])

Although in *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner focuses on the tensions between individuals of the Bundren family, a wider view of his work shows an intimate familiarity with the audience or mob, from the Easter congregation in the Dilsey section of *The Sound and the Fury* to the lynching crowd of *Intruder in the Dust* and “Pantaloone in Black.” Such scenes, when paired with the views expressed in his letters, may account for the silence of so many of his novels’ central characters. Whereas Woolf’s portrayals of silent young men in *The Waves* and *Jacob’s Room* reflect social values that Woolf desires to call into question even as she suggests alternative models of narrative attention for consideration, the silence of Faulkner’s characters reflects a sensitivity to the problems of the central position that is often overlooked in Faulkner criticism, where it is common to identify the author’s own opinions with those expressed by talkative characters like Gavin Stevens.

When Woolf returns to the opera house late in the novel, the narrator captures the social changes afoot by painting all inhabitants of the opera house with the same red brush: “Under the arch of the Opera House large faces and lean ones, the powdered and the hairy, all alike were red in the sunset” (*JR* 142). Although the various rooms that Jacob inhabits have been the focus of a good deal of Woolf criticism, the most intriguing “rooms” in the novel are places of public gathering, such as the chapel at King’s College or the London opera house. The public spaces of *Jacob’s Room* allow Woolf to explore, in the very settings in which Jacob seeks to confirm his place, the disruptions to such a system that come in the forms of women’s education, the growth of the city

scene, and the glare of war.

### **A Center that Is Unable to Hold Attention**

In addition to Jacob's social situation there is the question of his place in literary genre. Even as Faulkner's Addie claims a role in the elegiac process, Woolf's Jacob offers a check on readers' expectations of the protagonist of the novel. Roger Moss cites the novel's 165 "extraneous characters" as evidence of Woolf's protest against the strong strain of individualism in the novel tradition. Moss characterizes the individualism of the novel tradition as an "escape from the rigours of an urban and populous society," an "answer to the threat of anonymity and exploitation" (47). Woolf's narrative cuts through such fictions by illustrating that singling out a young man like Jacob will not make him productive or interesting; more than literary technique must be present to distinguish an individual from others. By making her minor characters more present—with names, back stories, and opinions—and her major character less prominent, Woolf critiques both the individualism of the novel and the widespread sense of crowds being made up of unthinking, unreflective beings who must be contained in orderly opera-house divisions. She reveals such things to be a manner of seeing, undercutting, finally, even her own narrator, whose fixation on defining Jacob suffuses the novel even as her eagerness to do so steals attention from him.

Although Percival's centrality to the dynamics of *The Waves* is corroborated by all of the speaking characters, Jacob's central position in the novel that carries his name is much more precarious. If Jacob's surname, Flanders, connects him to the World War I site at which nearly a third of the British mortalities occurred,<sup>38</sup> his first name reminds one, in calling up the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, of the question of birthright. Moss argues that Jacob steals our attention from

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<sup>38</sup> Zwerdling article 896. In addition to the raw numbers, Zwerdling also notes that John McCrae's 1915 "In Flanders Fields" was one of the most popular war poems of the period, and thus contributed to linking "Flanders," itself a corpse poem, with war death in the public mind.

his older brother, Archer (40). One might claim, however, that, in this novel, Woolf's narrative techniques perform a second theft, diverting attention from Jacob to anything and everything around him:

Now distracted by brown panelling; now by a fern in a pot; here improvising a few phrases to dance with the barrel-organ; again snatching a detached gaiety from a drunken man; then altogether absorbed by words the poor shout across the street at each other (so outright, so lusty)—yet all the while having for centre, for magnet, a young man alone in his room. (JR 75)

The final words, in which the narrator settles on Jacob, are a parody of the rapt attention and order that Percival inspires in *The Waves*. But Woolf's narrator defends her approach:

[T]here remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy—the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history . . . something is always impelling one to hum vibrating . . . endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities he had not at all. (56-57)

She characterizes what appears to be a kind of theft of narrative attention as, instead, an endowment. Even as Jacob himself notices very little of the world around him the narrator insists on the significance of such elements in understanding his character, and in doing so she suggests she may be able to offer a better picture of him than he could provide if the narrative were turned over to him.

In observing Woolf's attention to minor characters, rather than her protagonist, Edward Bishop concludes, "Woolf's problem throughout seems to be that although her subject is Jacob she is continually sidetracked by other characters" ("Shaping" 120). Woolf hardly seems "sidetracked," since her attention to minor characters only escalates in her next novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf's

“straying” attention is a mode, one that enables Woolf to draw to her reader’s attention literary assumptions about the appropriate space reserved for novels’ central figure. As Bishop himself acknowledges, the initial draft of the novel included a great deal more of Jacob’s presence; only in subsequent drafts did Woolf pare away Jacob’s influence and thus, as a result, draw in the stories and viewpoints of other characters. Although she removed several competing figures who would allow her to make explicit contrasts with Jacob’s situation and personality, the final version of the novel shows Jacob unseated by the confluence of other, more minor figures, and by the institutional changes that he refuses to acknowledge.

Jacob is, as Judy Little characterizes him, conventional “except for the war” (118). This exception is an intriguing one, because his death in the war does indeed shape the sentiments of many readers, as the cast of the elegy is prone to do, inclining them toward eulogy where one might otherwise see faults. But in another sense the war is precisely what makes Jacob conventional, as the loss of his future gets swallowed up in the collective loss of the war dead. Kelly Walsh reads Jacob’s war death as swallowing up his particularity: “Having died, offstage, in the war, the singularity of Jacob Flanders’s truncated, unripe existence becomes an emblem for all the other young men whose potentiality was not fulfilled” (8), though elsewhere she notes that the novel’s “poignancy derives from the singularity of its synechdochical figure” (9). The vacillation in the critical literature between Jacob’s singularity and his conventionality is already contained within the word that Woolf uses throughout the novel to characterize him: “distinguished,” both set apart from his peers and manifesting a bearing that situates him within a particular, socially elevated class of men.

Alex Woloch’s study of the relational structure of character-systems in novels is worth bearing in mind here, but so is a sentiment that both Leonard and Virginia Woolf express at various times in their writing: recognizing another individual’s subjectivity is key to preventing cruelty (L. Woolf, *Journey* 19). We might return to the quotation from Woolf’s diary in which she characterizes

the ability to kill another person as the result of a failed imagination, an inability to see “the infinite possibilities of a succession of days which are furled in him & have already been spent. (*Diary* 1:186). It is a critical commonplace that “*Jacob’s Room* [is] an excursion into the historical composition of character as such, and indeed, into the making of a set of beliefs and world views which could plausibly have led to war” (Bucknell 761). What is most striking about the novel, however, is how Woolf uses both the central character’s own affirmations and his absence to make such a critique. Jacob’s absence undercuts both the teleological bent of the *Bildungsroman* and the retrospective cast of the elegy.

Although Addie does not undergo the same kind of narratorial scrutiny that undermines Jacob’s role in *Jacob’s Room*, she, too, occupies an amorphous role, both in her family and in *As I Lay Dying*. Critics, however, seem to have taken her centrality for granted. Michael Millgate leaves little doubt about her significance: “[T]he relationships within the Bundren family radiate about Addie, the mother, as both their physical and symbolic core” (108). Millgate’s claims are echoed in much subsequent Faulkner criticism even though, as he acknowledges, the Bundren family members have “widely divergent purposes” in traveling to Jefferson (107), and Addie appears in their conversation most often as a cover for their own motivations.

If one reads Addie as assuming a central role in the novel, it seems significant that, when she speaks, she does much to deny her maternal role and the unity of her household. She undermines her marriage by disclosing her affair, distinguishes between children she loved and those who were born merely to satisfy her husband, and gives no indication that the promise she extracts from Anse to return her body to Jefferson is made for the good of the family. Indeed, although some critics read the journey as a means of uniting the family in their grief, others suggest that Addie’s motive lay in her desire to tear her family apart, or to humiliate them by forcing them to face “her people” in

Jefferson.<sup>39</sup> Faulkner does not need an inquisitive narrator to usurp Addie's position;<sup>40</sup> her bitter monologue forces the reader to reconsider his or her assumptions about what the central position requires of a character.<sup>41</sup> Whether one relies more heavily on Addie's discourse or the novel's plot, the novel's conclusion effectively denies Addie centrality through a double-erasure that operates on both levels: her burial goes unrecorded except in a dependent clause, and her husband readily supplies a new "Mrs. Bundren" upon arriving in Jefferson, underscoring how easily supplanted Addie is both within her family and as the motivation for the their journey.<sup>42</sup>

Addie Bundren's repeated efforts to empty out names and labels might be read as a direct response to those who, like the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, attempt to sum up another individual with a single word. The correspondence is striking, occurring as it does across such cultural and literary divides. Although Addie is frequently described as being set against language in general, André Bleikasten observes more accurately that Addie envisions "language as a lexicon rather than a syntax" (*Ink* 204). Thus Addie's criticism might well be read as that of attempts to sum one up, an inclination that both Woolf and Faulkner knew well, she whose diaries are filled with brief sketches of friends and visitors, and he who acknowledged that his long sentences were the result of "trying

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<sup>39</sup> Lester speculates, "By making Anse, who has not been to Jefferson in twelve years, promise to bury her there, Addie forces her family to suffer the disapproval of town folks after all. Perhaps she exacted this promise with the hope of making her family aware of her, of who she had been, what she was made of, what she had given up when she 'took' Anse. Such a desire for recognition informs Addie's reasons for whipping her students" (43).

<sup>40</sup> That is not to say that there is no narrative influence other than the voices of the speaking characters. Critics have long noted that the characters' diction often ill-matched to their education and age. Rather than fault Faulkner for poor fiction, Widiss argues that such mismatches are signs of a narrative presence woven throughout the monologues: the reader comes to notice "its dark humor at the characters' expenses, the strange consonances of disparate characters' deeply internal metaphysical ruminations, the repetitiveness or complementariness of imagery distributed through the text" (101).

<sup>41</sup> Bleikasten delineates the multiple ironies of Addie's monologue: "It is one irony that this impassioned eulogy of the raw energies of life is entrusted to a dead woman. It is another irony that language is here at once the target, the arrow, and the bow. Addie's resentment against words is conveyed through words, and her use of them bears witness to their persuasive power. Indeed, in its rich array of figures and tropes, its firmly controlled syntax, and its dense sound patterning, her speech is a superb feast of (Faulknerian) rhetoric" (*Ink* 204). In my reading, however, it is not a matter of giving Addie "credit," but of recognizing that Faulkner has built into her monologue a dialectic of claiming elegiac convention only to undermine it through his particular speaker and the contents of her monologue.

<sup>42</sup> Widiss reads Addie's replacement as exemplifying a shift in the novel tradition as a whole, particular novels that rely on a marriage plot: "Faulkner provides both an emblem of and a response to the grander sense of abandonment that a reader might feel when faced with the forced transition from the reassuring narrators and narratives of nineteenth-century fiction to the challenges of the modernist novel" (118).

to say it all in one sentence, between one Cap and one period” (*Letters* 185). Although, in their novels, both authors acknowledge the appeal of such summing up, their characters, in eluding such pursuit, enable them to suggest a much more nuanced view of the world than they could if their hunt were successful.

### A Note on Form

Perhaps here, at the end, one might turn to matters of form. Woolf’s elliptical form is, of course, the most notable aspect of *Jacob’s Room*, and only the even more experimental nature of *The Sound and the Fury* prevents form from dominating the critical discussion of *As I Lay Dying*. Woolf herself leads the way in discussions of her novel’s form with the following entry in her diary on the occasion of her 38<sup>th</sup> birthday:

happier today than I was yesterday having this afternoon arrived at some idea of a new form for a novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in An Unwritten Novel—only not for 10 pages but 200 or so—doesn’t that give the looseness & lightness I want: doesn’t that get closer & yet keep form & speed, & enclose everything, everything? My doubt is how far it will (include) enclose the human heart—Am I sufficiently mistress of my dialogue to net it there? . . . no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen . . . Then I’ll find room for so much . . . the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form. (*Diary* 2:68-69)

Woolf’s first critic, her husband Leonard, echoed her doubts about the marriage of form and character upon reading the final draft of *Jacob’s Room*; as Virginia reports, “he says that the people are ghosts . . . Thinks I should use my ‘method’, on one or two characters next time” (*Diary* 2:186).

That the form would be seen to make “ghosts” of the characters—a sentiment that recurs in the novel’s earliest reviews—that limiting the set of characters would make clearer the “one or two,” is



an interpretation that, though common, should not be accepted uncritically. Many of the minor characters in Woolf's novel are actually more prominent than they would be in a work of more traditional form; it is primarily Jacob's ghostliness that colors such reviews, and it is less indicative of Woolf's abilities than of conventions that the central character be the one upon whom the author lavishes such attention.

Woolf's narrative, however, is an experiment in egalitarian narrative interest, in making room for the characterization of many in lieu of the few. Unlike the minor characters that are the focus of Woloch's study, the protagonist's absence from the narrative does not simply diminish his or her significance in Woolf's novel. Instead, it seems to shape the reader's views of the protagonist in surprising ways: Percival's absence contributes to his being made a figure of mythical proportions, whereas it has led to readings of Jacob as either wonderfully unknowable or disappointingly conventional. The elegy contributes a great deal to holding together Woolf's novel as she experiments with the weight of narrative attention, since it is a tradition in which the central figure is significant, but not present. The elegy lends a kind of authority to her work that is unlikely to come from her making more prominent the influence of the short story on her novel's form. Elegy, in short, lends Woolf's form legitimacy.

Although Woolf strives for "looseness & lightness" in the novel's form, she does so precisely by anchoring her novel in a kind of formal symmetry that shows traces of its ties to poetic form. Lytton Strachey's October 9, 1922, letter to Woolf speaks directly to the poetic similarity: "I finished Jacob last night—a most wonderful achievement—more like poetry, it seems to me, than anything else, and as such I prophesy immortal" (209). The last chapter of *Jacob's Room* is a composite of key phrases that appear earlier in the book, the echo offering a formal cohesion that,

like the presence of the elegy itself, seems to compensate for the looseness of the earlier sections.<sup>43</sup>

Although Mrs. Flanders and Bonamy remark that in Jacob's room there is "confusion everywhere!"

(143), the confusion occurs only within the story; formally, the final chapter is a resounding conclusion that draws together the episodes that were, earlier, so loosely related to one another.

Karen Smythe reads in Woolf's "fiction-elegy" (64) formal consolation, if not consolatory content:

"what is at stake in Woolf's fiction-elegies, then, is . . . the potential ability of the aesthetic to console structurally or tropologically," to create "a model of mourning" for the reader (65).

Consolation is, however, as it appears in the guise of familiar literary forms like the *Bildungsroman*, itself the subject of the novel's criticism.<sup>44</sup> Although I agree with Smythe that Woolf draws heavily from the poetic traditions for her elegies, she does so, frequently, under the sign of a disjunction between content and form. Consolation cannot easily be found in the symmetries of the latter if, as we have here, the protagonist breaks from his elegiac role to undermine such packaging. Thus Jacob's voice, repressed for much of the novel, serves an important role in undermining the formal consolation that the elegy provides even as the elegy, in turn, helps to hold together a novel that is otherwise an explosion of the realist boundaries of the nineteenth-century novel. Nested within Woolf's generic experiments, Jacob's voice is the means by which Woolf resists her own inclinations towards form that will enclose "everything, everything"; his voice, though registering something of "a blank" as he echoes the values of his upbringing, makes room for the much less conventional voices to come in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

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<sup>43</sup> Moss offers a careful breakdown of the final chapter, identifying the earlier passages from which the material is drawn (42). See also Kiely (214).

<sup>44</sup> In speaking of her own brother's loss, Woolf ruminates on the permanent mark that his death made on her early impressions of him:

The knell of those words affects my memory of a time when in fact they were not heard at all. We had no kind of foreboding that he was to die when he was twenty-six and I was twenty-four. That is one of the falsifications—that knell I always find myself hearing and transmitting—that one cannot guard against, save by noting it. Then I never saw him as I see him now, with all his promise ended. ("A Sketch of the Past" 140)

By making *Jacob's Room* elegiac, Woolf acknowledges the shadow of death over Jacob's life, and the lives of the war dead, in the memories of the living. But in doing so, by including it in her novel's form, she can, in a sense, "guard against" it and begin to call into question the extent of its influence.

André Bleikasten observes that critics have struggled to identify the genre of *As I Lay Dying*, often calling on drama and epic to capture its form and tone (159). Bleikasten himself argues that “novel” is, however, perfectly adequate, since it is “the unabashed and voracious parasite of the other genres” (*Ink* 162). Although Bleikasten’s argument resonates with many of those that Woolf made in “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” in which she indicates that the novel has swallowed up many forms that were previously distinct from one another, Addie’s voice in *As I Lay Dying* seems to speak to the particular conventions of the elegy in its traditional poetic form. Faulkner is not subtle in questioning the motives of those who seem to speak for the dead, a move that most closely aligns his critique of the elegy with Woolf’s *The Waves*, but he is particularly compelling in his creation of space for the voice of the elegiac subject—without removing the obstacle of her being dead. The explosion of Addie’s corpse poem within Faulkner’s book of mourning spurns both generic and familial ties. From it Faulkner will next explore the elegy in what is, unabashedly, a novel built on short stories.

If Faulkner’s formal gymnastics are, as Paul Lilly argues, an attempt to speak to the failure that lies behind even poetic pursuits of perfection, his oeuvre might be seen as an elegy for poetry itself. Although Faulknerian critical discourse does not ring with the kind of respect for the author’s critical faculty that suffuses Woolf criticism, and that is substantiated by her copious book reviews and essays, I would argue that, in *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner reveals a strong critical consciousness of the constraints of traditional mourning and literary conventions of mourning, criticisms that are given voice in Addie’s monologue.

#### IV

##### Lessons from a Hostess: Sharing Elegiac Space in *Mrs. Dalloway*

*[The modern novelist] will have extended the scope of his interest so as to dramatise some of those influences which play so large a part in life, yet have so far escaped the novelist . . . the emotions bred in us by crowds, the obscure terrors and hatreds which come so irrationally in certain places or from certain people . . . Every moment is the centre and meeting place of an extraordinary number of perceptions which have not yet been expressed.*

– Virginia Woolf, “The Narrow Bridge of Art”

*And this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him.*

– Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Although the primary tension in the traditional elegy is that of the relationship between elegist and elegized, both Woolf and Faulkner work to expand the scope of the relations that the form recognizes. Mourning, after all, concerns more than simply those two parties, and so through the polyphony of *The Sound and the Fury* one sees the competition between storytellers, which also gives Bernard’s solo conclusion in *The Waves* a triumphal ring. In *As I Lay Dying* and *Jacob’s Room* the elegiac subjects break into the elegizing process, protesting the elegies being framed for them. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Go Down, Moses*, however, the challenge to elegy is made not in one or the other of the elegiac roles, but is instead made by blurring the boundary between them. In these novels the elegiac subject is also an elegist.

As Percival does in *The Waves*, Septimus Smith appears only belatedly in *Mrs. Dalloway*. But unlike Percival, whom Bernard uses to stitch the six stories together, Septimus appears as a divisive

force, calling into question the narrative reliance on a single central figure; by the time one returns to Clarissa Dalloway and her party, the reader can no longer see her as a traditional protagonist, carrying the full weight of the novel. Instead, one sees her as one who *attempts* to bring all together, but also as one who recognizes the personal cost of that effort. Thus Woolf makes possible a new kind of narrative position; with Clarissa no longer a protagonist, but instead a hostess, the central figure of *Mrs. Dalloway* takes on the trappings of a traditional character-centered novel without its cost. She hosts the event, but does not become it, by relying on the “bringing together” of different people to be sufficient to make the party work.

Whereas the titles of *As I Lay Dying* and *Jacob's Room* point directly to their nearly silent subjects, *Mrs. Dalloway* gives no indication of the Septimus Smith who crowds Clarissa Dalloway to the edges of “her” novel and whose death leaves Clarissa in a position to reflect on such a loss. A parallel structure occurs in Faulkner's more loosely organized *Go Down, Moses*, in which Lucas Beauchamp, a figure who dominates the stories in the novel, yields to Rider, whose intense violence cuts a wide swath through the middle of the text. In both of these novels, two figures share the central position, one dying and one living, but in both novels both central figures feel the presence of death and exert themselves to record the deaths of others, bearing the marks of both elegiac roles.

### **Septimus the Elegiac and the Greeks**

Septimus has garnered much critical attention as a victim of shell-shock,<sup>1</sup> far less as an aspiring poet (*MD* 84). But much of the power of Woolf's portrayal of Septimus hinges on his maintaining both of these roles, preventing readers from readily diagnosing and subsequently dismissing him, as the doctors Holmes and Bradshaw do within the story. Like Christine Froula, whose reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a post-war elegy is now a classic in Woolf studies, I think there is

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<sup>1</sup> See Joyes and Wang.

much to be gained by reading Septimus as more than solely a victim of war trauma. Whereas Froula posits Septimus as a “prophet” of England’s post-war struggles (*Bloomsbury* 110), here I will read Septimus as a poet, linked both to the elegiac tradition and to the fraught ground of modern poetry.

*Mrs. Dalloway* is rife with references to poetry. Woolf not only alludes to Shelley and more recent English poets but also links Septimus, in particular, to Greek literature.<sup>2</sup> Critics such as David Bradshaw have drawn attention to the classical metaphors Woolf has strewn throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*: “by deploying . . . the ancient topos of falling or fallen leaves, an age-old simile for the numberless dead (see, for example, Isaiah 34:4), Woolf plainly encourages the reader to conceive of her book as an elegy” (107).<sup>3</sup> But by overlooking the elegist within the fiction as they connect the elegiac content directly to Woolf, critics fail to take into account the importance of her staging of elegy within the fiction so as to show precisely what challenges the modern elegist faces.

As she writes “The Hours,” the manuscript that became *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf wonders, “S’s character. founded on R[upert Brooke?] . . . or founded on me? . . . might be left vague—as a mad person is . . . so can be partly R.; partly me” (qtd. in Froula, *Bloomsbury* 118). Critics have leaped at the opportunity to read Woolf’s personal fight with mental illness in the character of Septimus Smith, but the Rupert Brooke relation has been sidelined, leaving behind an opportunity to see how Woolf uses the novel to articulate the difficulties facing the modern poet. One has to wonder whether Septimus’s name isn’t a reference to Brooke’s cause of death, as reported in the *Times* on 26 April 1915: “Brooke: On the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, from septicaemia, while on active service at the Dardanelles,

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2 See Hoff and Schlack for more about the classical allusions in *Mrs. Dalloway*. There is an additional reason for attending to the link between *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf’s interest in classical literature: Rowena Fowler observes, “Because Woolf’s reading notes on the *Choepori* of Aeschylus share a notebook with her working notes for *Mrs. Dalloway*, critics have paid special attention to the strands of vengeance and propitiation in the novel” (234).

<sup>3</sup> The allusion is, as Bradshaw notes, particularly striking, given that autumn leaves are rather conspicuous in a novel that takes place in June (113). The trope links Woolf’s novel to a tradition in both classical (Homer, Virgil) and English (Shelley, Byron, Tennyson, Houseman, and Hardy) literature (Bradshaw 113-114).

Sublitenant Rupert Chawner Brooke” (Levenback, *Great War* 15).<sup>4</sup>

In choosing between herself and Rupert Brooke for a model for Septimus, Woolf was not choosing between madness and poetry, but rather between one writer and another, both of whom struggled with mental illness. In a letter to Woolf during her breakdown in 1912, Brooke wrote to her with particular sympathy: “‘Hypersensitive and Introspective,’ the good doctor Craig said I was,” Brooke writes, acknowledging that he, like Woolf, was susceptible to nervous breakdowns (364). By situating Septimus somewhere between herself and Brooke, Woolf acknowledges not simply their shared mental anguish, but also the tendency of the medical community to treat hypersensitivity and introspection as problems to be solved, ignoring the other side of such tendencies: their contribution to poetic facility. Or, as Brooke puts it, “I feel drawn to you, in this robust hard world. What tormented and crucified figures we literary people are!” (364).

Septimus’s struggle with mental illness, particularly when he hears sparrows sing “in Greek words” (*MD* 24), echoes Woolf’s own; she, during a breakdown in 1904, “had lain in bed . . . thinking that the birds were singing Greek choruses” (*Moments of Being* 184). But just as strongly, the birds’ singing in Greek suggests a link to classical literature, echoing Aristophanes’ *The Birds*, as Rowena Fowler has argued (231). The allure of the fantastic in Aristophanes’ comedy is given a darker edge in Woolf’s rendition, as it means escape from the war-scarred life that Septimus is living in London.

I do not dispute that Woolf links Septimus’s trauma directly to his war experience. It is in Septimus’s being a “clerk, but of the better sort” (84), rather than the singularly elegant Brooke, that the character is most useful to Woolf as a critique of the war; the war’s ruin of even ordinary men, and not merely literary types, is central to the argument that runs through the novel. When Freud

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<sup>4</sup> Levenback writes of Rupert Brooke’s influence on Woolf’s war writing, arguing that it is overlooked by critics primarily because of Woolf’s silence on his death—a silence Levenback attributes to a failure to come to terms with his death rather than on a lack of influence (10). See also Levenback’s “Virginia Woolf and Rupert Brooke.”

reflects on the war losses in “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” in his first essay he dismisses the combatant as “a cog in the gigantic machine of war” (275), and thus one who does not share the non-combatant’s bemusement at the ideological changes afoot. In the second essay, Freud reconsiders, acknowledging that it would be interesting to look into the psychology of the combatant, “but I know too little about it. We must restrict ourselves to the second group, to which we belong” (291-292). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf does not restrict herself to the second group, instead taking care to incorporate the combatant’s viewpoint into her novel, ensuring that combatants and non-combatants are brought together, rather than separated, socially, in the war’s aftermath.

Woolf’s novel points not only to the effect of the war on Septimus and his fellow Britons, however, but also to the impulses that led him to such an experience: “He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (86). Septimus was, like Brooke, “one of the first to volunteer” (86). As Woolf writes in her review of Brooke’s posthumously collected poems, “No one could have doubted that as soon as war broke out he would go without hesitation to enlist” (*Essays* 281).

By linking the war with the poetic impulse so explicitly, Woolf draws attention to the significance of what are all too easily dismissed as merely poetic sensibilities; she highlights their importance in the political realm even as she holds poetry responsible for its part in the devastation of the war. But poetry can participate in the healing, as well as the violence; as Christine Froula argues, the elegy is a “field for confronting the violence that had devastated Europe and still loomed as a threat to its future” (*Bloomsbury* 87). Through Septimus’s poetry Woolf can explore a world and a poetry that Rupert Brooke did not live to see.

Woolf’s post-war portrait of London is a departure from the comparisons to classical Greece that surrounded Brooke during his lifetime. Brooke was called a “Greek god” by D. H. Lawrence, and Winston Churchill lamented the loss of one of “England’s noblest sons,” of “classical symmetry



of mind and body” (Levenback, “Virginia Woolf” 5). Woolf, whose own grief for Brooke was described as “Olympian” by Brooke’s lover, Cathleen Nesbitt, nevertheless “objected to the vision of Rupert Brooke . . . [who] had been elevated in the public imagination to a mythic figure of Olympian proportions” (5).

Unwilling to offer a hyperbolic elegy, linking modern England to classical Greece, Woolf instead uses allusions to Greece in *Mrs. Dalloway* to show the harsh contrast between the two eras. In doing so, she contributes to the development of modern poetry that she sees as a promising thread in Brooke’s work. Repeatedly in her review of *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke: With a Memoir*, Woolf pushes back against the Rupert Brooke of legend, aligned with classical Greece, and figures him as a writer poised to confront the present: “You felt that to him literature was not dead nor of the past, but a thing now in process of construction by people many of whom were his friends” (*Essays* 280); “he showed his power of being in sympathy with the present” (281). Woolf’s portrait of Brooke succeeds in breaking from an elegiac portrait that ties Brooke to his past and literature’s past. She credits him with considerable sensitivity to the influence of the times in shaping literature’s future.

In her own work, Woolf resists the temptation to use classical allusions to set Septimus up as a hero in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Longing to escape the post-war life, Septimus contests the claim that he “served with great distinction in the War,” thinking instead, “Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed” (*MD* 96). Unlike the protagonist in *Jacob’s Room*, Septimus is not viewed from afar and imagined as a Greek hero, but is, instead, made to endure the clash between poetic sensitivity and the brute nature of the London to which he has returned. London is no longer full of Shakespeare and Miss Isabel Pole; instead, the post-war city bears the marks of a Greek tragedy.

What, then, does the Greece of Woolf’s allusions bring to the novel that another poetic era

does not? For an answer we might turn to Woolf's essay, "On Not Knowing Greek," published in the same year as *Mrs. Dalloway*. In Greek literature, Woolf writes, "we meet them before their emotions have been worn into uniformity" (28):

In the vast catastrophe of the European war our emotions had to be broken up for us, and put at an angle from us, before we could allow ourselves to feel them in poetry or fiction. The only poets who spoke to the purpose spoke in the sidelong, satiric manner of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. It was not possible for them to be direct without being clumsy; or to speak simply of emotion without being sentimental. But the Greeks could say, as if for the first time . . . They could march straight up, with their eyes open; and thus fearlessly approached, emotions stand still and suffer themselves to be looked at. (34)

In alluding not only to Shelley and other English poets in *Mrs. Dalloway*,<sup>5</sup> but also to Greek poets and tragedians, Woolf returns to the directness of their approach to tragedy.

Unable to join the war poets in their satirical elegies, Woolf distances herself from the modern elegists that Jahan Ramazani has characterized as melancholic and seeking an anti-consolatory elegiac tone (xi). Interested in neither the melancholic, satirical elegies of the war poets, nor what she would characterize as the stiflingly ritualistic mourning of her Victorian childhood, Woolf works to return to classical expressions of grief. As Anne Fernald observes:

Her depiction of the Greeks as hunters of their own timid emotions combines a residual Victorian admiration for courage with her modern interest in psychological self-knowledge. What Penelope, Antigone, Electra, and Clytemnestra all show is the power of inconsolability, the fidelity and courage of a mourning that never ends. . . .

The mourning here is distinctly anti-Victorian in its rejection of sentimental soft-

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<sup>5</sup> Shelley, of course, may have encouraged Woolf's turn to Greek literature for influence. In his preface to *Hellas* he writes, "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their roots in Greece."

focus weeping and its emphasis on the violence preceding grief. (*Mourning*)

Notably, Woolf's interest in the classical world not for nostalgic but rather for clarifying purposes shows her seeking a kind of mourning that is neither, in the Freudian sense, mournful nor melancholic. There is a steadfastness in the classical figures' mourning—and it is notable that they are figured as female—as well as a public recognition of that deep mourning, that enables Woolf to combat the marginalization of mourning in the contemporary world by drawing on such venerated literary precedence.

In her novels, Woolf “naturalized the conventions of epic and tragedy” (Fowler 218), so as to emphasize, as she wrote in an early diary entry, that “any live mind today is of the very same stuff as Plato's & Euripides. It is only a continuation & development of the same thing. It is this common mind that binds the whole world together; & all the world is mind” (*Passionate Apprentice* 172-173). And yet Rupert Brooke's legacy serves as a warning: classical allusions may well bring her close to the “sentimental” writing of which she had such a lifelong abhorrence. Thus the sharp irony when the narrator of *Mrs. Dalloway* observes, “so prying and insidious were the fingers of the European War [that it] smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's nerves” (86). Greece does not, as Woolf uses it here, contribute to an air of pomposity in England; figures who stand like statues and boys who march in a similar manner are not treated kindly in Woolf novel. Instead, she aims for an incorporation of the Greeks that will enable her to break through the deadening effect of the war and the cultural suppression of its effects that makes Septimus feel like a failure. Ironically, she draws on the dead in order to reawaken post-war England, so that “England & Greece stood side by side, each much *enlivened* by the other” (*Diary* 4:100; emphasis added).

Woolf's incorporation of Greek allusion is, therefore, staged as a direct confrontation between the classical world and the modern one, rather than as an indication of the unbroken line

between the founders of Western civilization and the contemporary English inheritors of that tradition. Septimus hears “a shepherd boy’s piping” (*MD* 68), but the pastoral allusion quickly gives way to reality:

(That’s an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy’s elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus . . . The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house. (68)

Although threads of poetry appear, they are quickly perverted, the young shepherd replaced by an old beggar, reflecting the realities of Septimus’s situation and creating a trajectory of decrepitude, rather than any flowering of civilization. The elegy here is not akin to the poetry that Woolf describes elsewhere as that which “bids us take refuge in the past” (*Essays* 4: 434), but is, rather, brought wrenchingly into confrontation with the realities of the present.

The sudden appearance of Peter Walsh, whom Septimus mistakes for the dead soldier and friend, Evans, continues the poetic allusion. When Septimus’s wife, Lucrezia, notes that “it is time” to leave the park (*MD* 69), Septimus thinks:

The word “time” split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—  
  
“For God’s sake don’t come!” Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried. (69-70)

Suddenly the lost soldier returns, and is fully restored to his former self, bearing no marks of the war.<sup>6</sup> Rather than welcome his friend back home, Septimus is initially fearful. The line between living and dead is not one to be crossed so easily.

And yet the rest of the passage works to blur that line, making it difficult to distinguish London from Greece, living from dead. With Evans's appearance, it seems that the division between the living and the dead, the elegist and the elegiac subject, is no longer clear. Those Greek-singing birds, like the classical chorus that, in the essay "On Not Knowing Greek," Woolf characterizes as "the undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind" (29), suggest that there is life to be had "beyond the river where the dead walk" (*MD* 25). In an echo of the birds, Evans, too, appears from the shrubbery, as evidence of the renewed life of the dead, despite Septimus's persistent description of him as a "dead man" (70).

Evans has come closer to life even as Septimus himself edges toward death. Before the former's death, the two men "had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other" (*MD* 86). With Evans's death comes a death of feeling in Septimus: "[he] congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him" (86).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Molly Hoff reads this as a reversal of Aeneas's dream of a bloodied and unkempt Hector (197). Whereas Aeneas is surprised to see Hector bloodied, rather than once again successful in battle, Septimus is surprised to see Evans without the wounds that mark him as a war casualty. I read Septimus's horror as that of seeing the soldier not as a monument—as Peter Walsh sees marmoreal soldiers walking elsewhere in London that day—but as a living human being. That the soldier cannot be banished to monument is a revelation to Septimus. I would also note the contrast between Septimus's initial horror at seeing the dead re-embodied and Lily Briscoe's inspiration at "seeing" Mrs. Ramsey "return" at the end of *To the Lighthouse*, the "there she sat" an echo of the "there she was" that follows Clarissa throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, connecting the two novels. In *To the Lighthouse* the appearance of the dead provides the muse for artistic fulfillment. Evans's appearance, however, reminds Septimus of how far he is from fulfillment; his elegy remains mere scraps jotted on papers that are stuffed in drawers.

<sup>7</sup> Although Septimus's inability to feel is ascribed to his war experiences, contemporary sociologist Georg Simmel noticed a similar effect resulting from the stimulation of the modern city. As Choi characterizes Simmel's findings: "The

The lack of feeling continues after the war, marking a death of a different kind than Evans's, but one that nonetheless removes Septimus from the life around him, as if everything were "behind a pane of glass," before Septimus breaches that glass with his suicide (87). Septimus's remove from everyday life leads Rezia to describe him as "Septimus, who wasn't Septimus any longer . . . a dead man" (65). If "it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave," then Lucrezia concludes that "he was not Septimus now" (23). In her mind, as well as Septimus's own, the Septimus who had fought in the war was dead.

In a war where the only body to return to England was that of the Unknown Soldier (Trumpener 1097), this return home of Evans's body, even if only in Septimus's mistaken identification, is notable. No less fantastic than the narration by Addie's body in the center of *As I Lay Dying*, Evans's presence in post-war London shows the impossibility of, as the doctors have recommended, Septimus's living in the present. The figures of the past reappear in what Septimus reads as a request that he, the "giant mourner" (*MD* 70), speak for their loss. But, as the close pairing of Evans and Septimus makes clear, the modern elegist is not far removed from the dead. The elegist and elegiac subject are bound up together in a way that contemporary London life does not seem to recognize. Dr. Bradshaw counsels Septimus to focus on the "brilliant career" before him, but Septimus can only focus on the "crime" of the past (98). Asked to function without a past, Septimus fails to live in the present. The desire to make of Septimus yet another "case," to label him as either damaged or a hero, renders him without a place in post-war London.

### **Time's Split Husk**

As Septimus looks in fear and wonder at the "dead man in the grey suit" (70), his wife,

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blasé mind is the intellectual consequence of having hardened oneself to the shocks of everyday existence, and the price paid for surviving the nonetheless constant onslaught of sensual stimuli in the metropolis, resulting in the 'incapacity to react to new stimulations'" (711).

Lucrezia, punctuates his reveries with reminders of their appointment: “It is time” (69); ““The time, Septimus,” Rezia repeated. ‘What is the time?’” (70). Critical imagination has been caught by the persistent clanging of Big Ben throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. Some read the chime of the hour as a reminder of the modern world in which Clarissa and others move, with commercialism, the market, and the modern city coming to the foreground in what might otherwise seem a too-domestic novel. Others have read Big Ben as one of many reminders of the patriarchal system in which Clarissa struggles to give voice to her own perspective.<sup>8</sup> But if Big Ben is a voice of solemnity, with its oft-cited “leaden circles” (4) filling the air, it is primarily because of its role in reminding its hearers, Clarissa and Septimus among them, of what Frank Kermode has famously called the “tick-tock” of narrative expectation (45). When Clarissa pauses, awaiting the striking of Big Ben in the opening pages, Woolf introduces the life-halting sense of expectation that will become a recurring theme in the novel. Given one thing, readers who are also inheritors of narrative convention expect something further. In this, a novel set shortly after World War I, it is telling that the sense of expectation called up is one largely characterized by anxiety and dread.

As one moves through the story it is Septimus who keeps in the forefront that sense of something awful to come. While he blurs the boundary between the war dead and the war survivors, so, too, the boundary is blurred between his anxiety and what Woolf suggests is a widespread social anxiety in post-war London.<sup>9</sup> Melissa Bagley has argued persuasively that the language men and women use to describe women throughout the novel demonstrates a shared convention, a socially absorbed construction. I would argue that something similar appears to be

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<sup>8</sup> Blanchard describes Big Ben as “split[ting] time into artificial constructs of hours and minutes of a certain day in June, 1923” (296). Tseng describes the strokes of Big Ben as signifying “the official social and political order imposed on the city dwellers of London” (241).

<sup>9</sup> That London is, of course, marked by physical reminders of the difference between pre-war and post-war London: “Woolf goes to great lengths to present a historical London, in great transition both at home and in its colonies abroad. The tomb of the Unknown Warrior, built at Westminster Abbey (1920), by which many characters walk during the course of the novel, and other similar features of London public ideology were also still new and unfamiliar in the London landscape” (Lamot 165).

happening with anxiety: just as both men and women signal their shared cultural assumptions about women being bird-like and delicate, so, too, does the anxiety about garnering the attention of the crowd suggest a broader cultural basis for the anxiety Lucrezia and Septimus express.

Throughout the novel, Septimus becomes the figure for social anxiety, the one who, though he has “that look of apprehension . . . which makes complete strangers apprehensive too” (*MD* 14), bears the burden of his apprehension almost entirely alone. Like the motorcar grazing something “very profound” in the social fabric of its spectators (18), Septimus’s feeling that “some horror had come almost to the surface” (15) grazes something that many of the other characters express throughout the story. Peter Walsh is haunted in his mid-day dozing by the sense that spectators were about to be swept into “complete annihilation” (58). In a sequence of scenes that offer multiple explanations and potential causes, Clarissa’s memories of Bourton on the first page of the novel are marred by the sense that “something awful was about to happen” (3), and are immediately followed in time by her sense of “a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes” (4). By layering these moments of suspense and their possible causes, Woolf enmeshes such sense of anticipation, expectation, and dread into all avenues of life, be they physical or mental, in one’s past or present. They are not simply Septimus’s delusions, but rather a widespread anxiety that cannot be easily categorized as shell shock or any other medical ailment. It takes an outsider, Peter Walsh returning from a long absence, to note that “a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place. . . . Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important” (71).

As one sees in Clarissa’s heart trouble, possibly but not conclusively linked to war-time health trouble, the effects of the war are widespread and largely beyond categorization. From his position fifteen years after *Mrs. Dalloway*, E. M. Forster observes:

This is a period between two wars—the Long Week-End it has been called—and



some of the books published in it look backward—like Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*—and try to record the tragedy of the past; others look forward and try to avert or explain the disaster which overtook Europe in the thirties. And even when they are not directly about a war—like the works of Lytton Strachey or Joyce or Virginia Woolf—they still display unrest or disillusionment or anxiety, they are still the products of a civilisation which feels itself insecure. (280)

In Forster’s sketch, the “tick-tock” of anticipation—or, more accurately, anxiety—is the ingrained fear of yet another raid, of an inability to let go of the war mentality even five years after the fighting ended. There are traces of this throughout Woolf’s novel, from the backfiring car that causes hearers to jump as they would not have jumped before the war, and in the way that the narrator’s assertion that “The War was over” is immediately qualified by a number of exceptions, tumbling finally to a close:

The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over. (*MD* 5)

For those who draw the line directly from Greek civilization to that of Britain, who see civilization progressing, the Great War unravels all that had been and undermines any clear sense of narrative.

What Woolf is clearly disinclined to do is to brush such changes under the rug. As *Mrs. Dalloway* amply illustrates, she shares Maynard Keynes’s concerns about the effects of the war’s conclusion; Septimus’s death, driven by those who simply want to remove him from public view, is a reminder of the price of pushing the loose ends of the war aside. And yet she also sees an opportunity in breaking free from narrative expectation, illustrating something of the benefits of

such a change, even as she examines its costs.

## A Surviving Hostess

In “The Metaphysical Hostess: The Cult of Personal Relations in the Modern English Novel,” Peter Conradi notices something striking in four major works by E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf: there seems to be a fatal plague among the hostesses (433). Mrs. Ramsay dies early, even parenthetically, in *To the Lighthouse*, as does Mrs. Wilcox of *Howard’s End*. Mrs. Moore dies later in *A Passage to India*, and the eponymous heroine of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* may well have been originally slated to die at the end of the day on which the novel takes place. Indeed, given that Clarissa is drawn from Kitty Maxse, a friend of Woolf’s who died of what Woolf strongly believed was suicide, rather than accident, a dramatic death is at the core of her genesis. But, despite the heart trouble that shadows her from the novel’s opening pages, Clarissa does not die. My project is, in essence, an exploration of the change of circumstances that makes it possible for Clarissa to be there at the end of *Mrs. Dalloway*, for Peter Walsh to say, “It is Clarissa,” and for the narrator to affirm, “For there she was,” an affirmation that speaks to the possibility that, like these other female figures, Clarissa might well not have been there at the end of the novel.<sup>10</sup> Clarissa Dalloway’s survival marks something of a change in the trajectory of the elegiac novel, as she skirts the “tock” of the narrative, eluding her fate even as Septimus succumbs to it. By drawing attention to narrative convention through Big Ben’s mechanical imperturbability, and yet ultimately eluding such conventions, Woolf asks the reader to consider what it would take for the conventions of narrative to shift, and why such a burden need be there at all.

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<sup>10</sup> Ksiezopolska argues that, from our opening look at Clarissa through the eyes of Scrope Purvis “we see Clarissa in terms of transitory beauty, fated to die but still vivacious—a vision that will be made more explicit later through Clarissa’s musings on Shakespeare’s lines in *Cymbeline*, Peter Walsh’s thoughts and many other suppressed hints. This is actually what we may call a deceptive motif in the novel, since it is not Clarissa who is fated to die within the narrative. Scrope Purvis is thus the first in the line of agents of the false plot (the plot of Clarissa’s death from heart failure or by suicide)” (39).

Criticism of *Mrs. Dalloway* has largely read Septimus as a foil for Clarissa: he dies so that she does not have to, as the author splits up particular protagonist tasks. Woolf herself seems to encourage such a reading. In her 1928 introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf offers her readers the following “scrap”: “in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence . . . Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party” (*Mrs. Dalloway Reader* 11). Tentative though she is about offering such rich interpretive nuggets to the reader, Woolf is much more forceful in her assertion, immediately following, that *Mrs. Dalloway* is not a novel created merely to try out a new form; it is, she says, an idea that simply would not fit existing novel forms, and thus “the idea started as the oyster starts or the snail to secrete a house for itself” (12). As the only two direct comments Woolf makes about *Mrs. Dalloway* in this introduction, their proximity suggests that Septimus’s entrance in the text is closely related to the form that the novel takes, a form that, she acknowledges, bears only some resemblance to the novels of earlier times.

But there is a problem with reading Clarissa’s death as the shadow that haunts *Mrs. Dalloway*, calling forth Septimus Smith to divert the tragedy. Christine Froula suggests that these “scraps” may have been misrememberings on Woolf’s part, since “she invented Septimus almost immediately, and nothing in *The Hours* suggests that Clarissa was to die or kill herself” (94). Preoccupied as Woolf was by Kitty Maxse’s mysterious death, Froula claims, Woolf may have simply confused the fate of her character and that of her friend. Septimus may then not be simply a supplement to the larger narrative of Clarissa’s party.

The novel that secretes a house for itself is Woolf’s alternative to the “secretion” that occurs in those who create for themselves a hard shell of identity, like Lady Bruton of *Mrs. Dalloway*, for whom Emigration is the “object round which the essence of her soul is daily secreted, becomes inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking-glass, half precious stone” (109). Woolf’s novel is more

malleable, blurring the relationship between protagonist and the crowd. When she writes of wanting to explore the “party consciousness” (*Diary* 3:12-13), Woolf notes that “people secrete an envelope which connects them & protects them from others, like myself, who am outside the envelope, foreign bodies,” drawing on the same image as that used to describe Lady Bruton, but using it, here, to serve the dual purposes of connection and protection.

The image of the secreted layer recurs once more, in Woolf’s 1927 essay, “Street Haunting”:

As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one’s own room. . . . The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughness a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye” (*Essays* 4:481).

This essay appears two years after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, echoing Clarissa’s stepping out in the first page of that novel. In “Street Haunting,” the “adventure” of letting the eye get its fill of “this simple, sugary fare, of beauty pure and uncomposed” is coupled with the “haunting” shadow of deformity, the “maimed company of the halt and the blind” (*Essays* 4: 483-484). So, too, in Woolf’s earlier novel, Clarissa’s lark is matched by the shadow of Septimus’s torment, the horrors of his past come to life in the form of Evans. Observation comes at a cost: Septimus does, after all, resist looking at the city around him, as if madness comes from without, not from within.<sup>11</sup> What the narrator of “Street Haunting” describes as the delight of shedding one’s personality for the anonymity of the crowd is given a much darker cast in Septimus’s soldierly anonymity and his post-war trouble, deprived as he is of his “envelope,” vulnerable to the stares of others. Although

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<sup>11</sup> Note the repetition of “They are signalling to me” (*MD* 21), and “they beckoned” (22), as well as the sparrow who calls Septimus’s name before bursting into Greek (24-25).

numerous critics have described Peter Walsh as a liberated *flâneur*,<sup>12</sup> Septimus is forced closer to a version of Georg Simmel's "metropolitan type," in whom personality and intimacy are suppressed so as to make the most of "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions" (Simmel 410). Instead of being the carefree observer of city life, Septimus is exposed to others' observations, exhibiting an anxiety about the anonymity of public life that distinguishes him from the narrator of "Street Haunting."

If Woolf is a novelist whose subject must create its own shell, the sense of narrative expectation called up by the characters and Big Ben is not one that is fulfilled in the traditional ways. Woolf insists on a doubling of explanations and scenes: offering multiple explanations for Clarissa's anticipation of Big Ben's strikes (both medical and affective), interweaving the presence of Evans and Peter Walsh before Septimus in Regent's Park, and, most of all, offering Septimus and Clarissa as competing figures for the attention of the reader. It is not surprising, then, that the sense of narrative expectation takes on a doubled sense in Woolf's novel. Having lived through the First World War, Peter, Clarissa, and Septimus live perpetually in fear of another disaster, the past marking the present with a dread of the future.

### **Septimus the Messenger**

It is here, with the awful event both before and behind, that one should consider Septimus anew. The elegy, after all, registers in formal terms the tension between times, pivoting on the occasion of the subject's death. The elegist of the present returns to a prior time, when the lost subject was alive, and then often creates an alternative picture, one in which the subject would have lived, in order to make clear the extent of the world's loss. That alternative is realized in the portait

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<sup>12</sup> See Bowlby.

of Clarissa, Woolf makes clear the direction of narrative expectation and then defies it, allowing her protagonist to live. But Septimus is left to bear the burden of both elegiac subject, the victim of war trauma who eventually commits suicide, and elegist, for Evans and other war casualties. Continually pressed by his visions to carry secrets to the Prime Minister (*MD* 67), Septimus is, clearly, burdened with the telling of a story.<sup>13</sup> It is, perversely, upon seeing Evans “returned,” whole and unharmed, that Septimus feels the need to speak. Some critics have read Septimus as needing to tell a story so that he might work through the trauma of his war past.<sup>14</sup> In emphasizing Septimus’s poetic inclinations, I propose reading him as one who is burdened by the role of the elegist.

When Evans/Peter Walsh appears to Septimus in Regent’s Park, Septimus regards him as Tennyson might Arthur Hallam; his one true friend, destroyed and with such promise, must be elegized appropriately. But Evans is there merely to announce the return of the dead *en masse*. The elegizing of such a body is a task that cannot help but overwhelm Septimus:

I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand . . . like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees light on the desert’s edge . . . and with legions of men prostrate behind him, he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole—

[Lucrezia interrupts.]

The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation—

[Again Lucrezia interrupts, asking for the time]. (70)

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<sup>13</sup> Septimus overhears someone in the crowd identify the grey car that halts his walk as “The Proime Minister’s kyar” (14), which may prompt him to think of the Prime Minister as the recipient of his message.

<sup>14</sup> See DeMeester.

Septimus attempts to be the mourner large enough for that crowd of men, a burden of mourning larger than that of any prior elegist. But the “one moment” of vision is fractured, just as the story, hymn, and even occasion of death must be fractured when it represents such a teeming body of loss.

Lady Bexborough continues her public duties without faltering when she gets word of her son’s death in the war: she is the novel’s picture of post-war grief. In such a world Septimus’s elegiac messages, the scribbles he continues to make throughout the book, have no place. The “European War . . . smashed a plaster cast of Ceres” (*MD* 86), rendering the elegiac tradition and its links to classical Greece inconsequential. Such forms of mourning are ruined. All of England “stiffens,” an action echoed throughout the public scenes in the novel. As Susan Bennett Smith argues:

By the 1920s, medicine had implicitly replaces mourning ritual, and grief had become virtually unmentionable . . . physicians considered it their duty to aid the grief-stricken, but without acknowledging the source of the pain. That Holmes treats Rezia as his patient after Septimus’s leap is indicative of this encroachment on mourning ritual. (315)

Although Dr. Bradshaw is perhaps terribly wrong in his attempts to turn Septimus into a “case” for his own medical and political aims, he may be right in assessing Septimus’s trouble as a matter of “proportion” (*MD* 99). Septimus attempts to swell to the size needed to speak to the loss of so many, but his hampered in that his war experience rendered him unable to feel (86). The experiences which burdened him with such a loss also render him unable to mourn.

Unable to be the elegist that England needs, Septimus is unable to give the “tock” to the events of the war, to offer a body of poetry sufficient to carry and shape his mourning. What is left, then, is for him to embody the loss himself; since such losses have been ignored as they occur off-shore, his death brings the loss home to England. By such means he takes part in the “melodrama” of the present, offering himself up as the center of spectacle, the desire of which lies just beneath the

bustle of the modern life. It is a failed elegy, as it means simply another bodily substitution, rather than the story that the public needed proclaimed. But in the repetition of loss there is also an insistence on bringing the loss home, where it cannot be ignored.

Septimus appears in the course of the first major interruption of Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts as she shops for flowers: that of the grey motor car.<sup>15</sup> Although both Faulkner and Woolf have incorporated public rituals like bear hunts and dinner parties into their novels, they also bring to the foreground the ways in which interruption, spectacle, and arrested daily life create a kind of community. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the interruptions draw attention to the novel's temporal situation, coming, as it does, just a few years after World War I, when the interruptions of air raids and war news did create a kind of community. The community based on these interruptions, however, may well act as an implicit critique of the value of community, or at least a means of investigating what it is, precisely, that holds people together in such situations, as well as the situations that include more well-established rituals such as Clarissa's dinner party.

The "pistol shot" Mrs. Dalloway hears draws the attention of the reader away from her for the first time since the novel's beginning (13), and attention does not return to her for another dozen pages. Although "the throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body" (15), there is not, as with Percival, a particular body at the center of attention. As with Percival, however, the car brings order where there was none before, a sense of "sobriety" (14), and the car and the crowd are spoken of as a single, collective body, of which the car is the heart (15). Those on the street wonder if the car carries the Queen or the Prime Minister, reminded of "the dead; of the flag; of empire" (18), aware only that the car "grazed something very profound" (18). What the car grazes, then, is a pre-established social fabric, one that does not rely

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<sup>15</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway* is not the only novel in which Woolf uses royalty to arrest the motion of her characters. In *Jacob's Room*, published three years before *Mrs. Dalloway*, Jacob Flanders is "stopped by a block in Holborn waiting to see the King drive by" (93).



on the appearance of a particular individual but only needs rumor to call forth a reaction from the London crowd.<sup>16</sup>

By denying the reader and the spectators a particular individual, however, the scene demands more from the crowd. As a reflection of British patriotism, the window of the car acts as a mirror for the personalities of the crowd. Each of the bystanders seems to feel the burden of the car's passing: "tall men, men of robust physique . . . stood even straighter . . . and seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth, as their ancestors had done before them" (18). This central incident, marked by an impersonality that differentiates it from Percival's role in *The Waves*, seems to place demands on the bystanders; it seems a call to service.<sup>17</sup> Although those in the crowd gathered at the gates of Buckingham Palace get at thrill "at the thought of Royalty looking at them" (19), such mutual recognition seems unlikely. The blind had been pulled, mutual recognition denied. The window, rather than allow an exchange of glances to take place, simply acts as a mirror for the patriotism of the bystanders. The sense that little relies on the individuality of the figure at the center is confirmed much later in the novel, when the Prime Minister's appearance at Clarissa's party causes a flurry of excitement, but only when one did not look directly at the man, since "He looked so ordinary" (172).

In a 1926 journal entry, just one year after *Mrs. Dalloway* was published, Woolf bemoans the lack of community at such junctures:

Two resolute, sunburnt, dusty girls, in jerseys & short skirts, with packs on their backs, city clerks, or secretaries, tramping along the road in the hot sunshine at Ripe. My instinct at once throws up a screen, which condemns them: I think them in every

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<sup>16</sup> Woolf describes a similar event in her diary on the first of February, 1915: "In St James Street there was a terrific explosion; people came running out of Clubs; stopped still & gazed about them. But there was no Zeppelin or aeroplane—only, I suppose, a very large tyre burst. But it is really an instinct with me, & most people, I suppose, to turn any sudden noise, or dark object in the sky into an explosion, or a German aeroplane. And it always seemes utterly impossible that one should be hurt" (*Diary* 1:32)

<sup>17</sup> See Wang, 180.

way angular, awkward & self assertive. But all this is a great mistake. These screens shut me out. Have no screens, for screens are made out of our own integument; & get at the thing itself, which has nothing whatever in common with a screen. The screen making habit, though, is so universal, that probably it preserves our sanity. If we had not this device for shutting people off from our sympathies, we might, perhaps, dissolve utterly. Separateness would be impossible. But the screens are in the excess; not the sympathy. (*Diary* 3:104)

Just as, in her diary entry, Woolf's throwing up of a screen prompts rumination about herself, the window screen in *Mrs. Dalloway* prompts a kind of reflection on the part of the observers. They become self-conscious in ways that seem to challenge Woolf's assertion that "the screen making habit . . . preserves our sanity." For in throwing up a screen one becomes conscious of the condemnatory thoughts one has produced and that others may well produce about one. In addition to the sense of self-importance there is also the threat of violence when such feelings arise: in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a pub fight breaks out as a result of the heightened nationalism the spectacle of the car produces (18).

If the window of the motor car serves as a kind of mirror for the observers, masking the individuality of the person inside the car with patriotic sentiments that, like the window-shade, keep the observers from getting too close, then the terror that Septimus registers here may reflect his awareness of the fickleness of such spectacle. For the roving attention of the crowd, it may well be that a body, a particular body, is needed to sustain its attention. Septimus's war-deadened senses prevent him from taking part in the "unity of identity in the form of shared affective response" that, as William Egginton argues, marks crowds from the nineteenth century onwards (106). Without the protection of the vestments of authority or the shared emotional bond, Septimus has only his person to offer up to the crowd if it should attempt to claim him.

Feeling abandoned by his wife, who has attempted to secure him a doctor, Septimus hears the “whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes . . . It was at that moment . . . that the great revelation took place. A voice spoke from behind the screen. Evans was speaking. The dead were with him” (*MD* 93). Through his own death Septimus will provide an occasion for elegy, a substitutive spectacle for the losses that happened abroad, a melodramatic recreation of loss for the London public, feeding an unnamed hunger for spectacle on the home front. But in doing so he will also defer the work of elegy-making, offering instead only an additional body to add to the lists of those to be mourned.

The elegy is what would keep Septimus from participating in what he perceives as the public’s desire to rid themselves of him, and for much of the novel he appears invested in his elegiac undertaking. If Septimus’s death is a foregone conclusion, a careful calculus for the formal purposes of the novel, the character expresses no knowledge of such a decision. He is, instead, enjoying life a few minutes before his death. Feeling always that “they are signalling to me” (21), thinking that he, “lord of men,” must speak the truth to the Prime Minister (67), Septimus seems to have lost a sense of himself as simply an individual, one of many observers of the car, the plane, the park, and even the war. This loss of individuality does, however, give him a zeal for the life he has preserved, and for the role he is to play in reminding London of what it has lost.

The elegiac role enables him to respond to those who, like Dr. Bradshaw, have their own conceptions of Septimus’s role. Alex Zwerdling has written extensively on the tendency by Septimus’s doctors to see Septimus as not a single person, but rather a “case” that must be placed within the context of a larger cultural understanding. From Septimus’s own description, he has been dead to sensation for quite a while, and has, according to his wife, Lucrezia, been exhibiting symptoms of shell shock for nine months, which places the onset during the same year that the British government produced the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock.”*

Septimus's plight coincides with formal acknowledgement of such things; his life is prescribed by what the British government does or does not acknowledge to be the case, rather than what or when he himself acknowledges the trouble to have begun—say, with the death of his senses during the war. Sir William Bradshaw, the expert to whom Lucrezia takes Septimus on the afternoon of Clarissa Dalloway's party, later speaks of Septimus's suicide in the context of current legislative issues:

They were talking about this Bill. Some case Sir William was mentioning, lowering his voice. It had its bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock. There must be some provision in the Bill. (183)

Septimus is that case, buried in the repeated reference to “the Bill.” In Zwerdling's reading, “they compartmentalize in order to control and make things manageable. . . . behind the public concern and tradition of social service is the need to dominate, the habit of power. It is here that one can see the social system ‘at work, at its most intense’” (128-129). These final words are Woolf's own, ones she records in an oft-cited passage from her diary in which she outlines her goals for the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>18</sup> In seeing himself speaking to the Prime Minister, then, Septimus was not far off; at the Dalloway party, legislators, the Prime Minister, and Sir William Bradshaw are all on hand to turn Septimus into a case that promotes their own interests and the interests of the British establishment.

The difference between Septimus's understanding and Sir William's understanding, of course, is that in his case Septimus had a message of his own to deliver, one that he sacrificed himself to deliver. In the latter situation, Sir William sacrificed the individual for concerns of his own, turning the “Christs and Christesses, who prophesied the end of the world, or the advent of

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<sup>18</sup> “I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity; I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense—But here I may be posing.” (*Diary* 2:248)

God” (99) into “cases” for the furthering of medical knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Within the story of Septimus one sees the struggle of the individual to resist the charge that is laid upon him to reflect the concerns of the observers, to be the center of spectacle without delivering his own message. Early in the novel Septimus feels the weight of the one who is singled out:

Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness. (25)

Throwing off the isolation of such a role, one that speaks so clearly to the empty centers of *The Waves* and *Jacob's Room*, Septimus attempts to take control, to become the elegist for those who haunt them with the specificity of their bodies and their names.

It is clear why, when he is pursued by the doctors, Septimus's internal thoughts have the rhythm of a conversation that he has had before, both resigning himself to a role and alternately resisting it: “At last, with a melodramatic gesture which he assumed mechanically and with complete consciousness of its insincerity, he dropped his head on his hands” (90); “But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot” (92). Having previously rejected the role of the sacrificial lamb, Septimus is aware of his current situation as a role to play. Settling on the window as the means of suicide, he thinks that there is only the “rather melodramatic business of

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<sup>19</sup> In Schlack's work on Woolf's literary allusions she notes that there is a clear divide in *Mrs. Dalloway* between those who are well-read and those who are not: “The sympathetic characters read literature, or at the very least are respectful of its influence . . . Unsympathetic characters are almost always presented as unsusceptible to literature” (57). In looking at Holmes and Bradshaw in particular, she draws attention to the way “these men of science are aggressively antiliterary. Dr. Holmes in a visit to Septimus ‘opened Shakespeare—*Antony and Cleopatra*; pushed Shakespeare aside’ . . . In Bradshaw the Philistinism is even more explicit: “There was in Sir William, *who had never had time for reading*, a grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people who . . . intimated that doctors . . . are not educated men” (58; italics hers).

opening the widow and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy . . . Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing” (149).<sup>20</sup>

Awareness of “melodrama,” the social expectations that underlie Bradshaw’s and Holmes’s attention, sets Septimus apart from the other figures in the novel. He is aware that there are only two places for the individual: away, as in the “homes” that will keep disconcerting figures out of the public consciousness, or playing a role that will make them suitable for a “case” study by specialists. The only point of contention is to which elements of one’s behavior make for a particular kind of case. The leap from the window, what might easily appear an escape from Bradshaw’s rest home, is revealed as merely a different kind of role, one that Septimus plays to its full melodrama and that makes for a good means of promoting the bill that Bradshaw speaks to later that evening.

Although I have focused on Septimus and the particularities of his shell-shocked poetic voice, what is remarkable about his role in the novel is not his singularity, but rather how much Woolf’s narrative voice does to make him blend into the novel’s background. Septimus emerges only slowly in *Mrs. Dalloway*. When the reader moves away from Clarissa Dalloway’s mind, the shift is to a collective response to the backfiring car:

[N]obody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales’s, the Queen’s, the Prime Minister’s? Nobody knew. Edgar J. Watkiss, with his roll of lead piping round his arm, said audibly, humorously of course: “The Proime Minister’s

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<sup>20</sup> In her archival work for the Cambridge University Press edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Fernald notes that in the proofs of the novel:

there is only one page where Woolf crosses out a whole paragraph and substitutes a (significantly longer) typed page. That single instance is the paragraph in which Septimus kills himself. Seventeen lines in proofs have been crossed out and two typed pages have been added, making the paragraph now twenty-eight lines long. In addition to many small changes, the chief addition here comes toward the beginning of the paragraph, with the addition of Septimus scanning the room for possible means of suicide before deciding to throw himself out the window. (*Textual Editing*)

Fernald interprets such revisions as indicative of Septimus’s significance to the novel: “To know that, at the very last minute, Woolf was rethinking the book’s climax, giving it greater depth and a slower pace, is to know something about the centrality of Septimus to the novel.” I would add that the addition of Septimus’s contemplation of other means of suicide enhances the sense of theatricality of the event, the search for the right effect; this is not merely a question of the end, but of his contribution to a larger scene.

kyar.” Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him. (14)

The focus is on Septimus’s function within the form of the novel and the social scene of the street. It is not in distinguishing him as a lunatic or even as a war casualty. He is, here, one of many, and much of Woolf’s writing in the novel works to reincorporate him into the fabric of Clarissa’s world, indicating he is not alone in his anxieties.

An extended description of Septimus comes late in the novel, only well after the reader has become acquainted with his mental states. The description of him wavers, blurring his social situation and showing its fragility:

To look at, he might have been a clerk, but of the better sort; for he wore brown boots; his hands were educated; so, too, his profile—his angular, big-nosed, intelligent, sensitive profile; but not his lips altogether, for they were loose; and his eyes (as eyes tend to be), eyes merely . . . so that he was, on the whole, a border case, neither one thing nor the other. (84)

This description revisits the briefer description that appears when Septimus first does in the novel, where he was “beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat” (14). This narrative revisiting allows for a reconsideration of him. Rather than describe Septimus in order to explain him, as a Victorian predecessor might do, Woolf here does so in order to emphasize the mutability of his position. Here his role as a figure of elegy from the middle classes comes through. As one who is a “border case” (84), Septimus may be one of the crowd or one of the front lines, either a clerk or one whose educational aspirations puts him in touch with the medium of the elegy. The modern elegist is not, here, a university man in private mourning, but rather a man who might well be of the masses, speaking for the losses to which the crowd is alert, as demonstrated in its reaction

to the backfiring car, but that it does not name.<sup>21</sup>

There is a continual shift in perspective when Septimus is described, a shift that not only highlights the extremity of his feelings and his situation but also situates them in a frame that shows that such feelings and behaviors will not seem unusual in England. Although, of course, Woolf may merely be playing with perspective, indicating that no one can ever know the depth of turmoil that is seen from the outside, she also seems to be suggesting that such tumultuous feelings are not unusual in the larger fabric of the city that she is weaving.

Throughout the novel there is an undercurrent of being watched. In the manuscript for the novel Woolf asks, “Why not have an observer in the street at each critical point who acts the part of chorus?” (qtd. in Henke 126). There are always observers whose presence excite a sort of anxiety in the one being observed, the most extreme case of which is Peter Walsh’s observation of Septimus, who mistakes him for the dead Evans. Although for a moment Septimus and his wife “seemed queer” to Maisie Johnson, “Everything seemed very queer” as she visits London for the first time (*MD* 26). When Lucrezia is distraught at Septimus’s behavior in the park, Peter Walsh observes as he passes, “And that is being young” (70), “lovers squabbling under a tree” (71). Even Septimus’s hazel eyes, “which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too” (14), elicits a sympathetic response from others. There is in Woolf’s portrait of Septimus both a sense of the extreme and that of him as merely a part of the much richer texture of post-war London.

Continually deferred and deflected, his authentic entrance as a major figure of the novel,

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<sup>21</sup> I take MacKay’s point that in post-WWI novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* shell-shock victims are isolated cases, whereas in post-WWII novels “pathological states and sociohistorical circumstances amount to the same thing” (1605). The extent of the damage to London in WWII would have a different effect on the average London citizen from the WWI fighting on the Continent. On the other hand, as I argue here, Woolf’s clear attempts to fold Septimus back into London, blurring his thoughts with those of other street observers and, most notably, with Clarissa Dalloway’s, gives a strong sense of the resonance of his trauma in the minds of the London civilian; the people on the street may not, as MacKay points out, shrink from the plane overhead in the way they might two decades later, but they do, as Clarissa does, jump at the backfiring of a car. Although *Mrs. Dalloway* is not a post-WWII novel, here too, crowds have a sense of being “ominous and endangering” (1603).



Mrs. Dalloway's "double," comes only when he himself begins to express a preoccupation with centrality. First comes Clarissa Dalloway's walk, then the pistol shot of the grey car's backfiring, after which Septimus emerges as only one of many onlookers in the Street. Named just after "Edgar J. Watkiss," a character who gets only a line in the novel, Septimus is not yet a figure of interest for the reader when one sees the car through his eyes, in a passage with which I opened this chapter:

[T]his gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? (15)

Only in thinking of a center and its accompanying terror does Septimus in fact become the center of the narrative scene. By placing himself at the center—"It is I who am blocking the way"—he assumes responsibility for the narrative; the progress of the novel had, indeed, seemed to stop when Septimus, previously unknown to the reader, was rendered "unable to pass" by the grey motor car (14). Although his preoccupation with centrality appears at the novel's beginning, Woolf spends the rest of the novel exploring the events of his past that led to such a preoccupation. Through moves like this one Woolf takes part in what Rebecca Walkowitz has called "critical cosmopolitanism," marked by "an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the center that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is seen" (*Cosmopolitan* 2). In having Septimus express a horror of centrality only to become the center of narrative interest right after, Woolf opens up to critical inquiry a narrative position that has traditionally been the most secure. As she did with the narrator in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf uses the character to call into question the limits and benefits of his own

position.

If Septimus assumes responsibility for the narrative, he does not retain it for long. When his wife catches his attention and encourages him to resume walking, he “jumped, started, and said, ‘All right!’ angrily, as if she had interrupted him” (*MD* 15). And indeed she had, calling not only for his attention but also that of the reader. For after the remark from Septimus the narrative attention shifts to Lucrezia’s concerns:

People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were “people” now, because Septimus had said, “I will kill myself”; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked at the crowd. Help, help! she wanted to cry out to butchers’ boys and women. Help! Only last autumn she and Septimus had stood on the Embankment wrapped in the same cloak and, Septimus reading a paper instead of talking, she had snatched it from him and laughed in the old man’s face who saw them! But failure one conceals. (16)

I quote so extensively because in this, the reader’s introduction to Lucrezia, she enumerates some of the various shades of public spectacle that shape both her actions and those of the other characters of the novel. Lucrezia feels their vulnerability to the crowd in ways that she did not when she was happy, when she engaged the onlookers’ attention, rather than feeling its weight, as she does with the “must” of her opening concern.

Notably, Woolf voices nostalgia through the lens of an Italian, rather than a Briton, and the time longed for is a time of war, when the couple was together in Italy. But now Lucrezia fears such attention. She recalls clearly the “old man” of last autumn, but the potential observers in the present situation become merely “people.” The formerly English, with the markers of nationhood and

culture that one notices through Lucrezia's foreign perspective, are stripped of all such markers.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of Lucrezia's thoughts here rests, at least in part, on her role in demonstrating that it is not only the shell-shocked character who is fearful of becoming the object of attention. The schizophrenic may feel "a tremendous oneness with the world," and Septimus's sense of fusing with the objects in his surroundings may point to such a diagnosis, but Septimus is simultaneously attracted to and afraid of being swallowed up not by nature, as Ban Wang suggests (183), but rather by a society that is hungry for a body through which to form its own identity. Like the incident of the grey car, Lucrezia contributes to the disintegration of a neat contrast between Septimus and Clarissa.

She also, in her deliberations about Septimus, makes him less distinctive as an individual, linking his situation to that of other soldiers and of those who survived the war. In her worries about what would bring Septimus to want to kill himself, she thinks of Evans, who was killed, "But such things happen to every one. Every one has friends who were killed in the war" (66). Although such thoughts appear as an expression of her frustration with Septimus in "let[ting] himself think about horrible things" (66), her musings more clearly point to the widespread nature of Septimus's difficulty. If, as the narrator insists in the opening pages, "it was the middle of June. The War was over" (5), it is equally true that it is only over with the exceptions of Mrs. Foxcroft, Lady Bexborough, and many others. The war can only be over with exceptions leaking out, with survivors continually wrestling with those who were lost.

### **Clarissa's Selective Elegiac Inheritance**

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<sup>22</sup> Lamot observes that "every character in the novel is implicitly or explicitly linked to 'foreign' places, peoples or travel" and "All the characters' private contemplations and mental musings take place while they are in motion" (162). As a result, although Woolf is frequently caricatured as lacking the international sophistication of other modernist authors, she uses travelers—and here I would stress the use of figures like Lucrezia—to "reveal how greater systems of geopolitical power are already at work within the domestic sphere" (164). The expansion of social anxiety beyond the complex mind of Septimus Smith gains international ripples simply by including Septimus's Italian wife.

Alex Zwerdling and others have singled Clarissa out as the only member of the governing class to connect to Septimus as an individual, feeling empathy rather than clinical interest (*Real World* 128). But I join Deborah Guth in thinking that Clarissa makes her own use of Septimus. Guth follows Susan Henke in reading religious imagery at the end of the novel, when Clarissa retreats from the party to consider the implications of Septimus's death. Clarissa, she concludes, uses Romantic, pagan, and Christian imagery to fashion out of Septimus's suicide a reading that enables her to feel a renewed connection to life.<sup>23</sup> Sympathy she may have, but it is not for the Septimus who resisted becoming "the eternal sufferer" (*MD* 25), and the one who, even in his final moments, desired to continue living; instead, her sympathy is for a figure of glorious sacrifice who acts so that others might be driven closer to the meaning of life.

Despite his explicit rejection of the sacrificial typology early in the novel, Septimus is forced to embody that, through Clarissa's eyes, by the end. Her relief at being someone other than the victim, her reliance on Septimus to reinfuse her own life with meaning, is something that Peter Walsh instinctively shies away from earlier in the novel:

but thinking became morbid, sentimental, directly one began conjuring up doctors, dead bodies; a little glow of pleasure, a sort of lust too over the visual impression warned one not to go on with that sort of thing any more—fatal to art, fatal to friendship. (*MD* 151)

Peter catches himself in the act, suppressing such tendencies to use the body of another to brood on life and death, to become a voyeur of death to bolster one's own contentment. Citing Zwerdling's attention to Septimus as a "case" for Bradshaw, Guth notes that "Clarissa duplicates this procedure on the internal level by transforming Septimus into a symbol. . . . sanctification involves the sacrifice of the individual reality" ("Rituals" 42). As Septimus fears earlier in the book, for Clarissa "Septimus

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<sup>23</sup> See both articles by Guth.

has no substantive reality; he has no past, he does not even have a name” (“Rituals” 39).

There is, of course, a more generous reading of Clarissa’s elegy to Septimus. Rather than read Septimus as a crude means of refocusing her thoughts on the gift of her own life, one might remember Woolf’s own to the deaths in her family. Even as she saw herself as singled out for a Greek tragedy (Lee 169), plagued by the loss of so many close family members, Woolf acknowledged that her development as a writer relied on her learning to welcome such shocks. They were, as she wrote in “A Sketch of the Past,” inevitably followed by a desire to make sense of it, “a revelation of some order,” which was the desire to write (*Moments of Being* 72). Although Clarissa is no writer, her weathering of such shocks—not grimly bearing them like Lady Bexborough, but open to them as opportunities—marks the shift in her character from the cruder version Woolf offers of her in the short story, “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” to the one in the later novel that bears her name. Septimus’s fear, while striking, does not help us to determine what, precisely, he is afraid of losing. Clarissa, in her delicate balance of private and social selves, does begin to address such a concern.

Although Septimus is the only one described as a poet in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa shows herself fluent in elegiac poetry in all three of her major appearances in Woolf’s fiction. In *The Voyage Out* she claims to love “Adonais,” though she qualifies that with “I always think it’s *living*, not dying, that counts” (58). As she walks through London in “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” Clarissa Dalloway thinks of the lines from Shelley’s great elegy, “Adonais”:

From the contagion of the world’s slow stain

He is secure, and now can never mourn

A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain . . . (Shelley 40.356-358, qtd. in

Woolf, *CSF* 154)<sup>24</sup>

These lines enable Clarissa to mourn not only her “dear Jack Stewart” (*CSF* 154), but also those who, like herself, live to face their regrets and limitations as they age. She, like Septimus, finds herself speaking aloud when her interaction with figures of the past becomes sufficiently vivid. Clarissa’s walk continues to the refrain of “And now can never mourn, can never mourn,” turning the attention from the dead to the difficulty of mourning in the current age; one can “never mourn” again because the traditional modes of mourning are disintegrating. “For all the great things one must go to the past,” Clarissa thinks; “the moderns had never written anything one wanted to read about death” (155). Through Clarissa’s dissatisfaction Woolf registers a failure on the part of modern poetry to address the needs of mourners, those who seek consolation and find only cynicism in the poems of Sassoon and Wilfred Owen.

Clarissa’s thoughts outline a rift in the elegiac tradition, from when “It used . . . to be so simple,” to now, when, she thinks, “simply one doesn’t believe . . . any more in God” (158). The burgeoning secularism of the twentieth century presents a problem for the modern elegist; poets less confidently conclude their mourning song by finding consolation in thoughts of life beyond death. In this post-war, post-transcendental time, Woolf forces her readers to see the unraveling of poetic tradition that comes with a loss of belief.

The psychoanalytic distinction that runs through Peter Sacks’s and Jahan Ramazani’s analyses of elegy, that between mourning and melancholia, obscures another major difference between the poets of old and the modern elegists: whereas the former generally ended their elegies by offering up the dead to God or gods for immortality, the latter poets are far less certain that there is some means of offering the dead immortality other than through their own poetry. Although, as

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<sup>24</sup> Froula argues that Woolf’s original title for the novel, “The Hours,” comes from Shelley’s apostrophe to Keats’s death (*Bloomsbury Avante-Garde* 92). Hoff, however, suggests that “The Hours” refers to Homer’s *Odyssey* (188). When she makes her appearance in *The Voyage Out*, Clarissa Dalloway also quotes these lines from “Adonais.”

Ramazani points out, Lord Tennyson wrestles with his position throughout the entirety of “In Memoriam,” by the end the poet does trust that his friend will “live in God” (qtd. in Ramzani 68); in considering Thomas Hardy, on the other hand, Ramazani sees him wrestling with “the burden of the personal elegist in a secular time” (47) and suggests that the hundred-plus elegies Hardy wrote for his wife are the poet’s attempt to take on the burden of securing immortality for the dead when he thinks God no longer can.

Given her disappointment with contemporary elegists and their use of satire and cynicism, and her impatience with religious transcendence in elegies like Milton’s *Lyidas*, Woolf seems to be fashioning her own path between the two positions. But through Clarissa’s refrains of Shelley, Woolf forges a strong connection to the elegiac tradition. Shelley, whose pamphlet “The Necessity of Atheism” got him sent down from Oxford without his degree (xii), resisted the influence of religious belief on the English elegy. But he, too, ends his elegy for Keats with a trust in transcendence, concluding that Keats’s soul “Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are” (55.495). It is this search for transcendence unconnected to Christianity that Woolf echoes in her portrait of Clarissa Dalloway. In drawing on Shelley, rather than Tennyson or Milton, Woolf connects her search for alternative modes of mourning with a particular atheist strain of the English elegy.

In facing her lack of belief and her need for an alternative reason for continuing to breast the “slow stain” of her world, Clarissa forms a “transcendental theory” that, as Peter describes in the novel:

allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places

after death . . . perhaps—perhaps. (*MD* 153)

Although this emerges as the major theory guiding Clarissa's life and it strongly echoes Shelley's vision of Keats as being "made one with Nature" (42.370), Peter does note that "in those days—they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have" (*MD* 152), indicating that this may not be the best theory Woolf could offer. In her search for a *modus operandi* Clarissa makes little of the living apparitions (the part of us which appears) in order to invest herself in the dispersal of the unseen other, a choice that may contribute to what Woolf called the "tinselly" quality in Clarissa (*Diary* 3:32).

Just as Shelley introduces a number of mourners in "Adonais" whose mourning he finds insincere—I particularly like the woman who weeps over the body and then thinks that the dead man is also weeping, mistaking her tears for his—so too Woolf offers through Clarissa the picture of a mourner caught between modes and motivations. Clarissa mourns for death in general, slipping easily, as we saw in the opening quotation, between lost loved ones and her own waning future. But it is the death of a particular individual that Woolf, like many other modern elegists, works to see recognized.

The mass nature of modern war losses deprives the public of its ability to mourn loudly and at length for any lost individual. Woolf's awareness of such a problem reveals itself through the young men of *Jacob's Room*, as we have seen, and also *To the Lighthouse*: "A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay" (*To the Lighthouse* 133). As the narrator moves from "twenty or thirty" to the full name of one who is of concern to the reader, Woolf joins contemporary poets and prose writers in using literature to reclaim the right to mourn the individual, building up a story around the character to combat the mass nature of his or her death. Woolf's movement through many characters' minds in *Mrs. Dalloway* is an extension of this individualization, enabling her to attend to the range of frustrations, grief, and beliefs that



govern not only the mourning of individuals, but the mourning that is done by individuals who are attempting to find their way without the baroque machinations of Victorian mourning. As Woolf's poetic allusions remind her reader, much has changed from the time of earlier elegists, leaving the war survivors with the burden not only of mourning the dead, but also of creating a form in which that mourning can take place.

Woolf uses Shelley to ground her own inquiry into secular elegy, but she also, in the process, implicitly criticizes Shelley's transformation of the dead for his own purposes. He, like Clarissa, refashioned Keats's fate to suit his own system of beliefs,<sup>25</sup> illustrating the uneasy relationship that often exists between the elegiac subject and the elegist, as devotion to the dead and self-promotion come into conflict. Clarissa echoes Shelley by turning outward in her grief; as Peter puts it, "to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places" (*MD* 152-153). Both Woolf's fiction and Clarissa's philosophy turn from a search for transcendence to an attempt to re-enliven the secular world with a deep sense of sympathy. In Clarissa, Woolf practices a selective elegiac inheritance, circumventing the English elegy and its traditional call for the dead to be lifted up by the God in whom neither Woolf nor many of her contemporaries believed. In Mrs. Dalloway's survival—thanks, apparently, to Woolf's reimagination of Septimus—one begins to understand how one might work around the demands of a central position and the weight of the elegiac burden.

### Hostessing as a Way of Life

Part of the reason *Mrs. Dalloway* did not easily fit the existing novel form is that it was not

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<sup>25</sup> See Sacks for a discussion of the two poets' views of the soul: "But whereas Shelley rejects the circumstantial world as contagious dross, Keats goes on to insist that an 'intelligence' should be immersed 'in the medium of a world like this' in order that it may advance to take on an 'identity.' Only this 'identity' can be called a soul. For Keats, this attainment of a soul adequately stained by the world and by the heart constitutes salvation—a far different idea from that of Shelley's celebration of the return of a disembodied purity to its source" (161).

originally intended as a novel. In her earliest notes, Woolf conceives of *Mrs. Dalloway* as “a short book consisting of six or seven chapters each complete separately, yet there must be some sort of fusion.” (Dick 3). “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” was to be the first of those stories. But as the writing continues, Woolf notes, “Now I break off . . . to write Mrs. D. (who ushers in a host of others, I begin to perceive)” (*Diary* 2:189). It is not simply that Clarissa is to be joined by other characters in the book; Woolf had envisioned that all along, with her notion of separate chapters strung together. Instead, Woolf’s wording here reveals something useful about her conceptualization of Clarissa as both a character and a formal force in her project. Clarissa’s “ushering in” already positions her *as* a hostess, both on a thematic and on a formal level, and that dual hostessing is preserved through the writing and revising that Woolf does from there on out.<sup>26</sup>

In balking the trend of dying literary hostesses, Clarissa moves from the center of the novel to a peripheral perspective and a peripheral role. It is only by moving, reframing herself as a hostess, rather than insisting on holding the center, that the modern subject is to survive the changing nature of literary form. If, as Woolf suggests in her introduction, the form is an effect of the nature of the content, the modern subject has changed so as to make the existing novel form irrelevant. When Clarissa feels that she lacks “something central which permeated” (*MD* 31) and conceives of Septimus’s death as an attempt to fill the void created when people felt “the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them” (184), she remains uncomfortably aware of the gap between her sense of self and the fixed, permanent Victorian identities represented in the hard shells of Lady Bruton and Lady Bexborough.

In her moments of self-doubt, Clarissa struggles with feelings of being “just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it” for a moment before appreciating the flexibility of that position (170):

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<sup>26</sup> Early titles for the book suggested this focus: *At Home* or *The Party*, a book whose stories must “converge upon the party at the end” (qtd. in McNichol, “Introduction” 8).

yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn't help feeling that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs. Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. (170-171)

This position on the periphery, forming part of the stage of an event outside herself, offers a kind of freedom for Clarissa and for the protagonist of the modernist novel. By orchestrating a social space in which she holds a position on the periphery, Clarissa preserves, formally, a division between the individual and the event, leaving her free to explore the various facets of this anyone that she has become. If Clarissa frequently fails, in her own mind, to fix her personality in the traditional manner, she has instead the ability "to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed" (174). Unlike Bernard's "Now to sum up," in which he attempts to hold the momentary "illusion . . . that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed" (*TW* 176), Clarissa's centering is explicitly momentary, much like Jinny's fleeting coherence.

In "Character in Fiction," a later form of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf compares the role of the novelist to that of a hostess in reaching for conventions to engage a reader:

Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other. . . . The writer must get into touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognises, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-operate in the far more difficult business of intimacy. And it is of the highest importance that this common meeting-place should be reached easily, almost instinctively, in the dark, with one's eyes shut. . . .

House property was the common ground from which the Edwardians found it easy to proceed to intimacy. (*Essays* 3:431)<sup>27</sup>

But in her own case, Woolf says, the conventions of the past are no longer useful, and “how keenly I felt the lack of a convention” (3:431). Woolf does not, of course, say what the new conventions are to be in the “Georgian” era of literature, just that there must be crashing and destruction as the old ones are pulled down. What seems essential, however, as seen in both her essay and her novel, is that the reader must see the characters themselves striving with the old and with the new.

Although Woolf did not begin by writing a novel, in the end she produced a work that bears the protagonist’s name and has all the marks of a standard novel—except that Clarissa steps aside for the entire middle section of the book and does not share Septimus’s fate. The exclusion of the protagonist, Clarissa’s being pushed to the edges of the novel, echoes the way in which Woolf deliberately forces death, engagement, and war experiences offstage here and in her other works, particularly *To the Lighthouse*, which appears two years after *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Jacob’s Room*, published three years before it. Such reframing allows Woolf to bring to the foreground “echoes, tangential effects, and memories” (Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan* 81). By exploring the nature of hostessing, as it takes place throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, one might learn how a turn outward, an ushering of city and other characters and other times into the limelight, enables the central figure to lighten the burden of that central position. If the modern subject is to move beyond the “horror” of the central position, it is not, perhaps, surprising that Woolf turns to a peripheral position. It is one with which she has identified in her nonfiction, most notably in her advocacy for the “outsiders” in *Three Guineas*.

I join Christine Froula in reading the novel as a “communal postwar elegy” (*Bloomsbury* 88).

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<sup>27</sup> Conradi suggests that “*The hostess is herself an artist-by-proxy*,” citing the close relationship between the painter Lily Briscoe and the hostess Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, as well as Clarissa Dalloway’s orchestration of a party beyond that of her evening get-together, “for the book *is* in some sense the party” (451; italics in original).

But rather than see Clarissa as the “central elegiac consciousness” that Woolf uses to “transpose certain conventions to feminine conventions” (87), I read Clarissa as a peripheral elegiac figure, one who represents a turn away from the traditional relationship between elegiac subject and elegist to a network of relations maintained by the figure of the hostess. In “By Force of Mourning,” Derrida’s most concise critique of Freudian mourning, he challenges Freud’s assumption that the goal of mourning is to re-establish the ego. In a passage that speaks directly to Clarissa’s role in Woolf’s novel, Derrida argues that the mourning subject “welcomes” the decentering that comes with bereavement, as it is the foundation for “hospitality, love or friendship” (188).

The party hostess as a model of social function speaks powerfully to the changing theater of London life in post-war Britain. Rebecca Walkowitz declares *Mrs. Dalloway* a cosmopolitan novel not despite the apparent frivolity of the subject, a party, but rather in large part because of it:

The novels I examine approach large-scale international events, such as world war and immigration, by focusing on the trivial or transient episodes of everyday life. . . . these novels are testing and redefining what can count as international politics: they may emphasize incidents that seems to be trivial in order to reject wartime values of order and proportion, or they may emphasize what seem to be only personal experiences in order to expand what we know of global processes. (*Cosmopolitan* 10)

Within the novel Clarissa herself seems uncertain whether to make of her party a big thing or a small one:

Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift.

Nothing else had she of the slightest importance . . . (*MD* 122)

Although tempted to make of her parties a grand achievement, one that will match the affairs of the men in her life, Clarissa is unwilling to complete the articulation of any strong claim for her parties. Although there is the suggestion that something very grand might come of the meeting of those three people, she is unwilling to determine precisely what should occur. And in doing so she acknowledges her role in making something happen: she can simply make opportunity for something dynamic to occur. In not claiming the outcome for Clarissa Woolf calls into question the extent to which the individual can claim to have achieved something alone; the opportunity for communion, for individuals to glance off one another, is set next to service in India or in Parliament—Peter’s interest in “the state of the world” (7).

### **Breaking the Center**

In his 1908 analysis of the “social gathering” or “party,” sociologist Georg Simmel draws a distinction between a small gathering of friends and a party. In a party, he observes,

a complete harmony of mood, which is so characteristic of the small group, is [in the party] neither sought, nor could it be attained if it were. On the contrary—and this is a further difference—there easily occurs the formation of subgroups. The nature of a friendly gathering among few persons strenuously militates against its splitting up into two moods, even only into two conversations. In fact, the moment there is a dualism instead of an undisputed single center, we have a “party.” (113)

In a small group of friends, the attention of all is focused on a single point, a single speaker, a single topic of conversation. Their shared histories and interests enable them to sustain this single focus. But in a party, as Simmel wryly notes, the group of people is large enough and the interests disparate enough that what they can be said to have in common likely goes no further than their interest in

food and amusement (113). There is a lowering of “the level of the personality” (112) that must be compensated for by “an intensification of external and sensuous attractions” (113). Such an analysis speaks to the pressure on spectacle that Septimus expresses when the grey car passes early in the novel. But Simmel notes two effects that mark a party: there is an emphasis on entertainment, and there is a splitting of focus. At Clarissa’s party, however, the split focus of the group relieves her from the pressure of entertainment. If the party were to rest entirely on what all of the participants would have in common, the hostess would bear an incredible burden. But since, as Simmel observes, the focus is broken in a party, the hostess is released from such pressure.<sup>28</sup>

Though I do not want to press too hard on the party metaphor, it seems that Simmel’s analysis might shed some light on Clarissa Dalloway’s role as hostess of both an evening party and Woolf’s novel. Woolf did, after all, begin the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* by noting that she wanted to explore “party consciousness” (*Diary* 3:12). By hosting, rather than assuming the role of the protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway engages in a more fluid relationship with those around her than would be possible otherwise. As Simmel puts it, establishing party relations allows one to alternate “between involvement and release which, according to the nature of the individual, affects him as the most unbearable superficiality, or as a playful rhythm of aesthetic charm” (113-114). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the character Peter Walsh gives voice to the former opinion; his sudden appearance makes Clarissa self-conscious about her party, as she remembers that, many years earlier, Peter had called her “the perfect hostess,” “whereupon she winced all over” (*MD* 62). Her fear of superficiality recurs insistently throughout the novel.

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<sup>28</sup> In this reading I differ from others who may see Clarissa’s party-giving as a means of exerting complete order over a world in the face of the life of the outside world, which remains chaotic. Chloe Wofford, better known as Toni Morrison, argues that Clarissa Dalloway “feels a need for some pattern of existence and transcends the chaos. . . . The pattern . . . is expressed in her party-giving,” through which she creates a “small but ideal world” (“Virginia Woolf’s and William Faulkner’s Treatment of the Alienated” 6-7). Although I agree that Clarissa does hope to arrange things such that they will bear interpersonal fruit, she also acknowledges the limitations of her role in making that happen. She can organize the meeting, but she cannot control the relations that occur once it begins. This give-and-take is, I argue, an essential flexibility for the new protagonist that Woolf offers to the novel tradition.

And yet, of course, numerous critics have argued for a reading of Clarissa's role that claims more even than Simmel's delight in the "playful rhythm of aesthetic charm." Clarissa is the one who unites souls, sensitive to the delicate threads that bind humanity together. And then there is Clarissa as political statement.<sup>29</sup> Woolf suggestively compares Clarissa's activities with those of her husband and the other officious persons who appear in the novel. What, the reader is tacitly asked, is the difference between Clarissa's party and that of her MP husband, Richard? An evening party and a political one? If one wants to affect the domestic situation in England, is it better to begin by addressing it as a nation or as a home?

Although Woolf plays with the analogy between Clarissa's occupation and that of her husband, one should be careful not to transform Clarissa's party into something more overtly didactic than Woolf intended. It was Clive Bell, rather than Woolf, who used a party metaphor to criticize those who push the effects of the war under the rug and return to class-appropriate activities. In his 1928 *Civilization*, Bell writes:

And after the handsome sample of savagery offered us between August 1914 and November 1918, we, nostalgic intellectuals, know that we have returned to the artificial pleasure of a fashionable dinner-party, where we can sit and rail in security against the unheroic quietude of civilized life, with a secret but profound sense of relief. (141)

Woolf famously dismisses Bell's book with a reference to that depiction: "in the end it turns out that Civilization is a lunch party at no. 50 Gordon Square" (Q. Bell, Vol. II, 137).<sup>30</sup> Although Woolf's disagreement with Bell emerged most prominently when his later book was published, the seeds of their differences are apparent even in 1923, when his *On British Freedom*, was published. In her own

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<sup>29</sup> For discussions of Woolf's political and social engagement, see Friedman, Cuddy-Keane, and Berman.

<sup>30</sup> For further discussion of Bell's theory of civilization, as expressed in *On British Freedom* (1923) and *Civilization* (1928), as context for Woolf's 1925 *Mrs. Dalloway*, see Shaffer.



1925 novel, however, it is precisely Clarissa's party that enables Woolf to connect larger political issues to everyday decisions and settings, the suicide of a war veteran to dinner parties with the Prime Minister.

Through Clarissa, Woolf turns the protagonist-driven novel on its head, offering instead the hostessing model of involvement and withdrawal for a new form of novel.<sup>31</sup> It is a movement Clarissa performs throughout the novel, moving from the busy city street to the refuge of her attic room and from the busy hubbub of her evening party to a room where she can be alone to consider the death of the unnamed Septimus Smith. And it is the same movement performed by the novel, alternately deep within a character's thoughts and winging away to another figure on the street. Although Clarissa's party offers a climax for the action of the novel, the event anticipated from the opening lines, in which Clarissa sets out to buy flowers for the evening party, there is also a strong sense in which Woolf has dispersed the party throughout the novel, so that it becomes as much a narratorial attitude as it does an event. If the modernist novel is to draw attention away from the moment of death that propels the elegy, and if it is to balk at the theme of dying hostesses, it will do so not by replacing the climactic moment of death with a party, but rather by filling the novel with the attitude of the party. Upon re-entering her house after the walk through London, Clarissa goes upstairs "as if she had left a party" (*MD* 30), drawing upon the mood of that moment in order to reflect on her life and her connections to others. The streets of London have offered a parallel for her party, an occasion on which to open oneself up to observation, and an occasion to observe others, in which "people secrete an envelope which connects them & protects them" (*Diary* 3:12-13).

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<sup>31</sup> Philipson speaks to this rhythm with particular insight: "The rhythm of participating and withdrawing makes possible the continual re-creation of her integration (in her private or inner life) as well as balance in shared experience (in her public or social life)" (130); "A person is not, like an inanimate object, an isolable entity; a person is an event, a performance, an ongoing activity effectuating that existence through a rhythmic pattern of participation with and withdrawal from others" (138).

As he moves throughout London on the day of Clarissa's party, Peter repeatedly theorizes the role of the hostess, most notably upon hearing the bells of St. Margaret's:

Ah, said St. Margaret's, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. Not, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. It is half-past eleven, she says, and the sound of St. Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after rings of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest—like Clarissa herself. (*MD* 50)

By linking the sound of the bells to Clarissa's hostessing, Peter draws attention away from the single event of the party and offers an implicit rationale for the bells' moderated tone. The "grief for the past" and "concern for the present" are occasions not for wailing or satire, but rather for reserve and measure. The subsequent vision of Clarissa "falling where she stood in her drawing-room," indicates the fate that one might well expect in this novel, and the striving against death with which Woolf concludes *The Waves*. It does also, of course, precede Septimus's fall, but Clarissa's survival indicates an emphasis on bringing together the grief, the concern, and something of the discipline of repeatedly throwing oneself into the midst of others, as Clarissa does in party after party.

When Peter sketches a picture of Clarissa standing "as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her" (76), he thinks of the lines that will close the book: "there she was, however; there she was" (76). This refrain, echoed several times in the book and from several different viewpoints, alleviates the pressure of the anticipatory anxiety that fills Septimus, that brings one to a halt when Big Ben is to strike, and that makes one expect Clarissa's death at the end of the novel. The "exquisite suspense" Clarissa "felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the

threshold of her drawing-room” offers a kind of control over such moments of anxiety and anticipation, through active participation and repetition (30).

### **What Gets Lost?**

Hostessing enables Clarissa to remove herself from the central position that bears down on Septimus Smith for much of the center of the novel. Septimus articulates what one might see as the individual’s terror at being made the object of attention: “this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him” (15). He is always, whether observing the grey car with the rest of the crowd or at home in his apartment, surrounded by observers, “faces laughing at him” (67). He has no means of retreating to solitude. Rather than celebrate the attention that one might garner, Septimus reminds one that the individual stands to lose much when he is made over into a public event. By the time the reader returns to Clarissa’s thoughts, he or she has moved quite a ways: from deep within her thoughts to outside by a public spectacle, and from there to consider the costs of such a spectacle to the individual.

The question then becomes, what is the central figure afraid to lose? Why does the figure in the car remain shielded behind shades and windowpanes? What is it that Septimus fails to maintain in giving in to the pressure of melodrama? I would suggest that at least part of what is at stake is a historical self.<sup>32</sup> Being turned into an event does not allow for the kind of fluid identity that Clarissa

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<sup>32</sup> If the appearance of Evans in Regent’s Park is, for Septimus, the horrifying approach of the war dead, Peter Walsh’s reappearance in Clarissa’s life is the reappearance of her past life in Bourton, a reminder of the choices she has made to arrive at such a place in the present. Clarissa is, of course, the same for Peter. As he walks through Regent’s Park, he is struck by memories of childhood there: “odd, he thought, how the thought of childhood keeps coming back to me—the result of seeing Clarissa, perhaps; for women live much more in the past than we do, he thought” (55). Thus through Septimus’s mis-recognition the past appears, both threatening and comforting, bringing loved ones close in a way that cannot be simply forgotten, now that the war is over and now that the choices have been made. This connection between Septimus and Clarissa is one that seems to have been largely overlooked. Septimus is encouraged to get over his past, but Clarissa is allowed hers, an important split between these two figures, and one that is linked to their roles as events for public consumption.

Dalloway exhibits throughout the novel, walking in London in 1923 but recalling herself as a girl in her father's home, both hosting a social event and retreating to other parts of the house both before and during the party: "She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on" (8). In this insistence on multiplicity Clarissa resists the kinds of role-playing to which Septimus succumbs.

Even in facing death Clarissa divides herself into "seen" and "unseen" parts, the former of which will fade away in death, but the latter of which "might survive" (153). This is, as J. Hillis Miller argues, a strange kind of All Souls' Day, in which the dead return to the present, called forth by the beggar-woman's song: "Nothing could be less like the intermittencies and difficulties of memory in Wordsworth or in Proust than the spontaneity and ease of memory in *Mrs. Dalloway*" (176). Just as Evans "returns" to Septimus, Peter Walsh does indeed return to England from India, and appears with Sally Seton at the evening party.<sup>33</sup>

Christine Froula also sees Clarissa's history as important, both for her role in the novel and for Woolf's warnings about the dehumanizing effects of the war. Froula notes that, when Lytton Strachey found Clarissa a disagreeable character, Woolf acknowledged, "I found Clarissa in some way tinselly. Then I invented her memories. But I think some distaste for her persisted" (*Diary* 3:32; quoted in Froula 355). Froula then goes on to link this creation of memories, the revitalizing element in Woolf's shaping of character, with that exchange between Adrian and the German soldier in the war, seven years earlier. Recognizing the individual through his history defuses the inclinations to violence that played a large part in the war. This, then, is behind Woolf's desire to both recognize and respect the hidden ordinariness of the individual, that which heroism and nationalism can only obscure. In Clarissa, whose memories are a prominent component of her

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<sup>33</sup> Miller also reminds readers that, "Just as Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a book much admired by Woolf, ends with a party in which Marcel encounters figures from his past turned now into aged specters of themselves, so the 'story' of *Mrs. Dalloway* . . . is something which happened long before the single day in the novel's present" (179).

present life, Woolf suggests alternatives to the modern failure to recognize the history—and, thereby—the humanity, in another individual. By splitting the focus of the novel between Septimus and Clarissa, Woolf refrains from forcing a single protagonist into the elegiac role; Septimus shows the difficulty of shouldering the elegy of the multitude, particularly in an environment that dismisses his mourning as madness, but Clarissa indicates the network of memories and interpersonal relations that make the protagonist's position bearable.

In continuing to foster her connections with the past, Clarissa offers an alternative to the processes of grieving that Freud outlined in "Mourning and Melancholia." As Susan Bennett Smith has argued, Clarissa makes an effort to maintain her connections to lost things through remembrance, and through gatherings like her evening party (316-317). Through such connections Clarissa distinguishes herself from the pathological mourning that has characterized the elegiac tradition. From the opening lines of the novel, when the need for flowers sends Clarissa out into London's streets and the thought of the doors needing to be taken off their hinges—the door with hinges "she could hear now" (*MD* 3)—takes her back to Bourton and her childhood, she is always in past and present simultaneously. Unlike with Septimus, whose history emerges only gradually, one is made aware of Clarissa Dalloway's past from one's introduction to her, and of its influence on her current decisions. She, unlike Septimus, can move easily from public to private, where the historical self can play a role in her identity. It is in this feature that she is most clearly separated from Septimus, as exemplified by their different relations to the doubled figure who is both Evans and Peter Walsh. In seeing Evans, the dead soldier, in what he believes to be a restored state, Septimus is made afraid by the return of the dead and the appearance of the past in the present. That fear tells the reader something of the separation between past and present that Septimus is struggling to achieve.

A handful of critics have investigated Clarissa's struggle with the Victorian sense of identity

as that which is “self-contained, as independent of social structure,” and stable through time.<sup>34</sup>

Shannon Forbes sees Clarissa’s attempts to perform the role of the perfect hostess as a “substitute for what she refers to as her ‘incompatible’ self so that . . . [she] may . . . project to the outside world the image of one who possesses the much-coveted, Victorian conception of the self” (40). In my reading, however, Clarissa Dalloway is not a figure for stable Victorian identity or even a failed attempt at such a thing. It is no more helpful to describe Clarissa as having inherently a “split, fragmented self” (Forbes 39) that she must gather up to perform a particular role than it is to describe her as having a unified, monolithic self in the Victorian model. Though critical emphasis has been on Clarissa’s effort to collect “the whole of her at one point” (*MD* 37), as she looks into the mirror, the “self” she sees there is merely a public self, and does not erase the other selves with which she lives. Forbes and others have focused on Clarissa’s investment in her role as a “hostess” to the detriment of other aspects of herself:

Clarissa performs the role to the extent that it consumes her. Clarissa tries to equate the performance of this role with her identity, but her attempts to use the role as a substitute for the fixed—essentially the Victorian—sense of self she covets result in emptiness, a lack of fulfillment, and ironically, virtually no self at all. (Forbes 39)

But if one thinks of her use of the “hostess” role as the form by which she interacts with the various aspects of her past and the identities she has formed over her life, rather than the sum total of what Woolf would call her “personality,” then the reader has a very different picture of her performance before him or her.

Like a poet who conforms his art to the form of the sonnet, Clarissa uses the role of the hostess as a means of engaging the various parts of the self that she has gathered.<sup>35</sup> The party offers

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<sup>34</sup> See Forbes and Wang.

<sup>35</sup> Henke goes quite a bit further in linking Clarissa to artistry; she sees Clarissa’s parties as “works of art that challenge mortality and strive to reinstate the prelapsarian delights of infant joy” (128).

her an opportunity to see performed before her the parts/whole and individual/group dynamics with which she wrestles in determining her identity each moment of her life. She is both a woman whose regular guests include people of political importance like Sir William Bradshaw and the Prime Minister and someone whose past is brought into the present by the presence of Peter Walsh and Sally. There is also a formal acknowledgement of the difference between solitude and her party demeanor, expressed in the effort that she must put forth to take up the latter.<sup>36</sup> It is in performing this concentration of the self for the public, for the party that Clarissa creates the environment in which—formally, publicly, socially—such concentration can be let go. In effect, she creates a stage on which the interaction of the selves can be played out; things need not, as Septimus fears, draw “together . . . to one centre before his eyes” (*MD* 15), but might, in fact, be deliberately, actively, formally broken into parts that alternately interact and withdraw. Big Ben is an important sign not of patriarchal order against which Clarissa must rebel, but rather of interruption, a reminder to her of the variety of selves that might be had. She, unlike Septimus, balances past and present, spectacle and private, making use of each without allowing them to overwhelm her.

Reclaiming the historical self is particularly important given the shattering effect of the war. As Hermione Lee notes in her biography of Woolf, Woolf sensed that there needed to be “new forms for our new sensations” (372). But in the face of such jarring change, a defining moment, the appropriate response is not to, as characters such as Sir William Bradshaw seem inclined to do, send all signs of war trauma to “homes” in the country; instead, Clarissa helps to stitch the world back together again by maintaining her hold on the ghosts of the past and her place in London, where she

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<sup>36</sup> Such attention to the effort that goes into parties may stem from the toll they took on Woolf even when she was only a guest. As her husband Leonard reports, “She not only enjoyed society, the kaleidoscope of human beings, conversation, the excitement of parties, she was through and through a professional novelist, and all this was the raw material of her trade. This dual sensitivity to the most trivial meetings with her fellow human beings meant that society and parties were a great strain on her mental health and she herself was well aware of this” (*Downhill* 99). The two layers of which Leonard Woolf writes, that of pure enjoyment and that of purposeful material-gathering, are interwoven throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. The dominance of either one, of course, contributes to the value or devaluation of Clarissa Dalloway’s role.

passes physical reminders of the war, situating the war and its effects spatially and giving it a place in her present. Through all of the novel's movements, be they from past to present, Mayfair to Bond Street, or character to narrator, Woolf leans heavily on the mapping of London as both the reference point needed to register that movement and as a figure for that movement itself. Rather than emphasize the official post-war processions down the streets, Woolf creates her own walk through time, and hers is involved in recalling her past as well as proceeding into the future.<sup>37</sup> The hustle and bustle, the interaction of different elements (monuments, shopgirls, and bells), prefigures the party that Clarissa is to give later that day.<sup>38</sup>

### **Woolf and the Political Animal**

One of the most frequently cited lines in Leonard Woolf's biography is one in which he judges Virginia to be "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (*Downhill* 27). Although Virginia herself expresses similar sentiments in her diary, recent critics who are interested in trumpeting Virginia Woolf's social and political engagement have taken issue with this characterization.<sup>39</sup> But what is of interest is not simply the way that both husband and wife classify her as a non-political animal but the ways that both qualify the statement. Although Virginia writes in her diary, "I am not a politician: obviously," she completes her thought with "[I] can only rethink politics very slowly into my own tongue" (*Diary* V:114). Even as she says she "obviously" is

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<sup>37</sup> Walkowitz cites Benjamin as approving of such measures: "For Benjamin, forgetting and ignoring are not the unintended or necessary consequences of civilization's triumph but rather the inaugural moments in which destructive self-righteousness is achieved. Writing in a time of too many processions, Benjamin proposes, as Woolf does, that looking backward and looking below are principal tactics of anti-triumphalism" ("Virginia Woolf's Evasion" 141).

<sup>38</sup> Even when Woolf herself was not visiting parties, they continually intruded upon her. The Royal Hotel was built in Tavistock Square, where the Woolfs lived from 1924 to 1939, and the noise from the parties in the ballroom continually intruded upon the Woolfs' life. As Leonard rather grumpily reports, "At the back was a long ballroom the windows of which were immediately below the windows of our sitting-room. When in the evening these windows were open adn a jazz band was playing full blast from 8 to 12, the Bedlam of noise, funnelled into our room even with the double windows closed, made life impossible" (*Downhill* 124). It is perhaps fitting that their home at 52 Tavistock Square, which was destroyed by bombs in 1940, was later replaced by the Tavistock Hotel.

<sup>39</sup> See Carroll, the opening paragraph of Levenback's *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*; and Brenda Silver's discussion of the critical response to Leonard Woolf (121).



not a politician, she does not cede the subject, but rather takes the role of an interpreter. Similarly, even as Leonard says that she is not a “political animal,” he is quick to distinguish her from a stereotype on the other side of things, acknowledging her sensitivity to the world:

though she was not a bit like the Virginia Woolf who appears in many books written by literary critics or autobiographers who did not know her, a frail invalidish lady living in an ivory tower in Bloomsbury and worshipped by a little clique of aesthetes. She was intensely interested in things, people, and events, and , as her new books show, highly sensitive to the atmosphere which surrounded her, whether it was personal, social, or historical. She was therefore the last person who could ignore the political menaces under which we all lived. (*Downhill* 27).

If she is not a “political animal,” it may be because she must be implicitly compared to Leonard, who labels himself a “very much a political animal” after his seven years in Ceylon (*Beginning* 99), and whose subsequent involvement with the League of Nations, among other projects, may well have made Virginia look distinctly like an outsider to politics.

Leonard begins his discussion of Virginia’s politics by acknowledging that the First World War had changed the very nature of political involvement, saturating the lives of everyone:

I have reached the period in my autobiography in which our lives and the lives of everyone have become penetrated, dominated by politics. Happy the country and era—if there can ever have been one—which has no politics. Ever since 1914 in the background of our lives and thoughts has loomed the menace of politics, the canker of public events. (One has ceased to believe that a public event can be anything other than a horror or disaster.) (*Downhill* 27)

When he later reflects on the periods that mark his life, he notes that they have been “ruthlessly” divided by the two World Wars, which invaded his individual life, as well as the global scene:

If I am to continue with the story of my life, I shall have to deal with the events of each of these four periods, the effect of each upon me and my life, and my reaction to each of them. But even in our cruel, mechanized, barbarous age, we have not yet become completely robots, puppets jerked through life by history, governments, and computers. We still have, at any rate in Britain, some shreds of private life, which we can preserve unaffected by public events. (48)

The invasion of public events upon the private individual take on a prominence in post-war Britain that is only underscored by the Second World War. Situated as it is in 1923, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* speaks to the invasion of that "public event," the toll that it takes on the individual. If the language of politics is that of "case-making," as in the case of William Bradshaw and the bill that is mentioned at Clarissa's party, then Woolf's rethinking of politics may be an attempt to fight such abstraction, emphasizing the effects of the war on a world that can no longer be divided into political and non-political animals.

## Song and Silence: Unproductive Grief in William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*

*We showed an unmistakable tendency to put death on one side, to eliminate it from life.*

*We tried to hush it up.*

- Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times"

I conclude this study with Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942), not because it was published later than the other novels under consideration, but because it takes further than any other texts by Faulkner or Woolf the de-centering, genre-blurring, short-story-incorporating work I have been discussing. The genre debates that develop around Faulkner's "splendid failure" and Woolf's "playpoem" reach their peak in the critical discussion of *Go Down, Moses*, which exists at the boundary between short stories and novels. *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests a reconsideration of novelistic boundaries, as the short stories that surround it echo formally the theme of the hostess surrounded by party guests. *Go Down, Moses* is a work comprised entirely of interlinking short stories, in which the "hostess," if there is one, must be found by reading between stories and making crucial interpretive claims about the relations between them. It makes an unusual contribution to the elegy, combining the thematic mourning portrayed within the text with indications of other absences that occur outside the stories, in the narrative gaps that might be taken for granted in the short-story collection but are notable in a novel.

Faulkner's text is rife with acts of mourning, from the hunters who gather to tell stories at the death of the hunting dog, Lion, to the solemn funeral procession that accompanies Samuel Beauchamp's body in the book's final story. But some of the greatest losses remain unarticulated: one wonders about the siblings of Lucas Beauchamp, the character whose success in navigating his racial identity is juxtaposed, implicitly, with the different choices made by his brother and sister. But

the stories of these other Beauchamps leave the page when they themselves leave the plantation, indicating a formal boundary that matches the geographical one within the fiction. The temporal gap between the antebellum opening story, “Was,” and “Delta Autumn,” in which rumors of World War II circulate, also makes the reader intensely aware of the ghost of the wars that lie, unstoried, in-between.

Faulkner underscores family relations thematically to highlight the limitations of his form and the gaps in his story. By insisting on the legacy of the McCaslins and the significance of blood inheritance, he draws attention to the McCaslin blood that gets lost in the spaces between the narratives. Thadious Davis calls *Go Down, Moses* “a miscegenated text, one whose form and logic resist containment and defy boundaries,” (11). It is also, however, one in which juxtaposition gives Faulkner a means of articulating loss, a form of grieving that indicates the holes in the McCaslin family tree and the war that changed the slaves to sharecroppers. By yoking his stories to one another within a text that is, at least nominally, a novel, Faulkner offers his most elegant tribute to the many losses that extend beyond the boundaries of his text.

### **Resigned to “Boiling the Pot,” But Desperate to Write Novels**

The debate over the genre of *Go Down, Moses* reveals a critical unease with metamorphosing texts, an unease that proves a significant limitation when dealing with writers like Faulkner or Woolf.<sup>1</sup> As Faulkner proves in a 1925 letter to his “Aunt Bama,” writing in a variety of forms came naturally to him:

In Sommariva I wrote a sort of amusing travelogue, in Paris I wrote another one,

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<sup>1</sup> Early reviews set the critical tone for several decades. Malcolm Cowley, reviewing *Go Down, Moses* in *The New Republic*, called it “a hybrid: a loosely jointed but ambitious novel masquerading as a collection of short stories,” while Lionel Trilling, “after excepting the story called ‘Pantaloone in Black,’” also calls it “if not exactly a novel, then at least a narrative which begins, develops, and concludes” (Tick 67). In an extensive study of the shift from short stories to an integrated form, Joanne V. Creighton deems it a “short story composite” (86).

one poem so modern I dont know myself what it means, I am writing a book of verse for children and a novel at the same time; and I have just finished the most beautiful short story in the world. (*Letters* 20)

This early profusion gave way to formal preferences as his work in the different genres enjoyed different degrees of commercial and artistic success. Short stories became a regular source of income because they were relatively easy to place with magazines, but the novels signaled an artistic achievement that matched the time and effort required to produce them. Faulkner's inability to decide whether *Go Down, Moses* was a commercial or an artistic undertaking may well account for his inconsistency in identifying the genre of the work,<sup>2</sup> though these evaluative differences have garnered little critical attention.<sup>3</sup>

When he was asked about genre in interviews, Faulkner returned again and again to a description of himself as a "failed poet" and ranked the short story above the novel in greatness, second only to poetry:

I think that any writer is better off if he looks on himself as a poet—he's a failed poet, I agree with you—but to look on himself primarily as a poet. . . . If he is very fortunate, he can do it as the poets did it. If he's a little less fortunate, he can do it as the short story writers do it—as Chekov did it. If he is least fortunate, he's got to go

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<sup>2</sup> Faulkner's characterization of the novel shifted repeatedly. During a set of sessions with students at the University of Virginia from 1957-1958 he offered contradictory remarks: "That novel was—happened to be composed of more or less complete stories, but it was held together by one family, the Negro and the white phase of the same family, same people" (*University* 4); in a later session he referred to *Go Down, Moses* as "a book which was composed of short stories" (38). His letters to his publishers are no more consistent. On the first of May, 1941, Faulkner refers to *Go Down, Moses* as "a volume, collected short stories, general theme being relationship between white and negro races" (*Letters* 139). And yet, upon considering a reprinting of the book, he wrote with some heat: "Moses is indeed a novel. . . . Why not reprint exactly, but change the title from GO DOWN MOSES and other stories, to simply: GO DOWN, MOSES. . . . Indeed, if you will permit me to say so at this late date, nobody but Random House seemed to labor under the impression that GO DOWN, MOSES should be titled 'and other stories.' I remember the shock (mild) I got when I saw the printed title page. I say, reprint it, call it simply GO DOWN, MOSES, which was the way I sent it to you 8 years ago" (*Letters* 284-285).

<sup>3</sup> Marvin Klotz is the notable exception to this rule. He reads the separately published short stories of *Go Down, Moses* as, on the whole, better before they were rewritten for publication as a novel, and suggests that Faulkner and his publishers tried to sell the stories as a novel because novels sell much better than short story collections (2).

back to the clumsy method of Mark Twain and Dreiser. (*University* 145)

Faulkner repeated this hierarchy to a variety of audiences, perhaps out of a sense of modesty for his own achievements with the novel, but also, perhaps, out of genuine respect for those who had mastered concision. When asked whether it is easier to write a short story than a novel, he affirmed,

Yes sir. You can be more careless, you can put more trash in it and be excused for it.

In a short story that's next to the poem, almost every word has got to be almost exactly right. In the novel you can be careless but in the short story you can't. I mean by that the good short stories like Chekhov wrote. That's why I rate that second—it's because it demands a nearer absolute exactitude. You have less room to be slovenly and careless. There's less room in it for trash. In poetry, of course, there's no room at all for trash. It's got to be absolutely impeccable, absolutely perfect. (*University* 207)

When Faulkner spoke to a writerly and scholarly audience, the short story sat uneasily between poetry, a form that he gave up with his youth but that always remained his ideal model, and the novel, the form upon which he built his literary reputation.

Faulkner's recorded views stand in marked contrast to the ways in which he prioritized novels over short stories in his own writing endeavors. Throughout his career he turned to short stories as a means of keeping the bills paid: "boiling the pot," as he put it.<sup>4</sup> Writing them came at a cost to his novels, on which he struggled to make money.<sup>5</sup> The two genres served as competing commercial and artistic undertakings, a competition that is of particular interest for works like *Go Down, Moses*, which Faulkner attempted first as short stories to be sold to magazines and then as a

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<sup>4</sup> The short-story work was complemented by Faulkner's work in "the salt mines," as a screenwriter in Hollywood (Cowley 7).

<sup>5</sup> Only *Sanctuary* and *Intruder in the Dust* might be considered relative commercial successes. At the publication of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner*, in 1946, nearly all of Faulkner's novels were out of print, though Cowley's work helped to return Faulkner to the public eye, with a boost from the Nobel Prize Committee in 1950. Although he received the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature, the prize was not awarded to him until 1950.

novel to be drawn together for his book publisher.

*Go Down, Moses* was delayed partly because it failed to manifest success as a set of short stories, and Faulkner could not afford the time to address it as a novel. As he wrote to his publisher on April 28, 1940, “I have another in mind in method similar to *The Unvanquished*, but since the chapters which I have written and tried to sell as short stories have not sold, I haven’t the time to continue with it” (*Letters* 122). Just as critics would later struggle to find the category into which *Go Down, Moses* might be placed, so, too, Faulkner struggled in making space for the writing of his book because it was neither one form nor another. Despite his professions of respect for the short stories of Chekhov, Faulkner’s labeling of *Go Down, Moses* as a novel may rest as heavily on its failures in magazine publication as it does on the aesthetic merits of the work.

Poetry and the short story indicate a perfection of form to which Faulkner aspired, and yet upon collecting stories or poetry Faulkner turned to the novel for aesthetic guidance. When writing to his publisher, Harrison Smith, in October of 1932, about the early poetry that was published in 1933 as *A Green Bough*, Faulkner showed that he saw poetry through prose eyes when composing the collection: “About the poem. . . . You are not going to add to it, are you? . . . I chose the best ms and built a volume just like a novel” (*Letters* 67). Faulkner’s poetic inclinations are well known, but of perhaps as great a significance is his tendency to regard collections of poetry or short stories in the same way he would regard the cohesion of a novel. They needed to be reworked into a whole to manifest the relations that already, he presumed, existed between them. As he notes in a letter to Malcolm Cowley in 1948, “even to a collection of short stories, form, integration, is as important as to a novel—an entity of its own, single, set for one pitch, contrapuntal in integration, toward one end, one finale” (Cowley 115-116).

Although he expressed respect for the short story as a form, and he well understood the financial significance of his short-story work, Faulkner clearly regarded himself as a writer whose

form was the novel. As he acknowledged in 1928, “I am quite sure that I have no feeling for short stories; that I shall never be able to write them, yet for some strange reason I continue to do so, and to try them on Scribner’s with unflagging optimism” (*Letters* 42). But just as regarding himself as a “failed poet” contributed to his novelistic pursuits, enabling him to reinvent the latter as a form of self-conscious failure, so, too, his investment in a conception of himself as a novelist contributed to the writing of his short stories. Although the “crystallised instant” of the short story indicates that Faulkner saw it as a closed form,<sup>6</sup> his desire to build collections of stories as he would a novel opens the short story out into a form that reflects both the successful capture of the instant and also all that occurs outside that capture. The work thus sustains a dual focus: the integrity of the story and also the resonance of the other stories in the collection. Faulkner’s particular view of short stories, reading them through the lens of novelistic relations, enables him to preserve the Chekov-like care of the short story even as the threads that connect story to story keep him from the “fetish of simplicity” that he saw as limiting the works of Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway.<sup>7</sup>

Although Faulkner may have, in his own estimation, failed at writing poetry and even short stories, one sees both the acknowledgement of failure and also the insistence on the attempt inscribed in *Go Down, Moses*. Ike McCaslin, when he is quoted lines from Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,”<sup>8</sup> rejects the accord suggested between his situation and that of the poem: “*Somehow it had seemed 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. He had heard about an old bear . . .*” (GDM 284). Rather than accept Keats’s words as a substitute for his own, Ike

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<sup>6</sup> From a letter to Joan Williams, 8 January 1953 (*Letters* 345).

<sup>7</sup> The quotation is from Faulkner’s 1953 essay on Anderson, originally published in *The Atlantic Monthly* (*Essays* 5). His estimations of Hemingway’s work are revealed in another hierarchy, one for which he paid by spending many subsequent interviews explaining the remark. In a list of his contemporaries, Faulkner ranked Hemingway near the bottom of the list for the latter’s failure to try something beyond the control of which he was currently capable. Rather than experiment continually with new methods, Hemingway, in Faulkner’s estimation, “learned early in life a method by which he could do his work, he has never varied from that method, it suited him, he handled it well” (*University* 149).

<sup>8</sup> Faulkner’s own evaluation of the poem is a bit unorthodox: “If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is worth any number of old ladies” (*Lion* 239).



insists on telling the story of the bear hunt (192). In an assertion that recurs several times in Faulkner's work, Ike insists that "even suffering and grieving is better than nothing" (179),<sup>9</sup> thus rejecting the terms of Keats's solace: an object that "cannot fade" and thus does not need one's grief (283).

In rejecting poetic substitution for his grief, Ike McCaslin offers a tentative reconsideration of poetry's clarity. Though Ike, whose failure on so many fronts is a refrain throughout the novel, can hardly be said to speak for Faulkner, there is a sense in which his tumbling, half-uttered, dwindling-to-silence tale of the bear and his dog is "simpler" than Keats's manicured ode, a recognition of the ill match of a perfect form with an imperfect situation. *Go Down, Moses*, with its individual stories, complete in themselves and yet repeatedly pointing the reader to absences in the grand story of the McCaslin epic, enables a peculiar fusion of Faulkner's poetic ideals and his unwillingness to let the ideal inhibit the endeavor.

For all that the novel is comprised of seven distinct stories, the stories themselves seem to spill outside their boundaries; the narratives gesture repeatedly toward a larger storyline of which the reader is given only glimpses. From the opening lines of "Was" Faulkner makes the reader feel the existence of a story already underway. Although the three paragraphs that introduce the story make some effort to connect the subsequent story to Ike McCaslin, suggesting him as a protagonist who will guide the reader through the narrative, the dismissive description—"a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one" (*GDM* 3)—points not so much toward Ike as through him, to a greater McCaslin genealogy that is beyond the scope of the narrative. Faulkner's opening paragraphs give an indication of the richness of his narrative, suggesting an endless web of relations among fictional characters.

For *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner brought together ten separate stories, eight of which were

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<sup>9</sup> A similar sentiment occurs in *The Wild Palms*.

published in magazines. In addition to these earlier manifestations, however, *Go Down, Moses* has strong links to other Faulkner novels, connections that play a prominent role in Eric Sundquist's analysis in *Faulkner: The House Divided*. Early drafts of the novel connect the characters to the Sutpens of *Absalom, Absalom!*; Samuel Beauchamp, of the titular story in *Go Down, Moses*, was originally "Henry Coldfield Sutpen, the grandson of Rosa Sutpen, one of Thomas Sutpen's slaves" (Sundquist 131). Ike McCaslin, the character most often taken for the protagonist of *Go Down, Moses*, was first named Quentin, linking him to *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* and the grief and shame that dominate those texts.<sup>10</sup>

*Go Down, Moses* not only benefited from Faulkner's early novels, it also generated further work. The hunting stories that form the center of *Go Down, Moses* reappear in a later collection, *Big Woods*, published in 1955.<sup>11</sup> Lucas Beauchamp, of "The Fire and the Hearth," blossomed into the main character of a separate novel, *Intruder in the Dust* (1942), of which Faulkner recorded, "But once I thought of Beauchamp, then he took charge of the story and the story was a good deal different from the idea that—of the detective story that I had started with" (*University* 142).

The formal experiments of *Go Down, Moses* are also anticipated in Faulkner's earlier writing. Stanley Tick notes, "at the time Faulkner was working on the elements of *Go Down, Moses*, his over-all method of composition was of a kind that could be called 'blending'" (68), by which he means the blending of short stories and novels. After *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Faulkner produced three consecutive 'blended' works before *Go Down, Moses* (1942): *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Wild Palms* (1939), and *The Hamlet* (1940). All three works are comprised of short stories, many of which Faulkner published in magazines, rewritten so as to indicate a larger narrative threaded throughout.

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<sup>10</sup> Sundquist sees other parallels between the *Go Down, Moses* and *Absalom, Absalom!*: in *Go Down, Moses* "the conjunction of incest and miscegenation that the earlier novel had violently repudiated is once more revealed, in figure and in fact, as the heart of the South's long, continuing catastrophe" (131). Sundquist refers to the suggestions of incest and miscegenation that mar the marrying of Judith Sutpen to Charles Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Cowley reads *Big Woods* as the author's attempts to "try again" to say what he wanted said, much as the multiple narrators of *The Sound and the Fury* represent such a reiteration (39).

*Go Down, Moses* is thus part of a larger movement in Faulkner's work that might be described as reinterpreting his "failure" at the literary genres to which he aspired.

### **Telling Old Pharaoh: Mollie's Grief in "Go Down, Moses"**

It is tempting to read this project as having "summed up" all that Faulkner and Woolf have to say of the meeting of grief, elegy, and modernist narrative, particularly if, as I have, one defines particular stages in their rewriting of the elegy. But just as *The Sound and the Fury* enacts a perpetuate "failure" to tell the story of Caddy, and as Bernard's final soliloquy multiplies, rather than simplifies, the characters' relations, so, too, this final chapter indicates only further permutation, rather than summation.

The final, titular story of *Go Down, Moses* is particularly adept at balking readers' expectations of conclusion, and I begin with "Go Down, Moses" precisely because of its resistance to resolution. Faulkner disorients his reader by placing him or her inside an Illinois jail cell with a man whose appearance defies kinship with the rural farmers of the book's earlier stories. The character is implicitly sketched against these more familiar figures, with clothes that "had cost too much and were draped too much, with too many pleats," speaking in a voice that "was anything under the sun but a southern voice or even a negro voice" (*GDM* 351). He is alien to the world of Mississippi sharecropping and bear hunts.

Only after the character offers his full name, "Samuel Worsham Beauchamp," does his relationship to the novel's other stories become clear; in claiming his name he also subsumes his story under the grander McCaslin saga with which the novel is filled. It is worth noting that, after he reveals his name in an interview, his jailers strip him of his fancy clothes and hairstyle, actions that deprive him of the acquisitions that distinguish him from his poorer relations back "home" as well

as prepare him for execution.<sup>12</sup> At the same time as the reader learns Samuel's name, he or she also learns of his death sentence; we have been introduced to a walking dead man, a figure taken away even as he is introduced. His death, rather than serving as a ringing conclusion to the story and to the collection, is instead a catalyst for further questions and intrigues, as was the case in *As I Lay Dying*.

"Go Down, Moses" is, in a sense, only half of the novel's conclusion; it is paralleled by the previous story, "Delta Autumn," in which a hunting expedition, following the grooves of the ones told in "The Old People" and "The Bear," is interrupted by the appearance of a young woman. Like Samuel, her identity is something of a surprise; she is Samuel's cousin, a nod to the pervasiveness of the McCaslin blood and the closed society of the book. But her presence as the lover of Roth Edmonds, and that of her child by him, produces a horror in the observing character, Ike, and he encourages her to leave the area. Samuel Beauchamp's return home by coffin is, then, balanced by the new mother's presumed movement away from the father of her child, the resident head of the McCaslin clan. Roth Edmonds drives away the Beauchamp cousins in both "Delta Autumn" and "Go Down, Moses"; in both stories it is blood relation that leads to exile. This doubled ending, with the death of one McCaslin member and the birth of another, a return home and a departure, both relying on a surprising revelation of the McCaslin blood, leave the reader with little sense of the future of the McCaslin-Beauchamp family, despite the novel's structural closure.

Although "Go Down, Moses" begins with novelty and unfamiliar settings, the remainder of the story returns to home territory, both geographically and thematically. In what might be read as a somber conclusion to the family saga that runs through *Go Down, Moses*, Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, the lost son of the Beauchamp line, returns home by train in a casket, greeted by "more

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<sup>12</sup> The revelation of Beauchamp's name is significant for the plot, as well, even making the regional newspapers: "Mississippi negro, on eve of execution for murder of Chicago policeman, exposes alias by completing census questionnaire. Samuel Worsham Beauchamp—" (GDM 356).

than a dozen cars” and “Negroes and whites both . . . idle white men and youths and small boys and probably half a hundred Negroes, men and women too” (363). The solemnity of the occasion, as Samuel’s body returns to the plantation on which his great-grandfather was a slave, offers ample reason for critics to read “Go Down, Moses” as a resolution to the generations of conflict between the white and black lines of the McCaslin legacy.<sup>13</sup> The grandeur of the homecoming, with an expensive coffin, flowers, and a vehicle procession, seems fitting, not for the dead man himself, as he existed for the reader only a few pages before his death, but for the inheritor of a racial and familial identity of such complexity.

But to read the final story in such a way fails to recognize Faulkner’s criticisms of such mourning. Much as Virginia Woolf undermined elaborate Victorian mourning in *The Years* by emphasizing the perfunctory nature of the mourners’ actions, the undertaker’s men in Faulkner’s novel exhibit an abrupt, business-like manner as they “snatched the wreaths and floral symbols of man’s ultimate and inevitable end briskly out and slid the casket in and flung the flowers back and clapped-to the door” (*GDM* 363). The modern-day business of the undertaker is no more attuned to the nuances of grief than were the earlier intricate social arrangements.<sup>14</sup> With these strident descriptions, Faulkner builds on the story’s resistance to resolution, using it to prompt a further criticism of the character of public mourning practices.

And yet it is the business of grief that takes center stage in Faulkner’s story. Just as the character Gavin Stevens attempts to shield the dead man’s grandmother from news of Samuel’s crime, so, too, he lies about the cost of the funeral arrangements, attempting to shield grieving, impoverished women from the disparity between their resources and those required for the funeral

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<sup>13</sup> Even Susan Donaldson, who argues that the stories unravel the master narrative of the McCaslin family, assumes that “Go Down, Moses” is a concluding sign of hope, a change in the failed resistance that marks the other stories of the novel. This somewhat undercuts her larger argument, that the stories, as an aggregate, suggest an ongoing, enduring resistance to the McCaslin story that will continue on beyond the boundaries of the narrative (144). She sees in the final story “a moment of compassion, hope, and true community” (147).

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the rise of the funeral director in modern mourning, see Ramazani’s introduction.

they desire. But the reader is not so shielded: the meager funds from Miss Worsham's reticule, "twenty-five dollars in frayed bills and coins ranging down to nickels and dimes and pennies" (359), are followed by Stevens's more frank dealings with fellow businessmen:

Stevens passed from store to store and office to office about the square—merchant and clerk, proprietor and employee, doctor dentist lawyer and barber—with his set and rapid speech: 'It's to bring a dead nigger home. It's for Miss Worsham. Never mind about a paper to sign: just give me a dollar. Or half a dollar then. Or a quarter then. (360)

The object of the solicitation, as Stevens shifts from "a dead nigger" to "for Miss Worsham," is less clear than the desire for contribution in the form of dollars and coins. Adjustments to new modes of mourning are registered in monetary differences, and it is as the arbiter of these different modes that Gavin Stevens plays a significant role in this final story. As he tells the town newspaper editor:

It will cost about two hundred. . . . I'll get something out of Carothers Edmonds the first time I catch him; I don't know how much, but something. And maybe fifty around the square. But the rest of it is you and me, because she insisted on leaving twenty-five with me, which is just twice what I tried to persuade her it would cost and just exactly four times what she can afford to pay—. (359)

This commercial lens is not the only one that Faulkner uses to consider the funeral of Samuel Beauchamp, but it features as prominently in the story as flowers or songs or mourning or any of the other elements that one expects from elegy. The traditional cataloging of flowers bestowed upon the dead gives way to the solicitation of funds. Samuel's death offers Faulkner an opportunity to extend his study of mourning to a time contemporaneous with the publication of his novel, a modern-day assessment of the efficacy of funeral practices.

The theme of modern funeral practices supplanting expressions of grief is by now familiar,

from the spectacle of Damuddy's funeral in *The Sound and the Fury* to the way in which Addie Bundren's family uses her burial as an opportunity to make purchases in town in *As I Lay Dying*. In "Go Down, Moses," Faulkner considers rather pointedly the way in which the preoccupation with funeral arrangements obscures the larger social implications of a death, offering false comfort for readers and mourners who seek closure. Unlike the traditional elegy, Faulkner's story offers neither an opportunity to laud Samuel—who was, we are told, a bad seed like his father—nor to admire the depth of his grandmother's grief. What is brought to the foreground is, instead, incomprehension, public spectacle, all of the elements that draw such criticism from Woolf and Faulkner in their other works. Faulkner distances the figure of the funeral-arranger from the grieving grandmother, encouraging the reader to look carefully at the gaps between modes of grief as they are represented across generational, racial, and gendered lines.

If the beginning of the story, set in Samuel's Illinois jail cell, is striking for its shift in character and setting, the conclusion of "Go Down, Moses" surprises largely because its concluding revelations obfuscate more significant predicaments. At the story's end, as the lawyer Gavin Stevens reflects on his hand in arranging the funeral for Samuel Beauchamp, he "realizes" that he misread Mollie Beauchamp's desires for her grandson's burial. After learning from the newspaper editor that Mollie insisted she wanted her grandson's story in the paper, "All of hit" (365), Stevens reassess his initial instincts to protect her from news that would reflect negatively on her grandson. He need not have attempted to shield her from news of her grandson's crime and execution because "*she doesn't care how he died. She just wanted him home*" (365). As a send-up of Stevens's elaborate acts of chivalry, it is a satisfying end to the story, since it both acknowledges the white lawyer's inability to read the ancient black woman and also indicates a final moment of understanding between them.

But Stevens's realization, even if correct,<sup>15</sup> also raises questions about the accuracy of the other assumptions he has made about the desires of the bereaved. After acknowledging his mistake, Stevens goes on to assert, "*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*" (365). If Mollie discarded eulogy for the truth in print, one might wonder whether she did indeed provide the motivation for the funeral trappings, particularly given how they are relayed to Stevens in the story. The effort to reclaim Samuel Beauchamp's dead body and engage in such elaborate practices is relayed through multiple characters, and it is unclear whether the true mourner, Mollie Beauchamp, ever desired such outward display. The dying man himself certainly desired no such plans; when tentatively asked how, if his family did not know of his whereabouts, Samuel expected to "get home," he replied, "What will that matter to me?" (352). His ready dismissal of such connections offers the beginning of a note of skepticism about funeral protocol that one might well extend to his grandmother, Mollie, despite Stevens's concluding satisfaction.

Mollie enters Gavin Stevens's law office with a simple request: "I dont know whar he is. I just knows Pharaoh got him. And you the Law. I wants to find my boy." (354). Mollie's rather cryptic announcement points to a problem among family members; she blames the current plantation owner, Roth Edmonds, for exiling her grandson from the plantation after a series of misdeeds. Finding him, reclaiming him, and identifying Roth's responsibility in the matter appear to be at the forefront of her concerns. But when Miss Worsham, the employer of Mollie's brother, subsequently takes up Mollie's case, the concerns change. Miss Worsham sat "on the hard chair where the old Negress had sat," claiming a kinship with Mollie that transcends race: "Mollie and I were born in the same month. We grew up together as sisters would" (357). And yet Miss Worsham substitutes her own concerns for Mollie's, claiming a kind of family bond that is also

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<sup>15</sup> Godden and Polk call Stevens's conclusion "misguided and socially self-serving," as it enables Stevens to focus on something other than the accusations that Mollie makes against Roth Edmonds (331).



mixed with unmistakable racial paternalism, as she attempts to preserve the dignity of a family that, in earlier generations, belonged to her own. From Miss Worsham come the requests for the return of the body and for a nice coffin, as she presses Stevens with the weight of family obligations, both Mollie's and her own:

He is the only child of her oldest daughter, her own dead first child. He must come home . . . He is her grandson, Mr Stevens. When she took him to raise, she gave him my father's name—Samuel Worsham. Not just a box, Mr Stevens. (358)

The family ties that have been the focus of the earlier stories in the novel make themselves known in the quality of the funeral arrangements. Here the body is returned, unlike the lost bodies of *The Waves* and *Jacob's Room*. Like the ambulance that bears Septimus away in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the arrangements for Samuel's body bear the marks of modern efficiency. But in "Go Down, Moses" Faulkner considers that even the mourners may not provide the impetus for such arrangements, that their force may come from the sense of obligation of others.

Mollie's grief is expressed in old words. Her mourning begins well before her grandson's body arrives, as she grieves that "Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him" (353).<sup>16</sup> As Mollie Beauchamp situate her grandson's death within the narrative of the

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<sup>16</sup> As Godden and Polk observe, Faulkner freely admitted to using the names Joseph and Benjamin interchangeably (see *University*, 18), and thus they read Mollie's use of Benjamin as a "nominal error" in trying to align Samuel's fate with that of Joseph. It seems relevant, however, that the Biblical story contains multiple levels of trickery: Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt, but then he later uses trickery to retain his youngest brother, Benjamin, in Egypt. The multiple layers of trickery, Jacob's favoring two of his sons above the others, and the significance of brothers recognizing each other as such despite changes in circumstance, correspond with the many games and substitutions in Faulkner's book and thus complicate the allusion in the final story. As in the Biblical story, in which Benjamin and Joseph share a mother, unlike their brothers, so, too, Mollie is the link between Samuel and Roth in Faulkner's novel. Although neither man is actually Mollie's son, Samuel is raised by his grandmother (354), and she is "the only mother [Roth] ever knew" (97). Because of what Mollie perceives as Roth's betrayal, she is, as Jacob feared he would be, bereaved of both her sons. By speaking of Samuel in terms of Benjamin, Mollie implicitly prevails upon Roth to recognize Samuel as his brother, rather than simply as his misbehaving tenant. What Godden and Polk do not note is that Faulkner not only "admitted" to using the two Biblical names interchangeably (Godden and Polk 331), he seems to have done so precisely because of the parallels between the selling of Joseph and the selling of Benjamin. When asked why Mrs. Compson refers to Benjy Compson as having been sold into Egypt, Faulkner takes the opportunity to do a bit of Sunday schooling:

Biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, the reader is acutely aware of the family ties that cause Mollie to identify her grandson's death with a betrayal on the part of his employer and cousin, Roth Edmonds.

Just as her grandson cut through the census-taker's circumspection in asking how he would get home, as if something more than his body would be returning to Mississippi, Mollie corrects Stevens when he, too, offers as comfort: "He'll be home the day after tomorrow" (361). "He dead," she replies, "Pharaoh got him" (361). That correction becomes the central theme of a call and response that passes between Mollie and her brother:

"Sold my Benjamin," she said. "Sold him in Egypt."

"Sold him in Egypt," Worsham said.

"Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin."

"Sold him to Pharaoh."

"Sold him to Pharaoh and now he dead." (362)

They are joined by Mollie's sister-in-law, "a true constant soprano which ran without words beneath the strophe and antistrophe of the brother and sister" (363). The response on the part of the two white observers, excluded from this family cry, is striking. Miss Worsham, despite having grown up with Mollie "as sisters would" (357), attempts to silence them. Stevens finds himself protesting Mollie's accusation against Edmonds, and then, abruptly, fleeing. In realizing that "*she cant bear me*" (362), Stevens is shut out of Mollie's grief, grief that is, she makes clear, not only for the loss of a grandson, but for a wrong done by a man who is like her own son. Eric Sundquist points to this scene as an "elusive" juxtaposition of the two characters' responses to death:

The impassioned family grief that Gavin Stevens can in no way share, but can only

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"Is there anybody who knows the Bible here?"

"I looked it up and Benjamin was held hostage for Joseph."

"Yes, that's why I used them interchangeably . . ." (*University* 18)

mechanically respond to by arranging for Beauchamp's funeral, is left side by side, for reasons precariously elusive, with Aunt Mollie's confused version of the slave spiritual from which the book and story take their title. (151)

Although Stevens is an Old-Testament scholar (*GDM* 353), he is ill-equipped to answer the Biblically phrased accusations that are an important element of Molly's grief. Mollie's allegations discourage a reading of this final story as a means of completing the others and instead encourage an ongoing investigation of the interlacing obligations of family, ownership, and race.

Although Stevens is portrayed somewhat unsympathetically, his role is an important critical reassessment of Faulkner's own role in the burial of Caroline Barr, the "mammy" in Faulkner's family and the woman to whom *Go Down, Moses* is dedicated. Critics like Judith Sensibar have noted that Barr's family protested Faulkner's actions: taking charge of her funeral service, holding the main funeral in his family parlor, speaking the eulogy there, accompanying the body to the cemetery, and erecting a tombstone with the epitaph "MAMMY/Her white children/bless her."<sup>17</sup>

In claiming a relation to Barr Faulkner seems to have ignored the claims of her biological family and her community, fixating solely on her role as his childhood nurse and that of his daughter, Jill. As Thadious Davis evaluates his position:

Faulkner's role in Barr's funeral was performative; it was an enactment of his relationship to her and a performance of his ability to naturalize her place as a race-marked mammy who attended to the white Faulkner family. Beyond her raced bodily functions and symbolizations, Faulkner cannot go. (193)

But in this last assessment Davis is mistaken. The dedication to *Go Down, Moses*, drawn directly from the eulogy he offered at Barr's funeral, is an extension of that appropriation, using the near-century of her life to delimit the temporal span of the *Go Down, Moses* stories; Stevens's awkwardness in the

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<sup>17</sup> See Sensibar for an analysis of Barr's family's reaction to Faulkner's involvement in Caroline's burial.

final story, however, and his incomprehension in the face of black mourning, suggest that Faulkner reconsidered his role at the head of Barr's funeral entourage. Thus his management of this final story, as he focuses the story through white eyes, this time to witness black mourners, signals a new attentiveness to those alternative claims to grief.

Just as with the uncomprehending Caddy Compson, peering from her perch in the tree on the funeral arrangements of her grandmother, in "Go Down, Moses" Faulkner portrays mourning through the mind of one looking on from the outside. Like Caddy, who mistakes the funeral visitation for a party, Stevens commits mistakes in his witnessing of grief, mistakes that carry a critique of the role of the elegist. Although he visits Molly with reassurances that the funeral arrangements are all in place, he refuses to consider the accusation embedded within her grief or the echoes of slavery that resonate in her choice of Biblical allusions.

To Stevens Samuel is simply "A bad son of a bad father" (*GDM* 357), but to Mollie, who nursed Roth Edmonds along with her own children, the trouble comes from a very different set of family relations: fraternal, rather than paternal. Stevens's ignorance of such relations is made explicit when he thinks:

They were like that. You could know two of them for years; they might even have worked for you for years, bearing different names. Then suddenly you learn by pure chance that they are brothers or sisters. (354)

In drawing a racial boundary between his own sense of family relations and "they" who were simply "like that," Stevens fails to remember that the "different names" may be derived from the masters of generations past, when slave ownership, as much as blood ties, defined "family." Mollie's mourning cry, however, reflects an awareness of this more complex system of familial relations, as well as the many reasons for grieving that go beyond her grandson's individual death.

Here is an interesting case of balancing grief for the loss of an individual with the grief of

many generations' transgressions. Mollie's Biblical echoes at once refer to the McCaslin family history that plays out over *Go Down, Moses* and also look beyond it, fitting it within a larger narrative that swallows up the grandiose claims of the McCaslin family. As the editor of the town newspaper puts it, upon being asked by Mollie to put the news of her grandson's death in the paper, "I wanted to say, 'If I should happen to know how he really died, do you want that in too?' And by Jupiter, if I had and if she had known what we know even, I believe she would have said yes" (365). In Mollie's telling, however, Samuel's crime recedes in significance, replaced by Edmonds's wrong and its Biblical echoes of fraternal betrayal. In wanting "hit all in the paper. All of hit" (365), Mollie gestures toward the larger narratives that would put Samuel's actions in context, that would make public the other betrayals that preceded the crime for which he has been executed. Although "Go Down, Moses" is not a summation of the previous stories, much less a tidying up of the issues raised therein, it is the weight of these earlier stories, with their emphasis on the blood relations between the Beauchamps and the McCaslins, that makes Mollie's attempts to focus on the "betrayal" of her grandson by his landlord and distant cousin, plausible.

The novel remains carefully poised between old songs of mourning and the expensive displays of the modern funeral parlor. What Mollie Beauchamp wanted, of course, remains unclear, mediated by race, age, and gender, her deep grief limned by the Biblical story to which she alludes. Although Faulkner focalizes the story through Gavin Stevens, a figure of both education and incomprehension, the story's title suggests a sympathy with Mollie Beauchamp's reclamation of the Biblical story for the modern problem, with her focus on the familial troubles behind her grandson's death, rather than the headlines he made. What Faulkner explores in this recasting of the modern elegy is not simply the inability to portray, adequately, the loss, but also the inability to gauge the knowledge and desires of the mourners themselves. Stevens's elaborate actions distract attention from Mollie's expressions of grief, sidelining what is the potentially deep well of emotion in the

story, but in doing so Faulkner builds a story around the mediation of grief.

As with so many narratives in Faulkner's and Woolf's works, important questions surround the body of the dead. Samuel describes himself as a man with "No family," and then owns up to a grandmother in Mississippi (352). It is in being both "Samuel Worsham Beauchamp," a name that calls up a multitude of connections for the reader, and a man of "No family" that Samuel most compellingly draws on the earlier threads of the novel. The stories of *Go Down, Moses* move in roughly chronological fashion, tracing the complications of inheritance as they play out in the black and white branches of the McCaslin-Beauchamp family. Samuel's story draws the reader up short with his initial disinclination to own to family connections and with the reader's dawning realization that his execution also terminates the possibility of further legacies through him. In Samuel, Faulkner finally turns his attention to the "lost" sons and daughters of the family, the ones whose disappearances work against the intergenerational story that is the focus in the rest of the novel.

Like his grandfather, Lucas Beauchamp, who makes use of his family connections and from whom Samuel may well have inherited his "impenetrable" expression (351), Samuel is a part of the extended McCaslin saga that the majority of critics read as the central theme of the novel. I will consider the ramifications of the family history by looking at the character of Lucas Beauchamp, the figure in the novel who is perhaps most concerned with his family ties even though they are ones he cannot publicly claim. Samuel's offhand comment about having "No family," however, points to the lack of children of his own: his line dies with him. I will analyze the implications of this position as they are played out in "Pantaloon in Black," when Rider's grief at the loss of his wife, his being bereft of his only family and the future to which he had been applying himself, drives his suicidal efforts.

In these two stories, a look backward and a look forward, Faulkner continues his exploration of the relationships among grief, nostalgia, and the social aspects of death and mourning. Lucas and

Rider offer creative interpretations of what it is to seize ownership of one's family history, and to mourn in a way that uses social conventions for one's own ends, rather than be slave to them. The story of Mollie's grief for Samuel in the "Go Down, Moses," is, more than a conclusion to the novel, a reminder of how much one fails to understand either of those two "predecessors" of Samuel when the novel is read from beginning to end.

### Lucas's "two separate plantations . . . one on top of the other"

Although plantation life and ritual hunts in the wilderness dominate Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* stories, trips to town interrupt those rural narratives at regular intervals. In town the shock of social rules that run along class, gender, and racial lines, rather than familial and community ones, serves as a reminder of the geographical and social limitations of the communities in which most of Faulkner's characters live. When Lucas Beauchamp appears in the county courthouse of Jefferson near the end of "The Fire and the Hearth," he is assaulted by the command, "You, nigger! Take off your hat!" (123).<sup>18</sup> Lucas does not acknowledge the clerk's rebuke, for which he is deemed "uppity" (124), but the exclamation is a reminder for Faulkner's reader of the social status of the man to whom one has been tied for the length of the story. Lucas is a man who cannot even initiate or withdraw a bill for his own divorce before the courthouse commissioner, but who must, as he reluctantly acknowledges, act always through his employer, the white "Mister" Roth Edmonds (124).

That the reader needs reminding of Lucas's status is a testament to Faulkner's careful

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<sup>18</sup> This is, importantly, *not* an example of Althusserian hailing. Lucas does not acknowledge the command directly, simply continuing his approach to the table, "removing his hat as he did so" (*GDM* 123). I would not ordinarily spend a great deal of time pointing out what is *not* happening, except that doing so is a common trope in Faulkner's literature. The opening pages of "The Fire and the Hearth" are filled with discourses on what Lucas is not doing and why not, a device that enables Faulkner to spell out the various nuances of Lucas's actions and make evident the extent of the latter's plotting. Lucas's lack of acknowledgement here is not accidental, but rather in keeping with his policy of ignoring addresses that would relegate him to an inferior status. When another white man, a traveling salesman, insultingly calls Lucas "big boy" (85), Faulkner underscores Lucas's detachment by having another white man, Roth Edmonds, respond to the address with "Were you talking to me, sir?" "No," the salesman said. "I'm talking to him. And he heard me" (85). Lucas may well have heard him, but he does not acknowledge the address or, thereby, the inferiority that the other man attempts to pin on him.

representation of the character in the pages that precede the courthouse confrontation. For much of the novel Lucas acts as one who is master of his world and superior to those around him, though he accomplishes this without forgetting that, to others, he is simply a black man in Mississippi. His life is comprised of relentless calculation as he takes into account his public status, but refuses to be limited by it. When Lucas hopes to leak information that will neatly rid him of his son-in-law, Faulkner's narrator makes clear that Lucas is not blind to the way that he appears to others:

The report would have to come from Edmonds, the white man, because to the sheriff Lucas was just another nigger and both the sheriff and Lucas knew it, although only one of them knew that to Lucas the sheriff was a redneck without any reason for pride in his forbears nor hope for it in his descendants. (43)

Faulkner's indirect narration indicates that, no matter how Lucas may tread the line of propriety, he is not bereft of his own feelings of contempt, nor of means by which to leverage his relationship with Edmonds, the white landowner, to do as he likes even in the world beyond the plantation.

In using such tools Lucas moves beyond the limitations of his social and racial situation, so that when a white salesman attempts to treat Lucas as he would any other black man, he is brought up short: "he stopped talking and looked at the negro in battered overalls who stood looking down at him not only with dignity but with command" (76). Lucas's presentation of himself to the world is no less a performance than that of Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares herself for the public eye before entering her drawing room.

Just as Woolf places Septimus's story at the center of Clarissa's novel, so, too, Faulkner places Rider's story, "Pantaloon in Black," at the center of the McCaslin narrative in which Lucas plays an important role. The fragmentation of individual stories is more extreme in Faulkner's novel than it is in Woolf's, with short stories not merely composed before, during, and after the novel, but here woven together loosely to form a text in which no single character appears at all times. Like



Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf's oeuvre, Lucas Beauchamp is a recurring figure in his author's fictions. He appears three times in Faulkner's writing career: in 1940, when the *Go Down, Moses* short stories were first published in *Collier's* and *Atlantic Monthly*; in 1942, with the publication of *Go Down, Moses*; and in 1948, with the publication of *Intruder in the Dust*.<sup>19</sup> Lucas's character changes significantly over those publications, from a cunning trickster to a self-stylized Southern gentleman, to an opaque murder suspect.

I emphasize Lucas Beauchamp's role in *Go Down, Moses* because he is the character who most clearly engages his familial and racial history without being consumed by it, and who uses the past most effectively for present-day life for him in rural Mississippi. Although he does not, as Clarissa does, think in terms of lines from Shelley, Lucas's careful navigation of his social situation manifests his awareness of the many layers of cultural grief that shape that position. When read in isolation, Lucas's story does not appear to bear on the reinvention of grief work and elegy that is the focus of this study. But in considering the way in which he both draws attention to and circumvents conventional evaluations of inheritance and productivity, and then pairing his story with that of the more obviously grief-stricken Rider, I argue that Lucas helps to define Faulkner's criticisms of productive or successful mourning, and the ways in which one might begin to think those evaluations.

Lucas's approach to his own social position is very much like his means of approaching the white plantation owner's house:

He didn't go around to the back, the kitchen door. He had done that only one time since the present Edmonds was born; he would never do it again as long as he lived. Neither did he mount the steps. Instead he stopped in the darkness beside the gallery and rapped with his knuckles on the edge of it until the white man came up

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<sup>19</sup> See Weinstein for a detailed examination of Lucas's changing character in those three settings.

the hall and peered out the front door. (*GDM* 44)

Lucas avoids the racially charged front and kitchen entrances, insisting instead on an alternative means of getting the man's attention that draws the latter out of the house that marks his superior social standing.

Even as this description maps out Lucas's status in geographical terms, it also provides a narrative opening for Faulkner to explore the past events that shaped Lucas's desire for a third option: the story of Edmonds's birth, forty-three years earlier, for which both Lucas and his wife were called to the plantation house to help; and the story of Lucas's fight with Edmonds's father over Lucas's wife and their shared blood inheritance, a fight in which Lucas strode up the house steps and through the front door. Both the larger social and the more personal, familial resonances of the house and its entrances are present in the account I have quoted. Lucas does not acknowledge the social conventions of racial difference directly, but he uses the events in his history and that of Edmonds's family to renegotiate the entrances that are available to him.

What Lucas cannot do, of course, is articulate his alternate view of the social rankings in his world aloud. No labels will enable him to move between the wider social roles and his reinterpretation of them. Just as he cannot respond to the courthouse clerk's calling him "nigger" without also asserting a rejection of the other man's authority, he cannot fail to call Roth Edmonds "mister" in the courthouse with calling upon himself another rebuke. That is, however, the only time in the story in which Lucas uses such a title for his employer. As Edmonds himself notes on numerous occasions:

even as a child the boy remarked how Lucas always referred to his father as Mr Edmonds, never as Mister Zack, as the other negroes did, and how with a cold and deliberate calculation he evaded having to address the white man by any name whatever when speaking to him. (101)

In Edmonds's reading, Lucas's approach is one that requires constant vigilance: "a calculation so coldly and constantly alert, a finesse so deliberate and unflagging" (110). Naming is one of the most uncompromising elements of the social world, and Lucas refuses either to take part in the role given him or to acknowledge, via confrontation, his rejection of that world.

Lucas carries the surname of the white family that owned his mother, and yet he is prohibited from carrying the surname of the plantation owner whose blood he inherited: "Lucas a McCaslin on his father's side though bearing his mother's name" (44); "Beauchamp, the elder line and the male one, but, black, could have had any name he liked and no man would have cared, except the name his father bore" (285).<sup>20</sup> Lucas's negotiation of a role within the McCaslin plantation relies on social dynamics that differ dramatically from those of the general population, but names and titles offer a few points at which the two worlds meet. To return to the geographical metaphor, Lucas's alternative social landscape is like Sophonsiba Beauchamp's attempts to gentrify her property in the story "Was": "it would sound as if she and Mr Hubert owned two separate plantations covering the same area of ground, one on top of the other" (9).

Lucas's strategy only works, however, because he promotes the myths of the Old South and the vitality of the original Lucius McCaslin, using the old stories to replace social progress with antebellum nostalgia. Like his wife, Mollie, Lucas links the McCaslin saga to the fathers of the Old Testament, but he does so in order to underscore that it, too, features men whose lengthy lives enabled great deeds and whose sons were often less powerful than the fathers. Lucas inscribes himself into the McCaslin narrative even though he is not acknowledged as a McCaslin heir, much as

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<sup>20</sup> It is an arrangement that Lucas inherits from his father, "Tomey's Turl," whose name associates him with his mother, Tomasina, and not with his father, Lucius McCaslin. In Faulkner's complicated fictional genealogies, names, blood relations, and acknowledged familial ties become distinct entities, identifying the flaws in a system that assumes their accord. Lucas can muster only oblique defiance, but Faulkner can level a far more direct charge against a system in which slave practices define even modern social relations. Lucas and his family bear the name of the white family that owned his mother before Emancipation; likewise, McCaslin is the name "which some of the descendants of [Ike's] father's slaves still bore in the land" (3).

he inscribes his life into the larger Biblical narrative: “Man has got three score and ten years on this earth, the Book says. . . . But I am near to the end of my three score and ten, and I reckon to find that money aint for me” (*GDM* 127). Lucas’s echo of Psalm 90 continues the layering of allusion that links Woolf’s and Faulkner’s work; the psalm is the source of Macbeth’s final soliloquy, from which both Faulkner and Woolf draw, as I argued in the third chapter. The psalmist’s lament that “a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday,” and that “we spend our years as a tale that is told” (v. 4-9) are echoed by Macbeth’s railing against the spending of “All our yesterdays” and the life that is “a tale / Told by an idiot” (Shakespeare V.v.22-27).

Lucas’s ability to benefit from his proximity to the “Old South” is particularly striking, given the prevalence of young men in Faulkner’s fiction, Quentin Compson being the most obvious example, who find themselves paralyzed by the stories of the Old South that make up their childhood. Lucas’s shrewd navigation of the myths of antebellum Mississippi offers him relative freedom within the boundaries of those myths, and within the geographical boundary of the McCaslin plantation, even though, as he acknowledges, “in the world’s eye he descended not from McCaslins but from McCaslin slaves” (35). His is a modern rewriting of the old for the purposes of the new American South, one in which he must constantly represent himself as an old man and in which his most freeing role is one that, however perversely, ties him closely to the antebellum world of slavery, ownership, and inheritance.

### *Two Houses, Interchangeable*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Doubling plays a significant thematic role in the novel, among both persons and places. The theme is perhaps most clearly embodied by Ike’s father and uncle, the twins commonly referred to as Buck and Buddy., and whose given names, Amodeus and Theophilus, are mirrors of the same phrase in Latin and Greek, respectively. “Two houses, interchangeable” comes from one of many descriptions of black and white “brothers” in Faulkner’s novel: “the two houses had become interchangeable: himself and his foster-brother sleeping on the same pallet in the white man’s house or in the same bed in the negro’s and eating of the same food at the same table in either, actually preferring the negro house . . . to his own” (107). Faulkner himself seems to have had a “twin” relationship with a descendant of his black

Although Ike McCaslin is the favored central character of the novel for most critics,<sup>22</sup> Lucas Beauchamp proves an important contrast to Ike's withdrawal from the culture of inheritance into which he was born.<sup>23</sup> Ike's life is threaded through the stories of *Go Down, Moses*: "Was" is the story of his parents' courtship, "The Old People" and "The Bear" tell of his coming-of-age, and "Delta Autumn" finds him in his twilight years. As the McCaslin descendant who has the strongest claim to an inheritance from the original Lucius McCaslin, Ike makes for an obvious protagonist. But other cases might be made. In *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner's Go Down, Moses*, Thadious Davis reads Faulkner's novel through the character of Tomey's Turl, the runaway slave of "Was," and develops a persuasive argument for his centrality to the most significant issues in the novel. A reassessment of his role as a minor character seems warranted, given that Tomey's Turl colludes with Ike's mother in the opening story to bring about two marriages. He also deals the poker hand that brings about a resolution to the many hunts in the story. With a nod to Davis's reading, I argue for the significance of Lucas Beauchamp, Tomey's Turl's son, who matches Ike's role as a narrator and focalizer in ways that Tomey's Turl does not. As with Ike, *Go Down, Moses* traces Lucas's genesis and, unlike Ike, his descendants. "Was" is not only the story of Ike's parents' courtship, but the story of Lucas's as well. "Delta Autumn" is the story of Ike's old age, but "Go Down, Moses," the final story, describes the death of Lucas's grandson. Just as it is the second poker game of "Was" that decides the weddings that hang in the balance, so, too, it is the second

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nurse, Caroline Barr, to whom he dedicated *Go Down, Moses*. His description of that relationship appears in his essay "Mississippi" (*Essays* 17).

<sup>22</sup> After citing critical consensus on the matter, Creighton goes on to read Faulkner's emphasis on Ike as an important balance to the diffuseness of the other material, the individual that makes Faulkner's crowd compelling. She reads Faulkner as seeking "a form flexible enough to accommodate both the expansive panoramic across-the-generations look at a host of characters and incidents and an intensive examination of the moral consciousness of one individual, Isaac McCaslin" (86).

<sup>23</sup> In this my reading resists Faulkner's own comments on the book, when he declared that "The central character in the book was a man named Isaac McCaslin" (*University* 38). And yet Faulkner had his own reservations about Ike. When he was told that one interviewer's favorite character was Ike McCaslin, because he rejected his inheritance, Faulkner asks, "And do you think it's a good thing for a man to reject an inheritance? . . . Well, I think a man ought to do more than just repudiate. He should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people" (225).

major character of the novel—Lucas, rather than Ike—who carries the weight of inheritance most illuminatingly in this novel.

Of all the twinning that occurs in the novel, beginning with Buck and Buddy McCaslin and running to the doubled ending of Beauchamp cousins in the novel's final two stories, Ike and Lucas are perhaps the most compelling pair. Ike's retreat from his family heritage, as he renounces his claim to the plantation and, in the process, loses his chance for children of his own, is contrasted with Lucas's unparalleled vigor, his domination of the Edmonds descendants who lay claim to the plantation as a result of Ike's renunciation.

The way in which Faulkner's narrator introduces Ike and Lucas also indicates the difference in their connections to the story. "Was" famously begins with three baroque paragraphs that tie Ike to the story that follows, as if he will be the novel's signal figure, but the paragraphs omit Ike's most significant link; Ike is not only cousin to the story's narrator, but also the son of two of its active players. The story concludes not with Sophonsiba's successful capture of a husband, but rather with a near-miss, leaving their marriage and Ike's birth un-narrated. And the frequent negations of Ike's role, "not something participated in or even seen by himself" (*GDM* 3), amplify his lack of connection to the story, even as the note that he was "a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one" hangs precariously at the end of the first paragraph (3), an incomplete sentence marking him as an incomplete link to the McCaslin clan and the stories of the novel.

Although the opening pages of "The Fire and the Hearth" are similarly punctuated by negation, there Faulkner uses the negation to share more of Lucas's story, emphasizing his character's business successes, ability to deal effectively with competitors, and, above all, exasperation at finding himself dealing with the current situation alone when he has so many resources at his fingertips. Although Ike McCaslin is reminiscent of the Quentin Compson-like nostalgia of Faulkner's earlier writing mode, Lucas is indicative of the Snopesish opportunism to

come in the later novels. As a bridge between old and new fiction, Lucas is an important figure in Faulkner's conception of the relations between the old and the new in the South, a figure who avoids the pitfalls of Faulkner's most memorable fictional families. As Faulkner told the students at the University of Virginia: "Well, I feel sorry for the Compsons. That was blood which was good and brave once, but has thinned and faded all the way out. Of the Snopes, I'm terrified" (*University* 197). Lucas reflects Faulkner's nostalgia for the former family's history and his warier respect for the latter's cunning.

Ike serves as a nominal connection to many of the other characters in the novel. He hunts up Lucas's siblings in order to determine their fates and ensure that they receive their legacy, he serves as the messenger between Roth and the latter's mistress, and, most notably, he reads the ledgers in which much of the plantation history unfolds. Lucas, however, is more than a repository of stories. By seizing hold of his material inheritance and using it in surprising ways, Lucas reshapes the stories that are his inheritance as much as Ike's. Both Ike and Lucas inherit the stories of the McCaslin family, but only Lucas uses them to advance his role in the world.

The ledgers in the plantation commissary are a site of connection between the material and oral inheritance of the two men. There lists of names run alongside columns of value, first the prices paid for slaves in the antebellum years and then the sharecroppers' crops and goods, "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" (*GDM* 245). As Faulkner's narrator makes clear, the connections between person and property run deep, and are not disrupted by Emancipation.<sup>24</sup> Ike is fascinated by what the ledgers hold, and his horror at inheriting such a legacy of oppression underlies his renunciation of the family plantation.

Lucas's relationship to the ledgers is more complicated. He does not appear in the old

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<sup>24</sup> See Davis for a thorough analysis of the relations of persons and property in *Go Down, Moses*.

ledger, the one that records the slaves of Lucius McCaslin. Ike notes that he “could have” entered Lucas’s information, and the novel records the entry Ike would have made, recording there what was not recorded in the ledger itself. But Ike quickly unravels his tidy imagined entry:

except that there was no need: not *Lucius Quintus @c @c @c*, but *Lucas Quintus*, not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name; not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing, altering it, making it no longer the white man’s but his own, by himself composed, himself selfprogenitive and nominate, by himself ancestored, as, for all the old ledgers recorded to the contrary, old Carothers himself was. (268)

Although it might seem at first as though Ike is authoring a new ledger, one that unravels the terse summaries of previous generations, he is, once again, simply transcribing Lucas’s own refashioning of legend and ledger. Lucas did not set the tone by his own naming, but has, in his attempts to bind himself to the McCaslin legacy, made those connections seem significant. One might, therefore, consider this an inscription by Lucas himself, through the person of Ike, writing and then rewriting his role in the family ledgers, though always remaining just off the books, ready for more transformation.

The rewriting reflected there, in the place in which family, property, and labor meet, is only the beginning of the rewriting that Lucas enacts in his life. Of note is the difference between Ike’s and Lucas’s ways of responding to their inheritance of the stories and myths of the South. Although Ike’s uncle ostentatiously offers him a silver cup and gold coins as an inheritance, the uncle eventually taps into that legacy for his own needs; by the time Ike comes of age, he inherits merely an old coffee can full of slips of paper that mark the debts of the older generation to the younger one.



Lucas's father was bequeathed a thousand dollars by his presumed father, the original Lucius McCaslin, but Tomey's Turl never claimed that legacy. Lucas's elder brother, James, "quitted the cabin he had been born in, the plantation, Mississippi itself, by night and with nothing save the clothes he walked in" (103), but Lucas seizes the inheritance that comes to him, appearing promptly on his twenty-first birthday to claim the thousand dollars that was the only means by which Lucius McCaslin acknowledged relation to him.<sup>25</sup> But the money remained in the bank, useful as a note in "not only . . . in the Edmonds family annals, but in the minor annals of the town too" (105). The money, returned to the bank, becomes a symbol of his freedom to leave and a monetary advantage to be held over the heads of his white employers, the source of a good story to add to that of the long McCaslin history. And he remains in the community in which those stories shape social relations. Lucas, like Bernard of Woolf's *The Waves*, shows an acute sense of audience in remaining on the McCaslin plantation, where names of his and his employers' progenitors have currency.

Although the young courthouse clerk labels Lucas an uppity nigger, in an earlier courthouse appearance the judge, "a man whom Lucas did know, who used to come out in old Cass' time forty and fifty years ago and stay for weeks during the quail season, shooting with Zack, with Lucas to hold the horses" (71), recognizes Lucas and treats him more favorably. Lucas's decision to draw on his inheritance and then, much to everyone's surprise, not use it as a means to leave town, reflects his recognition of the social power to be had by remaining in a place where he is known. But to remain in the place of his birth, grandson to a man who would not have recognized the kinship, requires from Lucas a subtle dance between claiming and not claiming the connections that bind him to that community. The tension in his position is evident in the fates of his older brother, James, for whom the weight of history was too much, and for his grandson, whose fate Mollie

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<sup>25</sup> James left, "shaking from his feet forever the very dust of the land where his white ancestor could acknowledge or repudiate him from one day to another, according to his whim, but where he dared not even repudiate the white ancestor save when it met the white man's humor of the moment. But Lucas remained" (102).

laments in part because the young man's community failed him. Lucas's and James's fates, the one on the plantation and the other making his own way in an unforgiving world, contribute valuable context for Mollie's grief in "Go Down, Moses." Samuel's is not the first generation of Beauchamp men to choose between the home of one's ancestors' enslavement and the rest of the world, in which one's place is determined by different rules.

Remaining on the McCaslin plantation does not, as Lucas makes clear, mean accepting the stories and roles that are handed down. Many of Lucas's material pursuits play a role in his attempts to rewrite his family legacy. Although he escapes the older generations' ledgers of slave ownership, he does appear in the new ledgers that the Edmonds descendants keep. Those ledgers record the goods owed by the sharecroppers, debts that bind the sharecroppers to the land and to the landowners nearly as strongly as the slaves' ownership did them. But, as Roth Edmonds notes:

[Lucas continued] drawing supplies from the commissary . . . having on the commissary books an account dating thirty years back which Edmonds knew he would never pay for the good and simple reason that Lucas would not only outlive the present Edmonds as he had outlived the two preceding him, but would probably outlast the very ledgers which held the account. (113)

The accumulated debt to Edmonds makes a mockery of the owner's careful records of harvest and purchase; both parties know that generations of forced black labor were spent caring for the plantation. Lucas approaches the commissary records in defiance of their binding quality, an exception to the threads "cable-strong" that preserved the race relations of the plantation well after the Civil War.

Although Lucas is a sharecropper, it becomes clear throughout "The Fire and the Hearth" that much of Lucas's time is invested in making money off the books, bootlegging and treasure-hunting for gold. Both pursuits provide Lucas with money that need not be recorded in either the

commissary ledgers or in the bank's records. It is a means of angling for influence outside the relationship between landowner and sharecropper, and marks the most significant shift in Faulkner's novel from the early stories he published in magazines. In those early stories Lucas plays the part of a wily old black man who outwits his white employer, a role that draws on the crude lines of stereotype: the black man who is cunning, rather than intelligent, greedy, and always looking to make money without earning it. Those familiar outlines persist in the novel version, but only in the white characters' estimations of Lucas. Roth Edmonds notes wryly that Lucas was always interested in money "on which there was no sweat, at least none of his own" (119).

In the novel Lucas's actions are the same as in the early stories, but the shift from the stories' "Luke" to the novel's "Lucas Beauchamp" carries with it the weight of those earlier Beauchamp and McCaslin generations and the monetary value of black bodies and black labor that marked those times, as Thadious Davis has explored in detail. As she observes of the novel's additional material, "the rhetoric of law and business elevates Lucas Beauchamp's [actions] above comic buffoonery to parody" (129). Critical consensus has it that Faulkner's revision of the short stories for the publication of *Go Down, Moses* simply strengthens the McCaslin family narrative. But it seems that in those revisions Faulkner is also, if not primarily, exploring the antebellum racial and financial relations that give rise to Lucas's contemporary financial eccentricities, redefining those stereotyped qualities as Lucas's deliberate rejection of the ledgers and all that they represent. The fool's errand in which Lucas is engaged for much of "The Fire and the Hearth," hunting buried treasure with a metal detector, may well provide Faulkner with comic material, but it also epitomizes Lucas's attempt to replace the work of his body with an income that is outside the purview of his white employer.

Although the issue of inheritance in *Go Down, Moses* has incited a great deal of critical discussion, little attention has been paid to the fact that neither Ike nor Lucas is the owner of that

plantation that helps to ground the stories. After he refuses ownership of the family plantation, passing it off to a cousin, Ike lives in a home owned by his late wife, a house that he claims to be merely holding for his wife's sister or niece until his death. These actions are his attempt to escape the inheritance that was due him: a plantation made and maintained by slave labor. But he refuses to acknowledge the irresponsibility of such an action, the shift of the ownership to one who does not share his sense of the responsibility that comes with the land.

Lucas, by contrast, retains the means for buying land, but chooses instead the life of a sharecropper on the McCaslin plantation. That does not keep him from claiming the land as his own, however, on terms that differ from those that the plantation owner could make:

[I]t was his own field, though he neither owned it nor wanted to nor even needed to. He had been cultivating it for forty-five years . . . He had been born on this land . . . He had worked on it ever since he got big enough to hold a plow straight; he had hunted over every foot of it during his childhood and youth and his manhood too. (*GDM* 35-36)<sup>26</sup>

Unlike Ike, who renounced his claim to the plantation he inherited, Lucas claims it for his own even though his racial legacy prohibits him from claiming it as an inheritance from his grandfather.

Lucas even goes a step further, re-evaluating ordinary ownership as a road to weakness. Roth Edmonds, is, in Lucas's estimation, only burdened by his role as landowner:

In age he could have been Lucas' son, but actually was the lesser man for more reason than that, since it was not Lucas who paid taxes insurance and interest or owned anything which had to be kept ditched drained fenced and fertilised or gambled anything save his sweat, and that only as he saw fit, against God for his

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<sup>26</sup> Here one might think, too, of Lucas's similarities to and differences from the McCaslin slaves who, upon being made free men and women, chose to remain on the plantation, rather than make a new life elsewhere. Their refrain, "*Don't want to leave*" (254), offers an important foundation for Lucas's decision to stay in contrast to those who, like James and Samuel, tried their luck farther north.

yearly sustenance. (58)

Lucas's evaluation of ownership as debilitating is, however unconsciously, seconded by Roth himself, who sees in Lucas's face one that "looked actually younger than his own at forty-three, showed less of the ravages of passions and thought and satieties and frustration than his own" (114). The Southern decay that dominates Faulkner's early novels is here located in the land itself, a force that eats at the white landowner but that, ironically, leaves the black sharecropper free from its ravages. As with the commissary ledgers, land ownership is closely tied with the legacy of slave ownership. Although Lucas appears eager to bind himself to the McCaslin bloodlines, he is not eager to take the man's place in the hierarchy of the plantation system.

Through Lucas Faulkner methodically dismantles the tenets of Southern gentility as Quentin Compson knew it or as even Ike McCaslin seems to have inherited it, revealing them as hindrances to success in contemporary Mississippi. Although Lucas may appear to be tied to the legacies of older generations, particularly when he situates himself against electricity, tractors, and cars (43), his doing so is, ultimately, a means of propelling him into a new, post-slavery and even, in a sense, post-agrarian South.<sup>27</sup> Although Faulkner's novel certainly laments the encroachments of carpetbaggers and the South's new industrial economy, his interest, his narrative energy, and his humor are reserved for Lucas, a figure whose sensitivity to the old ways enables him to refashion the social and racial dynamics of his home in the twentieth century. Over the course of Lucas's narrative the plantation house is stripped of its modern trappings, filled with "better men than these" (44), and made interchangeable with Lucas's own home, the one in which men both black and white were fed and raised. Through his memories of earlier years Lucas reframes the houses in domestic terms, and his hearth emerges as a site of ingenuity, productivity, and generation, set against the barren

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<sup>27</sup> This reading is in contrast to that of Donaldson, among others, who finds Lucas's resemblance to his grandfather troubling: "If his stiff-necked pride and determination to hold his own define his manhood, individuality, and resistance to the McCaslin narrative, those same qualities also bear testimony to the bonds that bind him still. Seeking to author himself, he falls back into patterns of patriarchy, mastery, and conquest set long ago by L.Q. C. McCaslin himself" (144).

plantation house.

### **Rider's Wordless Grief**

Lucas's silence in matters of race relations, necessary in order that his "uppity" demeanor not give way to direct confrontation, stands in marked contrast to his internal social commentary. He is one of the few black characters in Faulkner's fiction whose internal thoughts are available to the reader. In granting the reader access to the character's interiority, Faulkner allows the reader to note discrepancies between the internal activity and Lucas's exterior "impenetrable" visage. Although similar descriptions mark a number of black figures in the text, from "Tennie's inscrutable face" to "the tremendous fathomless ink-colored eyes" of Lucas's sister, Fonsiba (289, 268), the adjective becomes Lucas's signature description in *Intruder in the Dust* and appears numerous times in "The Fire and the Hearth."

Each time the description appears in *Go Down, Moses*, Lucas's impenetrability is ascribed to different motives or ends. At first it appears as part of his performance of the black man's role when dealing with white men:

Without changing the inflection of his voice and apparently without effort or even design Lucas became not Negro but nigger, not secret so much as impenetrable, not service and not effacing, but enveloping himself in an aura of timeless and stupid impassivity almost like a smell. (58)

At other times, however, Lucas's impenetrability is read as a sign of his McCaslin blood:

Now the white man leaned in the window, looking at the impenetrable face with its definite strain of white blood, the same blood which ran in his own veins, which had not only come to the negro through male descent while it had come to him from a woman, but had reached the negro a generation sooner—a face composed,

inscrutable, even a little haughty, shaped even in expression in the pattern of his great-grandfather McCaslin's face. (68-69)<sup>28</sup>

That Lucas's inscrutability is assigned to both black and white lineages indicates the extent to which even here, in a story in which Lucas's plotting offers a glimpse of his thoughts, the view of him is still, frequently, an outside narrator's perspective—a white perspective. That inscrutability may mark the narrator's inability to read meaning across the color line, but it also indicates the black characters' care not to be read by white observers.<sup>29</sup>

Although "The Fire and the Hearth" begins with Lucas's thoughts, by the end of it the reader looks at Lucas from the outside, through the eyes of Roth Edmonds. Such a shift has its advantages: one sees how strongly Lucas's family ties and his shaping of himself as the true inheritor of Lucius McCaslin's legacy have been taken up by the white man over whom Lucas seeks influence. But in other stories in *Go Down, Moses* this shift, from a perspective sympathetic to and inclusive of the black man's voice to one that finds him "impenetrable," is cast quite differently. In "Pantaloon in Black" the figure of Rider is one to which the reader never has internal access. The narrator at the beginning of the story is sympathetic to Rider's situation, explaining the character's actions in terms of Rider's grief over the loss of his wife. But the sheriff's deputy who narrates the second half of the story exhibits a lack of sympathy, and thereby offers a characterization of Rider that hews to stereotype.

Rider is, then, an important check on the "impenetrability" that Lucas uses to his advantage.

Although Lucas influences the characterizations that are made of him, Rider is at the mercy of

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<sup>28</sup> The McCaslin legacy is mapped onto Lucas's "inscrutable" face not only because his inscrutability serves as a blank canvas, but because inscrutability is itself the legacy. Ike McCaslin sees in Lucas's expression "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). This interpretation becomes even more exaggerated, the legacy overwhelming even the source: as Roth Edmonds thinks, "*He's more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together, including old Carothers*" (114).

<sup>29</sup> Faulkner appears to have had some experience cultivating such impenetrability himself; his interviewers speak repeatedly of "a wall, that famous wall" Faulkner erected when speaking with journalists (*Lion* 229).

stereotypes that, particularly when embodied by a representative of the law, offer a caution to those who might be satisfied with Lucas's scheming as sufficient progress in race relations. Rider's story has some parallels with early versions of "The Fire and the Hearth," in which Lucas's story was also told primarily through a deputy and in which he appeared a buffoon. To turn from "The Fire and the Hearth" to "Pantaloon in Black," is, then, also to reconsider the significance of the changes that Faulkner made when transforming the short stories into a novel.

Despite these ties to other stories of *Go Down, Moses*, "Pantaloon in Black" remains something of an outlier in Faulkner's novel. Like Woolf, who cleft the story of Clarissa Dalloway with Septimus Smith's suicide, Faulkner, too, divides the McCaslin narrative with the story of Rider, a man who is only loosely associated with the McCaslins.<sup>30</sup> Like Septimus's story, Rider's changes the terms of grief and mourning in the novel; his is the story that has given critics the most trouble.<sup>31</sup> As John Limon puts it, *Go Down, Moses* "is either a collection of stories or a novel, depending on the success one has in integrating 'Pantaloon in Black' into it" (422); "The former custom was to regret the intrusion of this alien story into the novel.' That being the former custom, the current one is to show how the story is not alien at all" (428).<sup>32 33</sup> Faulkner revised "Pantaloon in Black" only slightly

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<sup>30</sup> Rider rents his home from Roth Edmonds, and the story includes a brief mention of Lucas and Molly Beauchamp, but otherwise he has no explicit connections to either the Beauchamp or McCaslin families. When Malcolm Cowley asked Faulkner about the presence of Rider amongst the McCaslin stories, Faulkner replied, "Oh, you mean the story about Rider? . . . Rider was one of the McCaslin Negroes" (Cowley 113). As Cowley puts it, "It was no use asking, 'Why didn't you say so?'" (113).

<sup>31</sup> This was not, apparently, one of the stories Faulkner considered to be just part of "boiling the pot"; in a letter to Harold Ober (received 18 March 1940), Faulkner noted of "Pantaloon," "This is the good story I mention in my recent letter" (*Letters* 119). In considering possible sites of publication, Faulkner cautioned that it might be "strong meat" for many of the usual journals (133).

<sup>32</sup> Tick is one of many critics who sets aside "Pantaloon" before seeing the six remaining stories as so compellingly bound together that "no single section is fully explicable out of its context" (68). Given how readily critics like Lionel Trilling complained about the difficulty of the book when it was published in 1942, one might wonder at the apparent explicability of these stories with or without their companions. Tick's exclusion of "Pantaloon" rests on the apparently "unintegrated and therefore non-essential" nature of the story, given that it "concerns no one with McCaslin blood (though it takes place on the McCaslin land). And the central unifying theme in the six sections of *Go Down, Moses* is the fate of McCaslin blood, the fortunes of the McCaslin lineage" (69). Critics who do not set aside "Pantaloon" risk the trouble that plagues Vickery's analysis: given the diversity of subjects in the various stories, talk of them as a whole limits critics to speaking in only the vaguest of terms.

<sup>33</sup> Critics of the "current custom" tend to read the narrative disunity as mirroring a social one: the racial tensions that persist after the Civil War. As Robinson and Town argue, "Faulkner offers instead a struggle between two unequally



from its original 1940 publication in *Harper's* (Creighton 115), and it is the story that consistently rebuffs critics' attempts to bring it into a cohesive reading of *Go Down, Moses*.<sup>34</sup>

Of primary interest here is not how "Pantaloon" might be made to fit the McCaslin narrative, but rather that, in a novel so concerned with intimate, even incestuous, family relations, Rider's most striking quality is his isolation. Upon the death of his wife, he is separated from his community by his bereavement; like Mollie Beauchamp's rhythmic chants in "Go Down, Moses," Rider's actions elicit incomprehension in observers. Whereas Mollie's "Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin" situates her grandson's death within a larger narrative of familial betrayal (*GDM* 353), Rider's "I'm snakebit now and pizen cant hawm me," captures a strongly individual sense of grief (144).

Unlike Mollie's cry, which is taken up by her brother and sister-in-law but overwhelms the white man and woman present, Rider's grief produces incomprehension that does not fall along racial lines.<sup>35</sup> His determination to return home after the funeral causes a fellow black mill worker to say "what he had not intended to say, what he had never conceived of himself saying in circumstances like these, even though everybody knew it" (132). Rider's seeming obliviousness to superstition prompts the man to make explicit common assumptions about the dead:

the dead who either will not or cannot quit the earth yet although the flesh they once lived in has been returned to it, let the preachers tell and reiterate and affirm how

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matched narratives, or rather two ways of telling and understanding the same events" (192). Robinson and Town stretch credulity somewhat in reading the women of the novel as manifesting a second narrative that appears "in the gaps and interruptions of the primary narrative" of the McCaslin legacy (193), but they are right to attend to figures whose influence is felt not in what they say, but rather in what they do to influence the events of the novel. Rider might well join the women in this regard.

<sup>34</sup> The non-McCaslin blood that separates Rider's story from the others in the collection is a difference not only familial, but also racial. As W. Taylor observes, Rider is significant because "Faulkner's typical Negroes are either females or males who have large portions of white blood" (432), figures like Dilsey, Nancy, Joe Christmas, Charles Bon, and Ned McCaslin, as well as Lucas Beauchamp.

<sup>35</sup> Godden and Polk make much of the fact that "The novel offers two exemplary and parallel white misunderstandings of black grief in response to violent death," (331), but a third instance of comprehension, that in "Pantaloon," is significant precisely because it transcends the color line.

they left it not only without regret but with joy, mounting toward glory: ‘You dont wants ter go back dar. She be wawkin yit. (132)

It is an unusual moment of revelation about the practices of grief. It reveals the distance between what is believed and what is said, the superstitions that run concurrently with the practices of faith.

That all this comes about as a result of Rider’s failure to participate in either mode is even more surprising. But his silence may well be a result of silencing from that same community. When his uncle offers him the traditional words, “de Lawd guv, and He tuck away,” Rider responds with a challenge: “What Mannie ever done ter Him?” (140). His uncle’s subsequent “Hush” prefigures Miss Worsham’s “Hush” in “Go Down, Moses” when Mollie, in an ironic parallel, calls on Biblical language for her own grief. Both responses, of course, echo the “hush” that passes from adults to children in *The Sound and the Fury* as respect for the mourners at Damuddy’s funeral becomes infused with competition for control. In “Pantaloon in Black,” superstition and religion contend with one another within Rider’s community, and when neither offers him comfort he becomes an object of dismay. Rider is like a walking ghost to those around him; his co-workers “carefully refrained from looking at him” (139). This double loss, first of his wife and then of his community, is not an element of the traditional elegy, but it is an aspect of mourning that Faulkner draws out here to emphasize Rider’s isolation. He has no religious beliefs or social ties to guide his grief, and thus it is not entirely surprising that he should think rejoining his wife in death more viable than rejoining his community.

### *The Deputy’s Language*

Because Rider’s grief is expressed in unfamiliar terms, it is susceptible to misinterpretation. The voice of the deputy sheriff intrudes halfway through the story and speaks to Rider’s vulnerability as one whose mourning does not accord with the social consensus. In the first half of

the story, the narrator makes Rider superhuman. The story opens with the burial of Rider's wife, Rider "flinging the dirt with that effortless fury so that the mound seemed to be rising of its own volition, not built up from above but thrusting visibly upward out of the earth itself" (131). Rider's feats of strength and desperation continue throughout the book, fueled by what readers are led to presume is an overpowering grief for his wife. But the distance between the narrator's perspective and that of the grieving Rider in the first half of the story gives the reader little evidence with which to rebuff the less charitable reading by the deputy sheriff in the second half. The deputy uses Rider's situation to lecture on "Them damn niggers," concluding that "they 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" (149-150).

The reader's dismay at the deputy's characterization of Rider is made all the more acute by the knowledge that he or she relies on the deputy's narrative for the ending of Rider's story.<sup>36</sup> If the reader stops before the deputy starts, one is left poised at the moment in which Rider commits murder, cutting the throat of a white man who had cheated the black mill workers in weekly dice games for many years.<sup>37</sup> As the deputy tells his wife the story of Rider's escape from prison and eventual lynching, he offers a variation on the earlier narration. In neither narrative is Rider's own voice heard.<sup>38</sup> Rider's anger and sorrow, the emotions insisted on by the first narrator, are replaced

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<sup>36</sup> Donaldson reads in the shift to the deputy's voice a sign of great failure: "For the grief that Rider displays and that threatens to burst through the story's very boundaries is eventually brought under control and confined through the storytelling efforts of the sheriff's deputy. It is the deputy, after all, who sums up the white perspective of Rider's grief and relates the seemingly inevitable outcome of Rider's rebellion—a lynching." As I argue here, however, the deputy's narrative is repeatedly undermined. Rider is also, of course, the engineer of his "inevitable" lynching, a point of agency that should not be overlooked.

<sup>37</sup> N. Taylor notes that the shift to the deputy's point of view is not unique in Faulkner's fiction: in *Light in August* "the perspectives of several major characters (Gail Hightower, Byron Bunch, Lena Grove, and especially Joe Christmas) are counterpointed with the perspectives of various observers from the communities, including a racist sheriff and his deputy" (87).

<sup>38</sup> Ogden argues that, "Though we are asked to stand aghast at the unsympathetic 'reading' of the white deputy at the end of the story, one could argue that readers are baited into sentimentalizing the black experience" by the story's first narrator (389). Ogden argues that, rather than take either the overwhelming grief at Mannie's loss or the deputy's dehumanizing reading, "we can also understand his grief as a response to an impending loss of position and status (as

with cold inhumanity in the deputy's retelling:

[W]hen McAndrews and everybody else expected him to take the day off since even a nigger couldn't want no better excuse for a holiday than he had just buried his wife, when a white man would have took the day off out of pure respect no matter how he felt about his wife, when even a little child would have had sense enough to take a day off when he would still get paid for it too. But not him. (151)

The deputy speaks confidently of what actions might be expected of Rider even though he freely admits that a number of motives might be covered by the action. He is interested in the outward sign, rather than the motive, and his criticism of Rider comes out of Rider's unwillingness to fit a familiar public role: grieving husband, wily "nigger," or child.<sup>39</sup>

Faulkner keeps the story's focus on Rider as a grieving man, omitting from the narration any clear account of Rider's capture and hanging.<sup>40</sup> This is an elegy for inadequate means of mourning, rather than for the dead man himself or even for his wife. It is not clear how Rider passes from the hands of the law into those of the murdered man's family. What little the reader knows of Rider's death is told between the dashes that interrupt the beginning of the deputy's tale, buried within a sentence that begins "After it was over," making it past before the reader is even aware of "its" happening (149). Narration stops, in effect, where the laws stops, like an official record in which vigilante enthusiasm has no place. Rider's identity is slowly erased, as he becomes simply "the

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well as a meaningful social bond) within a heartless system of labor relations, all as a consequence of Mannie's death" (389).

<sup>39</sup> In Polk argues that the deputy is, as a white man, attempting to talk through his interpretation of a scenario that flies in the face of his most basic assumptions about black men: "he is clumsily trying to talk it out, trying to explain to his own mind, using a completely inadequate redneck vocabulary and conceptual system, something it cannot quite grasp" (239-240). It is this inability to come to terms, the out-loud attempts to convince himself and others, to stretch his story enough to cover over a black man's humanity, that I want to underscore. In a 1956 article in *Ebony*, Faulkner said, "It is easy enough . . . to say glibly, 'If I were a Negro, I would do this or that.' But a white man can only imagine himself for the moment a Negro; he cannot be that man of another race and griefs and problems" (qtd. in W. Taylor 444).

<sup>40</sup> Faulkner may also have had reservations about depicting such a scene. In a letter on the eighteenth of February, 1935, Faulkner mentions that "Vanity Fair I think it was wrote me for a lynching article. Tell them I never saw a lynching and so couldn't describe one" (*Letters* 89).

prisoner” and, finally, “the body” (149).<sup>41</sup>

If Rider’s story is something of a departure from the novel’s major themes, it joins the other stories in offering a glimpse of the vulnerability of being without family and of the value of Lucas’s remaining on the plantation. It also indicates the limitations of such protection, extending, as it does, only to the boundaries of the plantation. “Pantaloone in Black”’s parallels with “Go Down, Moses” also help to delineate the fault lines among law, race, and region. Unlike Rider, who dies at the hands of a lynching mob for his murder of a security guard, Samuel is lawfully sentenced to death for his alleged murder of a policeman in Chicago. And, unlike Rider’s body, Samuel’s body returns home shrouded in the trappings of public decency. Samuel’s family ties ensure a decent burial, but they cannot prevent the violence of his own actions or of his end. Rider’s body, “hanging from the bell-rope in a negro schoolhouse” (149), indicates a very different kind of spectacle, one that serves as a warning, a perverse kind of black education.

Even as one struggles to come to terms with how little the reader actually “knows” about Rider, one has to acknowledge that he enables some crude realities to break through the surface of stories that have, up to that point, read like folk or fairy tales. In the first story, “Was,” the slave owners switch houses with their slaves, pursuing an escaped slave in with an energy that is moderated by humor. In the second story, Lucas dominates Roth Edmonds, the plantation owner, because of what Lucas sees as his own natural superiority. Lucas has woven for himself and, at least in part, for Roth, a new set of terms for their relationship. As “family,” they share a history that Lucas is all too eager to enlist in his attempt to maintain his dignity. But the ambiguous understanding that the McCaslin members seem to have with each other across racial lines extends no farther than their own members. Such limitations lead critics like John Limon to conclude that, because Rider is not related to the McCaslin family, he is “the pure Southern product that devastates

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<sup>41</sup> This is in contrast to Samuel’s death in “Go Down, Moses,” when the characters are careful to speak only of how “he” would come home.

the idea of Southern community” (429).

Such losses as those of Rider and Woolf’s character, Septimus, jarring their way into the narratives of the McCaslin fable and into Mrs. Dalloway’s party, respectively, may explain the authors’ wariness about creating traditional protagonists who bear the full burden of the novels’ elegy. Just as Woolf looks past Clarissa, devoting the center of the narrative in *Mrs. Dalloway* to Septimus, so, too, Faulkner removes his reader from the McCaslin entanglements to offer Rider’s story at the center of *Go Down, Moses*. Septimus’s social class makes him a surprising elegist in *Mrs. Dalloway*, even as his war trauma enriches his ability to speak as one suspended between the living and the dead; here, Rider’s story indicates Faulkner’s interest in rewriting the role of the central elegiac figure for one who can neither articulate his own grief nor be ensured of a sympathetic elegist for his own death.

*Go Down, Moses* marks a radical departure from the aesthetic of black endurance that marks Faulkner’s characterization of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*. Despite Ike McCaslin’s assertion in *Go Down, Moses* that “they will endure” (286), the novel is filled with black suicides and homicides, with Lucas threatening a suicidal homicide in his fight with Zack Edmonds, Rider’s similar move in “Pantaloone,” and Sam Fathers’s ambiguous end in the third section of “The Bear.” The description of Samuel Beauchamp that opens “Go Down, Moses” may note that his head resembles “a bronze head, imperishable and enduring,” but within a page the reader sees him prepared for his execution (351). The deputy’s incomprehension at Rider’s actions matches that of Buck McCaslin when faced with the drowning of the slave Eunice, the mother of the black half of the McCaslin family: “*Who in hell ever heard of a niger drowning him self*” (GDM 256).

*Rider’s Agency: Reconsidering the Bid for a Good Story*

Rider’s death speaks to the fate that haunts all those whose mourning for another causes

them to consider death for themselves. The failure to mourn, if grieving is defined as a process of working through grief to a life beyond it, is what Freud cautions against in “Mourning and Melancholia.” Rider maintains his fixation on the lost object, and thus “fails” to manifest a productive mourning in Freudian terms.

Rider’s own evaluation of his grief remains unspoken. His cryptic refrain at the end of the story, “Ah’m snakebit and bound to die” (147), suggests a fatalism that seems ill-suited to the determined way in which he seeks a means of joining his wife in death. Rider’s inability to give voice to his own story might serve as a check for those who would see the dead man’s own words as the best means of representing himself. He is unable to tell his own story, and thus the two narrators become a kind of grudging necessity for making his story available in any form. “Pantaloone in Black” relies on a multiplicity of narrators to explore out the logical space of grief, rather than attempting to capture the mode in any single voice.

The deputy’s story is a burlesque of an elegy not only because his racism shapes his interpretation, but also because he uses his material to try to tell a comedy, rather than a tragedy. The emphasis in the deputy’s section is on the telling, rather than the actions that take place after Rider’s crime; the section’s opening sentence buries news of Rider’s hanging in a subordinate clause within the sentence, “After it was over . . . the sheriff’s deputy . . . was telling his wife about it” (149). As the deputy’s wife moves from one room to another, carrying dishes from the kitchen to the dining room, “The deputy raised his voice a little to carry the increased distance” (150). As she repeats the movement the narrative is punctuated by reminders that the deputy adjusts his voice to the change in range, so that his attempts to engage his audience are never far from the reader’s mind, a striking counterpoint to the violent events that he relates. Since his wife spends much of the story’s duration in the dining room, much of the story is told at high volume, underscoring the

effort of narration.<sup>42</sup> More striking even than the way in which Faulkner foregrounds the storytelling aspect of the story's end is the way in which the deputy's audience responds. The deputy's wife repeatedly interrupts her husband to express her irritation with him and indicate that she is preoccupied with other affairs. Even as the deputy mangles his interpretation of Rider's grief for his wife, the distance between the deputy and his own wife, revealed in the telling of the story, points to another significant difference between the teller and the subject of the story. The deputy's rhetorical flourishes become the handle by which his wife undercuts his authority and the value of his contribution: "Now you take this one today" is met with "I wish you would . . . Take him out of my kitchen, anyway. You sheriffs! Sitting around that courthouse all day long, talking" (150-151).

Whereas Rider expressed his grief through relentless action, the deputy's wife's words characterize her husband as a man whose own inaction makes him ill-suited as an interpreter of a man like Rider, because of personality as much as race. The "concreteness" of action that Thadious Davis ascribes to Tomey's Turl of "Was" might also be said to characterize Rider's role in the novel:

While Tomey's Turl's language may suggest that he is positioned in the text as a cipher, his actions define the concreteness of his effort to win the woman he loves and thus remove the opaque veil enveloping him because of his inarticulate state.

(88)

The similarities between Tomey's Turl's situation and Rider's draw some unsettling parallels between the lives of antebellum slaves and the lives of free black men in Faulkner's contemporary Mississippi. Both characters are largely voiceless in "a text of talk and telling by white men" (Davis 89), but neither would be described as playing a passive role. Like Tomey's Turl, Rider rejects characterizations that link his physical labor and his identity: he surprises his coworkers by returning

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<sup>42</sup> Robinson and Town observe that the story's women have a significant effect on the voice of their men. In addition to the deputy's volume adjustments, when the ghost of Rider's wife appears, he found himself "talking as sweet as he had ever heard his voice speak to a woman," attempting to woo her into staying (GDM 136).



to work, but abruptly leaves it well before his shift is over, despite being called back by his white supervisor. He shows the same disregard to the bootlegger who attempts to limit his purchase of alcohol on grounds that “This is Monday. Aint you all running this week?” (*GDM* 142). And, finally, he confounds the deputy, who thinks only in terms of excuses for laying off work under the pretense of grieving. As is the case with Lucas and the other black characters in the novel, Rider’s actions make evident the labor expectations that haunt the black figure. Rider exhibits a seemingly inexhaustible vigor, and yet his grief is expressed by balking at others’ attempts to make that vigor productive or profitable.

Although Freud did not characterize his concern for beneficial mourning in terms of labor and productivity, those two systems interact in remarkable ways in the figure of Rider in his rejection of them. Although Freud would likely characterize Rider’s actions as melancholic, such a diagnosis indicates an all-enveloping investment in the dead that fails to acknowledge the social ramifications of Rider’s final violence. The alternative option, mourning, suggests a return of the ego and the resumption of normal activity. In a passage that I quoted in the introduction, Freud acknowledges in it a kind of inefficiency that frustrates his sense of productivity:

bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy . . . Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. (“Mourning and Melancholia” 245)

Here and elsewhere, Freud speaks of the “economics” of mourning, terms that grate against the deliberate unproductivity of Rider’s energy. If one considers “Pantaloone” in terms of elegiac relationships, here Faulkner offers an opportunity to reconsider the means of elegizing available to those who, like Rider, are most in need of consolation. The division between action and storytelling, characterized by Rider and the deputy, is as significant in this story as their racial difference. Rider’s

“unproductive” mourning offers a new way of considering the unproductivity of other characters in the novel, particularly Lucas Beauchamp, a character obsessed with making money in ways that are not recorded in the plantation ledgers. By coloring the work of grief with references to racialized social expectations of labor, Faulkner uses the particular historical circumstances of his milieu to reconsider the terms of productivity in life and in loss.

Rider’s action, the murder of the nighttime security guard at the lumber mill, is both a murder and a suicide, the murder a means of ensuring that Rider will be able to overcome his bodily resistance to death. Rider’s plan, however, relies on the lynching inclinations of his victim’s family, on the racial tensions that will guarantee him not justice, but revenge. His is a stark calculation of the social circumstances in which he lives and of the simmering tensions that lie just beneath the surface of a community ruled by “the Law.” As Sandra Lee Kleppe contends:

Rider’s murder of Birdsong is not a random and meaningless act of violence. It is a carefully planned maneuver which serves the double purpose of liberating him from his bodily prison so that he may join his wife and an act of solidarity with his co-workers in the black community” (216).

Most significantly, his plan accurately predicts the results of his actions. Since his story comes immediately after “The Fire and the Hearth,” which features Lucas Beauchamp’s calculations, one cannot help but respect the clear-eyed appraisal that Rider’s actions make evident. Although he says little, and the deputy’s interpretation only obfuscates Rider’s motives, the actions themselves speak to Rider’s situation and to the depth of his grief.

*Go Down, Moses* is a novel full of rhythms and rituals, beginning with Tomey’s Turl’s biannual visits to Tennie on the neighboring plantation in “Was,” and extending through the annual hunts of “The Old People,” “The Bear,” and “Delta Autumn.” It is not surprising, then, that even the crooked dice game that Rider interrupts is itself a long-standing tradition. As the reader learns from

the deputy, Rider went to:

the same crap game where Birdsong has been running crooked dice on them mill niggers for fifteen years, goes straight to the same game where he has been peacefully losing a probably steady average ninety-nine percent of his pay ever since he got big enough to read the spots on them miss-out dice. (*GDM* 151)

Rider's crime is not the result of a sudden realization, but rather of premeditation. The element that causes such bemusement in the deputy is the same one that lies behind Rider's choice of Birdsong as the means through which to end his period of grief.

Rider's violence appears entirely self-destructive, as he runs until exhausted, then tests his strength against the logs at the mill, and turns to whisky. But his last act of violence, the murder of Birdsong, is one that speaks not only to his individual trauma, but also to a public one. His crime is also an attempt to right a long-standing injustice. His final words to Birdsong register the difference between his attentions to his own life and those of the other players in the room: "Ah'm snakebit. Ah kin pass wid anything . . . Ah kin pass even wid miss-outs. But dese hyar yuther boys--" (148). In a state of what appears to be all-absorptive grief, Rider registers an acute understanding of the social significance of his actions and of the insidious effect Birdsong will have on the other mill workers if his crooked game is allowed to continue. Rider brushes off the inquiries, sympathies, and invitations that are extended to him by his aunt and by members of his mill gang, and he ignores his white supervisor's attempts to get him to return to work, but here he proves to be anything but a figure whose grief blinds him to the world.

In Rider's story Faulkner seems to offer a mode of grief that is not played out in poetic or even prose elegy but seems to reject words altogether. The sympathetic narrator of the story's first section makes of Rider's grief a superhuman loss, and the deputy dismisses it as an animal one, but in Rider's actions the grief for his loss appears in best form. His crime both enables him to reunite

with his wife and to halt a vicious “ritual,” uniting the personal and the social wrongs in the story. Like Tomey’s Turl, of the earlier story “Was,” Rider proves a significant player of games of chance. Although Tomey’s Turl’s role in the earlier story is ambiguous, Rider’s in this one is not: he “moved as the white man moved, catching the white man’s wrist before his hand reached the dice” (148). In that move Faulkner shifts attention from Tomey’s Turl’s role as poker dealer, or Lucas’s as the man whose calculations are informed by the various players’ roles, to a man who seizes the player who fixes the game. The mirroring of Birdsong and Rider, black man and white, echoes the positions of Lucas and Zack Edmonds as they fought in “The Fire and the Hearth,” a contest in which Lucas’s assertion, “I would have paid” shows both his readiness to accept lynching if he succeeded in killing the white man and also an awareness of the fact that it would be lynching, rather than the law, which won out.<sup>43</sup> Such echoes indicate the closeness of homicide and suicide by black men and women in the novel, a current of violence that runs beneath the “games” that are played and the hunts that are run. In Lucas’s story it was indeed simply luck that caused his pistol to misfire, saving both him and the white man from death as he spoke of “twinned” deaths coming from a single bullet. In Rider’s case both the crooked dice game and the lynching to which he succumbs show that there is nothing of skill or even luck involved in the racial dynamics of his life.

Even as the deputy tells the story of Rider’s crime, the latter’s actions draw attention to the “cheating” of justice that takes place on a larger scale in the community. The deputy sheriff is candid about the forces that shape the way that justice may be played out. When considering the role of the sheriff in standing between Rider and the vengeful Birdsong clan, the deputy characterizes the vigilantes as “forty-two active votes” (150), not to be lost lightly; a fellow deputy

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<sup>43</sup> Although Lucas is falsely accused of murder in *Intruder in the Dust*, Weinstein admits, “Perversely, I would like to envisage a Lucas at least capable of murder, one whose embroilment within the racism of the South were reciprocal, unpredictable, threatening. . . . To glimpse what such a Lucas might have been, we must go elsewhere, go backwards in Faulkner’s career, and conceive a shadowy tripartite figure composed of Joe Christmas, Rider, and Samuel Worsham Beauchamp” (248). In *Intruder*, the threat of lynching hangs over Lucas, seemingly as much for his “uppity” behavior as for the murder of which he is accused.

likewise refrains from preventing Rider's escape from jail because "if it wasn't going to be the law, then them Birdsong boys ought to have the first lick at him" (153).

In murdering a white man, Rider brings to the foreground the racial tensions that may seem peripheral to the overwhelming grief of the loss of his wife, but that are themselves another reason to grieve. Even as his body is left "hanging from the bell-rope in a negro schoolhouse" as a lesson to the black community (149), so, too, Rider's murder of Birdsong offers an education in the many outlets for grief, particularly the transformation of the personal to the social cause. At the late-night game in which Rider kills Birdsong, the narrator repeatedly refers to the latter as "the white man," reinforcing the racial difference between him and the others present, a difference that is matched by a difference in power: "They were the same faces—three members of his timber gang, three or four others of the mill crew, the white night-watchman with the heavy pistol in his hip pocket" (147). Although "the same" here refers to the fact that Rider is revisiting a game that he had taken part in every Saturday night before he was married, it also reminds the reader that these are the same people he sees in his work each day. The black timber gang is led by Rider, but there is also a "white foreman"; the night-watchman's pistol is a convenient reminder of which man is the acknowledged power in both day and night situations. Like Mollie's mourning cry in "Go Down, Moses," Rider's grief finds expression in both action and implicit accusation of the greater sources of grief in the community.

*Baldwin and Faulkner*<sup>44</sup>

As a coda to the discussion of Faulkner and grief, I would like to turn to a story by James Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man"; what Faulkner leaves out in "Pantaloon in Black" Baldwin

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<sup>44</sup> My thanks to Nancy Knowles of Eastern Oregon University for drawing my attention to Baldwin's story.

exploits in the title story of his 1965 collection.<sup>45</sup> There, as in the Faulkner story, the speaker is a white man, a deputy sheriff, who attempts to parlay his day's interactions with an inscrutable young black man into a story to entertain his wife. Like Faulkner's deputy sheriff, the character's wife only discourages the storytelling: "'You awake?' he asked. She mumbled something, impatiently, she was probably telling him to go to sleep. It was all right. He knew that he was not alone" (Baldwin 231). Baldwin's character also thinks of black men and women as "animals, they were no better than animals" (231), a conclusion he stresses by using a cattle prod to punish them, and that underscores the connection to Faulkner's character's comment about "wild buffaloes" (*GDM* 150).

The similarities to Faulkner's story are striking, as is the extent to which Baldwin lets loose a violence largely occluded in the Faulkner story. In addition to the story the deputy tells his wife, of his beating a young black man senseless in a jail cell, the narrative relates his memories of an event from his childhood, when he witnessed the burning and mutilation of a black man. Whereas Faulkner omits Rider's pursuit, capture, and lynching, Baldwin not only includes such scenes, he does so through the eyes of an eight-year-old boy who witnesses the scene from atop his father's shoulders. Like Faulkner's characters, Lucas Beauchamp and Zack Edmonds, Henry Beauchamp and Roth Edmonds, Baldwin's character also had a black twin, "a black friend, his age, eight, who lived nearby. His name was Otis. They wrestled together in the dirt. Now the thought of Otis made him sick" (240).

Baldwin's story carries more of an air of paranoia than does that of Faulkner, even though the latter describes his deputy sheriff as "a little hysterical" after his encounter with Rider (*GDM* 149). Baldwin's deputy feels the singing of the black men and women, songs of mourning and of protest, get under his skin. His beating of the black man comes about because "They were still singing and I was supposed to make them stop" (Baldwin 232). As his victim says, however, "those

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<sup>45</sup> See Pavlic for an extended reading of the interplay between *Go Down, Moses* and Baldwin's *Just Above My Head*.

kids ain't going to stop singing. We going to keep on singing until every one of you miserable white mothers go stark raving out of your minds" (233). The singing of the black men and women links him to that earlier memory, of the lynching he witnesses as a child, for he hears the mournful singing of black men and women on his way home. As his father surmises: "I guess they singing for him . . . Even when they're sad, they sound like they just about to go and tear off a piece" (239). In his present-day musings, Baldwin's deputy considers the singing that has formed the backdrop to his life:

He could not remember the first time he had heard it; he had been hearing it all his life. It was the sound with which he was most familiar—though it was also the sound of which he had been least conscious—and it had always contained an obscure comfort. They were singing to God. They were singing for mercy and they hoped to go to heaven, and he had even sometimes felt, when looking into the eyes of some of the old women, a few of the very old men, that they were singing for mercy for his soul, too. . . . He knew that the young people had changed some of the words to the songs. He had scarcely listened to the words before and he did not listen to them now; but he knew that the words were different; he could hear that much. . . . Perhaps this was what the singing had meant all along. They had not been singing black folks into heaven, they had been singing white folks into hell. (235-236)

The young people sing while standing in line at the courthouse to register to vote, and the mourners sing after the lynching is over; Baldwin pairs the mournful and the political in his text, much as does Mollie Beauchamp's cry in "Go Down, Moses."

The song that is, in Faulkner's text, both mourning and accusation is hushed by the white listeners, whose incomprehension limits the extent to which the text can engage the misunderstood mourning. But through Mollie's song Faulkner acknowledges the mourning that his white

characters cannot understand, and in giving the title of his novel over to the words of the old song he distinguishes himself from Baldwin's deputy, who reads the songs as a threat. In a letter to Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner speculates about what Cowley sees as the dearth of good music in the antebellum South, as compared to the Northern compatriots: "They talked too much, I think. Oratory was the first art; Confederate generals would hold up attacks while they made speeches to their troops. . . . The Negroes invented the songs" (Cowley 78-79).

In "Pantaloon in Black" Faulkner's voice is deliberately observational, withdrawing to the edges of the violence that was enacted on Rider. The deputy is the means by which the reader can imagine Rider's death, even though he was not himself an active participant. Faulkner is, in this way, perhaps more condemnatory than Baldwin, despite the fact that he does not narrate the lynching. Rider's story is the notable exception to the hunts that take place throughout the novel; whereas the hide-and-seek with Tomey's Turl is the focus of "Was," the manhunt is almost entirely elided in "Pantaloon in Black." There are no games here. The story's circumspection denies the reader the embodiment of Rider's legal murderers, the Birdsongs who revenge their dead relative. Instead, the reader is given only the teller of the story, one who insists that he remained a keeper of the law. But in his very telling he conveys his guilt. His attitudes, shared by his coworkers, convey his lack of sympathy for Rider, and his sense that the Birdsongs' retaliation was, if not legal, just. Faulkner has certainly shown himself capable of portraying gruesome acts in his fiction: one only has to look to *Light in August*, a decade earlier, for a lynching scene played out to the fullest, or to *Sanctuary*, a year before that, for detailed acts of violence. But here Faulkner refrains, not allowing the reader to, as Baldwin does, align the law with the torturers; the figure of the law is, instead, simply a witness to the violence, though a witness who condemns himself in the storytelling.



## Closing Turns

Concluding this project with Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* enables one to see how the boundaries of elegiac literature might stretch to accommodate prose works that consist of fragmented internal dialogues about the nature of mourning. And yet, given the emphasis in this project on intertextual links, it is tempting to make a final turn back to Woolf, from Rider to Rhoda, whose death garners so little narrative attention in *The Waves*. In my second chapter I suggested that, through Rhoda, Woolf indicates all that the elegy misses in adhering too closely to schoolboy subjects. When Rhoda's death is placed alongside the suicides of *Go Down, Moses*, the accumulation of spectral presences makes them too substantial to ignore. In the course of this project I have argued for a reading of Faulkner's and Woolf's work that reclaims those deaths from the margins, even as the authors continue to question the place, number, and narrative significance of those voices that speak for the dead.

But if, instead of turning back to the project's early chapters, one looks ahead, we might see the fruits of Woolf's and Faulkner's elegiac endeavors in their critic and literary heir, Toni Morrison. Although I have argued for a unique correspondence in Faulkner's and Woolf's elegiac projects, I do not mean to suggest that their efforts affect only their own work. Morrison's novels, so saturated with the voices of the dead and the haunted lives of the living, speak to the legacy of Faulkner's and Woolf's earlier pursuit of elegiac reinvention.

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