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The Acoustics of Narrative Involvement: Modernism, Subjectivity, Voice

By

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Committee in charge:

Professor Ramona Naddaff, Chair

Professor Trinh T. Minh-ha

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Professor Ramona Naddaff

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# The Acoustics of Narrative Involvement: Modernism, Subjectivity, Voice

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The theory and history of the modernist novel traditionally emphasizes a shift away from “telling” towards “showing.” The project argues that the overly visual account of modernism misses a crucial opportunity to “hear” modernist narrative and composition. The project is an acoustics of modernist narrative backed by two case studies, the work of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner. These writers propose a way of listening to the modernist novel and to the neglected importance of sounds and voices within it. I attend to Conrad’s peculiar transnational voice, Faulkner’s regional, southern voice, and their shared sensitivity to the physical, rhetorical, and musical properties of speech and writing. In Chapter One, “The Incanted Image: Vision, Silence, and Belonging in Conrad’s Theory of the Novel,” I pose an alternative reading of Conrad’s famous 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*. I argue that Conrad’s theory articulates his struggle to realize a form of narrative vision that might neutralize the most troubling effects of embodied voice. His theory of the novel, his struggle with voice, isolated him from his contemporaries while opening up new possibilities for the genre. Chapter Two, “Waiting for the Voice: Echo, Trope, and Narrative as Acoustic Displacement,” recuperates the acoustical and rhetorical dimension of Conradian narrative voice, largely illustrated by his famous storyteller, Marlow. I argue that in Conrad’s early narratives, a dramatic voice is separated from the speaker’s body in order to occupy the listener’s own. This voice is one effect of Conrad’s attempts both to theorize and craft a narrative that might appeal to his English reader’s sense of kinship. Exterior to that voice, however, is a pulsing world of sound. On the one hand, Conrad’s problems concerning his perceived foreign voice appear in “displaced,” racialized form through the sonic register of his novels, particularly those of non-European domains. On the other hand, there is a sonic imaginary “echoing” throughout letters, memoirs, and early novels that allow us to rethink the phrase, “the author’s voice.” In Chapter Three, “An Unorchestrated Voice: Faulkner, Song, and The Politics of Archival Listening,” I argue that Conrad’s sense of readerly involvement with the acoustical influenced Faulkner to a radical extent. Faulkner develops the novel as what I call an “archival” phenomenon, a haunting of narrative and the act of composition by sounds and voices. He registers the echoes of any one voice as it is accompanied by other voices that condition it, Faulkner tarrying in particular with sonic legacy of slavery. In his practice of composition, Faulkner revisits several voices and sounds that move between bodies, across gender and race. At the level of acoustics, this movement composes a compelling, modernist critique of racial identity. In that way, I conclude the project with a theory of an acoustical approach to literary history, one with significance beyond modernism.

For Mom

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## Prelude: Another Art Altogether

In his 1917 Author's Note to the first appearance of *Heart of Darkness* (1899) in book form, *Youth, A Narrative and Two Other Stories* (1902), Joseph Conrad reflects on the development of what he calls "another art altogether." These three stories, he recalls, were written in the period immediately following his first widely acclaimed novel, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), a period that generated what is among his most important literary inventions, the narrator Marlow.

Making his first appearance in "Youth" (1897), only to return again in *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* (1900), and *Chance* (1912), Marlow is an ambiguous, musing sailor who tells stories of seamanship at length to fellows, at times aboard ship and at times in repose on a verandah, but always inconclusively and on the edges of intelligibility; he provides his listeners with neither simple entertainment nor moral. An anonymous narrator reflects upon having listened to Marlow who himself reflects upon what he once saw and heard in multiple journeys. Neither of these minds can be thoroughly penetrated, Conrad's style involving a restricted access to consciousness that, as Michael Levenson was among the first to note, set Conrad apart from his Victorian predecessors. In the nineteenth century, the narrative technique employed by such writers as George Eliot implied a remarkably different view of and faith in knowledge, Eliot treating the narrator as a "disembodied presence, moving freely over the dramatic scene, and granted prerogatives not granted to mere mortals" (Levenson 8). The Victorian narrator is frequently not "implicated in the recorded scene" becoming "an assimilating, amalgamating force who makes transparent the opacities between individuals, who lets moral evaluation mingle freely with description, who sees hidden thoughts quite clearly as natural landscapes..." (8).

Perhaps the most famous description of Marlow's contrasting sensibility appears in *Heart of Darkness*:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (3)

The form of vision proffered by this description is neither transparent nor amalgamating. The physical, human conditions of seeing are perhaps more important than the object seen. There is meaning, but it is limited, contingent, and impressionistic.

As Ian Watt argues, such vision is largely consistent with the ambiguity proposed by Impressionism. It is a term first launched against a series of paintings in 1874 by the journalist Louis Leroy "to ridicule the affronting formlessness of the pictures exhibited at the Salon des Indépendents..." in particular Claude Monet's *Impression: Sunrise* (1872) (Watt *Conrad* 170). Such paintings attempted to evoke the changing qualities of light and movement, brush strokes becoming visible as if capturing the subject matter in the moment first seen. *Heart of Darkness* shares that visual sense and its wider implications, asserting "the bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understanding..." (Watt *Conrad* 174). Perhaps more than any previous work of fiction, *Heart of Darkness* exposes and confronts the limits of human understanding, Marlow describing his impressions without seizing upon a final significance. The most entrenched account of Conrad's innovation is argues for visual impressionism, an account that originates in Ford Madox Ford's memoir of Conrad, written after his death. Conrad "avowed himself an



impressionist,” Ford writes. That assessment has been critiqued by Watt who notes not only Conrad’s dislike of the paintings of Cézanne, but his criticism of Stephen Crane as being “*only* an impressionist” (Conrad 173). The passage regarding the glow that brings out the haze is highly “symbolic,” Watt argues, emphasizing meaning as much as the impression. Yet, the visualism of such account remains notable: “the most distinctive quality of Conrad’s own writing, like Crane’s and unlike Ford’s, is its strong visual sense” (174), Watt linking Conrad’s technique to his comment in the 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* that successful art is an “impression conveyed through the senses.” There, Conrad make his most famous statement regarding the novelist’s “task:” “it is to make you hear, to make you feel—it is above all, to make you *see*.” This early self-appraisal appeals broadly to sensation; yet, it culminates in vision. Conrad frequently asserts in the Preface that the novel promises a direct vision of the sensible, providing a sensitivity of “impression” that returns the reader to “visible world.”

How is one to hear the voice of Marlow in that regard? How does it facilitate and collaborate with such vision? Why not simply have a narrator who sees as Marlow does, without placing him, as Conrad does, within the world of the story as an oral narrator aboard ship? Conrad had already begun to experiment with the restricted access to the scene in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, a novel in which he allows the narrator only scattered moments of penetrating into the inner thoughts of his fellow mates. In other words, it is not the limitations he placed on omniscience that alone makes Marlow so radical—such techniques could have been furthered without him. Why, then, this turn to Marlow as a speaking voice?

The Author’s Note provides one of the few, scattered accounts of Conrad’s relationship with this fictional narrator; it remains highly suggestive for any consideration of Conrad’s radical departures, particularly his own sense of them. While Conrad notes that he would be the best person to explain Marlow, an English “gentleman,” he instead notes “friendly” critical responses, that “he was supposed to be all sorts of things: a clever screen, a mere device, a ‘personator,’ a familiar spirit, a whispering ‘daemon’” (9). Conrad neither confirms nor denies these accounts, seeming to enjoy the mystery. Marlow “haunts his hours of solitude;” he describes the two laying “their heads together,” finding “great comfort and harmony in each other...” (10). Conrad never knows when Marlow will leave and return.

The *relationship* to Marlow as both a companion and a kind of “voice” seems to interest Conrad most, not a consideration of Marlow’s challenge to conventional Victorian narrative technique. Such a challenge would have been recognizable to Conrad by 1917, only a few years away from 1922, the year marking a turning point in literature with the publication of T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*. Unlike those writers, Conrad harkens back to a more traditional mode of storytelling in his development of Marlow. Nevertheless, his recurring sense of a personal investment in this figure is not to be effaced or underestimated in a consideration of Conrad’s experimentalism. He problematizes Victorian technique by restricting the role of the author and the narrator’s omniscient access, replacing it with a human and therefore limited impression. Yet, the intimate relationship with his narrator is a significant dimension of “another art altogether” as represented by *Heart of Darkness*, what was a major turning point in the genre of the novel.

It is an art, this project will contend, that is perhaps more auditory than visual, one that ushers Conrad out of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It is not Marlow’s impressionist sense alone nor Marlow as he provided the power delimiting “screen” between the author and the work that is to be isolated as the source of Conrad’s inventiveness. There are important ramifications of Conrad *as he heard* Marlow, a recurring *voice* who is at the

complicated intersection of writer, work, and reader. He must be approached as such, as a kind of nodal auditory point both between world and text and within the history of the modernist novel.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad further develops frame narration as he first utilized it in the earlier story, "Youth." Yet, Conrad notes that his approach had shifted. If "Youth" had been a matter of "sincere colouring," an autobiographical reflection, *Heart of Darkness* is "experience pushed... beyond the actual facts of the case" (11). That "case" perhaps refers to the novel as it is drawn from Conrad's diaries recorded during his maddening time witnessing the colonial project in the Belgian Congo; he does not say, however, what was altered or for what purpose, what was true or false. Conrad does not summarize the novel's theme. In reflecting on the shift represented by this novel, he does not even expand upon the development of Marlow between the two works. In an important way, Conrad rather considers *how* the communication of the novel's theme operates and how he, as a technician, handled the material of his memories. In that moment, something impersonal and auditory insinuates itself into both his account of the "harmony" with Marlow and the previously strong role of verisimilitude in his work. He writes:

That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear long after the last note had been struck.

There is a "tonality" that belongs to the work itself, independently of how it may or may not represent either the life of the writer and what he calls "reality" or "the facts of the case." This novel is not a product of writer's self-reflection, nor is it a product of representation; it is posited as a product of the act of hearing. Who hears and what is heard? To whom does "the ear" belong? Does the "note" hang in the air for the reader upon the return to the world after reading? Does it hang in the air for the writer, affecting his reconsideration of his own work and later acts of composition? The novel makes its "effect" felt "long after the last note has been struck;" yet, when, for whom, and for how long?

It is here that the acoustical register in Conrad opens upon a set of problems not fully approachable via the visual register: the act of composition, the act of reading, the author's so-called "voice," and within them, the status of repetition, reiteration, lingering, and return. The acoustic register raises the problem of temporality and personality, of how Conrad seems to hear his work, to hear himself as a writer, and how the reader is forced to hear and rehear in turn. The critic is confronted by a conundrum, one that calls for a most rigorous pursuit of how these acts of hearing are enacted in and around *Heart of Darkness*. There is an intimacy between Conrad and Marlow; yet, *Heart of Darkness*, as the above passage asserts, is premised upon an impersonality: this "tonality" cannot be linked to either the voice of Conrad or Marlow. Where does this tone originate? How is to be heard? Is such hearing limited to a metaphor? Is it even emitted by a voice? Does this voice sing, speak, or cry? Conrad's theory of tonality is not further elaborated. Nevertheless, this auditory appeal is not merely incidental, a passing moment in Conradian thought to be deemphasized. Not only would that foreclose an entire set of problematics, but the 1917 Author's Note represents a major attempt by Conrad to reflect upon the early development of his work.

In the shift from "sincere colouring" to "sinister resonance" as descriptors, Conrad appears to be compacting several points about his transformation as a writer in *Heart of Darkness*. First, he accounts for a change in narrative technique and with it, a change in the work's effect on the reader. "Youth" had been a highly personal tale, a matter of handling "the facts of the case" with a sense of realism and verisimilitude that is more comfortably assimilable to the work of his Victorian predecessors. His theorization of *Heart of Darkness*, however, posits

a motility that is not fully contained by either “reality” or the writer’s autobiography; it “pushes” facts and with it, the reader’s experience of novelistic reality. Second, in referencing “tones” and “vibrations” that seem to have little to do with how we usually think of the speaking voice, Conrad seems to argue that his inventiveness is not be limited to the voice of Marlow, or perhaps that Marlow, as he is in “Youth,” is to be distinguished from how he is implemented in *Heart of Darkness*. The voice of Marlow, Conrad seems to suggest, is not to be confused with the writer’s own voice or an autobiographical voice. Youth self-reflexively addresses the difficulty of autobiographical self-reflection, yet, Conrad admits, it remains autobiographical. In contrast, the “continued vibration” appears to suggest to Conrad form of memory that is not entirely voluntary nor definable as an act of self-reflection or “expression;” it operates on an other level, one that seems to take place *as* the event of writing, a process of composition that lingers in tonalities, that hears and rehears a peculiar note. A third point compounded by Conrad’s summary is that the “sinister resonance” alone indicates the difficulty of adequately rendering the elusive nature of *Heart of Darkness*—it remains among the most challenging works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is an epistemological critique, driven by a *cogito* that is now uncertain, unstable, and unable to communicate the meaning of its experience to others. The power of *Heart of Darkness*, however, cannot be fully credited to Marlow as one who provides both aesthetic and moral distance by forcing the reader to reflect upon the events along with an anonymous listener. The sinister resonance appears to affect Conrad as much as the reader him or herself.

Conrad’s critical approach to *Heart of Darkness* through sound is not incidental, but has everything do with the radical nature of both his novels and their compositional process. As Conrad reflects on his early developments as a writer, from the late perspective afforded by writing his Author’s Note thirty years later in 1917, Conrad seems to suggest in his use of the acoustical metaphor, but will not directly say, that between *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and *Heart of Darkness*, he became a “modernist” writer.

This project asks what Conrad’s sense of “the continued vibration” can tell us about the modernist novel. How is one to theorize the stakes of Conrad’s invocation of the sinister resonance and the continued vibration, both in terms of Conrad’s own development as a writer and what is, in fact, the neglected importance of listening as an essential element in modernist fiction? I ask if there is an “acoustics” of the modernist novel, one that might be differentiated from, and heard as working in accompaniment with, the presence of oral narrative. For Conrad in particular, Marlow’s storytelling implies a set of auditory practices involving iteration, continuation, and ambiguity; yet, they are practices that had begun in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, a work narrated without such recourse to orality. This project, then, is concerned for how listening to the novel does not simply extend to voices, but to sounds, noises, music, and the writer’s way of hearing the act of composition.

As I explore in its consequences for the study of the novel, there is “listening,” as a voluntary or intentional *act*, and “hearing” a perceptive *function* that operates without one’s full awareness. One listens to Marlow speak, but perhaps hears a tonality. In his essay “Listening,” Roland Barthes distinguishes between hearing as a “physiological phenomena” and listening as “psychological fact.” Barthes argues that there are three levels of listening. In the first, the human or animal ear is “on alert,” distinguishing between sounds, such as sounds of prey; in the second, the point at which the “human” act of audition begins, one listens according to certain “codes” and the relationship between signs; finally, “the third listening, whose approach is

entirely modern..., does not aim at—or await—certain determined, classified signs: not what is said or emitted, but who speaks, who emits: such listening is supposed to develop in an inter-subjective space...” (245-46). While Barthes does not explain why this third listening is “modern” *per se*, he refers in part to Freud’s discovery of the unconscious and with it, a way of listening for what is not said or said only indirectly, for origins and for desire. “The recognition of the other’s desire can therefore not be established in neutrality, kindness, or liberality...” (256). In listening to desire, Barthes argues, one “enters it.” Such a space, inconceivable without the unconscious, is performative, repetitive, collaborative, and generative. Such a space, I contend, is one way of anatomizing what happens when one listens to writing and to literature.

This project attends to each of the ways of listening, a spectrum of audition that can be thematized, represented, and incited by the space of literature. I consider in particular the act of composition in its relatedness to modes of listening, particularly along the axis of time. The difference between hearing and listening is related to awareness, attention, but also *temporality*. One can listen later and attend more closely to what was heard inattentively in a prior instance. One may bring renewed psychological attention to what was only unconsciously registered, and such listening can be turned upon one’s own self. This temporality has consequences for the study of modernist composition, not only in its challenge to traditional modes of organizing time in the novel, but in the way that a writer such as Conrad seemed to hear himself. For example, Conrad’s description of a “continued vibration” in the 1917 Author’s Note already appears repeats several voices and sounds that had appeared in other moments of his writing. Conrad seems unaware of that fact even as he describes how listening organizes his way of writing. In a way that will only become evident throughout this project, in its attention to auditory detail, Conrad is subject to the same force he is trying to master. Conrad imputes a lingering capacity to audible phenomena, yet in that moment, such phenomena already appear to be lingering; Conrad recalls past bits and pieces of writing. As I argue, then, both listening (and hearing) in and to the modernist novel incite a particular way of writing and with it, a way of negotiating the novel as a reader and critic. In writing of listening and hearing as an essential element of modernist fiction I mean to 1) broaden the consideration of the audible in modernist narrative in way not delimited by orality and 2) to work against the sense that if there is a voice, it must be “personal,” that it is contained, motivated, and determined by the intention of the writer; it is subject to modulations. In that regard, there are two terms that must be preliminarily defined, “modernist” and “acoustic.” Part of what I intend to do in this project is show how the second can allow for a fuller sense of the first.

### 1) *Modernism*

In the most basic sense, *Heart of Darkness* is a “modernist” work insofar as it reflects a loss of faith in Enlightenment ideals of progress, reason, and knowledge. It tells the story of Marlow’s pursuit of Kurtz, a “pure voice” bursting with eloquence and rationality that is, in the end, not only unavailable, but proven to be a phantasm. The modernism of Marlow’s journey, both at the level of plot and presentation, is well documented, most notably by Watt in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, and Edward Said in numerous works including *Beginnings*. Much critical attention has been paid to Marlow’s troubled search for Kurtz as a kind of compact metaphor for the effect of advances in science, industry, and capital upon traditional values, an effect which Matei Calinescu calls a “deep sense of crisis” (5). The novel concludes without a moral and the skeptical sense that all pursuits of knowledge are vain and misguided. “Progress” meets with idleness and aimlessness (digging holes, waiting for months for rivets so as to get to the place where one might consider departing for a still uncertain

goal); “reason” is pushed to its extreme in inane bureaucracy or over-rationalization and categorization, a means-ends thinking that wreaks havoc; “knowledge” erodes into lingering dissatisfaction with experience, a sense that something had happened, something that is neither understood nor fully communicable to others; commodities have replaced “values;” and “morality” can no longer appeal to a central authority who might redeem human pursuits as ordered and causal, untroubled by relativity and ambiguity.

The terms “modern,” “modernity,” and “modernism” in that way are not synonymous, but rather in intense conflict. The “modern” has its roots in the Middle Ages and is simply the “new” or “of the day.” Yet, implied therein is already a sense of a *break* between what has come before and what is “now” or “recent.” As Octavio Paz writes of “the modern age,” it is “a continual breaking away, a ceaseless splitting apart” (Calinescu 66). In other words, for the new to be new, it cannot stay the same; it must turn against itself. We “search for ourselves, chasing our own shadow” (66), Paz writes, a phrase that could describe Marlow’s own journey upriver in *Heart of Darkness*. “Modernity” is the post-medieval period marked by the move from feudalism to capitalism; it poses a series of irreconcilable contradictions between subject and object, the individual and its own practical advances. Modernity, Calinescu argues, is not only identifiable as the lack of faith in Judeo-Christian eschatology, the belief in *Weltanschung*, but “a sense of *unrepeatable time*” and “*historical time*, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards” (13). Modernity is not simply the “new,” but the new as it must continually outdo and surpass itself in each of its guises, be they social, economic, or political.

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, modernism, one aesthetic response to the social, economic, and psychic conditions wrought by modernity, is a rejection of traditional aesthetic ideals in an attempt to adequately represent the psychic and economic rifts posed by the industrial revolution, the rise of information technology, and bourgeois commodification. Modernism, as “a recognition of tradition’s irrelevancy to the specific creative tasks of the modern artist” (Calinescu 59), is doubly at odds. It is a critique of what Calinescu calls “the modernity of bourgeois civilization (with its ideals of rationality, utility, progress)...” (10). In the 1850s, the symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire was among the first to rigorously mobilize the term “modern” to mean both the “new” and a critical reaction against both traditional society *and* bourgeois modernity. He lauded an aesthetic of the fleeting, the provisional, and the incomplete. The “painter of modern life,” Baudelaire argues, is the sketch artist whose rapid gesture and attention to fashion can alone could keep pace with change, “the beauty of the occasion and of day-to-day existence” (20). Baudelaire’s sense of modernism as critique inheres to the more radical definition of Enlightenment first proffered by Kant in “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784). We do not live in an “enlightened” age, Kant argues, but an age of enlightenment, what is “mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another” (58). Enlightenment is not simply the fall of “despotism,” but “the true reform of a way of thinking” (59).

In what remains one of the most lucid definitions of aesthetic modernism as a critique from the “inside,” Clement Greenberg invokes Kant in his essay “Modernist Painting:”

The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what there remained to it.

In this gesture of critique, the “modernity” of the literary work can perhaps be distilled to the way in which it includes, within itself, an auto-telic reflection on its own status, a discourse on method. The modernist novel, like the paintings Greenburg describes, offers not simply a story, but a story about its own conditions as such, its value, its possibility and definition as a story. It reflects on what it means to be a novel even as it mobilizes certain conventions.

That self-reflexiveness of the work is not to be confused with the self-reflection of the author. Romanticism had subscribed to the inspiration, genius, and personal autonomy of the artist; yet, as an aesthetic response to modernity, it had also posited that “the aspiration towards universality, the desire to make the work of art resemble as close as possible the transcendent model of beauty, belonged to the classical past” (Calinescu 38). The “sublime” and the “grotesque” replaced such models, offering a “sense of the present conveyed artistically” (Calinescu 40). Literary modernism, widely considered to have begun with Gustav Flaubert in 1857, was a reaction-formation against modernism, being rather less confident in the power of the artist. Evacuating a sense of authorial presence from the work, literary modernism is remarkable in its aesthetic of fragmentation, abstraction, and a radical attentiveness to the texture of language itself, not the personality motivating it.

Reflecting on contemporary changes in the novel, his own work included, Henry James writes in 1884 that the novel was once “naïve,” that there was a “good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel.” The novel, he asserts, is now with a “consciousness,” both of itself and the way in which it documents or performs the synthesis of the phenomenal world into narrative, showing the very process of organizing sensation via cognition. There is a marked divergence from the role of Kantian “reason;” yet, James essentially extends and modifies the Kantian spirit of modernism as critique, placing it inside of the work itself. In the novel, the Kantian refusal of “guidance” relates directly to the perceived presence of the author as one who “tells” the reader what to make of events, what character should be lauded under the banner of what cause, who should succeed and who should fail. The narrator, as a kind of despot, was previously allowed to omnisciently enter the domain of character in order ascertain the truth of motive, morality, and identity.

It is often argued that the modernity of the novel thus coincides with the evacuation of the author’s so-called “voice.” In “History and Criticism,” Jameson makes precisely such a point, positing *Madame Bovary* (1857) as the first “modernist” novel. Jameson’s reasoning clings to studies of literary modernism: Flaubert provides the first “visual text” to attend impersonally to sentences as “precious objects fashioned one by one.” The novel is not longer addressed to the “existence of a relatively homogenous public or class,” but rather “fades into the silence and solitude of the individual writer.” In other words, the modernist novel is no longer metaphorizable as a kind of “voice” speaking to the reader.

As Percy Lubbock rejoins in his 1921 study of French and English fiction, *The Craft of Fiction*, the modern novel “would suggest an object that you fashioned and abandoned to the reader, turning away and leaving him alone with it,” the writer resisting “a long and sociable interview with the reader, a companion with whom he must establish definite terms.” Anglo-American modernism is widely regarded to have begun with James, for he appeals in the 1909 preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* to a new sense of vision: “The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will.” These windows, however, do not “open straight upon life;” the vision comes with great strife. While he asserts the role of the individual,

each window is equipped with “a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other...” (*Portrait* James 7). In a crucial way, James does not invoke the spirit, personality, or motivating life of the artist, but a disembodied “pair of eyes,” further separated from the artist by the presence of a mediating “field-glass.” He appeals to the “posted presence of the watcher” and what he calls “the consciousness of the artist.”

“Consciousness” of the artist is a rather impersonal term, though it remains “individual;” it is neither psychology nor biography, but a visual apparatus, a keen strength of observation that allows one to notice and then render minute gesture and color. The strength of observation is positioned *within* the world of the novel, what becomes a “pierced aperture” that “shows” and does not tell.

“The Turn of the Screw” is an important story in that regard, for it allows one to understand the degree to which the role of the speaking voice has been diminished in the assessment of modernism. The majority of James’ novella is a “manuscript” as it was written by a governess struggling to document to herself a series of ghostly encounters, proving their reality. She can seek no help from the master of the home; he is away and has requested that she “meet with all questions” herself. That abandonment is a dramatic instance of modernist self-reflexivity. The reader, in other words, is left to his or her own devices in the attempt to sort through the governess’ predicament; the author has left the scene, James providing no account that might “prove” what really happened.

One influence upon *Heart of Darkness* (Watt *Conrad* 213), the novella does not begin, however, with the manuscript, but a curious prologue that establishes a complicated series of oral layers. An anonymous frame narrator remembers how a character Douglas first told him about the existence of the manuscript, engaging in a number of stalls and delays before finally reading it aloud. Before even remembering Douglas, however, the narrator begins by recalling how a group of listeners gathered around the hearth to tell stories. James begins the novella in *medias res*: “The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless.” An irretrievable voice is rendered obsolete. A once audible act of storytelling has been missed; the qualities that might have made such a story so enthralling remain unheard by the reader arrived too late. The past-perfect tense emphasizes closure: there is an event of oral storytelling that is no longer available to the novel for mimesis or representation. It is a gesture by which the English novel begins to find its modernism.

If Charles Dickens’ readers had gathered together to read a new serial aloud in the 1830s, there is something of “The Turn of the Screw” that resists such an event, reaching the reader as a text that must be beheld and speculated. The preoccupation with the visual register is not reducible to the level of subject-matter (the “visions” of the governess), but inheres in literary technique. James’ frame narrator summarizes the missed storytelling in a way that pushes the sentence to its limit, becoming a visual object or what Jameson might call an “art sentence.” James’ narrator summarizes the missed story told by a guest around the fire:

The case, I may mention was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion—an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shocked him.

There is something of this sentence that does not and cannot cling to the capacity for audition—it is thoroughly written, forcing the reader to return to the beginning after the final clause; it is observable and seen. James’ modernism might be partially summarized as committing the Victorian storyteller to death. This story begins with a death of orality, ushering in its place not only an incredible feat of *écriture*, but a series of troubling visions handed over to the reader for speculation. James’ novella is organized through a binary opposition between the visual and the oral.

With such a break, James poses one beginning of modernist narrativity in England and America, the novel being “modernized” far later in England than in France, Jameson argues, due to its continued dependence upon the oral. Modernism, as the aesthetic response to the crisis in traditional and inherited ways of knowing, is argued to bring with it a certain distrust and devaluation of storytelling voices, replacing it with the aesthetics of vision. The prologue to “The Turn of the Screw” is one nodal point within a visual trajectory of the Anglo-American modernist project. In poetry, James’ “pair of eyes” might be said to culminate in Ezra Pound’s theory of “Imagism,” which in 1913 recalled Cubist synthesis of multiple perspectives into a single image. There was a depletion of the poet’s emotion, striving for the concrete and “luminous.” In the genre of the novel, Woolf moved towards what she called in *The Waves* (1933) “the world seen without a self.” As Anne Banfield writes in *The Phantom Table*, a study of Woolf’s relationship to painter Roger Fry and the epistemology of the Cambridge Apostles, “Objects are reduced to ‘sense-data’ separable from sensations and observing subjects to ‘perspectives’” (1). Woolf’s visual aesthetic principle was one novelistic response to advances in science and epistemology; an atomistic theory of knowledge had also found expression in impressionist and post-impressionist painting: “the sensible world suddenly came into focus; the canvases Fry put on display in 1910 presented the look of things at the moment the completion of the logistic project turned the philosopher to the physical world” (Banfield 13). Woolf begins *Jacob’s Room* not with a narrating “I,” but a world seen through tears: “The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor’s little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun....She winked again. The mast was straight; the waves were regular; the lighthouse was upright; but the bloat had spread” (1). “A perspectivized style records the vision mutely, imparting its strangeness to the vision” (Banfield 1).

The Armory exhibit in 1913 brought the work of Picasso, Matisse, and Duchamp to America, startling a generation of writers with its violation of Renaissance perspective. In Paris, American writer Gertrude Stein had been writing under the inspiration of Cézanne’s “Woman with a Hat” (1905) and amassed an important collection of modernist painting, exhibited in her salon that hosted such writers as Ernest Hemingway. As Diana Souhami writes of Cézanne’s influence on Stein’s *Three Lives* (1903), “There was no center to Cezanne’s picture to give it an organizing principle; the composition was the picture” (x). As Stein writes, “Everything I have done has been influenced by Flaubert and Cézanne and this gave me a new feeling about composition” (Rogers 82). This “new feeling” meant that writing might show itself *as* composition, a “continual present” that gave not a fixed perspective, but a mobile sense of transition, shaping and reshaping sentences in the way a brush might continually stroke the same area of canvas, without concealing itself as having been made. As Stein writes in *Picasso* (1938), a new seeing renders objects “not as one knows them, but as they are when one sees them without having remembered looking at them” (20). They are not stable objects of knowledge, but mobile, changing, and renewed; writing is not fixed, but keeps pace.



This brief account of the relationship between Anglo-American modernism admittedly elides central nuances. It is meant to demonstrate the degree to which the dominant narrative of modernism is punctuated by a series of visual moments and epiphanies. There is a deep intertwining with advances in the pictorial (and cinematic) arts that radicalized the possibilities of what could be achieved in writing. Nevertheless, Stein herself writes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, “you see, I feel with my eyes and it does not make any difference to me what language I hear, I don’t hear a language, I hear tones of voice and rhythms, but with my eyes I see words and sentences and there is for me only one language and that is english [sic]” (70). Vision in this way is already more complicated and entangled in a way of hearing. The emphasis upon the question, *how do we see*, has limited our ability to address *how can we hear* as an equally central and productive question guiding modernist technique.

## 2) Acoustics

The rise of the modern industrial city had a central effect upon the ear and sensibility. In *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), Rainer Maria Rilke describes a violent soundscape of modernity, the impingement of city noise upon the psyche with its “slams,” “clattering,” and the “ringing” of street cars. In 1913, Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo called for an “art of noise,” a new music that would expand the sonic range of music. It was not simply a liberation of noise, but the liberation of hearing that could experience in noise new dimensions of thought and feeling. In James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Bloom makes his way through an advertisement and noised filled Dublin. Scraps of folk song and jingles continually float through his mind as a debris of modern life. One section of the novel, “Sirens,” concludes with a loud “pprrpffrrppfff,” a fart sound that pushes, as had the Dadists poets, the visibility of prose to register and represent sound. If modernism, as Greenberg suggests, is “the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself,” the irruption of sound in text brings the discipline of written words to a limit. The modernist ear is attuned to radical disjunction, dissonance, and interruption of narrative.

While the work of Conrad can be heard within this field of modern noise, he is unique in his development of Marlow, a voice that accompanies his sense of *Heart of Darkness* as a series of acoustic phenomena that are musical in nature. Such a register does not suggest noise, but it is invoked precisely in the moment Conrad admits that *Heart of Darkness* is a most difficult story to summarize, both in action and emotion. “Youth” is a “sincere colouring” of the writer’s personal experience; *Heart of Darkness* is indicated three times over as a sound that could belong to a voice or an instrument, a “sinister resonance,” a “tonality,” and then finally a “continued vibration” of a dwelling “note.” It is in that context that Conrad will invoke his turn to “another art altogether,” what refers to a mode of listening that cannot be reduced to the ways he asks his reader to attend to Marlow’s inconclusive tale. Conrad’s brief statement regarding the sinister resonance that is *Heart of Darkness*, a work that sits on the hinge of the twentieth century, is a most compelling, evocative, and yet poorly understood description of modernist technique. It is one entry point into a vast field of sounds, voices, and tones that have been neglected as playing a central role in the development of modernism.

What is available to be listening in modernism and what is modernist listening? Why does Conrad, in accounting for his remarkable development as a writer between the approachable story that is “Youth” and the irrefutably complicated one that is *Heart of Darkness*, shift from the visual register to the acoustical? Why does the acoustical and not the strokes of impressionist painting, offer itself as the most promising way of presenting what he achieved by his own estimation? There seems to be an “acoustics” of narrative that is not limited to the speaking

voice. We traditionally think of “narrative” as being semantic, linguistic, or in the case of the sonata form, an organization of themes that are organized as a plot, experiencing climax and resolution. To argue for an acoustics of narrative, however, is to investigate how the sense of hearing is activated by reading and writing, both as an inward listening to the self (inhabited by text) and a listening to the physical world (transformed by text). Narrative can call upon the reader and writer to remember sound and returns him or her to the audible world after reading and writing.

The term “acoustic” is thus proposed by this project in two central ways:

- 1) The acoustic designates the ways in which electrical sound is differentiated from naturally vibrating instruments. In a material sense, the sound is generated in a physical contact with air and space. An acoustics of the modernist novel, then, is partly an effort to shift away from the overdetermined sense of “voice” as expression. The acoustic is a physiological, cognitive, and psychological phenomenon.
- 2) Acoustics is the branch of physics concerned with the properties of sound and designates the qualities of a room that will determine how the sound is transmitted. To ask after an acoustics of the novel is not simply to ask after the voices which speak and tell stories, but the ways in which narrative can be composed of a world of sound and can address itself to the faculty of hearing beyond mere metaphor. It is an attempt to open a consideration of how there is a *technical* means of negotiating the sonic in literature that affects both reception and the experience and practice of composition.

The ability to attend to listening as modernist phenomena, or to the “voice” and “sound” of modernism, has been suppressed by the overbearing role of the history of the voice in western thought, which, since Plato, is to thought to secure authority in speech, and since Rousseau, is thought to provide emotional veracity in song. If a certain form of authoritative telling or the author’s voice was no longer available to the novel if it was to be modernized, what other kinds of sounds or ways of hearing insinuated themselves into modern literature and with what effect?

What makes *Heart of Darkness* a “sinister resonance,” in part, is its defiance of meaning—Conrad does not describe words or signs, but the physical properties of sound. They do not appear to be connected to an expressive body or performance, yet have an effect nonetheless. Conrad was not a musician, though he was an appreciator of music and had read Schopenhauer, a figure who ascribed transcendent meaning to music. One could perhaps begin an acoustical inquiry with Conrad’s departure from nineteenth-century conceptions of music. Such conceptions grant, as Carolyn Abbate writes in *Unsung Voices*, “a security of meaning, transcendent force, even prelapsarian virtue” (16). The sinister resonance confounds each of those descriptions. To approach the sinister resonance through its departure from nineteenth century music, however, would lose a sense of the important ways in which Conrad, in writing of tonality, writes of the *novel*. He introduces a loose, yet powerful metaphor into its domain. He describes how *Heart of Darkness*, as a novel, changed the possibilities of reading and composition. There is a musicality, but not music. He is attempting to account for a written event in its contact with the sense of hearing.

This project is an attempt to hear the work of *narrative*, not simply the voice that tells stories. How does narrative discourse (tense, mood, duration, metaphor, syntax, prose motion, style etc.) make itself available to be heard? Conrad exhibits in the Author’s Note and throughout the body of his work, a sensitive ear, one that takes in account not only how words might “ring”

in the ear of the reader, but how narrative discourse can represent an entire spectrum of sound. It is Conrad's ear (not his voice *per se*), its contact with writing and his thorough acquaintance with poetics and the nineteenth-century discourses surrounding the novel, that must be approached as generating "another art altogether" as an acoustical art.

Conrad's elusive description of tonality and resonance can perhaps be defined via T.S. Eliot's elaboration of impersonality in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published in the same year as Conrad's Author's Note. Eliot writes that "The emotion of art is impersonal." The poet cannot reach such an aim "without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done." In what has dominated accounts of modernism, poetry must be impersonal, Eliot asserts, both in its historical relationship to a preexisting "order" of art, or "dead" work as it is living in the present, and in the poet's total "surrender" of personality to the technical demands of the work at hand. The impersonality of art calls for a shift in criticism, away from the life of the author to technique. Eliot writes:

To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet.

The free-floating tonality in Conrad seems to be consistent with Eliot's notion of "surrender;" it dwells in the "air," as if in no one, and then finally in the ear of the reader. In inventing Marlow, Conrad appears to absent himself from the work in a death of the author. The frame narration of Marlow, as he is heard by an anonymous listener, places a certain burden of interpretation on the reader. The reader is now confronted with the absence of the author as one who might explain events beyond the shadow of doubt and might contain, as origin, the emotion of the work.

Why, then, does Conrad take pains at the beginning of the Author's Note to establish his feeling of *intimacy* with Marlow only to culminate in an impersonal tone? Is that intimacy to be negated in favor of the impersonal tone in order to establish Conrad's radical departure from a Victorian sensibility? While it cannot be said to originate in the voice of Marlow or even in that of Conrad, can tonality be addressed as working *with* that intimacy as in, for example, the inter-subjective listening described by Barthes? In a way that defies the paradigmatic status of Eliot's call within considerations of early twentieth-century technique, Conrad's "another art altogether" appears to be both impersonal and personal. This project undertakes the task of arguing for that co-function as an important dimension of modernist "voice."

In order to do so, I attend to the complicated ways in which a writer can listen to his own physical voice (timbre, tone, and accent), can become entangled with both the voices of characters and narrators, can hear written identity through the soundscape of a novel's world, and can be subjected to hearing a "voice" of writing itself or sounds and voices as they recur to the writer as an object of rewriting. An acoustics of the modernist novel must, then, consider both the impersonal and the personal, the way sound can take leave of an originary source, yet have startling after-effects. The task of critical reading becomes one of following them in their vicissitudes.

In "Aural Objects," film theorist Christian Metz criticizes what he calls a "primitive substantialism" of western culture in its concern for sound as being "of" a more primary entity. The babbling is "of" a brook, the shot is "of" the canon, and, in a way that is only implied by Metz's acoustics, the speaking voice is "of" the speaker. Why is the sound not an object unto

itself, Metz asks? It is a similar metaphysical substantialism that has partly led critics to reject voice as a fundamental component of modernism in its call for impersonality and the death of the author. If there is a voice, it is “of” the author. There are other voices, however, that are not to be limited to the expression, the “author’s voice.” Attuned to the status of the aural object *qua* object, I develop a modernist typology of the human voice. In contrast to the possibility of a visual typology, however, it poses the problem of being heard both by the person who emits the sound and by *another* who is listening, hearing, or overhearing. Acoustics, then, can have at least two different effects based upon the perspective of one hearing oneself or one hearing another.

To hear oneself, argues Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, is frequently “hearing-(understanding)-oneself-speak.” When speaking aloud, Derrida notes, one immediately perceives a coincidence between the sound that is heard and oneself as the source of that sound. Furthermore, one perceives an idealized coincidence between what one says (the subject of speech) and what one means to say (the speaking subject). Except perhaps in stuttering (a central sound for Nietzsche’s poetics), there is no delay, no deferral. The typology of vocality in this project is directed towards ways of hearing that are not circumscribed by hearing oneself as “understanding” oneself.

This typology touches upon, but is not limited to:

- 1) *the cough*. It suggests a sickness of the body, a decline of the life that carries the voice. The voice in its physical reliance upon air now endangers those who are in its vicinity. The danger of the cough is that it takes leave of the body to enter the air of others. The cough interrupts speech and narrative. Catherine Clement, for example, posits it among “synopes,” moments when the progression of time seems to be seized and stalled, as with laughing and fainting. “Suddenly, time falters” (1).
- 2) *the cry*. In *The Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Rousseau attends to the cry in a kind of auditory lining between individuals; it is the core of his ethical theory. To hear someone cry out is to become affectively bound in a way that cannot be refuted. It is “passion,” he asserts, that first “wrings” voice from man; the first voice is not a word, but a cry. While Derrida refutes the metaphysical status of listening in Rousseau—voice as it signifies and depends upon presence—he too addresses the cry as the violent insinuation of one person into the “audiophonic system of the other” (*Grammatology* 166). He poses “the problem of the cry—of that which one has always excluded, pushing it into the area of animality or of madness...” (166). To hear oneself cry, however, violates and disrupts “hearing-(understanding)-oneself-speak.” The cry in modernist narrativity cannot be immediately understood by the one who emits it or by the one who hears it, reopening what Derrida calls “spatial exteriority” (166) within one’s own hearing of oneself. There is a third space, between my voice and my ear, between my voice and another’s ear. The cry can cry out in moments when speech seems to fail, crying out at injustice, subjugation, and violence. Lastly, the cry can be, Fred Moten argues, a “critique of the theory of value” (Moten 13), the commodified or enslaved body crying out at the possibility of being valued by capital. To cry can be to refuse the law or to remind the exterior world of one’s psychic and corporeal being.
- 3) *the moan*. The moan is one type of cry, but it is lower in register and volume, and more sustained. One moans in pain and in pleasure, and unlike the cry, it is curiously without addressee. The moan can appear in song, indicating a moment when the lyrical content has fallen away such that the singer now continues a given feeling

while also disarticulating it, expanding a word's nuances, vicissitudes, and sonorous substance. In spirituals, religious songs that are a hybrid of African music and the nineteenth-century hymn, sing-a-longs were called "moans," the audience not always singing along to the words, but moaning underneath the words in sympathy and agreement.

- 4) *the bellow*. The bellow is deep, roaring sound and with it, an unremitting current of air. It is different than crying, perhaps, because it *perceives* that it is not speech and sounds out all the more. It is as if the bellow wants to be speech. It suggests pain, like the cry, but also nonsense, a differential between the maximal physical capacity of lungs and the limited glottal capacity of the mouth as it is connected to and organized by the linguistic. Shakespeare writes of "sound and fury signifying nothing," a sound that William Faulkner heard as a "bellow." To "signify nothing" is an oxymoron—how can nothing be signified? The bellow forces the semiotic to confront itself as a temporary, arbitrary, and limited organization of affect.
- 5) *the shout*. It can be both an interruption, but an enforcement of attention. The shout has associations of the law, authority, and the hail—an authority figure can shout at one to stop what one is doing, and calls for immediate attention. As Louis Althusser describes of interpellation—a scene which seems to depend upon the acoustical—the shout can stop one in one's tracks. One becomes radically submitted to the law. Even when the source is uncertain, one not being sure if one is the person to whom the shout is being directed, the listener seems to know, as if by instinct, to pause and seek out the source. In that same instance, the listener asks, "I am the one being hailed? What have I done?" There is a dual disorientation. It is inter-subjective, and yet impersonal: one is called by another person *and* by a more virtual structure that demands attention. The shout is also pure volume. One can shout directly at another in an attempt to force the other to submit to the terrifying experience of volume; it can assert not simply anger, but mere presence. The shout can be made across distance, but it be made in a contained space in moments when normative volume is ineffectual. Contrastingly, the shout can indicate participation, encouragement, and kinship.

What can this range of the human voice tell us about modernism? There is an entire field of sound that includes, but is not reducible to the storytelling voice or the dialoguing voice, voices which themselves work in intense engagement with sounds beyond vocalic. This range of hearing not been adequately considered as a dimension of modernist narrativity in the preoccupation with visuality.

Nevertheless, such sounds make contact with the visible and can enhance one's awareness of dimensions and imperatives within it. In the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, Conrad asserts that his task "to make you hear, to make you feel—it is above all, to make you *see*." There is an incredibly complicated engagement between hearing and seeing, along the axis of feeling, that has been most neglected or not sufficiently understood as a modernist entanglement. Consider, for example, the beginning of Conrad's novel, a studied reworking of Ovid's myth of Narcissus. As the *Narcissus* takes leave of Bombay in order to bring its crew home to England, both novel and ship struggle with the means of self-organization. In an auto-telic self-reflection, a quintessentially modernist gesture, the novel looks unto itself to discover its method, asking by what means it can tell its story. Mr. Baker, chief-mate of the ship *Narcissus* "stepped in one stride out of his lighted cabin into the darkness of the

quarter-deck” just as “two streaks of brilliant light cut the shadow of the quiet night that lay upon the ship.” The *Narcissus* is no mere ship, “a fragment detached from the earth, [which] went on lonely and swift like a small planet.... The days raced after one another, brilliant and quick like flashes of a lighthouse, and the nights, uneventful and short, resembled fleeting dreams” (18). Such a vision is in keeping with his often quoted maxim; a way of life that has been “lost,” Conrad suggests, will take virtual shape in and as prose. Mr. Baker demands the “good lamp” to “muster our crowd,” asking if all hands are aboard.

But then, as the “silhouettes of moving men” in the forecandle are cast against this brilliant light, the silence is cut as a “hum of voices was heard there;” the ship disengages itself from the quiet that lay upon it. A visual motive registers the reflective peace and solitude of the *Narcissus* only to be troubled by voices that sound out from elsewhere. The narrator is aboard ship illuminated by Mr. Baker’s light when a distant clamor is perceived, coming not from the ship, but from the shoreboats which move towards it, rowed by “Asiatics” as they carry the new hands, all liberty-men, who argue over payment:

The feverish and shrill babble of Eastern language struggled against the masterful tones of tipsy seamen who argued.... The resplendent and bestarred peace of the East was torn into squalid tatters by howls of rage and shrieks of lament...and every soul afloat...became aware that the new hands were joining the “Narcissus.”

There are multiple modes of vocality that call out for attention and typology: babble, masterful tones, howls, shrieks. The narrator hears not what these voices say, but rather tones and volume. As the narrator hears boats rowing toward the *Narcissus*, he discerns a violent sound-clash, a discord between the men who row and their British passengers. The reader is given the sense that these new hands bring to the ship mutinous voices that are not to be fully distinguished from the “babble of Eastern language.” The British voices begin as masterful tones only to tear the “bestarred peace” of the sea and sky itself, an otherwise silent tableau. While dialect voice is subjugated by “masterful tones,” Conrad rhetorically and acoustically heightens a failed distinction between terms that begin in binary opposition. The men do not speak, but “howl” and “shriek,” bound together only by the cacophony which threatens to unknit them in just the same instance—voice is devocalized, pushed to its exterior, endangering, however, he who hears it: these voices do not offer themselves as an object of understanding, yet they demand attention and recognition.

One must recall that in Ovid’s myth is a suggestive co-tale of sound and image. Perhaps more importantly, it is a story about the problems of “gibberish,” semantic speech that is not understood by the other to whom it is addressed. Narcissus is enraptured by the reflective surface of water, but as he gazes at himself, the voice of Echo calls out. A gifted speaker and rhetorician, she has been cursed by the gods to repeat only the ends of the phrases she hears; her voice is transformed into one unable to communicate and convince. She sees Narcissus and loves him, but cannot speak her heart and call out to him through the glade. “She cannot speak first; but she cannot remain silent,” writes Adriana Cavarero of Echo’s predicament (166). Narcissus is for a moment distracted away from his captivation by the sound of her rustling and calls out to her; Echo only repeats what he says. Their encounter is a suggestive rhetorical dilemma, for she can only repeat the end of his sentence, what confuses the meaning of the words and changes their significance through decontextualization.<sup>1</sup> She repeats not words, but what becomes in the course

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<sup>1</sup> As Cavarero writes, “Believing that he is holding a conversation with a girl who does not want to show herself, the young boy invites her to join him. ‘Come here and let us meet [*huc coeamus*],’ he says. And the voice of the nymph

of repetition, a sound. She appears to be holding on a conversation, but she is a pure acoustic mirror. The result is dire: as Echo repeats only a fraction of Narcissus' words, his meaning is augmented in unintended ways. As Cavarero writes of the story's narrative and textuality, "Ovid constructs a text in which the sounds reverberated by Echo not only substantiate the meter but reorganize the semantic register through the dialogue's equivocations" (167). The voice of Echo is de-semantized to become a "sonorous substance," one that challenges the semantic substance of narrative by drawing grammar away from intention into alternative registers. Her voice is "a babble where the semantic system, and the subject that should sustain this system, are dissolved" (168).

Conrad seems aware of Ovid's myth as a tale of acoustic equivocation. While the British seaman and Asiatics argue verbally over payment, it is as if an alternative conflict sounds out at the sonorous register—the conflict is not between them, but between the acoustical and the narrator's previous interest in the serene silence of light and shadow. As the narrator orients himself and the reader to the ship, so as to tell the story, he is split between a dual motive, drawn towards the visual while the acoustic pulls distractively at his attention. Stimuli vie for his attention: silence, light, and sound. As the setting of the novel emerges—the ship *Narcissus*—there are within it adjacent spaces of sound and image. Such conflict seems to challenge not only narrative technique, but once heard, to challenge what is available to narrative as an object.

The force of this scene cannot be negotiated, however, without a fuller discussion of Conrad as a writer, in part what this project sets out to do. At this stage, we can at least note how the acoustical is a threat which moves beyond the diegesis to approach and reorganize narrative. Conrad seems to be crafting new techniques of registering the complicated intersection of seeing and hearing. As I argue in this project, however, Conrad was writing this novel precisely in the moment he was most concerned for how he might be assimilated into the English literary community. A Polish-born native, he spoke with a thick accent that troubled him in letters, at times referring to it as "gibberish," a recurring trope in his work. At stake in Echo's failed articulations is a semantic system troubled by a sonorous material, one that will not, as Echo says, "let us meet." Echo, the sonorous, fails to speak in a way that will bring about an encounter. It is a tragic story in which a gift for spoken voice unfolds into its own condemnation—were she to speak clearly, semantically and along the order of intention, she could meet Narcissus. As she withers, turning first into bone, from lack of his recognition, she becomes stone that now resounds those who call into it, an alternative surface than the one into which Narcissus gazes. In a way that has not been noted by critics, Conrad's novel ends with such resonant stones and a narrator who hears them.

While I do not suggest that Conrad is Echo, the plight of Echo helps to raise a rather urgent question concerning an acoustics of modernism. This question relates to how Conrad was hearing his own voice as a writer, both in the moment he turns to rewriting of the myth of Narcissus and Echo, and beyond, in future composition. For this "scene" of Echo is one that Conrad seems to return to time and again. A full consideration of the acoustical register can bring with it questions, on the one hand, of the "personality" writing, questions that are supposedly evacuated by modernist technique, and on the other hand, questions of how a writer hears the act of composition in relationship to the implied reader. A writer can return to certain sounds and phrases in an effort to assert their meaning for an ideal audience, those reading, and

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repeats, 'Let us meet [*coeamus*].' Her response is naughty. For without the *huc*, *coeamus* alludes to coitus.... The result is an unequivocal and definite refusal on the part of Narcissus" (166).

for the one writing. Each voice that calls into Echo's stone façade will be reminded of its own interior fractures, as "a mere acoustic resonance, a voice that returns, foreign, to the one who emitted it" (Cavarero 167). What then, does it mean for a writer to "repeat" sounds and voices across a series of works? How can a reader read "acoustically," that is, *read for resonances* between seemingly disparate moments, writers, and scenes?

As Aaron Fogel writes of Conrad in a rare consideration of acoustical method, *The Coercion to Speak*:

...his prose poetic has undersongs, rhymes, and off rhymes, which link one paragraph or sentence to the next by musical rather than logical transition. These chimes themselves 'force' the reader to work differently, paying a new kind of attention to prose motion, and to the 'force' of sounds, an attention which is both aesthetic and political. (39)

The "method" demanded by this chiming narrative discourse, Fogel argues, is in contrast to that demanded by "ordinary symbolism." The reader *responds* to a "'politics of motion'—rest, unrest, arrest..." (40). The moment the specificity of the acoustical register intervenes in a study and is treated not simply as a "motif" or "figure," but a force, it changes the relationship to criticism. Fogel argues that these prose motions in part owe themselves to Conrad's unique position in British modernism as an "overhearer" in relationship to the English language. As he only learned English in his twenties, still learning it when he was naturalized, Conrad was in the position of having to listen to others in order to master the language. Can a second language ever be "mastered," however, and how does technique, the supposedly impersonal vicissitudes of narrative, bear the traces of that negotiation in ways that are generative, i.e. exceeding the very personality to which they also attest?

Conrad seems to be working out the problem of forgotten and dejected registers *in* the moment he is working out the problem of his literary identity. In the 1917 Author's Note, Conrad does not emphasize the *story* of *Heart of Darkness*, but rather its *effect* upon the reader and himself as a writer, beginning to work through its appeal to the auditory register. Conrad was not alone in this emphasis. Indeed, the more one begins to listen to literary modernism and the novel in particular, the more an alternative dimension of its history and theory arises. This project is an account of how the acoustical dimension does not fully corroborate the thinking of modernism as a "death of the author," sounds boding a curious personality or address to the reader's ear. It is an attendance to the way sound works upon writer, narrative, and reader, it is development of a vocabulary that might begin to address the complicated, varied, and overdetermined literary technique of working with the sounds of modernity, i.e. not simply how writers represent their physical reality, but how such a task affects compositional practice itself, there being something like an acoustics of modernist writing.

### *Two Case Studies*

This project argues for the importance of the acoustical as a neglected aspect of modernist technique in two case studies, Conrad and Faulkner. It is an attempt to develop a way of reading modernist compositional practice at the intersection of acoustics and writing. The project, as a study of "acoustical technique," returns to two writers' ways of negotiating acoustical material in the novel, the "ear" of the reader, and the act of writing, retrieving the radical possibilities of hearing (in) modernist literature against claims of pre-modern, nostalgic "return." The project explores the development of Conrad's techniques of working with acoustic material in the works written between 1896 and 1900, the period in which he was arduously seeking his "voice" as an English author, listening to his own voice, and concerned for how it



was heard by others. These early techniques find expansion in Faulkner who works with Conradian acoustical technique in order to intervene in American literary discourse.

On the level of acoustics, there is a largely unrecognized encounter between Conrad and Faulkner, one that implies an alternative way of thinking through the central role of hearing in literary modernism. The pairing of the two writers seems most unlikely: the first, a Polish pre-war author who grew up in exile, was concerned with “exotic” locations drawn from a life of being a merchant marine, and who came to English as third language; the second, a “regional” American author writing in the late 1920s through to post-war era, who spoke with a thick drawl, wrote few stories that took place outside of Mississippi, and was concerned for the aftermath and legacies of the Civil War.

Albert Guérard’s *Conrad: The Novelist* was among the first works to position Conrad as both a modernist and “one of the most subjective and most personal of all English novelists” (2). He suggests that the “paradoxes” of the two authors are the same,

the men belonging to an aristocratic tradition which yet professed sympathy for the underprivileged of the earth; recalling with amused envy and pride the fantastic military exploits of ancestors; belonging to lands that had been invaded and brutally occupied and now watching with disdain a degraded present and the manipulation of the masses by propaganda. (3-4)

Both writers were outsiders in their own literary moment. Conrad’s transnational identity and his commitment to writing in English, the only language in which he would write fiction, set him apart from his British contemporaries. Faulkner was torn between wanting to represent the people and region that he knew, and to be recognized as an artist in his own right. For both writers, their technique is inflected by their biographies and by their personal struggles with publishers and the act of writing in ways that become impossible not to comment upon. Nevertheless, that entanglement between personality and the formal innovation does not tarnish, as I demonstrate, but rather augments their status as modernists.

Both writers have a complicated relationship to that status. Conrad’s earliest work is more easily assimilable to the paradigms guiding Victorian strategy and Faulkner began as a minor, regional poet under the enormous influence of the Romantics. While there are already modernist tendencies in his first novel, Conrad becomes a modernist, Levenson suggests, with *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and its complicated negotiation of narrative voice (8-9). This novel straddles two periods, but also two worlds: one might circuit his experiments in this novel through his troubled history of exile and naturalization. The narrative voice, I argue at length, wavers between a sense of inclusion in and exclusion from the story it tells. Faulkner’s innovations are similarly over-determined. He becomes a modernist, Carolyn Porter describes, when tired of being conceived as a minor regional writer he undergoes “a treacherous psychological regression that ironically enabled a radical formal innovation” (*Faulkner* 37). Faulkner writes that “I seemed to shut the door between me and all publisher’s addresses and book lists” (Porter *Faulkner* 37). It was a shutting the door that enabled the wild growth that produced *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), an experiment in narrating from within consciousness that would change the novel.

On the surface, that novel could not be more different than *Heart of Darkness*. At the level of sound, however, there is a strong affinity. Faulkner’s concern for one character’s bellow resembles in complicated ways what Conrad achieves with the cries emitted by inhabitants of the jungle. The relationship between those sounds does *not* lie in their shared nonsense, being “improper” to human speech. In the case of Conrad, such a reading has served as the basis for the

critique of his racism, most notably by novelist Chinua Achebe in “An Image of Africa.” In contrast, once one begins to consider the *acoustical techniques* adopted by these writers, different ways of hearing the sounds, and the resonances between them, become possible.

The technical affinities between the two writers has been traditionally explored on the visual register. Guérard notes Conrad and Faulkner’s shared “abrupt violation of point of view” in order to achieve what the scene demanded (86). In an early essay comparing the two writers, Faulkner critic Stephen A. Ross seizes upon Guérard’s description of “Conradian impressionism.” It is “a narrative method of deceptive emphasis and constantly shifting perspective,” writes Guérard, “depending for much of its beauty on swift oscillations between the long view and the close, between the moralizing abstract and the highly visual particular” (77). In both instances, the emphasis is decidedly visual, missing an important opportunity to engage the acoustical in its specificity. Ross emphasizes the indebtedness of the multiple voices of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) to Marlow, showing how Faulkner quite literally rewrites passages from *Lord Jim*. Yet, he emphasizes the search for Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* as it is akin to the search for Kurtz. That search that has been over-emphasized in Conrad studies to the detriment of examining how the *voice* of Marlow effects the reader. In Ross’ seminal study of voice and speech in Faulkner, *Fiction’s Inexhaustible Voice*, the presence of Conrad and Conradian technique disappears. Without that force of Conrad, several of Faulkner’s major interventions and innovations go unnoticed.

Conrad and Faulkner’s methodology and sense of acoustics relate in two important ways. Both figures approached composition with an ear for how the narrative might effect the reader. In using storytelling voices, both writers exhibit a modernist’s lack of concern for verisimilitude: voices run-on and challenge audibility. In other words, their method is not to provide a “document” of realistic speech, but to exploit a contact between what is possible in writing and what is possible in speaking. There is a kind of alchemy, a voice-writing. In another way, both writers are concerned for the remainders of certain normative discourses—cries, howls, moans—and for a technique that might centralize those remainders while also critiquing the logic that enables their suppression and displacement.

While throughout this project I cross-breed their methods and acoustics, it is there that the differences between the two writers must be most rigorously preserved. Conrad, I argue, was concerned for writing himself into the English community. There is a strong awareness of how a work might most incite its reader’s sense of kinship, yet also of the forces that make such a project most strained. His narratives often seem to include within themselves a representation of the forces that afflict him as a writer, even though he is, to some degree, trying to write them away. On another level, Conrad’s critical project was directed away from himself personally and towards the logic of colonialism; Faulkner, however, was arguing within and against an American context marked by the legacy of the Civil War. As much as Faulkner was arguing against certain discourses, that of race in particular, it is with deep reverence, intimacy, and affection that he preserves the kinds of regional voices that occupied his youth. Conrad seems to recede behind the voice of Marlow, an idealized English self or placeholder. Conrad also turns to a series of voices of racial others, voices that dispel and quiet turbulent forces with the writer’s voice by providing a place for their displacement. Faulkner, however, is keenly aware of the fiction of autonomy that sustains the illusion of displacement: racialized voices return to haunt, resisting the narratives that suppress them, both within the novel and without.

Nevertheless, there are ways of negotiating voices that Faulkner partially learns from Conrad. In his seminal study of Faulkner’s relationship to the tradition of the novel, *Faulkner’s*

*Place*, Michael Millgate suggestively argues for “two supreme moments of discovery” in Faulkner’s fiction, the first being his turn to fictionalizing the region of his youth, the second being “the moment when he perceived the infinite possibilities of the fictional techniques already pioneered by such writers as James and Conrad and Joyce” (46). The first moment incites *Flags in the Dust* (1929), as a novel in which Faulkner turns to local lore and the figures who haunted his memory of his youth. Disheartened and rejected at first by publishers, he continues writing a series of short stories which culminate in *The Sound and the Fury*, a novel in which the imaginative surge of recollection called for a new form, a kind of writing in solitude that will echo Conrad’s own tortured pursuits. Faulkner only becomes a modernist when he “returns” to the regional domain: the turn to his youth, however, was above all to its sounds and voices, the works of the 1920s and 30s being driven by dialect talk, singing, soundscapes, and storytelling. While James, Joyce, and Melville are equally influential, it is Conrad who devotes his early works to a world of sound and voice in his struggle to identify within himself an “English voice.” Few studies of Conrad’s techniques of working sound and voice, their relationship to the image, and their effects upon narrative voice, time in the novel, and the experience of reading, have been undertaken. Without such a study, Faulkner’s own means of negotiating the voices and regional sounds of Mississippi, particularly in their critical valence, addressed to a reader’s capacity to hear in a world organized by race, class, and gender, cannot be fully registered. I argue, in other words, that Faulkner seizes upon the most important techniques of negotiating the acoustical in Conrad—what I call “narrative incantation” and “acoustic displacement”—in order to make his own intervention in the genre which I argue culminates in *Absalom, Absalom!*

It is worth commenting on a more elusive relationship between these two writers, one that only an acoustics of the novel can address. As Conrad writes of *Almayer’s Folly* and Faulkner of *The Sound and the Fury*, these works were written with “no plan,” Faulkner experiencing in writing a kind of unmasterable surge and Conrad a well-documented self-torture. Porter notes, however, that Faulkner “cannot wholly disguise the fact that [he] did indeed develop a plan,” beginning the novel with the Benjy section that, while self-contained, was not a short story, but rather had “secreted within it...the larger story of the Compson family itself...” (39). That site of expansion will prove to be important in two ways, the second implied by the first.

First, the major force of the Benjy section is his unrelenting *bellow*; that sound, however, is one that Faulkner would continually return to in its different registers. In this project, I do not hear the sounds across the works as “separate,” but rather as *registers* or *intervals*, which *through* such an approach create a most penetrating (or vibrating) critique of identity, history, and consciousness. In other words, it is a “modernist” sound. It is a sound that, to some degree, defies “plans” and calls for a mode of historical reading that cannot be limited by the intention of the writer. I hear in Conrad and Faulkner two listeners who were attuned to lost sounds at the edges of reason, history, and thought itself.

Second, the way in which Faulkner’s writings continually *implied* other writings, expanding to create an entire fictional Mississippi county he named “Yoknapatawpha” is the basis of another suggestive parallel between the two writers. The similarity here is subtle and operating at the micro-level of hearing. Conrad’s composition was structured by the return to figures, ideas, and works, the recurring narrator, Marlow, being only one example. For both writers, such recurrence was not simply a matter of revision, an act that therefore poses a developmental discourse between texts. More importantly for an acoustics of modernism, recurrence is suggestive of their peculiar way of hearing composition. That way of hearing, I

argue, is itself modernist, no work seeming to be fully written, ending at times with vibrating voices and echoes that already imply future rewriting.

### *Criticism as Close Listening*

How is one to “read” for these sounds as they are often passing notes within and between large and complicated works? Is there a “close reading” for sound? In recent years, the decreased interest in stylistics as an approach to the study of genre and writing has largely foreclosed such questions. Stylistics cannot adequately address the discursive and ideological relations that are determinative of the styles possible in a given language. The term “register” as employed by stylistics, however, remains suggestive for an acoustics. The “register” in the linguistic sense refers to semantic patterns and context, a way of using language, for example, in casual as opposed to professional situations. As M.M. Bakhtin shows in “Discourse and the Novel,” an individual speaker “heteroglott” in that he or she engages in multiple registers and styles of speaking; the novel is itself woven of these various patterns, some of which being parodic in nature. In Conrad’s case, the registers are yet more complicated. As Fogel shows, Conrad’s position as an overhearer of English undoubtedly affected his style. How, then, do writers “sound like” each other? What does it mean to say that Faulkner at times sounds like Conrad? What does it mean, as Houston Baker Jr. asks, to “sound modernist?”<sup>2</sup>

In order to begin to address such questions, one might turn to the comments made by one of Faulkner’s students in a 1957 course at the University of Virginia, during Faulkner’s time as Writer-in-Residence. The student asks Faulkner if he “got something in the way of arrangement of words from Conrad” (Blotner *University* 20). He notes in Faulkner similar “arrangements of cadence, rhythm:”

I’m thinking of a passage in [Conrad’s] ‘Youth,’ an arrangement of adjectives, ‘resplendent yet somber, full of danger, yet promising,’ the description of the East when the young boy comes upon it. There’s something of the same kind of use of—kind of heavy arrangement of adjectives I’ve noticed in your writing. (20)

Faulkner responds, “Quite true. I got quite a lot from Conrad” (20). He later notes that many of Conrad’s choices were likely owed to how he had taught himself the English language (142), what shows Faulkner’s keen awareness of what I argue to be a “foreignness” of Conrad’s prose both in sound and ontology. There are cadences and rhythms; the adjective circles round the object in an effort (and simultaneous refusal) to seize it; these qualities cannot be heard outside of Conrad’s relationship to English as a “cathected” object. It is, I argue, highly charged not only with Conrad’s own curious hearing of the English language through the circuits of Polish and French, but with the project of producing a certain “ring” in the reader’s ear, his desire to generate a particular emotive relationship between word and reader. Faulkner hears these cadences at the intersections of his own history of listening to the cadences of southern oratory and porch-talk, what creates a most polyphonous writing.

Again, how does one read for polyphony? How does one give a reasonably sensible account of this phenomena that escapes traditional means of organizing a work, such as pursuing the linear history of revision, the meaning of symbols, or the significance of unfolding plot

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<sup>2</sup> In *Modernism and The Harlem Renaissance*, Baker continually italicizes the word “sound” as if to suggest that the emphasis upon sound by Harlem Renaissance writers, such as Jean Toomer, and with it, the presence of another kind of sound of writing, has in part marginalized black writers from considerations of modernism.

events? This project is structured through a series of “registers” as are intervals or notes of a chord. I read for registers, which at times calls for a most challenging oscillation between works and events. On the one hand, the bellow of Benjy—it is only cursorily “of” this character—has several registers: it will sound out in different ways and towards different effects in different texts. On the other hand, Faulkner is interested in sounds that are not heard fully and must repeat to be effectuated. What, in that regard, separates a full from limited hearing? It cannot be mere volume, particularly if we are dealing with the silent registers of reading to oneself. In contrast, we arrive at something like closeness or a proximity to the acoustic.

In this way, my involvement with texts and their history is acoustical in nature. My project works *within* an acoustical modality. A relationship between these authors who are drawn to repetition and revision, at the level of sound, lends itself to an argument for a sonorous literary history: there is a way of working through texts at the level of a single sound that calls, not for the personality of the reader, but his or her closest capacities of hearing. Nevertheless, the “closeness” of close-reading implies a visual proximity. In “Formalism and Time,” Catherine Gallagher claims that the formalist tradition of close-reading ocularly isolates the passage from the movement of text. Yet, there is at once an acoustical activity, for as many critics would perhaps agree, there is in the isolated passage, before it is isolated, an echoic phenomenon, a single word or a phrase, striking what Faulkner calls in *Absalom, Absalom!* the “resonant strings of remembering.” Here the most mysterious effects of reading take place. One moves backward and forwards, and yet, there is at once a topological phenomenon in which the words are turning, striking a chord, and will strike again. Associations are activated across the field of reading.

There is already a strong precedent for reading for the fragment in modernist literature. Eliot’s practice in *The Wasteland* is a negotiation of the fragments of what Adorno might call “damaged life,” and Pound and Joyce’s prose is riddled with allusions. The fragment in Conrad and Faulkner is somehow other, acoustical in substance; indeed, the original epigraph to *The Wasteland* was the Kurtz’s final words, “The horror! The horror!” My approach to narrative as “scraps,” as Faulkner might call it, owes itself to a modernist aesthetic of the fragment redirected through the acoustical sensibility.

Walter Benjamin, a thinker to which I return throughout this project, and his theological sense of the “naming” function of art is important in this regard. “Naming,” a concept retained after his move to Marxism, implied the reestablishment of the divine language of names; methodologically, however, it was elaborated through the fragment or his emphasis upon what Susan Buck-Morss calls “the verbal representation of phenomena.” As a writer, Benjamin yielded to the particularity of things, forming a one-time only configuration” (*Negative* 89). Methodologically, such concern for particularity is to be found in Benjamin’s resistance to linear argument in the literary-critical essays. His writing emerges as kernels around passages that incite a discussion that is at once wholly personal and objective, binding the literary work to a discourse that is already, as Benjamin writes of Baudelaire, “a murmur of the past.” Such criticism is difficult to excise from its own groundedness in particularity, speaking as it does from within the work.

As Benjamin writes in “The Task of the Translator,” all great works of literature contain “between the lines their virtual translation.” It is a theory of language that is a theory of translation, as Rolf Tiedemann describes (Buck-Morss *Negative* 253). Such a theory has consequences for the continued relevance of the Anglo-American formalist practice of close-reading. While it is without a theological dimension, secular to the extent of denying authorship

as a relevant category, it was developing in the same moment as Benjamin a sense of devotedness to the particularity of the literary work. In the project he was working on until his death, a massive tome of Parisian life at the turn of the last century, Benjamin was drawn to the overlooked and forgotten phenomena, what Buck-Morss calls “the seemingly insignificant historical details...[that] reflected the hope for rescuing phenomena from temporal extinction by redeeming them within the name” (*Negative* 89). Conrad himself called the novel a form of “rescue” and both he and Faulkner, I argue, develop in the world of their novels a way of listening that might itself be understood as *rescue*. For their characters, acoustic rescue is a patient listening and with it, a redemptive reenactment of the suffering of others; for their readers and for themselves as composers, acoustic rescue relates to the concrete particularity of sound, one already suggested by my cursory typology of vocality.

It is important to note a final sense of what it means to read acoustically and its implications for the method and structure of this project, what I call “double hearing.” In “A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” Theodor Adorno, a most sensitive listener to whom I return throughout this project, writes a central aphorism (as a writer, he tends repeatedly towards the aphorism as it might be seized as a fragment rescued from the totalizing whole): “Misunderstandings are the medium in which the noncommunicable is communicated” (*Prisms* 232). This project often lingers in moments of misunderstanding, places in which characters attempt to assess the means and possibility of communication. Conrad and Faulkner force the reader to hear what characters and narrators cannot. I consider the generative aspect of misunderstanding, the burden it places upon the reader both as a critic and historian. Conrad’s character Jim will lament, “There are no words for the kinds of things I would like to say.” In Conrad’s sensorium, *sounds* often intervene in conversation, saying what voices do not. In Faulkner, human voices pushed to their semantic limit—the bellow—sound out in the moment a certain way of thinking through identity has become untenable; such a moment is not fully recognized by the characters, yet is registered by the narrative’s attention to sound. Again, the sounds seem to say what speech does not.

In this regard, Adorno refers to Benjamin’s “micrological and fragmentary method” as it resists the universal and absolute (*Prisms* 237). “Micrological” is a term that suggests a way of listening: it appears in Adorno’s earlier essay, “On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music” (1953). There Adorno argues that philosophy must become micrological if it is to “come close to touching music’s enigmatic character, without being to flatter itself that it had resolved it” (*Music* 141). There is, then, a most pressing relationship between criticism and the act of listening—it suggests another way of thinking, another way of writing. The micrological as employed by Benjamin and Adorno is a modernist aesthetic faithfully concerned for the fragmentary, the unresolved, and the ambiguous.

While Adorno writes of music, this project brings such considerations to bear upon the human voice. Indeed, Conrad and Faulkner’s use of oral narrative is micrological, storytellers often being consumed by the events that do not add up, for the passing notes of experience. In *Lord Jim*, for example, Marlow spends a large tract of time describing a brief first encounter with Jim in a hallway, noting the many sounds and voices that were heard. These details are seemingly incidental. When heard micrologically, that is, as occupying the interstices of the larger structures that frame the encounter between the two men, an entirely different way of understanding the encounter than the version offered by Marlow arises. The reader listens to Marlow tell the story, but also against Marlow, hearing what he does not; one hears, in

particularly, the extra-deictic registers of Conrad's predicament as writer seeking an English identity.

### *The Modernist Storyteller*

Both Conrad and Faulkner take care to dramatize scenes of storytelling on porches, ships, and verandahs, appealing to a most traditional act while the prose is exploding around it. Is storytelling a nostalgic, traditional act that violates a novel's modernity? Is there a modernist storyteller? In "Youth," an unnamed narrator remembers having listened to Marlow tell stories of his first turn to sea and his subsequent disillusionment. The presence of Marlow as a storyteller is continually emphasized by the phrase, "pass the bottle," reminding the reader of the oral atmosphere and with it, the remove or distance from memories of youth. It is an autobiographical reflection on the exuberance of taking to sea, a "record of experience," a story that "begins and ends in myself," writes Conrad in the 1917 Author's Note (*Darkness* 11).

As numerous critics, such as Peter Brooks, Michael Greaney, and Edward Said have noted, Marlow harkens back to the traditional figure of the storyteller as described by Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay, "The Storyteller." The storyteller narrates from what Benjamin calls "personal experience" and within the "realm of living speech." The story, he argues, "thrives for a long time in the milieu of work" and "is itself an artisan form of communication" (91). In that same way, Marlow spins the "yarns of seamen," telling his stories in moments of repose that punctuate the merchant mariner life of work. As Said writes in his brief consideration of Benjamin's figure, "Conrad had the dubious privilege of witnessing within his own double life [as mariner and writer] the change from storytelling as useful, communal art to novel-writing as essentialized, solitary art" ("Presentation" 125). In other words, the presence of Marlow in the novel is at the curious intersection of Conrad's memories of life at sea, the communal role of storytelling therein, and Conrad's pursuits as a novel writer, pursuits which are, ultimately, undertaken alone. Conrad comments most despairingly in letters upon the solitude of writing, which I explore at length in terms of the way Conrad also seemed to hear voices in writing, voices that provided, as he notes of Marlow, a particular form of "companionship."

A closer evaluation of Benjamin's essay and argument is required if one to address that paradox. Benjamin does not, in the end, oppose the novel and storytelling, writing and speech, solitude and community. There are in his essay a series of rather more suggestive organizing contrasts, contrasts that have been lost in the critical emphasis upon the binary between writing and orality. The more subtle dimension of Benjamin's argument, one to which I return throughout this project, can begin to one to understand what was so radical about Marlow and Conrad as he heard Marlow. Several of Faulkner's storytellers, we will find, follow suit. Benjamin's essay has a canonical status both in Conrad studies and in the dominant account of the late nineteenth-century novel. As we have already noted, critics argue that the novel turns away from imitating the storyteller around the hearth to a more impersonal form of narration. Marlow sits uneasily at the crux of this transformation, suggesting *both* a traditional figure of the storyteller and a resistance to the models of knowledge implied thereby. He is a narrator that seems not to know, to be exposed to radical doubt, and to speak of what he has heard and seen without final resolution. Rather than further rehearsing how Benjamin's essay is dominantly employed, however, it will prove most generative for an evaluation of what Conrad perhaps meant by "another art altogether," as an acoustical art, to consider the ignored nuances of Benjamin's essay.

Benjamin considers the late nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Leskov as someone who, like Conrad, begins his stories with a description of a journey or encounter, a

story that was already heard by another. *Heart of Darkness*, in that way, is a story told by an anonymous narrator as he heard it from Marlow. Benjamin writes that Leskov “evokes a gathering,” such that “his tracks are frequently evident in his narratives” (92). These “tracks” are perhaps indicators that the story is unoriginal, a story being handed down from someone else at some previous time. Nevertheless, they are not merely technical; they are, for Benjamin, quite material, for they lead to a discussion of what he calls “craft” as it has been estranged by “industrial technology” (92). The story, Benjamin argues, is akin to a piece of pottery; craft “sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller” (91) “Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (92).

Already, several points are important to underscore. Benjamin is drawn to frame narration as it implies traces of human materiality that are endangered by modernity. This essay, in part, is an implicitly Marxist critique of industrialization and the division of labor, of the shift in experience, perception, and aesthetic possibility implied by the industrial revolution. Indeed, in volume 1 *Capital*, the section titled “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret,” Marx argues that fetishism essentially removes the story of an object, the object becoming silent such that it no longer speaks its origins, appearing not to have been humanly made.<sup>3</sup> That Benjamin begins his essay with a reflection on contemporary technology is significant, for both Conrad and Faulkner considered a capacity for experience and memory that seemed to them to be receding under modernity. While the globe is shrinking, Benjamin argues, men appear to have been severed from each other and their own experience; men seek not “stories,” but “information,” one meeting less and less another person able to communicate his experience to others. By invoking information technology in particular, Benjamin suggests that experience itself has shifted (he is frequently concerned for the historicity of perception, not as given, but as a material process). Experience has been disrupted and fragmented such that the need for data has replaced a holistic event. It is holistic in the sense that the story is charged with what he calls “germinative power.” Information, he writes (and one should hear the echoes of Marx), “lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it complete and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (90). It is with “nesting places” in the listener.

While Benjamin attacks information technology, he also considers the decline of storytelling as contemporaneous with the rise of the genre of the novel, a critique that can allow a deeper understanding of what he means by “release” and “germination.” What appears to interest him about the story is its temporality, both as a kind of life-span and how time is experienced in the moment of hearing it. The temporal register of Benjamin’s essay is important in that regard—he offers not dates, but rather a highly suggestive, floating temporality that is central to the performative (modernist?) nature of his argument. As the definition of the “story” unfolds in what is Benjamin’s clear attempt to model his central term, the story is not factually driven; it does not provide data, but rather what he calls “counsel” (*Rat*). Counsel, he writes, “is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation [*die Fortsetzung*] of a story which is just unfolding.” Benjamin seems to invite a certain model of reading that relies not upon direct argumentation, but a slow sedimentation of thought. Such counsel depends upon one

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<sup>3</sup> “If commodities could speak they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other as exchange-values” (Marx 176).



being “receptive to counsel” and such receptiveness occurs not in the heightened awareness that characterizes the information age, but the integration of storytelling and work: “The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory” (91). In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin Compson will be described as “not listening” to a certain storyteller, Rosa, and in *Heart of Darkness*, the listeners are bored, lulled by Marlow’s tale. At some later date for the listener, Benjamin argues, the story is “integrated into his own experience” and “the gift of retelling comes to him all by itself” (91). This belated integration will prove important for a consideration not only of how Conrad and Faulkner ask one to read with a different form of attention, but how they, as writers, return to and retell certain stories.

As critics meditate on the relationship between Marlow and Benjamin’s essay on the storyteller, locating in Conrad a certain “nostalgia” for oral community, they ignore its nuances and a most central dimension of Benjamin’s own way of *writing*. Benjamin forces the reader to consider claims that are only ever evocative; he writes in the *mood* and unspecific tense of storytelling (“storytelling is coming to an end” or “the beginning of modern times”). Conrad critics such as Greaney tend to isolate a false binary between writing and orality in order to diagnose Conrad’s desire to speak directly to the audience; yet this binary is in no way proposed by Benjamin. His essay is most ambiguous and in being ambiguous, he evokes “the realm of living speech” as it is not limited to the oral. The central difference between the story and other forms is not to be found in the medium, but rather in the fact that the story “does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report” (91). In complicated ways, Benjamin’s essay is a commentary on the technologization of the word, a critical response to Georg Lukács’ *Theory of the Novel* (1920), and a reflection on the decline not simply of oral culture, but storytelling as it is both a written and oral phenomenon. Again, however, there is no binary between writing and the realm of living speech. Given that Leskov is Benjamin’s primary emblem, such a “realm” is not limited to a spoken event: the “outlines” of the great storyteller become “visible” in Leskov, a writer who not only teaches us that “the art of storytelling is coming to end,” but alerts us to a “new beauty in what is vanishing.”

Here it is important to flag a central point largely ignored by studies of modernism. As Benjamin invokes it, the story is not an oral phenomenon, but rather a modality of organizing one’s own experience and relating to the experience of others. It is a relationship to narrative as an ongoing process—the story does not appear to be fully or finally told, implying in itself “continuation” (*die Fortsetzung*). The story is not expended; it is not fully articulated in the first instance. Stories are with “nesting places” created in the space and time of boredom, and mental and physical relaxation; it lives in an “ambience” (91). This sense of continuation and ambience will prove crucial for a consideration of how Marlow and Faulkner’s multiple storytellers function, function for their diegetic listeners, for Conrad and Faulkner’s readers, and for Conrad and Faulkner as writers. Both are figures who continually returned to the voices of their works; Conrad, in particular, was someone who materially reworked these “voices” (they are not always voices of people, but at times “voices” or registers of single words) in letters, essays, and novels. Conrad seemed to hear and rehear Marlow in particular as a voice that had no singular proposition to make.

While Benjamin does not elaborate this most central term, “continuation,” it seems to be a primary integration between living and telling, or activity and narrative. His assessment of the novel, like that of Lukács, is that it distances the reader from others; its birthplace is in “the solitary individual.” The novelist does not “take what he tells from experience” and make it “the experience of those who are listening to his tale,” Benjamin argues. As one must ask, however,

what does it mean to take one's own experience and make it the experience of another? Is there an originary experience if it is always-already implicated in the retellings of others? Is the transference of experience something like persuasion or belief? It is vividness, the feeling that one has witnessed something him or herself?

While Conrad and Faulkner will provide several compelling answers to these questions, it is important to note here that, on a phenomenological level, what Benjamin calls "the realm of living speech" is not incidental to how these two authors write. The "germinative power" or protracted expansion of storytelling lies in ambiguity, an ambiguity everywhere performed by Benjamin's prose and already suggested, in fact, by Conradian visual impressionism or the glow that brings out the haze. In conveying neither information nor "the pure essence of the thing," the story, one might argue, stays with one: it is defined by an aesthetic of lingering, reconsideration, and return. "For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories," Benjamin writes (91). Again, however, such repetition is for Benjamin the slow "piling of layers," versions that do not repeat the same way each time. In a real way, Conrad seems to insist that Marlow haunts him, and stays with him, having a non-determinative force of appearance and disappearance. To write is to hear and rehear this voice, each event of listening suggesting from its very beginning an end in inconclusiveness.

Benjamin seems to argue that the novel is opposed to such a capacity *unless* the novelist finds a way, as did Leskov, to incorporate this way of knowing or listening. The novel, Lukács asserts in a passage quoted by Benjamin, "becomes the divinatory-intuitive grasping of the unattained and therefore inexpressible meaning of life" (*Illuminations* 99). The novel reaches its end. Benjamin writes that the "meaning of life" is the "center" around which the novel "moves;" life becomes "remembered life" (100) without prospect of continuation. "The nature of the character in the novel cannot be presented any better than is done in this statement, which says that the 'meaning' of his life is revealed only in his death" (100-101). For in death, Benjamin explains, a man will always be remembered as one who died at a certain age at every interval of his life. Perhaps, then, it is conclusion, not inconclusiveness, that is for Benjamin now implied at the beginning of life. On another level, the novel belongs to the realm of the "solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others" (87). The novel "gives evidence to the profound perplexity [*die tiefe Ratlosigkeit*] of the living" (87). If "there is no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate," Benjamin writes, the novelist "cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond that limit at which he invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing, 'Finis'" (100).

For Benjamin, this contrast between storytelling and the novel implies two forms of memory or rather, two ways of approaching the object of memory. There is one which reiterates and another which seals, one which continues or gives counsel and another which concludes or completes. Benjamin claims that epic memory was, in its origin, *divided* in its principle: there was "remembrance" and "reminiscence." The novel, he argues, developed out of the remembrance, the *Bildungsroman* appearing as his most central example. It depicts one person in a progressive journey and concludes; there can be no ambiguity and it is nearly informational in its didacticism. Remembrance is the epic story "dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, *one* battle." It is contrasted with reminiscence insofar as it describes what he calls "many diffuse occurrences." The reminiscence, one might conjecture, arises in a moment of relaxation or repose ("And this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth," Marlow begins in *Heart of Darkness*). It does not present itself as a *whole* nor is it with a final meaning. Like the distinction

proffered by Benjamin's essay on Proust, reminiscence appears to be involuntary: one is *incited* into "reminiscence" time and again; yet, one is called to "remember" in a reverent, sanctioned, and singular event.

There is in Benjamin's essay a crucial organizing contrast between *conclusion* and *continuation*, one that has not been explored in its fullest potential for a consideration of orality in Conrad and Faulkner. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks attends to the ways in which the death of Kurtz at the end of *Heart of Darkness* bestows upon Marlow an uneasy authority. Kurtz's last words—"the horror, the horror"—fail to communicate anything that might be transmitted; they lack a summarizing meaning and only reiterate failure. Lukács defines the novel as *the* genre of "incompleteness," what is, in fact, an ontological incompleteness—the novel is symptomatic of a "fall" from "integrated civilization." Benjamin, however, speaks more directly to a formal property of the novel in its incompleteness. This formal dimension is temporal, owing to the aforementioned divided principle of memory. On the one hand, Benjamin is careful to assert that storytelling cannot be duplicated by the novel through shortening its length; the written version of the story, he argues, is not simply the "short-story," a kind of compact kernel that implies more to come. It is not length that concerns Benjamin's sense of conclusion, as if only the novel were "shorter" it could return to the vanishing art. Like the novel, he argues, the short story "has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitute the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings." In a way that will prove central for a consideration of what Conrad calls "another art altogether," the split between remembrance and reminiscence is not fully synonymous to that between writing and orality. Benjamin is concerned for the difference between an aesthetic of *singularity* and one of *multiplicity*. The novel is argued to be premised upon the individual; the story, however, is handled by many people and implies multiple retellings. Benjamin contrasts conclusion, singularity, and remembrance with continuation, multiplicity, and reminiscence. These terms will provide a most suggestive way of working through the relationships between writers and texts, and a way of thinking about writing not as a failed metaphor for "speaking," but as an act of hearing, not only hearing "now," but over-hearing, before-hearing, and after-hearing (writing changing audition) in involuntary, yet generative ways.

### *The Incanted Image*

In Chapter One, "The Incanted Image: Vision, Silence, and Belonging in Conrad's Theory of the Novel," I argue begin not with storytelling, but Conrad's theory of vision as a most challenging and contradictory theory of modernism, one that must be understood in relationship to how he heard his voice as a writer and speaker. While other writers were theorizing a new novelistic vision based in impersonality, craft, and the "consciousness" of the work of art itself, ideas largely based in Flaubert, Conrad proffered a highly personal sense of vision, one that seems inseparable from how he understood his identity as an English writer. I show how some of his most radical techniques are in dialogue with personality, "temperament," and biography. That reading grounds my alternative theory of the voice of the writer—what I argue to be both an impersonal and impersonal phenomenon—as it preoccupies the whole of the project.

I begin by engaging Conrad's radical turn away from life at sea towards literary pursuits in his late thirties. I ask how his way of narrating his emergence as a writer, in fact, marks several of the most radical moves made by his prose technique. There is, from the beginning, an intense entanglement between his identity as a writer and the written world he imagines. Working with how Conrad writes of the turn to writing in his memoir, *A Personal Record*, I

show how many of his central prose preoccupations, including time, characterization, and inconclusiveness, were already given rough outline by the way he identified his “compulsion” to write. There is an important correspondence between the way his first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895), is organized and the way Conrad thinks about what it means to write. The collusion is so great, however, that the unidirectionality becomes difficult to maintain. One observes how the personal struggles of this writer inform novelistic technique and how that technique informs his sense of struggle, what sets the stage in later chapters for a consideration of writing as it affects hearing and hearing as it affects writing.

In the 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, Conrad theorizes his techniques, among them an attention to sensory detail. As Levenson notes, the Preface “conforms to a prevailing view of Conradian Impressionism...which emphasizes attention to physical, especially visual, immediacy.” Yet, Levenson argues, “Conrad pursues definition in another direction” (1). The artist is described by Conrad as one who “descends within himself.” “If the aim is fidelity to the visible universe,” Levenson writes, “then the inner life of the artist would seem beside the point” (1). While Levenson seizes upon the central tension of the Preface—appealing both to the shared visible world and the personality of the artist—he resolves its divided commitments, arguing that for Conrad, “meaning is not intrinsic, that the significance of events remains incomplete without further adumbration” (2). Placing the Preface in the context of its vexed publication history, its dialogue with contemporary debates surrounding the novel, and Conrad’s own transnational biography, I argue that the tensions of the Preface are not so easily resolved, that they go much deeper than a theory of meaning. These tensions are related to his dilemma as a Polish-born writer attempting to make a place for himself in the English literary community. Such tensions must remain unresolved, I argue, for only then can one address how Conrad’s prose quite literally registers a sense of being in two places at once, one way of thinking through a complicated temporality that will influence Faulkner.

It is in the Preface that Conrad makes his most famous statement regarding the novelist’s task as “above all,...to make you *see*.” Such a statement is, on the surface of things, quite far from acoustics. To see, as Conrad defines it however, places the writer in the midst of a relatedness with the world; to see is not simply to see the visible world, but to understand its meaning as it may be upheld for subsequent generations and for an itinerant “community.” The novel quite literally desires to “belong” to the world of the (English) reader. I show how the appeal to vision by his contemporaries, Walter Besant and Henry James, more easily “fits” into the Flaubertian call that the novel be “impersonal,” a discourse into which Conrad seems to seek admittance, but from which he necessarily departs in his transnationalism.

In 1884, Besant addressed the Royal Academy and argued that fiction is with an “art,” that it has general principles and rules that may be laid down with “precision.” In particular, he appeals to the novelist’s sense of foresight and to character development as “outlining” figures. In response to Besant, James dramatically continues the notion that fiction is with an “art;” James rejects, however, the idea that fiction might be formally regulated. He emphasizes instead the artist’s power of sensual, particularly visual, “observation.” It is there that James makes the famous assertion that what the reader cannot see in daily life—consistent with Baudelaire’s modernism and the fleeting gesture—the art of fiction can “*show you*.” I address how this statement was later seized by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction*, a work that paved the way for the consideration of modernism as a technique of “showing” and not “telling,” an evacuation of vocality in favor of visuality.

Turning to a close reading of Conrad's Preface, I argue that his sense of vision is incredibly nuanced and charged with the desire to join the art of fiction debate and with it, the English literary community. The Preface, largely rejected by publishers, lauds vision in a way that cannot be easily synthesized into the terms posed by his contemporaries, what reveals another dimension of modernism. At the level of syntax and diction, the Preface bears traces of Conrad's acquisition of English as a third language after French. There is an ontological sense that objects are difficult for the subject to seize and describe: an over-abundance of adjectives—the hallmark of his prose noticed by Faulkner's student—emerges as a symptom of distance and alienation not to be reduced to the fractures posed by the modern condition. At the conceptual level, Conrad asserts terms such as "bond," "solidarity," and "kinship," concepts which nowhere appear in the art of fiction debate. These terms suggest that Conrad had a remarkably different project and sense of vision than his contemporaries in England. That project is not easily routed through the Jamesian allegiance to Flaubertian impersonality and the removal of the author from the work.

While Conrad appeals to the "solitude" of the writer, as had Flaubert, it is not consistent with Jameson's sense that Flaubert marked the beginning of the modern novel by retreating away from the public into the practice of solitary writing. Nor is Conrad's sense of solitude consistent with Lukács' philosophic sense of the novel as the genre of "transcendental homelessness," i.e. a symptom of man's melancholy under modernity. There is a solitude, I argue, that inheres in Conrad's biography of exile, a personal struggle under the realities of naturalization that mark and "personalize" his theory of the novel. Over and against the theory of modernism as a theory of "impersonality," one must attend to the personality of Conrad's theory of the novel, one that cannot be reduced to either romantic self-expression or to a correspondence theory of art where the artist gives his impression to the audience. Only by way of that personality can the most compelling philosophic principles of Conrad's Preface, their significance for his technique and implications for Faulkner, emerge.

These most important of these principles involve, on the one hand, a theory of time, and on the other, a theory of the self. Beginning with the former, I argue that Conrad continually tarries in the Preface—as he does in his novels—with a complicated temporality where the future promises to revise the past and make the present more fully itself. There is a dialectic between what he calls "registering," what appears to be the initial instance of impression, and "rescue," a belated principle of commemoration, lending the novel its role as historiography. These two terms and the movement between them provide an important theoretical basis of the project. I continually return to them as a way of negotiating modernist hearing, despite Conrad's direct appeal to vision in the Preface (which I argue is symptomatic of the suppression of hearing):

- 1) *Registering*. Novelistic activity, Conrad argues, begins in the sensitivity of the "registering temperament," a kind of pre-cognitive sensory observation that receives the world in brute form. The novel records these impressions, allowing the reader to access the events as if seeing along with the narrator for the first-time.
- 2) *Rescue*. The novel then upholds, "before all eyes," the "rescued fragment." What is the rescued fragment? On the one hand, it is a sensory particular that has been submitted to moral reasoning; it is sense-data and personal perception understood in terms of where it "belongs" both in history and the larger community. There is the sense in the Preface that the novel can become a material bond amongst readers. The novel, then, is itself a rescued fragment.

Conrad argues that it is seen by “all eyes:” he hopes for the work not only full recognition, but full synthesis into the memory and experience of the reader. In later chapters, I argue that registering is both a way of writing and a way of reading. Conrad seems to raise images and sensations in an incomplete way, such that they are repeated in his imaginary, returned to, and rewritten in a not entirely conscious or programmatic way. “Rescue” gradually unfolds in my project as, on the one hand, the way that Conrad and Faulkner’s characters and narrators listen, retroactively piecing together events and significance, and on the other hand, the way Conrad and Faulkner write, returning time and again to the sensory particular as it might be heard differently.

In Chapter One, I argue that the dialectic between registry and rescue, then, is not simply a modern aesthetic program, a way of understanding the relationship between sensation and cognition. In the Preface, Conrad essentially argues that the novel *becomes* itself or is only completed upon being read by others; the future of reading promises to revise and make whole the past. In this course of arguing for that unique temporality, I ask, what drives it as a theory of the novel, particularly insofar as it sets Conrad as a writer *apart* from contemporaries from whom he seeks recognition? The enacted theory, in other words, appears to be divided. Based upon my reading of *Almayer’s Folly* as essentially “syncopated,” I argue that the most complicated gesture of Conradian novelistic temporality may be traced to that predicament. It is a prose that can never simply describe what is happening, there being an influx of past and present. The moment is quite literally not “at home” with itself, asking where it might belong.

The image in Conrad, I conclude, is neither present tense nor past tense: it is directed at the reader. Nevertheless, as much as Conrad avows vision, the Preface begins to read like a disavowal. His theory of vision cannot be conceived without an intensive analysis of the acts of *hearing* that accompany it, a hearing that the Preface only *registers* at the level of its own transnational prose. Conrad’s way of hearing his own accented voice, one that marked him as an outsider to the English community, sounds out in that prose. The way Conrad heard his voice, as I turn to in the following chapter, cannot be separated from his theory of vision, what grounds a drama of seeing and hearing throughout his work.

#### *Waiting for the Voice*

The dilemma of homelessness never fully leaves Conrad’s prose. In Chapter Two, “Waiting for the Voice: Echo, Trope, and Narrative as Acoustic Displacement,” I provide an analysis of the novels Conrad wrote between 1896 and 1900, the period in which he is most consolidating his identity or “voice” as an English writer. This period also produces that novels that will find “rewriting” or “rehearing” in Faulkner.

I begin the chapter with a consideration of Conrad’s early encounter with the phonograph just after the publication of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*. In a letter to his editor, David Meldrum, a close interlocutor and friend, Conrad describes his realization that “waves” are the “impalpable substance” or matter beneath all things. He describes matter as a “vibration,” what will become the most central trope, not only in his 1917 description of *Heart of Darkness*, by my sense of modernist listening. Among these “things” that are vibrations, Conrad lists his recently published novel. It is a work that he metonymizes in the letter as “the Nigger.” While I lend extensive attention to the problem of race in later sections of the chapter, I begin by addressing the significance of Conrad referencing this novel in a letter that also addresses his experience with disembodied sound. That coincidence is highly suggestive given that this novel is one that negotiates his relationship to his identity as an English writer. He seems more than attracted to

the disembodied speech provided by the phonograph and it is one that will bear out in the development of his technique, the invention of Marlow in particular.

As Ivan Krielkramp argues in *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, the phonograph is one source of Conrad's use of synecdoche and his later description of Kurtz as a disembodied voice that cannot be accessed; it is a voice that no longer transmits authority or experience. Against claims of disembodiment, I argue that what this voice transmits according to Conrad is highly physical, *substance* and *vibration*. Krielkramp and other critics, such as Vincent Pecora and Bettye London, posit a kind of "nothingness" in Conrad's conception of voice, missing an important opportunity to consider how the reader might in fact be a body that is "on-loan" to the disembodied vibration. That relationship is consistent with Conrad's sense in the 1897 Preface that the reader fulfils the novel. In a real way however, it suggests that the (English) reader becomes a proper or idealized body to house the writer's voice. Furthermore, one must follow the life of the trope of "vibration" as it appears again in his 1917 Note to *Heart of Darkness*, what allows him to rethink his theory of the novel.

Linking Conrad's emphasis upon the voice Marlow as it tells stories in the dark to that vibration, I show how Conrad describes a kind of sound that moves *through* Marlow, as if not properly belonging to him as a "voice." I argue that the critical emphasis upon "disembodiment" prevents us from theorizing the rhetorical and dramatic means by which Conrad *addresses* his reader. There is a sound that is quite literally seeking both persuasion and an affective location. Conrad seems drawn to vibration as a force that both moves beyond and penetrates seemingly stable and contained forms. The novel is not a form, but a vibration. It is as if Conrad had an epiphany with the phonograph. If *voice* is reconceived as vibration, he seems to ask, might it not penetrate the world beyond the book and with it, the body of the reader?

Positioning Conrad's description of Marlow within available theories of the phonograph, most notably that proffered by Adorno, "vibration," I argue, provides a whole new way of conceiving of the voice of modernism. When we say "voice," we seem to mean something much more involved in the life, being, or "soul" of the speaker. Roland Barthes was among the first to radically differentiate between the voice, as an emotional product of the soul, and what he calls "the grain of the voice," as an acoustical product of the body. His emphasis upon the latter is consistent with his thesis in "The Death of the Author" that writing is "the destruction of every voice, beginning with the person writing." Yet, given the extent of Barthes writing on listening, he in no way suggests that we can no longer "listen" to writing once we cease our investment in the figure of the Author. In "Death of the Author," Barthes suggestively concludes with a reference to Greek tragedy and the ways in which the audience is forced to hear that which characters often cannot, in particular, double entendres. While Barthes references something ancient, he at once gestures to our inability to reckon its consequences given our dependence upon the figure of the Author. Were we to relinquish this figure as a product of the rise of bourgeois culture, its emphasis upon the individual, a more modern hearing, unsuppressed by bourgeois culture, could arise.

This vibration has several important consequences for an inquiry into the modernity of Conradian acoustics in Chapter Two: "wavering voice," "narrative incantation," "acoustic displacement," and "tropology." I show how an important shift in Conrad's sense of hearing actually began not with the phonograph, but in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* to later be modified by *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*. Because the chapter does not simply argue for Conrad's development as a writer, but deals with the complex way he echoes works, it will be most helpful to schematize the major terms of Conradian hearing proposed by the chapter.

### 1) *Wavering Voice*

This term, drawn from Brian Shaffer's reading of Conrad, is an elaboration of the theory of the shared image proposed by Chapter One. I argue that Conrad's experiments with narrative voice in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* are directly related to issues of belonging. The narrator, in oscillating between the first person and the third person—what Shaffer briefly notes as a “wavering”—bears testimony to Conrad's struggle with belonging. As times the narrator says “they” and at times “we,” wavering not its subject position, but what I argue to be its *relationship* to the diegesis. Other critics have noted the oscillation and attributed meaning to it. It is not an error, Levenson maintains, but a statement on the nature of meaning for Conrad: the third-person is the location of impression, or “registering,” and the first-person is the location of its elevation into significance, or “rescue.” These two narrative voices are rightly located by Levenson as the training ground for Marlow, one who fulfils both functions. The narrator is, as Levenson notes, “a modernist narrator on a Victorian ship.” Despite rigorously recuperating Conrad as one origin of English modernism, however, Levenson does not consider that such a split between the narrator and the men he documents is a dimension of the same problem that I argue haunts the Preface—a split, a bifurcation, an outsidership, or a failure to belong. In other words, Conrad's dilemma is most generative, producing vital techniques that advance the novel in new directions even as he seeks mere inclusion in already existing discourses. I show how the wavering narrative voice is further complicated by the fact that Conrad specifically argues for a *national* memory upheld by the novel: *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is addressed to England, yet pulls away from that location even as it draws near. Through my reading of the discursive relationship between the narrator and the ship's stoic helmsman, Singleton, I argue that such an address is dramatized at the level of character. The narrator literally *desires* Singleton as one who sees and does not need to speak. The narrator continually recognizes Singleton, however, as one who is lost to representation, a loss not to be confounded with a Victorian set of values. This loss is highly personal, returning us to Conrad's predicament in the Preface.

### 2) *Narrative incantation.*

This term relates to Conrad's development of a disembodied voice that both persuades and casts an aura of affectivity and belief in the listener and reader. The double function of the split narrative voice—to both register and rescue, or to sense and make meaning—gives birth to Marlow as one who does not simply tell stories, but works towards a transformation in his listener. Given his fraught origin in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, Marlow's desire to share experience exceeds the dictates of character. In that way, I approach a reading of Marlow through Conrad's rigorous reading of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. In certain passages of that work, passages that Conrad appears to rewrite, Nietzsche argues that the role of the chorus is to create, by the force of its singing, a series of visions. These visions, seen by the chorus and then stirred in the listener, are the origin of tragic drama. In his description of Marlow, Conrad seems drawn to this power of what I call “incantation” to both persuade and disembody. This floating vision moves its audience to affective “belief” and it helps us to understand how Marlow functions as a narrator. I relate his function to rhetorical theory, Longinus' notion of *diatyposis* in particular: *Diatyposis* is a rhetorical figure that involves “seeing” events through the power of storytelling. The great orator is one who, according to Longinus, through the “music of words,” allows his audience to begin to see the events being narrated and believe them as having taken place. Such incantation is central to understanding why Conrad might have found it necessary to narrate through a speaker such as Marlow, an Englishman.

### 3) *Acoustic displacement.*



Conrad is one who worked at the level of the “sound” of prose, there being a certain musicality that moves the reader to a feeling beyond the consideration of mere sense. That sound is central to how incantation functions. Both in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, the most musical passages often appear when Conrad is describing the voice of Marlow and its effect upon his listeners. It as if Conrad is attempting to duplicate the “aesthetic listening” achieved by the Nietzschean chorus. Marlow, I argue, is a figure who promises to incant another world unburdened by problems of communication, a purely aesthetic listening in which speaker and listener, writer and reader commune in the domain of an emergent shared vision. Such a commune comes at great cost—Conrad’s prose must continually register what must be rejected for Marlow, an Englishman, to be heard. The work of Conrad is no simple incantation, but is burdened by sounds.

In the auto-telic gesture that defines modernism, the narrator of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* lauds the silence of the character Singleton, who, as his name suggests, stands alone. He is untroubled by others and by the faculty of speech. He becomes a kind of pure image that is untroubled by the failures of communication; he merges with the visible world and is a most reticent man. It is in Singleton, or in gazing upon him, that the novel upholds the community Conrad argues is promised by vision. In a relationship to sounds and disruptive voices, Conrad seems to divert sound away from Singleton. Narrative voice “identifies” with this silence. It seeks to achieve a neutral status untroubled by the lived reality of accented voice, a lived reality painfully documented by Conrad’s letters.

On the one hand, it as if the sounds of the Conrad’s physical voice are “displaced,” a term drawn from Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, diverted away from narrative voice, and located in others. One such other is James Wait, a powerful figure in Conrad’s writerly imaginary. He is a black sailor whose noisy baritone and terrifying cough threatens the ship’s community. This displaced sound, as the level of plot, must be discarded, a *telos* that proves most challenging given Conrad’s tendency towards incompleteness. As revealed by letters and prefaces, the conclusion at the level of plot, Wait’s death, appears to drive towards Conrad’s sense of himself as an English writer. Wait must be silenced, he must die, for another identity to emerge.

Nevertheless, Conrad utilizes this technique of acoustic displacement towards an entirely different end in *Heart of Darkness*. This novel is a critical engagement with the project of colonialism. Conrad’s critique occurs at the level of acoustics in ways that have not been adequately theorized. As Marlow moves through the jungle, hearing sounds that he cannot understand, the reader is forced to attend to a certain dissonance between the narrative he provides and what he actually hears. I argue that it is that dissonance that relates to Conrad’s sense that the novel is with “a continued vibration that hangs in the air and dwells on the ear.” Against Achebe and North’s readings of Conrad’s racism, I recuperate the acoustical level as the source of critique. We “hear” colonialism as a logic pushed to its extreme undoing.

At the same time, however, the problem of neutrality haunts the acoustics of Conrad’s novels. Conrad often pauses action so that the terms of communication, interrupted by discord, can be reestablished. In the course of these pauses, the reader’s attention is brought by narrative to outsider, malingering sound before it is contained and diverted from the encounter. In a real way, the *reader* (not the characters) is the audience for this sound; it is the reader who alone is addressed by the narrative or narrative discourse. In other words, the reader “hears” the sounds, the characters voices, and the discourse that is organizing it in a kind of orchestration. It is as if the narrative discourse is introducing an alterior sound *against which* to assert its neutrality. Giving a focused reading of the famous “yellow cur” incident in *Lord Jim* (a scene rarely

attended to in its complicated acoustics), I argue the reader is made to hear certain disruptive sounds in relief against narrative voice itself, which I relate back to Conrad's project of acquiring the "voice" of an English author. Such sounds are not "details" that might be cut from a revision. They are, in a real way, the *substance* of the narrative, what holds it together.

One implication of my inquiry is that "narrative voice," as it appears in narratology as a neutral, grammatical category, is proven to be an evacuation of the acoustical and with it, difference. To listen the world of these texts brings with it questions of personality and identity. There is, however, no way to "resolve" Conrad's use of sound: it is polyphonous and varied. Though such sounds appear to be "outside," an acoustical reading rigorously reincorporates them into the structure that marginalizes them. In an echo-effect, I return to extra-diegetic moments of sound (in letters, drafts, and manuscript) that offer an acoustical narrative of the writer's ways of hearing writing.

#### 4) *Tropology.*

Conrad seems to be working through his sense of himself as a writer in recurring sounds and words. By what method can the reader evaluate them? While James warns in the *Aspern Papers* against the perils of searching for the author in drafts, manuscripts, and letters, the author always-already being dead to such an enterprise, I return to such documents in their tropological nature, performing and arguing for an acoustical modality of literary history. Acoustics, in its specificity, calls for another way of reading and moving between works. I ask after a kind of personality that inheres not to "word-choice" as intention, but rather to repetition and echo in themselves. To locate the "origin" of the trope is an impossibility. Yet, the trope—a single word that continually turns in new inflections—has a peculiar status in Conrad's *œuvre* in that he returns to certain words again and again in the estimation of himself as writer, among them "vibration," "knitting together," "echo," "gift of expression," and more importantly, "Wait." Michael North was the first to note that Conrad describes his own voice as a "gibberish;" it is the word he will use to describe the descent of James Wait voice in death in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. What can we make of that repetition given this novel is his first directly to address itself to the English community? I argue that the trope is overdetermined and impersonal in its persistence *as* concrete material; it lives a strange kind of life, particularly in its contact with the resonant practice of reading. The recurrence of words, sounds, and phrases provides an opportunity to theorize the "author's voice" as dispersed, tropological, and echoic. Conrad is subject to a repetition, to the struggle for self-assertion, his technique being superadditional, augmenting the object with adjectives. It is an attempt and then failure to get it right, one that must, then attempt again.

Rather than simply linking disruptive sound (both physical sound and the irruptive trope) back to the voice of an author, finding there an origin or source, I argue that in the sound's contact with writing, a certain diffusion takes place. It is in that way that the question of literary history or *œuvre* becomes most challenged by the insinuation of the acoustical. There is a curious temporality of reading and writing by which the trope, in turning phrases, articulates registers within the voice of a single word. In that way, the "voice of the author" is to be located in their sedimentation or superabundance. Tropes connect Conrad's voice back to the voices of his characters, their being shared and contrasting dilemmas. It is this way of hearing Conradian composition that opens upon Faulkner, a writer who rigorously reworks sounds and voices that together create a kind of unorchestrated fugue by which he launches his most central critique of identity.

#### *Unorchestrated Voice*

Chapter Three, “Unorchestrated Voice: Faulkner, Song, and the Politics of Archival Listening,” argues that an acoustic recurrence, the repetition of sounds and tropes, provides an important basis upon which to read Faulkner’s innovations in *Absalom, Absalom!*. This chapter reads the novel in the context of Faulkner’s preparatory work, nearly a decade before, with the sounds, voices, story-lines, and characters that would preoccupy that novel. *Absalom, Absalom!*, I argue, largely suggests that what one calls “my voice,” a kind of personal property, is not only a product of having listened to others, but emerges as a remainder of past speech and old ideas; it is a by-product that is not of one’s own choosing and brings with it a burden.

Faulkner draws from Conrad’s narrative techniques, in particular a way of negotiating time and the speaking voice. He resituates these techniques in an American context, its legacy of the Civil War and slavery. Faulkner’s history of reading was highly transnational, however, what already provides a suggestive way of thinking through his complex preoccupation with the regional southern voice. Faulkner’s negotiation of such a particular voice, in its accent, tone, and style, becomes a kind of epicenter, one that vibrates until *Absalom, Absalom!* becomes one of the most important critiques not only of American racial identity, but race as such. If Conrad had sought “belonging,” Faulkner deconstructs the whole to which one might belong. The logic that grounds identity, particularly racial identity, is shown to be at the origin of violence. Faulkner negotiates what I call *acoustical fragments* as remainders of discourses that claim to be synthetic, contained, and whole. There are sounds and voices that escape the logic of identity and return to haunt the structures that have displaced them. Drawing from the Frankfurt School of critical theory, I show how Faulkner’s sense of working is “non-identitarian,” that is, he is concerned for what is excluded by the claim to identity and the otherness that inheres to it. This non-identity poses a unique challenge to the critic, I argue, since Faulkner reworks these fragments across works, the relationship between them becoming one among several registers of his critique. In other words, if Faulkner is theorizing voice as a place where the remainders of discourses gather, i.e. its historicity, then one such voice is that of the author, there being not only a history of reading, but a history of writing that supports a single work or single articulation. I argue that a way of listening to Faulkner’s repetitive use of sound and voice opens upon a way of “doing” literary history that is echoic, a-chronological, and non-identitarian.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner situates his critique within the story of one young man, Quentin Compson, who, in 1909, is about to leave his home in Jefferson, Mississippi for Harvard. Throughout his life he has heard stories and lore of the pre-Civil War era and of one enigmatic man, Thomas Sutpen, who arrived in Jefferson in 1833 out of nowhere. To the shock of the town, he brought with him a motley crew of Haitian slaves, built a plantation, indecently secured a wife, and had two children, one of whom, Henry, murdered another young man, his college friend Charles Bon, at the threshold of the Sutpen plantation or “Sutpen’s Hundred.” Why Henry murdered Bon is a town mystery, though as the novel unfolds, Bon will be revealed to have been Sutpen’s rejected mulatto son, a product of a past marriage in Haiti. Quentin has grown up hearing stories and speculations, especially those of his father and grandfather; one day, however, the point at which the novel begins, he is called by Rosa Coldfield, the sister of Sutpen’s deceased wife, to hear another version. The novel, then, is literally composed of a series of fugue-like voices telling, retelling, and rehearsing the stories of Sutpen. Quentin sorts through these voices as they echo in his consciousness before he leaves the south; he then continues to sort through the residual echoes in his first year at Harvard, the novel ending with what appears to be the build-up to this recurring character’s suicide in an earlier novel.

What does such repetition mean for modernist acoustics? Several central aspects of the story-line appear in a series of short-stories written in late 1927, just before Faulkner began *The Sound and the Fury*, the work in which Quentin dies. Was Faulkner merely drafting or is there rather another activity, less programmatic, one that might be connected to his critical project, a way of writing that is linked to how he asks his reader to read?

*The Sound and the Fury* represents a radical departure from Faulkner's previous writings and is, in many ways, the beginning of his modernism. While it is a "stream of consciousness" narrative, representing a story from four different perspectives, three of which are "in" the consciousness of its characters, one impetus seems to be a recurring sound, the bellow of Benjy Compson, Quentin's brother. Benjy bellows at a world he can neither fully understand nor address. Yet, as what I call a "sonic material," this *sound* or its feeling, rather, appears in a 1927 draft, "Twilight;" it appears in a Compson story that was perhaps begun in that same period, "That Evening Sun," as the moan of black cook, Nancy; it appears at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* as the howl of Jim Bond. Faulkner does not simply repeat characters or events, but sounds. The acoustical fragment opens upon another way of thinking through a writer's history as something other than "development" or revision: is attending to the sounds, one hears how they move between bodies, across gender and race, such that the literary historical reading, in hearing trope after trope, becomes one enactment of Faulkner's critique of identity. Drawing from the personality and impersonality of Conrad's continued vibration, I perform how Faulkner's critique both incites and is continued by the act of resonant reading itself. He calls for the reader's participation, the reader-voice being determined by the same fragments that haunt his characters. Such reading is a practice that is, like the author's voice itself, without normative limit, always-already circumscribed by a lacuna.

There are several events and techniques in *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, that support this reading. In other words, I place the novel, among his most important works, in the context of Faulkner's larger practice as a writer, his re-reading of Conrad, and the central issues in American racial history that anchor his critique. I isolate *Absalom, Absalom!* as the most sustained realization of his critical project. It will be helpful to outline the major gestures of my reading of the novel as I continually oscillate between those three areas of inquiry in a faithfulness to the way sound moves.

1) *archival voice*. Conrad's way of listening to the past, his way of having his characters listen in turn, is taken up by Faulkner towards the formation of an acoustically "archival" narrative voice. I implement this term in two ways. In the first, I negotiate how Faulkner was driven by a sense of retrieval, of commemorating voices that he heard in youth. Faulkner was a voracious reader, but also a listener, growing up hearing tall-tales and old lore until he became a teller in his own right. Quentin seems to dramatize that transformation to some degree, moving from being a listener to a teller. I argue, however, that such a transformation is neither an epiphany nor singular. To address this problem, I draw in several fundamental ways from Foucault who argues that the archive cannot be considered a single, gathering place of documents. It includes ways of forgetting, oblivion, and the disavowal. This movement between remembering and forgetting, then, means that sometimes "statements" are not available to a simple act of memory; sometimes statements were not fully actualized. Linking this notion to the Frankfurt School's theory of immanent critique, I argue that Faulkner's characters, Quentin in particular, seems to perform a way of listening to the past that is not simply listening to what was said or done. An enormous burden is placed upon Quentin as the kind of sensitive temperament Conrad calls for in his theory of the novel. He must "rescue" what never had a full hearing, what

was rejected or forgotten, and what, under current material conditions, could not have been uttered at all. Faulkner generates a complicated technique that might *represent* that excess of direct discourse, as Conrad had in *Heart of Darkness* with acoustic displacement. Faulkner utilizes a peculiar prose motion and structure, one that works through time not in a linear fashion, but a reverberate one. Quentin's voice, an archive, is at the intersection of all of those currents. That intersection lends this novel its most confounding sense of temporality: Faulkner negotiates voices and the desires that drive them in their *agon*, loss, and melancholy. One's "voice" is not simply a *positive* accumulation of all prior instances within and as the present; there are struggles, lapses, and missed encounters within both phenomenal speaking voice and narrative voice.

2) *authority*. With Conrad's experiments with narrative voice in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, one can observe one beginning of Quentin. Conrad's narrators have a sensitive ear that remembers the voices of others; those voices accumulate and culminate in the desire to narrate. Faulkner not only protracts that transformation, but seems to depict the acoustical space of consciousness in which listening to others becomes speaking. In this process, he dramatize how the speaking voice of one is premised upon a phantom authority or "right" to speak, and how speaking, in a situation sanctioned by authority, transmits to the listener not only a story, but the right to tell it to another. There is in the novel a series of patrimonies by which stories are handed down from father to son. In a way that is important for a consideration of the author's voice, that inheritance corresponds to Plato's early argument for the authority of the speaking voice against the secondary term, writing. Given that Plato imagines this authority as a negotiation between father and son—the speaker is the "father" of his speech and writing is "orphaned" by the father—I argue that the handing-down of stories between father and son in *Absalom, Absalom!* correlates with Sutpen's refusal to hand-down his name to Bon. Against these patriarchal movements of the name and authority, however, is a third, unsanctioned movement, one that is the excess or remainder of the logic of authority. Bon, unauthorized by his father, has a son who has a son, the haunting, mixed-race idiot figure, Jim Bond, who howls at the end of the novel. This howl, I argue, is audible testimony to a complete break down in the logic that supposedly guarantees the filial movement of the name, the story, and even race itself.

3) *song*. In the second half of the chapter, I draw from philosophic accounts of music and language in order to prioritize Rosa Coldfield as a voice that performs what "to do" with such suffering under history. Her "mad" voice echoes the material condition of the speaking voice in music; it poetically "signifies" the history of racial and familial violence. She tells a story that is unsanctioned by the accounts given by fathers and sons. She is described as a "nonmother," someone who inhabits a space outside of the family. One of the major challenges of the novel is how to represent this voice that so radically undermines all traditional and metaphysical accounts of what it means to "have" a voice. Faulkner crafts a hypnotic prose—a singing—that does not seem to address the reader's understanding, but to reach him or her on an emotive level. Her violation of chronological storytelling is central to her critique of family, identity, and genealogy. The voice of Rosa, a white woman, becomes a complex intersection of multiple sounds in Faulkner's *œuvre*, echoing black woman's voices in particular. That archive of voice performs a most dramatic critique of the logic grounding race.

4) *suggestiveness*. The emotive level of her voice is complicated by the fact that Faulkner is also representing how Quentin hears her voice, registering or hearing it, before it is submitted to cognition or moral reasoning. The whole of the novel unfolds in such a fashion, Faulkner holding back certain crucial pieces of information such that the reader "learns" what happened

only through inference. Like Quentin, he or she must fill in the missing implications of what a given speaker only suggests. In a material way, at the level of cognition, the reader is implicated by narrative production, forced to collaborate where the novel remains incomplete.

5) *conversation*. The central collaboration within the diegesis is that between Quentin and Shreve. At the end of the novel, for several chapters, they tell their own version of the Sutpen saga in ways that seem to retrieve the details missed by the fathers. Again, there is a modernist aesthetic of the fragment, which for Faulkner, as for Conrad, must be rescued, not in the sense of piecing it back to the whole, but allowing the fragment, as fragment to enunciate an alternative version of an official narrative. The official is what *had* to happen by (socio-ideological) necessity or what was not allowed to happen, such as the love between Judith and Bon, what would have been both incest and miscegenation. As Rosa puts, “there is a might-have-been that is more than truth.” Not only do the scattered stories, manuscripts, and fragmented sounds articulate a “might have been” in the *œuvre*—they “converse”—each life narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to imply other ways that it might have been lived. The task is how to represent that problem. Character is never a function of what has been done, but what might have been done. The acoustical register, I argue, provides the most sustained way of negotiating that duplicity. That Faulkner would place Rosa’s chapter, a highly erotic voice, just before these two boys begin to speak emphasizes the degree to which they speak from a place that is concerned for those registers. They are not concerned for authority and largely aim to deconstruct its most phantasmatic basics through the rescue of fragments.

6) *lending a voice*. In the course of talking, they imagine to themselves, by use of Conradian narrative incantation, what might have happened to Sutpen as a young man to make him so ruthless. They create a story that is the primal scene of authoritative voice, retrieving a tragic potential for what is now Sutpen’s plight. Their dialogue makes use of Conrad’s technique of “wayward” narrative voice, one that moves from “we” to “they” to “I,” such that they move between subject positions, able to inhabit the site of past injury (as had Marlow for Jim) as a cathartic reenactment. They quite literally adopt several “voices” in order to give voice to central lacunae and negated potentials. This enactment, what I call after Adorno “lending a voice,” is one recapitulation of the Conradian theory of the novel as rescue. By the end of their dialogue, the whole to which the orphaned figure might seek admittance is revealed to have been premised upon a more primary orphanhood. In other words, Faulkner’s way of working with acoustics does not expand the whole so that the dejected terms can find inclusion. Rather, he unravels any recourse to totality, racial or otherwise, what is proven to be a fiction sustaining fiction. While Faulkner adopts several of Conrad’s techniques, he unwittingly redirects them, occasioning the deconstruction of the demands that had perhaps incited their emergence and application, among them, a desire for inclusion. Faulkner, in a real way, is the answer-word to Conrad.

#### *Towards an Acoustics of Narrative Voice*

Throughout the project, I use the phrase “narrative voice.” While I try to be quite clear about how I am mobilizing that term and when, there is central slippage that I am more subtly trying to evoke, the slippage between narrative discourse and audible discourse. At times I will write of a function of narrative and at times I will appear to be listening to it as an audible, speaking voice. Given the physics and physicality of acoustics, to argue for an acoustics of narrative voice is to argue for voice that both exceeds and exploits its status in narratology as a grammatical function. “Narrative voice,” as such a function, refers not to speech or a sounding body, but to the subject of the verb’s mode of action, Gérard Genette writes, “the subject here being not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person who

reports it.” It can be first-person or third-person, for example, but narrative voice is not to be confused with the presence of someone speaking.

As it developed out of Genette’s influential work, *Narrative Discourse* (1972), narratology is not concerned for acoustical properties of voice. Narrative voice is a kind of placeholder, designating the structure of language within the work itself, not a person whose voice it supposedly metaphorizes. Narrative discourse refers neither to the “story,” or the events being narrated, nor to a person who might be telling them. Many written narratives not only exceed what is humanly possible (as with omniscience), but they seem to operate in an anonymous space that Maurice Blanchot, in *The Infinite Conversation*, theorizes as a “neuter voice” or the “it.” Both Conrad and Faulkner provide the basis for a theory of an acoustical theory of narrative voice that has significance for how we understand the individual voice of a writer, a narrator, or person.

One might locate the Genettean theory of narrative voice as a provocative turn away from vision as emphasized by Anglo-American formalist critics such as Lubbock. Yet, it remains a search for structure, what is always a kind of “virtual” phenomenon in an attempt to release narrative discourse from its dependence upon the author, one whose speaking voice is metaphorized by the written word so as to secure its meaning, veracity, and life. Narrative discourse frees writing from its existence as a secondary formation of a more primary spoken event. In that turn, however, we lose an important opportunity to think through writing as an event of hearing. Blanchot is an interesting figure in that regard, in that he is both drawn to the impersonality afforded by the concept of narrative voice and is a highly acoustical thinker. He theorizes a generative contact between the physical properties of hearing and the act of writing, arguing for writing as “a space of redoubling, of echo and resonance where it is not someone, but rather this *unknown* space—its discordant accord” that speaks in narrative voice. It is unknown, but sounding, which returns to my series of questions regarding Conrad’s invocation of *Heart of Darkness* as having “a tonality of its own.”

Conrad’s sense of the continued vibration poses problems for an extra-acoustical theory of narrative voice. The vibration is impersonal, but also bears a relationship to the lived reality of speaking as it can inhere to writing and vice versa. On another level, the continued vibration poses a problem not addressed by Genette’s theory of “duration,” one property of narrative discourse. The action of the novel, Genette argues, is with tempo “a little bit the way the classical tradition in music singled out, from the infinitude of possible executions, some canonical movements (*andante*, *allegro*, *presto*, etc.) whose relationships of succession and alternation governed structures like those of the sonata, the symphony, or the concerto for some two centuries” (93-94). Genette isolates four narrative “movements” that are canonical for the novel, ellipsis, pause, scene, and summary, each affecting the “pace” of the relationship between narrative time and story time:

The isochronous narrative, our hypothetical reference zero, would thus be here a narrative with unchanging speed, without accelerations or slow-downs, where the relationship duration-of-story/length of narrative would remain always steady. It is doubtless unnecessary to specify that such a narrative does not exist, and cannot exist except as a laboratory experiment: at any level of aesthetic elaboration at all, it is hard to imagine the existence of a narrative that would admit of no variation in speed—and even this banal observation is somewhat important: a narrative can do without anachronies, but not without anisochronies, or, if one prefers (as one probably does), effects of *rhythm*.

The time of discourse experiences in relationship to its object, the story, a rhythmical effect. Such time is always spatial: summary, as a pure speeding up of time, is also experienced as “further” from the events while a descriptive pause is experienced as “closer” to the event. In direct discourse, Genette notes, the time and space of the signifier mostly closely approximates that of the signified. There is never an absolute coincidence, for the written narrative cannot account for the speed at which the reported words were uttered and will inevitably be read more quickly in one situation than in another.

It is duration, then, not narrative voice, that becomes the most provocative way of thinking through an acoustics of modernist narrative and the modes of subjectivity it implies. Even in direct discourse, there remains, for Genette, behind the voice of a character, a narrative voice that is fully self-coincidental and constituted, supporting and conditioning the reported speech. Despite the implicit temporality of grammatical voice, a being that is *there in time* to commit action, to carry out or to report, Genette distinguishes between voice and duration, emphasizing that the written event can never synchronize narrative time (discourse) and story time (event). Narrative voice, as the subject of verb’s mode of action, effectuates the speeding up or slowing down of duration, it orchestrates, a function that Bakhtin locates in the author in “Discourse and the Novel.” It effectuates the changes in rhythm. Orchestration, for Bakhtin, involves an authorial presence who takes all of the voices, dialogism, and heteroglossias and combines them into a whole that is the novel. Throughout this process, he insists that the author is primary and not rather an effect of such discourse. Though Genette largely evacuates the author, its function subtly returns in the guise of narrative voice, which itself remains itself a-rhythmic, unpaused, and isochronic. There are no temporal breaks within the subject of narrative voice as conceived by Genette; it is the force that effectuates temporal change and that is behind all temporal change in the novel. Narrative voice is in profound repose, moving time, but never moved.

In order to pose this problem in terms of modernism, one might return to Henri Bergson’s account of “duration” at the turn of the last century. His philosophy of time posited the instant as that which includes the succession of prior instants. There is a certain durability to time, Bergson contends. His *Matter and Memory* (1896) is contemporaneous with Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly*, a novel in which he experiments with a narrative that cannot be defined as taking place in the “present:” the narrative is pushed and pulled by the past and future as characters remember events from the past and project themselves into events to come. In a similar vein, Bergson writes of “the survival of images,” beginning to ask a question of time that had only been asked of space:

...beyond the walls of your room, which you perceive at this moment, there are the adjoining rooms, then the rest of the house, finally the street and the town in which you live. It signifies little to which theory of matter you adhere; realist or idealist, you are evidently thinking, when you speak of the town, of the street, of the other rooms in the house, of so many perceptions absent from consciousness and yet given outside of it. ...How comes it that that an *existence outside of consciousness* appears clear to us in the case of objects, but obscure when we are speaking of the subject? Our perceptions, actual and virtual, extend along two lines, the one horizontal...which contains all simultaneous objects in space, the other vertical...on which are ranged our successive recollections set out in time. ... In order to unmask the illusion entirely, we should have to seek its origin and follow through all its windings, the double movement by which we come to



assume objective realities without relation to consciousness and states of consciousness without objective reality—space thus appearing to preserve infinitely the things which are there juxtaposed, while time in its advance devours the states which succeed each other within it.

We prefer, Bergson concludes, “to imagine ourselves unencumbered” by “so much dead weight that we carry with us.” This “double movement,” particularly the way it is described by Bergson, is highly suggestive for a way of thinking through the individual voice (of a writer or speaker) and narrative voice. If Bergson brings the phenomenon of the residual to the experience and possibility of consciousness itself, can this “survival” of images extend to a consideration of modernist voice (of the speaker, writer, or narrative)? Is narrative voice a residual or encumbered phenomenon? In Bergson’s moment, the ontology of voice was under radical question. With the invention of the phonograph by Edison and Cros, individuals experienced, for the first time, the terrifying sense that his or her voice might live on as an object independently from his or body and life. As Friedrich Kittler has shown in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, the invention of the device affected the literary imagination and the sense of what it meant for the author to have a “voice.” The phonograph, a device of preservation, was depicted as maddening and haunting. Conrad’s representation of Kurtz was affected by his encounter with the phonograph to the extent that Kurtz is a “disembodied voice” that lives on after his death. Yet, the phonograph revealed to the modernist imagination a certain *reality* of the speaking voice itself. Conrad seems to ask, can it “preserve” while it advances? How can narrative represent such a voice? Are there narrative voices that can “retain” and narrate, therefore, in a double movement?

The categories of narratology cannot adequately negotiate modernist problems of listening as a faculty of memory. In that way, this project attempts to craft a new acoustical vocabulary from within the specificity of each work. Narratologist Mieke Bal shows how Genette’s main innovation was to identify an intermediary function between the narrator and character, “the focalizer,” the one who “sees and selects” the action which the narrator “speaks.” As Levenson shows, Conrad had already begun to achieve that split by separating two narrative functions in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, a third-person voice that senses (“registering”) and a first-person voice that gives meaning and morally “upholds” for communal memory (“rescue”). Such a divided narrative voice is impossible in a person, for it wavers, appears, and disappears; this voice is both in the world and outside the world. That split confounded Conrad’s reviewers and led them to believe Conrad’s novel was subject to a gross mistake.

How can we hear that split? Despite its anonymity and impossibility, the narrative voice of the *Nigger of the “Narcissus”* remains personal and seemingly affected by the events it describes. It seems to exceed focalization. The term “focalizer” attempts to resolve the tensions within the category of “perspective” or first and third-person voice; there is both a narrator and a focalizer fulfilling different functions. It depersonalizes narrative, unhinging it from the problems of thinking through the reality of lived subjectivity. “[T]he narrator is not a person, only an agent—an ‘it,’” Bal concludes. There is impersonality, a “neuter voice,” as Blanchot might say. Yet, narratology assumes in the category of “voice” the presence of enunciation. The narrator can enforce itself homo, hetero, or metadiegetically, i.e. it can be “a part” of the story as a character, outside of that story, and outside of the world of the novel altogether. Yet, the function of narrative voice is always *it speaks* or *it tells*, harnessed in and as the moment of enunciation, and not rather stratified or invocative of what is not immediately present in and as enunciation “in itself.”

With Conrad as a starting point for a discussion of the acoustics of modernist narrative, several questions arise. How is one to account for a lapse within the heart of narrative, an object to be “registered” and then subsequently “rescued?” How does the reader experience the oscillation in this voice, one that carries with it modulations in tone? The voice of the narrator, quite literally, “sounds” different depending on the activities in which it is engaged, in particular, when it is “hearing” the world and when it is “seeing” it. Perplexingly, “action” and “direct discourse” (both defined principally as an “event” by Bal) are placed on the same plane of focalization—to watch and to hear are not distinguished. For Bal, their recipient, the focalizer, is equally a “spectator:” speech *shows itself*, it appears. Neither Genette nor Bal differentiate between a focalizer which sees, and another function, *one which hears* and then selects overheard speech into narrative discourse. How can seeing and hearing be so confounded? Indeed, they often “accompany” each other in the modernist sensorium, but as supplements, fractured fulfillments, and stuttering negations.

With Conrad in particular, there are often noises that are posited as most disruptive to what the narrator is trying to see. The move from focalization to narrative, from “selection” to representation cannot account for how some sounds are “heard” but not “listened to,” they are registered, but suppressed and displaced. They persist just below the level of engaged attention. There is, quite literally, an acoustical space of narrative, some sounds being privileged and others deprived. There is an acoustical “action” that is 1) not precisely *spectated* (objects sounding out from unseen locations, 2) not self-coincident, i.e. it is heard later as an echo or repetition with a difference, both in the world of the novel and for the writer who appears to return to certain sounds across multiple works, and 3) a *de-selective* hearing sense of narrative that “registers” sounds in a discursive field only to prevent them from being fully attended to or heard in their entirety (not only gossip and whispering voices, but “unpleasant” sounds that disrupt a given action). To pose the possibility of an acoustics of modernist narrative is to ask what practices of reading and listening might account for and follow this field of audibility, not in general, but through the enormous acoustical sensitivity of two writers, Conrad and Faulkner.

## Chapter One: The Incanted Image: Vision, Silence and Belonging in Conrad's Theory of the Novel

...for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure, sun-bathed existence, demand to express itself in the shape of a novel, except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and hearts all the dwellers on this earth?

—Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*

The past, whilst retaining the fascination of a ghost, will regain the light and movement of life, and will become the present.

—Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*

No, Lautreamont and Rimbaud never saw, or had *a priori* enjoyment of what they described, which is to say that they were not describing, but were holed up in the gloomy darkness of the backstage of being, listening to the indistinct outline of accomplished, or accomplishable works, without understanding them any better as they wrote, than we do when we read them for the first time. “Illumination” comes *afterwards*.

—Andre Breton, “The Automatic Message”

The obsession which shackles him to a given subject, forcing him to repeat what he has already said...expresses his apparent need to come back to the starting point, to retrace his steps, persevere by beginning again what for him has never begun, be part, not of the reality of events, but of their shadow, not of objects but of reflections, be part of that which enables words to become images....

—Maurice Blanchot, “The Essential Solitude”

### *Prelude: An Indistinct Outline*

In 1895, Joseph Conrad took an unexpected turn away from his career as merchant marine to write his first work of fiction, *Almayer's Folly* (1895). The story is based upon a man of the same name whom Conrad had encountered four years before in the course of his journey up the Bornean river with the merchant marine. As Conrad was leaving his life as a sailor, he was thirty-eight and entering upon his life as a writer. His fiction would rarely cease to document and reflect upon his experiences at sea.

As Conrad claims in *A Personal Record*, a memoir of his beginnings as a writer, he had never made note of anecdote or an impression in his life—he simply awoke one morning to find that he must write. “The necessity which impelled me was a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon....The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write....I was not at all certain that I wanted to write, or that I meant to write, or that I had anything to write about” (71-3). Conrad attempts to explain his impulse, but he can only recall that his “whole being was steeped in the indolence of a sailor away from sea.” He gazed out the window, wrapped in recollections of Almayer as he had first appeared to Conrad on the bridge of a moored steamer. Unable to recuperate what might have occurred to him as he was driven to write, he knows only that he “was very far from thinking of writing a story,” so far so that his origins as a writer are narrated as a kind of automatism, as if the story of Almayer had begun to write itself.

Conrad would continue to write the novel while still employed at sea. “I remember the tracing on the grey paper of a pad which rested on the blanket of my bed-place. They referred to

a sunset in Malayan Isles, and shaped themselves in my mind, in a hallucinated vision of forests and rivers and seas” (*Personal Record* 71-73). Sitting down to write his first novel was, in effect, a compulsion to reconstitute this vision from memory; yet, it posed a form of deconstitution: “I had given myself up to the idleness of a haunted man who looks for nothing but words wherein to capture his visions,” Conrad writes. “I outwardly...resembled sufficiently a man who could make a second officer...and showed no signs of being haunted” (*Personal Record* 16). Finding himself somewhere other than aboard ship, Conrad appears to be one man, but is really another—a writer. And to be a writer is *to be pulled away* from the world around him into a world of those who are not or are no longer there. He is pulled away from the life of work and the reality of his self as it evident to others by a dual force, both by a real time of past experience and a fantastic time of writing as it seeks to recuperate the past and make it real once more.

To be a writer is to be thrown, to be torn between places and times. We shall find that such a phenomenon is not peculiar to Conrad; yet, he provides a particularly dramatic moment of a personal dilemma inflecting the vicissitudes of technique. Such techniques go on to inflect the possibilities of the modern novel. In Faulkner’s lectures at the University of Virginia, a student provocatively remarks upon Conradian time, seizing upon Conrad’s literary deviance:

I was thinking of the particular thing of Conrad’s effort to surround an event by throwing light on it from past and future as well as present. He seems to stop at a particular event and throw light from this character and that character, and from the front and the rear and the side in a way that I don’t remember other novelists doing before his time. (Blotner 142)

Faulkner responds that all writers are “inclined to do that, only most of them, except Conrad and me, may be a little more clever about it. Probably Conrad was because he deliberately taught himself a foreign language to write in” (Blotner 142). As Faulkner begins to suggest, there is something of Conrad’s relationship to the English language—a way of understanding a writer *as* a writer—that cannot be separated from his negotiation of time, what the student describes as a “throwing light” from the past, future, and present. Such “light,” a kind of constellation, is a negotiation of phantasm, haunting, and loss. To consider not a dead author, but a *haunted author* is to consider his past and his identity—both Conrad and Faulkner approach their projects as outsiders. Those hauntings, however, take on unpredictable shape; the “throwing light” becomes further depersonalized as it separates from the author to follow other courses.

To begin a consideration of the modern novel from the perspective of Conrad’s haunting, is to begin from the perspective of a loss that is not instantiated by writing as death. The loss of identity promised by writing seems to pull Conrad *towards* it, there being a force of a rupture perhaps more prior. He was “haunted man” before turning to the novel; Conrad had *already* been living with Almayer as a ghost—“for many years he and the world of his story had been the companions of my imagination.” There is a dwelling in the story of another, a time and space that is felt to be shared only somehow after writing. Conrad is in the midst of a “hallucinated vision” of companionship. He had stood outside of the moment of experience, inhabited the real as that which draws towards its own absence in writing, as the source of a writing in which companionship becomes possible. His vision continues to stand beyond his reach. Language, written language, is the instrument of “capture,” while it is simultaneously that vision’s *source*. He is captivated by a vision that is only exacerbated by literary production—writing perpetuates a syncopal image of loss, the hallucination being that from which one “awakens” or “returns” to find that its object is no longer there. Conrad then “gives himself up” to that separation from experience. In that act, he initiates himself as a writer.

### *Writing's Detour*

Conrad continued to write *Almayer's Folly* in a bifurcated time and place, while still employed at sea. As he lay in bed aboard ship writing, haunted not only by Almayer, but by a “mood of visions and words”, his mood was interrupted by the voice of the ship’s third officer speaking in the voice of non-literary language: “What are you always scribbling there, if it’s fair to ask?” Having been impelled to share the life of fictional companions, he is drawn back. Conrad recognizes the degree to which he, as a writer, can no longer respond to the world of men and the collectivity offered by the ranks of the merchant marine. There is something of the other world from which he has just returned, to which he is drawn, that is not **to** be communicated except through writing. Conrad then turns the writing pad over, just after Almayer’s daughter, Nina, had said from within his written vision, the sun “has set at last”—Conrad senses, but cannot say to the officer, that “the sun of my sea-going was setting too” (--). Conrad was between his life at sea, the community of men aboard ship, and the call to become a writer and its companions, others who are no longer there and are not yet there.

In order to understand the importance of that moment, a force of being somewhere in the middle and its centrality in Conrad’s literary technique, one can only turn to the novel itself as a record. Indeed, Conrad was a figure who negotiated his relationship to written language and himself as a writer *through* writing—the disjunctive ontology of his own self-initiation as a writer could only bleed into the narrative of his first novel itself, the story of a Dutch trader who gives himself up to an unhappy marriage in the hopes of finding great wealth. The plot of the novel seems less crucial if what one seeks is the sense of impulse, the visionary mood that can bring about writing.

As with all of Conrad’s novels, one must carefully attend to the way in which it *begins*, for it is there that the tenuous, syncopal division between ordinary world and literary world is most forcefully felt. As it begins, a voice calls Kaspar Almayer to dinner: “‘Kaspar! Makan!’” This call is the inauguration of the diegesis, hailing the beginning of the novel’s world. As the world of the novel builds itself, hearing a fragment of foreign “babble” is something which Kaspar must literally turn away from in order for the world of the novel—and perhaps writing itself, the sun “blotting” the horizon—to be established in its visibility. “Conrad confronts his [English] readers with these unexplained foreign sounds at the very threshold of his first work to emphasize the radical difference of [the novel] to follow,” writes Michael North. Yet, this call, “Kaspar! Makan!,” falls onto the page as an echo of the third officer who pulls Conrad back to work and seamanship. “The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour.” The voice is heard, but not listened to; visions draw Almayer’s attention away from responsiveness.<sup>4</sup> As Conrad’s career as a writer is inaugurated—the beginning of the novel telling the reader something about where the novel is to take place and how it will move in time—the consciousness of Almayer is oriented towards a hallucinated future of wealth and plenitude. As he does not turn towards she who calls him, Almayer seems to see gold before him, in the shape and glimmer of the sunset from which he does not break his gaze. He sees “gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured—dishonestly, of course—or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina” (*Almayer's Folly* 3). He stands idle, daydreaming about the distant fruits of honest work; he *must* work for this hallucination to become true, yet, like Conrad, he is locked in a “mood of visions and words.”

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<sup>4</sup> As I will discuss in Chapter Two, an inability to listen is a recurring affliction of his most central characters, often placing a sensitive narrative apparatus at odds with its hero.

Almayer will never turn the imagined gold of the sun into wealth. He is unable to make his hallucination a reality and it stands somehow more persuasive, real and determinative than the terms offered by the immediate world. “He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter” (*Almayer’s Folly* 3).

As a place away from the “coast”—precisely as a zone between here and there, sea and shore—Europe pulls Almayer beyond the Malaysian sunset, there where Nina finds happiness in a world unproblematicized by race. “[N]obody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty” (4). Yet, as Almayer is entranced by the sunset of Malaysia becoming somewhere else, the consciousness of Almayer lapses once again, this time to return **to** the place which is calling him. Almayer finds himself back in the real time of the *récit*, staring at drifting trees from the verandah. His gaze seems restored to the present and thereby to the possibility of response and novelistic action. The reader anticipates that finally the novel will *begin*, there having been no action but reverie, no place, except as it quickly dissolved into Almayer’s thoughts of the future. The first call of the novel remains un-translated for uncomprehending reader who at best, has no sense who is calling Almayer—“Kaspar! Makan!”—and who at worst, cannot understand the Malaysian language she speaks. Misunderstanding casts an acoustic shadow upon the particularity of the novel’s narrative unfolding, displacement upsets its will to take place. The Anglophone reader is literally dislocated, put out of place.

As Almayer returns to the setting, the time of narrative begins to answer to another directive, pulling once more away from the *récit* and the reader’s understanding along an alternative axis. “Almayer’s quickened fancy distanced the tree on its imaginary voyage, but his memory lagging behind some twenty years or more in point of time saw a young Almayer, clad all in white and modest-looking, landing from the Dutch mail-boat on the dusty jetty of Macassar” (4). Almayer sees in three realms at once, the trees in their material presence, distanced by a fancy which is quickened forward while a memory lags backward. He essentially sees himself as he once saw, taking himself as his object of vision; as a protagonist, he might take shape. Yet the reader finds no comfort in this vision, for in another gesture of deferral, the face of Almayer—a countenance which turns away from the voice which calls him towards the memory which lags behind it—remains opaque and without manifestation.

It is in this forestalled temporality, wherein present time continually draws back towards the past in order to draw towards the future, that the drive of this narrative is suddenly felt. It is no simple *récit*, but a record of a time that is perpetually pulling at itself, that is not at *home* with itself, such that what is called “present” is only ever a past that is pushing towards revising itself in the future. Does not Conrad’s compulsion to write here make itself felt?

In *A Personal Record*, Conrad reflects upon his impulse to write and reconstitute this image of a man, an image that was, in effect, never fully constituted. In what follows, the memoir’s most central scene, Conrad does not grasp the image, but is in its grip, falling back precisely to the place of impulsion, exactly or somewhere just alongside of where Conrad had been when he first began to write the novel. His memoir recreates the scene of his first encounter with Almayer in such sensory detail that it is as if Conrad, seventeen years later, begins to write *Almayer’s Folly* once more. Character re-doubles again. He sees a past image of Almayer upon a jetty, just as a fictional Almayer once saw a haunting, younger vision of himself: “The forests above and below and on the opposite band looked black and dank; wet dripped from the rigging upon the tightly stretched awnings, and it was in the middle of a shuddering yawn that I caught

sight of Almayer. He was moving across a patch of burnt grass, a blurred, a shadowy shape....” The momentary glimpse of Almayer takes pages to unfold; Conrad aims to hold the briefest, passing impression in suspension. He has set out to explain for his reader *why* he writes; he appears to evade this task, yet his evasion is his answer.

For Conrad, to understand *why* he writes *is* to write; it is a form of writing that reproduces the fractures of writing even as it seeks to observe them. Why he takes such pleasure in suspense—why he seems to locate himself in its folds—the reader cannot yet understand. The reader can only follow Conrad as writing takes its detour.

### *Syncopation*

Conrad cautions his reader, by way of preface, that he will violate standards of linear storytelling in narrating his own story, making his memoir no exception to his rule of fiction. Conrad, as one who might authorize his own act of writing, is derailed by the course of a written recollection that does not want to move towards narrative closure, but to suspend the impression somewhere in the midst of a hallucinated image. He begins to tell the story of coming to writing only to lose the explanatory drive by the very means that seek to reclaim it. Conrad is being driven by the force of writing as that which exceeds its own narration—writing cannot be observed, but can only recreate itself. That very excess in fact defines Conrad’s prose. It is a prose in which the conditions of sensation are more central than the object sensed, overtaking the scene of explanation and pivoting Conrad away from the task and towards another objective. The author is lost in his own prose, a prose which, like Marlow’s yarn in *Heart of Darkness* (“the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale”), surrounds the object of memory, seeming to surround Conrad himself as he gazes at the re-emergent shape of Almayer. Conrad seeks to remember himself remembering Almayer and thereby to locate his identity as a writer; yet, the reader is struck instead by his concerted effort to be enveloped.

Every novel begins as nothing, nowhere and in no time, constructing first a face and then a whole “world” which it senses. Nevertheless, the world of *Almayer’s Folly*, the present-tense place and time which Almayer inhabits, literally fails to be built under this pressure exerted by daydreaming dilating into past. As Almayer slips into the recollection of the past, the sun begins to set. The reader is displaced from the place and time of the *récit*, the past pulling Almayer away from the diegesis and the novel’s sense of enworlding. After having fallen into recollection, he is then pulled, once again, from the absent-image in which he is absorbed towards the present horizon. The time of the novel again becomes syncopated, the rhythm of linearity shifting in relation to itself, falling ahead and then falling behind, absorbed into itself away from progression, until finally, Almayer awakens from his vision:

He shivered in the night air and suddenly became aware of the intense darkness which, on the sun’s departure, had closed upon the river, blotting out the outlines of the opposite shore. Only the fire of dry branches lit outside the stockade of the Rajah’s compound called fitfully into view the ragged trunks of the surrounding trees, putting a stain of glowing red half-way.... He had a hazy recollection of having been called sometime during the evening by his wife. To his dinner probably. (Conrad *Almayer’s Folly* 9-10)

The meaning and source of the call, “Kaspar! Makan!”, is finally translated, but it has come at a cost. The place of the novel has been constructed without us, with no witness. Almayer, lost in reverie, has missed the time, the interval between sunset and darkness. It has passed and will never be seen, there being no one, no narrating consciousness, to recuperate it—the narrative

cannot even decisively say why or how long ago Almayer has been called—to his dinner, “probably.”

The “world” of *Almayer’s Folly* has begun as unworlding, fragments which miss the will to appear. The outlines of the opposite shore come into relief against the sun until finally “blotted” out in darkness as a kind of failed writing, for the transformation between sunset and darkness has not only been missed by Almayer, who looks through the image of the sun towards another vision, but is unseen by the narrating eye which strains to realize Almayer’s inner view and give it world.<sup>5</sup> Who is he? Almayer is only a look turned alternately towards the present, the future, and the past. Does not the reader begin to “see” Almayer in that instance? Has he not been in some manner described, lent a face, by that which he views? What kind of face is this, one which has no features, no expression, and no contours except those lent by the objects, visions of the future and the past, which push around it?

Scribbling aboard ship, Conrad sees “the tracing on the grey paper of a pad.” As he writes, “they referred to a sunset in Malayan Isles, and shaped themselves in my mind.” If the face of Almayer had been revealed in that effort, the shaping of his mind around things that are no longer there or never will be there, then it is precisely *in* that gesture, insofar as it flouts the act of explanation or “setting” as taking place or locatedness, that Conrad as a writer is himself revealed. The narrative seems to “miss” its own call, there being something of the task of writing that meets with its own failure—it is a writing that shares in hallucination rather than observe its occurrence. Conrad attempts to describe the impetus to write, but can only once again hallucinate its lost object, a missing time and place, or perhaps more precisely, a time and place that “is” only insofar as the excess of description, the excess of writing can maintain it. The two are in this moment co-extensive: Conrad seeks the source of writing and finds only the force of being pulled towards an irrecoverable and impossible image. The reader can only get caught up in the rhythm of that same drive.

#### *Fiction’s Opening*

The drive to become a writer as it escaped Conrad’s powers of narrative will prove to be important for thinking through precisely what kind of writer he would become. Indeed, the principle narrative innovation of *Almayer’s Folly* is one that Conrad would continually negotiate, standing precisely in excess of developmental discourse of mastering himself as a technician: his (mis)handling of time and place. *Almayer’s Folly* has difficulty “advancing,” characters and discourse itself failing to reach their goals. It is a story which begins in one moment only to leap forward and back into other distant, irrecoverable and hallucinatory places, haunted precisely by the “mood of vision and words”—captivating, yet uncapturable—that determined and compelled Conrad’s desire to write. The novel does not fulfill that mood, but becomes its continuation, compelling it towards an unreachable destination. Indeed, that compulsion seems to be the primary experience of the Conradian novel, a phenomenology of reading that draws from the predicament of writing itself.

His account of his origins as a writer provides a most suggestive means of approaching the narratological questions associated with the act of reading intersecting with the author’s subjectivity. Conrad’s account, or rather, his failure to fully account for his desire to write, emphasizes the degree to which positionality—intra- and extra-, “inside” and “outside”—is constantly worked-through at the level of narrative technique, in particular, the negotiation of narrative time as it tends towards displacing characters from their most immediate surroundings.

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<sup>5</sup> As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the trope of “blots” continually appears in Conrad’s work, most notably at the end of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* when Singleton fails to sign his name.



The moment of finally fastening upon a position in relationship to the narrative—the position of a technician who is extrinsic to narrative development—proves impossible for Conrad himself, a writer for whom positionality is never given *a priori* in advance of the act of writing but whose unfolding is a central force in narrative and plot development.

As Ford Madox Ford once commented of their co-writings,

Conrad's tendency and desire made for the dramatic opening; the writer's as a rule for the more pensive approach; but we each, as a book would go on, were apt to find that we must modify our openings. This was more often case with Conrad than with the writer, since Conrad's books depended much more on the working out of an intrigue which he would develop as the book was in writing.... (Ford *Joseph Conrad* 183)

This sense of the “opening,” without pensive “rule,” which must then continually be revised and modified, suggests that the lining between the fictive world and the writing world remains precisely that: a sensitive, expanding and contracting intrigue moving in two directions. Yet Ford not only speaks of a plot or figures that were unsettled in advance; he intimates the degree to which Conrad's identity as a writer was bound up with a technical indeterminacy. It was that being-bound-up with the act of writing, the visions it produced and writing as it bled hallucinatorily into the ordinary world, that made him something other than what Ford calls “the writer.” By that mysterious formulation, “the writer,” one can only assume that Ford designates an author who is divested of personal dilemma, standing outside of written production, if not as its overseer, than at least at some level of remove.

Proximity has consequences for the phenomenology of reading that have yet to be fully reckoned by the theory of the novel. Conrad would never stand “outside” of his writing as a theorist, schematizing what it is to read, except for his 1897 critical preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*. It is there that he makes his most famous assertion that the task of the novelist is “above all, to make you *see*.” While Conrad stands outside of his own production, examining the act of writing as an object, making forceful declarations about what his novel will achieve, the preface only reproduces the dilemma accompanying his hallucinatory impulse to become a writer. There is, one might say, a restaging of his dilemma at the theoretical level, the level at which a writer should be most “clear” and self-present. Such a dilemma, inhering to his attempt to assert writerly mastery, separates him from an English critical tradition in which he at once participates. Such a dilemma, however, binds him to an impossible world of what he calls “companionship.”

The drama of writing in *A Personal Record*, writing as it pulls away from the world so as to pull towards it, thus takes on another dimension in the preface, extending an aesthetic and personal problematic into social domain. Both the preface and *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* itself represent Conrad's determination to become not just a writer, but an *English* writer, composing a social novel for the benefit of an English audience. At stake in his theory of the novel is a certain form of relation to otherness, the *place* and *locatedness* of the novel amongst readers in what Conrad calls the “visible world.” While he insists upon the neutrality and even silence of that world, it is a world inflected by problems of communication, nationality, and belonging.

If the drama of becoming a writer is never fully, as Ford suggests, “worked out” before a given task, it is continued in and by his novels as they work-through their own determination, ground and, as with *Almayer's Folly*, their very right to exist. The preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* condenses that dilemma in order to arrive at an originary problematic: his novels'

right to address themselves to a public. Conrad, a Polishman, was determined to adopt the English language as his own, to write novels in English and no other language; it was a determination that conditions the particularity of his prose. While the critical preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* drives toward reifying his authority to address the English reading public, his handling of narrative time and place, both within and outside of the genre of the novel, tends towards setting his reader somewhere *outside* of narrative setting, to displace him or her from what is taking place. In other words, a condition of exile inheres to his form of address. This conflicted phenomenology of reading—being outside and yet courted into—is one that restages the predicament of written production itself, its inability to approximate the hallucinatory images which Conrad claims his words aim to “capture.” Writing, as what Jacques Derrida calls a “supplement” to presence and experience, is “exterior, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it” (*Of Grammatology* 145). Paradoxically, however, the novel becomes an opening, writing promising to resolve the problems of experience.

In his seminal essay “Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative,” Edward Said argues for the pressing importance of the biography of Conrad as it seems to redouble the self-distancing ontology of writing:

Conrad was trying to do something that his experience as a writer everywhere revealed to be impossible. ...For what Conrad discovered was that the chasm between words saying and words meaning was widened, not lessened by his talent for words written. To have chosen to write this is to have chosen in a particular way neither to say directly nor to mean exactly in the way he had hoped to say or to mean. No wonder that Conrad returned to this problematic concern repeatedly, a problematic concern that his writing dramatized continuously and imaginatively. (116)

There is a certain lure of writing, a pull that then pulls away from itself. That interior distance within the work of Conrad is, nevertheless, one that politicizes the ontological account of writing as it has been provided by post-structuralism. The lack of a “full presence” of spoken voice, the “chasm between words saying and words meaning,” has consequences for an English writer who never felt at home speaking English with a heavy accent, as Conrad did, that seemed to him to announce what he felt to be his alien status. If writing can only restage a failure to re-unite itself with the signified, to install itself in its place as a “complement,” one must then ask what problems of location, nationality, collectivity, fellowship and belonging arise to *recondition* writing as a burden marked by foreignness and the reality of exile? Such problems do not go away with written narrative, nor are they placed to the side the moment Conrad-as-author closes his mouth to pick up his pen. They rather inhere in the desire to write, to the particularity of his writing’s unfolding and to the novel’s attempt to re-open, fully and without chasm, upon the reality of the reader.

As I have already begun to suggest, such an opening no longer calls for a poetics, but an *acoustics*, a form of listening to writing that attempts to hear the voice—both figural and phenomenal—which conditions it. The acoustic dimension will at first appear delayed, for Conrad’s direct and most avowed aim is “above all, to make you *see*.” Before undertaking such an act of listening to writing—or perhaps allowing the ear to do what it is does best, to open and absorb before the understanding seizes upon a form—one must first ask what it is that Conrad thinks he “sees” *just beyond* the realm of the book and if it can even be accessed, and at what cost to the voices he hears so strongly.

### *An Autobiographical Vision*

In 1897, Conrad, born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, completed *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, his third novel based upon his 1884 journey from Bombay to England with the British Merchant Marine. Now at age forty, this Polish-born expatriate had been preoccupied with the faces, languages and landscapes foreign to most readers in England; yet, with the central narrative of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, a portrait of an English crew in their daily relation, reconciling themselves with a dying mate, Conrad chose not only to depict a journey home to England, but to make a direct appeal, in the novel's famous critical preface, to the "solidarity" of his audience. As Robert Eric Livingston notes, it is a novel which "Conrad wrote quite literally to make a name for himself: at stake in the production of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is the possession of a textual practice recognizable as the work of 'Joseph Conrad,' the establishment of an authorial identity" (134). The novel at once represents his mounting professionalism as a writer and what Livingston calls "the emergence of a distinctively Conradian thematic" (134). Yet, it is not simply an "authorial identity" that Conrad sought within his textual practices and their ratification in the Preface. The novel's task, Conrad explains, is to "rescue" the image of the past and with this image, to show his readers what "binds" them together as men. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is addressed to England. It positions itself as the image of a community of sailors on the verge of extinction, the redeemer of a national memory.

The Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* was composed with excitement and fervor in the months following his completion of the novel. It is Conrad's only sustained meditation on his technique as a "worker in prose," calling for the solidarity of his readers by means of the immediacy of the "visible world." Conrad articulates this sense of novelistic vision as a bond that might emerge beyond the confines of written and spoken language, beyond the novel itself. Nevertheless, Conrad's famous appeal to vision in the Preface does not, however, contradict his dramatic turn to the oral storyteller, Marlow, in the works published just after *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. These stories, "Youth," *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*, are works in which Conrad would secure the national recognition that had begun to grow with his third novel. Though Conrad makes no directed mention of conversation or oral narrative in his artistic credo, one whose convictions he would never fully reject, these are works that take place almost entirely between quotations. The role of the speaking voice and listening in Conrad's written technique, which I will turn to in Chapter Two, cannot be understood without attending to the problems accompanying his theory of the novel as a "presented vision."

In a way that seems strange for an author who will later become preoccupied with spoken language, Conrad suggests in the 1897 Preface that the author brings a shared past not only to language, but to the order of visual representation. It is a representation which, transforming itself, becomes an immediately accessible image before the eyes of his reader, allowing the reader to see not only a previously veiled or forgotten object, but to see by means of a formerly inaccessible mode of sight. The image of the past, rendered startlingly present, will ultimately return the reader to the presence of the phenomenal world, the reader newly able to see what binds him to other men. In becoming an image, one that commemorates a national past and a natural bond between men at sea, Conrad argues, the novel promises to undo the differences between its beholders, exposing them to a capacity to see together an object in a moment of physical and affective kinship. As *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* drives towards depicting men in their solidarity, Conrad's theory of the novel is a social theory, driven by a sense of the written word as that which transforms into an image in order to bind together not simply the audience, but as well the audience with the author himself.

In its emphasis upon kinship, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* has been largely understood as a dramatization of the tensions between the two social orders distinguished by Ferdinand Tönnies in his 1887 *Community and Society*. As Watt suggests in his influential monograph, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Conrad reprioritizes a lost sense of the natural order of *Gemeinschaft*—a community in which a social hierarchical position is obligatory and given—over and against the “free, conscious, rational, and willed choice” that sustains *Gesellschaft*, a fragmented and plural society under industrialization that “exists only to serve the specific interests of individual members, not those of the community at large” (112). *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* dramatizes Conrad’s lament over the predominance of *Gesellschaft* insofar as the novel radically rejects the individualistic impulses of labor revolt—Donkin’s uprising—surging against the bonds of the ship and its microcosmic community. In the Preface, however, Conrad is concerned with the sensory level of community, asserting the possibility of a singular vision, men seeing the phenomenal world in common.

It was Frederic Jameson’s seminal account in *The Political Unconscious* (1980) that began asking after the political stakes of the primacy of vision in Conrad’s novelistic sensorium. Jameson emphasizes Conrad’s call for vision as a response to the crisis of the aesthetic under capitalism. Jameson proposes an ideology critique, and with it, a destabilization of the traditional humanistic reading of Conrad’s preface as either a purely aestheticist call for art’s independence or a formalist demand for the novel’s artistic value. Conrad’s call for a collectively held form of vision is a desire for oneness, Jameson contends, a pre-capitalist mode of relating to the external world that might undo the “corrosive” and fragmenting effects of market relations, the rationalization of production and with it, of all life. Conrad’s call becomes understandable, in part, as a psychic response to “the repression of the aesthetic” in modernity, the over-valuation of the rational functions of the mind and industrial capitalism’s relegation of the senses to “a kind of psychic backwater” (209). Under these conditions, Jameson explains, subject and object are sundered as:

...the older, inherited ways of doing things are broken into their component parts and reorganized with a view to greater efficiency according to the instrumental dialectic of means and ends, a process that amounts to a virtual bracketing or suspension of the ends themselves and thus opens up the unlimited perspective of a complete instrumentalization of the world. (208)

Conrad’s descriptive capacity, one that often lingers over the visible in obsessive detail and super-adds adjectives, is an “aestheticizing strategy,” an attempt to mend the sundered sensible world by rewriting it in the code of a sensory absolute. His “sensorium virtually remakes its objects,” Jameson concludes, “refracting them through the totalized medium of a single sense, and more than that, of a single ‘lighting’ or coloration of that sense” (218).

As described by Conrad in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, however, the novel’s sense of immediate vision is understood as that which binds men not only to the sensible world, but also to each other. Why does vision, above any other sense, guarantee the possibility of “solidarity” and how is such a vision made possible by the written word? How is one to understand Conrad’s own position as a writer in terms of the image he claims his novel will instantiate, within the English community he imagines will behold it? At stake is not simply advocating of one social order over another, nor one form of vision over another, but the status of the writer as he might be authorized to make such a critical commentary, to craft the means of a shared vision, and to address an English community as one of its own.

Conrad's theory of the novel addresses his audience in the most literal sense: *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* represents his courageous determination to refashion himself as an English author, writing the story of Englishmen and depicting a national history in its national language in order to find the force and presence of an English "voice." Conrad's sense of vision is thus haunted by an acoustic displacement: the problem of foreign accent that so plagued his English speaking voice. As I will argue, the trope of vision is the displacement of phenomenal voice, Conrad attempting to theorize the conditions of possibility for being "heard" as a fully authorized English author. The generative and the historical thus collaborate in Conrad's theory of the novel in difficult ways: it is a theory that attempts to give reality and credibility to his right to envision Englishmen in their solidarity. At stake in his sense of vision is not simply the *preservation* of one social order, but the *invention* of an imaginary social order that might make his English authorship possible where sound otherwise mitigates its force.

Conrad's sense of vision and relationality, driven by his position as an outsider, must be brought to bear not only upon Conrad's theory and practice of the novel, but equally upon the broader role it can often play as modernist narrative pursues its ardent commitment to experimentation. It is a technique that makes of those who adopt it ontological outsiders within their literary moment. To "relate" to Conrad's theory of the novel and technique is to be set-apart: Conradian narrative voice is a longing voice that draws towards that from which it is separated, exposing the conditions of possibility for neutral belonging in a given order.

Upon writing *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* in 1897, Conrad, a naturalized citizen for nine years, had already begun to establish himself as a central presence in the English literary scene. His path to becoming a writer in the English language—the only language in which he was ever to write fiction and which he only learned to speak fluently in his twenties—had been circuitous and largely unanticipated, as was his eventual settlement in England. His biographer Norman Sherry describes a rather painful upbringing. In 1863, his family and father, a translator and radical political dissident, were exiled from the Czarist-ruled Polish Ukraine to a distant province in Russia. After spending his early childhood there in exile, an experience that hurried the death of his already ill mother, Conrad returned in 1869 to Poland where his father died of consumption, leaving him an orphan at the age of eleven. Precocious and willful, he went on to live in a series of boarding houses under the direction of his maternal uncle who had never fully approved of his brother-in-law's political writings. In 1872, inspired by his childhood readings of adventure literature—an image which would later haunt the beginning portrait of *Lord Jim*—Conrad turned against his guardian's wishes, leaving Poland for the French merchant marine. After spending four years in France, learning the language fluently and sailing several times to the West Indies—journeys which he would later document in *Heart of Darkness*—Conrad joined the British Merchant Marine. Not knowing "six words of English," he traveled alone to Lowestoft, England (Conrad *Personal* 103). By 1886, he earned his master mariner ticket and became naturalized as a British citizen.

Conrad would never lose the sense, as he confessed in 1907 to writer Marguerite Poradowska, that "l'Anglais m'est toujours une langue estragère" (Greaney 1). That he could only utter this confession in French, his second language after Polish, begins to touch upon the sense of alienation lingering within his determination to become an English author. After leaving the merchant marine to become a novelist, recollections of his encounters at sea would come to dominate Conrad's prose, generating his decision to write deeply autobiographical fiction. His prose is, Cesar Cesarino writes in *Modernity at Sea*, "often preoccupied with searching the shadow-lands of memory for those pivotal moments among the scattered pieces of past life that

might redeem the amorphous and meaningless flux of time by turning it *a posteriori* into narrative forms” (197). *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is not untouched by that preoccupation, what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthes calls the “autobiographical compulsion”—“the need to tell, to confess, to write oneself” (140). Yet, as Conrad writes in the 1914 Author’s Note to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, “its pages are the tribute of my unalterable and profound affection for the ships, the seamen, the winds and the great sea—the moulders of my youth, the companions of the best years of my life.”

While that assertion echoes Conrad’s sense that the phantoms of *Almayer’s Folly* gave him “companionship,” it begins to set *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and its preface somehow apart from the autobiographical impetus of that first work, a work that attempts to recreate the topography of a journey and the image of a man once encountered. With *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, Conrad attempts to recreate still more—an epoch, a way of life at sea. The pre-modern phase of the sea as Conrad experienced it, a way of accessing meaning through the bonds of *Gemeinschaft* relatedness, is in its twilight and otherwise inaccessible to subsequent generations; yet, the novel might provide it verisimilitude. *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is, as Watt suggests, “avowedly an attempt to commemorate a vanishing phase in the history of the sea” (Conrad 114). It is not simply a personal record, but a social tableau. Such a tableau is complicated by the fact that Conrad commemorates a Victorian way of life in a new narrative form, there being little action, a play of voices, and a narrator that has a most complicated split relationship to the story he tells. This novel, as W.E.B. Du Bois might say, “ever feels its twoness,” written at the cusp of the twentieth century and the brink of an English literary community.

The impulses to represent the personal and commemorate the social are deeply intertwined, gesturing to a theory of the selfhood that underwrites Conrad’s theory of the novel. It is a theory of self that seems to arise of the author’s own particular history, making his theory of the novel a fraught and necessary critical project responding to the demands of personality. In continually calling for oneness and kinship, Conrad challenges what one might mean by the term “autobiography” and the scope of the subject it can represent. The autobiographical compulsion, otherwise so determinative of Conrad’s writings, takes on in the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* an alternative register, one irreducible to questions concerning autobiography as the need to represent past moments of an individual life. Conrad appears compelled to write about others and the possibility of their community *in* representing his own life. It is precisely in the excess of the autobiographical—a sense of subjectivity as that which ebbs into otherness, of the collective as the foundation of the individual, and of the future as that which guarantees the shared status of the past—that Conrad’s theory of the novel finds an ethical dimension. In other words, Conrad’s theory of the novel is not simply aesthetic in nature (though it appears to be and dramatizes itself as such). It is a theory of the self and nation that might underwrite it: to read is to “see,” but to see for Conrad, is to relinquish one’s particularity to the whole, and to relinquish a certain form of experience in the present-tense. It is a way of understanding narrativity that will have a powerful influence on twentieth-century novelists, both in England and America. In theorizing the novel, Conrad never ceases to ask *who* the subject is who reads and writes, and *where* such a subject might belong, a seminal line of questioning for his heirs.

As I have already intimated, despite the centrality of Conrad’s literary sense in England and beyond, the formative force within his theory is his having been *set apart* from the English theorists of his generation. The question of subjectivity is central for Conrad in contrast to his contemporaries, novelists and critics who tend towards positioning the novel as an objective

means of representation, asking not who the self is who reads and writes, or how that self might belong to the world represented by the novel, but rather how the novel might produce its most authoritative verisimilitude. In pursuing the meaning of Conrad's divergence from a series of critics who similarly emphasized vision, one must pose a number of questions. Why is the "image" Conrad's most avowed object? How can the image be the locus of the *bios* of autobiography and that which binds the individual member to the collective? How is the image to take shape from the written word, yielding the experience of solidarity? What does it mean for Conrad, as one who willfully adopted the English language as his own, to theorize a shared vision of the collective English past?

*The Novel That Oversees*

In his second autobiography, *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad documents the traditions, codes, and modes of relating at sea. As a novel, however, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* aims at capturing the sense of nineteenth-century sea-life in the vicissitudes of narrative and character, which together form what Conrad calls in the Preface a "presented vision." As Conrad suggests, it is a literary vision which secures and makes "visible" what is vanishing. In many ways, Conrad's sense of the novel as a historical vision invokes and approximates the discourse of "showing," a term which had begun to circulate in English critical circles via Henry James' "The Art of Fiction" (1884). A novel that "shows," James argues, is a novel that objectively renders, removing the author from the impression he recreates and thereby allowing the work itself to become "sensible, wide-awake." "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" (4), James writes. It is in this capacity for dispassionate recreation that he locates the common cause of the historian and the novelist:

As the picture is reality, so the novel is history....The subject-matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian. ...To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer.... (5)

For James, the novel's objectivity, the "illustrative" certainty of that which it recreates, is precisely what it shares with history, the shift away from "telling," as the desire to represent oneself, towards the impulse to represent "life" and other men. In a 1905 essay dedicated to James, Conrad will agree, writing that "fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing" (*Darkness* 286). In the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, the novel-as-history is bound, just as it is for James, to the possibility of showing reality and the novel as a mediated vision.

Nevertheless, revising James' "task" of the novelist-as-historian—"to represent and illustrate life"—Conrad declares that "to snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is above all, to make you *see*." Throughout this project, I will continually re-negotiate this declaration in its multiple registers: James' sense of illustrative certainty is wholly absent; time is not objectively witnessed, but "rushes" and is felt; there are phases of life which must be "seized;" there is feeling, hearing, and seeing; there is a relation, a "you" to whom the personal experience suddenly becomes addressed, one that ties the reader "unbreakably to other men." Indeed, the problem of relation not only separates Conrad's maxim from James' drive towards objectivity, but becomes irreducible to the problems of capitalism and *Gesellschaft* fragmentation. There is a problem of belonging and relationality that governs novelistic temporality, as with the

“syncopation” of *Almayer’s Folly*, a narrative in which the moment is never fully at home with itself, pulled in multiple directions.

The negotiation of time by both reader and writer appears to force the culmination of Conrad’s maxim into vision, separating it from the discourse of showing as advocated by James. The problem of time and the problem of relationality collaborate in Conrad’s most well known maxim in difficult ways, making it impossible to truncate it into the often cited, “above all, to make you *see*.” His sense of a dramatic continuum between theory and practice, novel and novelist, script and post-script, reader and writer, present and past, sets Conrad apart from the theories of the novel proffered by his contemporaries, providing a sense of vision unexplainable through its more surface allegiance to an English discourse and the prominence of vision within it. There is what can only be called a “placelessness” of the preface within the history of the theory of the novel in England, a placelessness that emerges precisely *in* its concern for the “shape of a novel” as a shared place between men that not only reconciles difference, but dialectically resolves problems of the past into a stable and recognizable present. Such problematics are otherwise absent from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novel theory in England, a formalism which tends towards the evacuation, or as we will find, the neutralization of what most concerns Conrad in his development of novelistic technique.

#### *The Art of Fiction*

In its emphasis upon visual immediacy, the preface is in direct conversation not simply with James, but with a critical discourse which, in the decade before Conrad turned away from the sea and toward writing, began elevating the novel’s social and theoretical status. With his 1884 lecture to the Royal Institution, “The Art of Fiction,” Walter Besant had opened what James calls “the era of discussion” (*Fiction* 4). His lecture incited responses later that year by Andrew Lang, James, and Robert Louis Stevenson. In 1891, *The New Review* published two symposia devoted to the topic, “The Science of Fiction” and “The Science of Criticism,” featuring Besant, Thomas Hardy, and Paul Bourget, and James, Lang, and Edward Gosse, respectively (Spilka 101). In 1895, Vernon Lee, friend to Henry James, published “On Literary Discussion.” Mark Spilka in “The Art of Fiction Controversy” sees Lee’s commentary as concluding the British contribution to a debate “through which the novel in England and America acquired its first modern credo” (101).

Though his Preface was written only two years after Lee’s essay, Conrad is not included by Spilka among the architects of the “art of fiction” debate. The troubled publication history of Conrad’s preface—a history of rejection—underwrites its alien status, that which Roland Barthes would perhaps call “an extreme solitude,” suggestive of an alternative origin story not to be confounded with what Spilka calls the “first modern credo” of the novel despite being its contemporary. The Preface had originally been rejected for inclusion in the first publication of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* by Conrad’s editor at Heinemann’s. As Watt notes, Conrad himself expressed doubts about the preface in a letter to Garnett on August 24, 1897, enclosing it and asking whether he thought it suitable to be printed—Conrad remarks he has “no judgment of what is fitting in the way of literature” (this term, “fitting,” we will find, is a recurring trope in his letters and novels, intimating a problem of belonging to discourses already begun) (Watt “Preface” 101). Garnett was not enthusiastic and proposed several omissions, among them the concluding paragraph that is an apology for the “unimportant tale” that follows (Watt “Preface” 110). This tenor of apology too is recurrent, Conrad never feeling certain about his status and value as an author. *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* had been accepted for serial publication in *The New Review* (his first novel to be serialized, indicative of his growing success), a journal in



which Conrad's critical essay was included not as a preface, but an afterward. It was largely inaccessible to the British public, except for a small 1902 printing which Watt notes was arranged by Conrad himself. Such an arrangement suggests the degree to which Conrad continued to stand behind the larger propositions of the Preface (he would assert this belief in a letter to Garnett) though he would later reject the over-wrought tenor of its expression (Watt "Preface" 102). It was published in the United States in 1905 in *Harper's Weekly* as "The Art of Fiction" and it would not appear again with the novel in Britain until the Doubleday edition in 1914 (Watt "Preface" 102).

Despite its American title, there is something of the Preface that does not meet the demands of the art of fiction debate as it had begun in Britain, a difference that is particularly suggestive in that *The New Review* was publishing essays devoted to the topic as late as 1895. The same journal marginalizes Conrad's essay by publishing it as an afterward, not meeting his request that it accompany the novel as a preface. The essay's American title, however, clearly reflects the possibility of inclusion in that debate by both contemporary critics and literary historians. Rather than noting the similarities to pre-existing discourses, however, an opportunity arises to understand the Preface in relief, that is, as an alternative gesture. Watt writes that the Preface "remains by default the most reliable, and the most voluntary, single statement of Conrad's general approach to writing; and it also, incidentally, demonstrates that, in his own eclectic and undoctrinaire way, Conrad was from the beginning quite aware of where he stood amongst various critical traditions of his century" ("Preface" 103). The tensions within Conrad's thought as articulated in the Preface provide a means of framing the "place" of the essay within the English literary-critical tradition of the novel. Perhaps more precisely, they provide a central point of entry into the Preface's tenor of longing, which itself cannot be reduced to an origin in a critical tradition. "As the muse lost her objective status," writes Karl Zender of romantic thought:

poets came to relocate her in their own minds, where she served to symbolize their inward and idiosyncratic visionary power.... Caught between their sense of authenticity of their visionary power and the skepticism of the indifference of the culture at large, they were forced into either psychic or actual exile. (91)

The search for autonomy leads to isolation. Conrad's longing for inclusion and a very real history of exile is not to be confounded with the Preface's more general romantic emphasis upon the sensibility of the artist, a fact that once again places the essay somewhere outside of the movements it engages.

As David Goldknopf famously writes of the Preface:

I cannot make coherent sense of it. I do find repeated statements of faith in visualization, embodied in a hodgepodge of platonic, positivistic, and romantic sentiments. And when those are shaken out, there remains, I suppose, a credo of impressionistic realism—in Henry James's phrase, solidity of specification—qualified by the somewhat obsessive emphasis on the optical process. (Watt "Preface" 101)

There are contradictory impulses in the Preface that must be negotiated in their own terms. By "terms," I mean something quite literal: Watt suggests that Conrad had used the term "temperament" in its English sense to mean "elements in the total personality which control its response to sensory, emotional, intellectual and aesthetic experience" and that it may have originated in Conrad's readings of Maupassant, an author who used the term to mean "sensibility" and "soul" (the French sense is without the unfortunate pejorative English sense that Conrad did not intend) (Watt "Preface" 108). Yet, Conrad's use of the term moves against

Maupassant and is itself contradictory in that he seems to mean something both personal and impersonal, belonging to artist as artist and belonging to the collective, "attributing," as Watt puts it, "parallel function to the temperament in the artist, and in...mankind at large" ("Preface" 108). The temperament, Watt argues, is not understood as "amendable to persuasion," but is a more deep-seated location of what Conrad calls "solidarity," a term which itself entered into the English language by way of French in 1848 (Watt "Preface" 108).

These translated terms, "temperament" and "solidarity" do not enter into the art of fiction debate, neither as it began in 1884 with Besant and James nor as it was revived once again in the 1890s. James had been equally stuck by the French literature, had briefly lived in Paris in the mid-1870s, and quaintly uses French terms throughout "The Art of Fiction;" yet, the central concepts of Conrad's most important *propositions* regarding the novel seem to be circuited through French as his second language before English as his third, what Aaron Fogel calls Conrad's "forced dialogical" poetic that "forces one to rehear how he 'overheard' the English language" (40). Fogel argues that the central terms do not "organize the Preface [as much] as 'chime' through it, making for a common ground between the rhythms of 'physics' and of human work in a way that is not simply a pathetic fallacy" (40). Watt misses an important opportunity not only to inquire after the alien ring of certain terms within English literary discourse, but the *resonance* of that alien ring with the central contradiction of the essay, Conrad's appeal to the human *ethos* by way of the physical world, the collective by means of the most personal. There is, in the Preface's terminology, syntax, and additive sense of adjectives, a tenor of remove or alienness that, on the level of proposition, paradoxically argues for belonging, and on a rhythmic level of prose, calls out to the reader's resonant faculties. What Goldknopf rebukes as Conrad's discursive contradictions (tensions between realism, impressionism, and romanticism), Watt redeems in his seminal, paragraph by paragraph analysis of the Preface and its expanded historical reading in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. His work provided the general historical means of addressing some of Preface's most confusing elements, positioning Conrad in the romantic discourses of the late eighteenth century, and their elaboration and critique by Victorians in the nineteenth century. Such an analysis, however, cannot fully account for the ways in which several of the Preface's contradictions cannot be reduced to a more surface allegiance to already existing artistic movements and, in their personal grounding, set the scene for a re-dramatization in the most experimental and twentieth century aspects of Conrad's work. In a characteristic pressure upon the logic of the sentence, Conrad concludes his Preface with a declaration of the novelist's task: "And when it is accomplished—behold! all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest." As Watt observes of this sentence, there is "no wholly acceptable grammatical subject for 'the return' ("Preface" 111). Is it the work, the artist, or the reader who returns? "If we look closely we see that Conrad's referent has been slipping" (111). In a way that has not been recognized, however, such a slippage is at the heart of Conrad's project, a personal longing for a movement between reader, work, and artist (not the reverse course, we will find). It grounds a theory of vision that is not to be confused with romanticism, "impressionistic realism," or the models of vision proposed by the art of fiction debate.

The art of fiction debate provided what Livingston calls the "first modern credo" of the novel in England and America. Its progenitor, novelist and historian Besant, emphasizes the novelist's sense of regulated foresight. Defending the artistic seriousness of the novel against the widespread belief that novelistic discourse, without purely poetic lineage, was without aesthetic value, Besant began his lecture to the Royal Institution by declaring "I desire, this evening, to

consider Fiction as one of the Fine Arts.” The art of fiction is “the sister and the equal” of painting, sculpture, theater, poetry and music,” and as such, Besant contends, it is “governed and directed by general laws” which “may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion.” Drama and the pictorial arts are argued to be among the most analogous to the art of fiction, for it is the author’s “single business to see that none of the scenes flag or fall flat: he must never for one moment cease to consider how the piece is looking from the front.”

Besant elaborates a number of rules which should guide the practitioner of fiction, including how to observe life and take scrupulous note of its workings, until he arrives at the central rule governing novelistic conception as it moves to the page. The author must be guided by a clear sense of vision:

The next simple Rule is that the drawing of each figure must be clear in outline, and, even if only sketched, must be sketched without hesitation. This can only be done when the writer himself sees his figures clearly. ... From the first moment of conception, that is to say, from the first moment of their being seen and caught, they grow continuously and almost without mental effort. If they do not grow and become everyday clearer, they had better be put aside at once, and forgotten as soon as may be, because that is proof that the author does not understand the character he has himself endeavored to create.

As it has been since Plato, comprehension is here equated with visibility. The writer is above all, to comprehend, in an act of foresight, the form of his creation. That vision is analogized first as a catching glance and then a seeing clearly which grows in intensity until the writer achieves a decisive vantage point, viewing the novel, as it were, from the “front.” There is no promise of what I have described as fiction’s opening: Besant *frames* the act of composition by vision on all sides, the novelist finding a form of skeptical mastery, observing his creation from a carefully measured distance as if the work itself were seen in its entirety before even taking pen to page. Mental conception is itself linked unproblematically to its immediate materialization as a “sketch.” In contrast to Kaspar Almayer—who blurs into the outlining world, characterized by a syncopal lapse in and out of consciousness—what Besant calls “figures,” characters insofar as they are a repository for meaning, are “clear in outline.” Character takes on a visible shape, a turning of the inside out, available to the author’s view. Figures do not move in and open upon time, but grow in their spatial precision.

Besant attends to the cloistered spatiality of mental conception, closely modeling his theory of the novel upon Platonic metaphysics. It is itself founded upon what Adriana Cavarero calls a “static, unrelational videocentrism”:

The entire philosophical lexicon in fact finds its base in the objectivity and present of things, which is guaranteed by this detached gaze. This starts above all with Plato who uses the *theoria* to mean ‘the contemplation of real, lasting, immobile things’ whose truth lies in being visible, in being ideas. The decisive element is, of course, presence. This presence refers to both the spatial dimension that is typical of the object that lies in front of the onlooker, and to the temporal dimension of a simultaneous ‘now’ that is eternalized by the contemplator.

Indeed, Besant’s clear outline of character, viewed in its immobility and detachment, presupposes and reconfirms a *division* between the figure and the world it inhabits. This division can never be compromised; the figure takes on the status of an *a priori* Form, accessible to the writer’s noumenal vision. If character escapes the writer’s view, challenging his act of mastery, it

is to be discarded at once. An unclear figure is a phantasm courting attention in place of the idea.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in pursuing his analogy of conceptual foresight, Besant virtually suggests that this act of vision is to take place before the act of writing itself, whereby writing becomes effectively a mere mental execution. Moreover, writing emerges as the result of pure introspection, and the act of observation turns away from a furtive and syncopated lining between the writer's consciousness and the phenomenal world that might be said to impinge upon, modulate, haunt, and adapt it.

In was in response to Besant's lecture that James composed "The Art of Fiction," arguing for a new artistic seriousness of the novel in its endeavor to "represent life." In this endeavor, James writes, "the analogy between painting and the novel is, so far as I am able see, complete." Both forms, James suggests, take a measurable distance from the world, seeking to represent it in its objective reality. That seriousness of the novel is a pressing aesthetic problem—"the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened," James concludes, emphasizing a critical-theoretical consciousness that operates behind the novel as its authorization and condition. As he emphasizes this consciousness, James continually resorts to the French language, as if to authorize the tenor of "artist," or perhaps to signal his sophistication. By contrast, Conrad's references to the language operate quietly at the *intersection* of his fluency in French and his adoption of English. James writes:

Only a short time ago, it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it.... I do not say it was necessarily the worst for that: it would take much more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. It was however, *naïf* (if I may help myself out with another French word); and evidently if it be destined to suffer in any way for having lost its *naïveté* it now has an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel....

While James does much to undo Besant's claim on behalf a formal "law" of the English novel, he continues to emphasize the written medium's visual transmutation as the central ground for legitimating its aspiration to artistic value.<sup>7</sup> The novel is "illustrative," James asserts, driven by the artist's "power to guess the unseen from the seen" and to "convert" the impression of the moment into the reality of the "concrete image." The art of the novelist lies in his powers of observation, the ability to see and then represent the minute gesture of a woman as she stands up "with her hand resting on a table and look[s] out at you in a certain way.... If you say you don't see it (character in *that—allons donc!*), this is exactly what the artist who has reasons of his own for thinking he *does* see it undertakes to show you." In this image, a woman "looks out" at a "you"; yet, the author is outside what James calls the "scene" as an untriangulated third term. His

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<sup>6</sup> In this way Besant recalls Plato's critique of mimesis, the poet's forms as imitations of imitations. It is as if, in elevating fiction to the Fine Arts, what Besant really desires is to take the novel out of the realm of art and mimesis altogether, binding it more closely to epistemological speculation. Indeed, as Cavarero notes in *For More Than One Voice*, the *episteme* is, in Plato's words, "the incontrovertible necessity of that which stands firm", closely associated with *scientia* as "seeing clearly after having sought to perceive."

<sup>7</sup> The objectivity of the novel is the most direct claim of James' essay, yet it is important to understand here that his essay is most remembered for the claim that the novel "shows" and that the novelist is an objective observer of the world, ratifying Besant's sense of the novelist's distance, not only from the world, but from the novel itself insofar as it is a record of his or her observation.

gaze is not a look, embodied, affected, and temporal; it is unreturning and nonrelational—he is there to “show” the visible world to those who have failed to see it, just before absenting himself from the scene.

In the critical prefaces, James later becomes more interested in the third person center of consciousness, i.e. a depersonalized “he” who is seeing in the novel and therefore provides what he will call the “aperture” for the reader. He remains interested in showing the visible world, but as it can only be seen through an impersonal consciousness, a radical continuation of “*Madame Bovary c’est moi*” that is consonant with removing the author. The question of belonging to the *world* of the novel, we will find, is central for Conrad, grounding a temporal vacillation that cannot be found in James (James, as I will discuss in Faulkner’s turn to Conrad and divergence from James, rather attempts to keep pace with the speed of experience). The central difference between the two writers is that Conrad wants to be in the novel and wants to encounter the reader there, being most invested in the technical means that might constitute a sense of relatedness between writer, reader, and work.

James aims to move *consciousness*—a more depersonalized category—inside the novel to thereby occult its own status. That sense of the novel is most provocative to Percy Lubbock, the English critic who ratifies James’ claims in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921). He makes the stakes of a new solidity of the novel and conceptual foresight startlingly clear in terms of a critical mission. In what remains one of the most pressing passages in the history of novel theory, Lubbock begins his text with a personal lament over the novel’s formless mobility, only to *undo* that condition, affirming an alternative experience of the novel:

I cannot catch a momentary sight of the book, the book itself; I cannot look up from my writing and sharpen my impression with a straight and unhampered view of the author’s work; to glance at a book, though the phrase is so often in our mouths, is in fact an impossibility. The form of the novel—and how often a critic uses that expression too—is something that none of us, perhaps has ever really contemplated. It is ... withdrawn as fast as it is revealed; as a whole, complete and perfect, it could only exist in a more tenacious memory than most of us have to rely on. Our critical faculty may be admirable; we may be thoroughly capable of judging a book justly, if only we could watch it at ease.

...so far from losing ourselves in the world of the novel, we must hold it away from us, see it all in detachment, and use the whole of it to make the image we seek, the book itself. (Lubbock 2-6)

As Lubbock begins, he sounds not unlike Conrad who claims in *A Personal Record* to have seen “no vision of a printed book” before him at he first sat down to write. Yet, the conditions of writing as outlined by Besant and James are transferred to the act of reading: as a technician who approaches sentences as, Jameson writes of Flaubert, “precious objects to be fashioned one by one.” James is among those whose “method can be watched” (Lubbock 64). The novel begins as an impossible glance only to appear as a whole image in the culminating prescription of the critic’s detached unrelationality. The novel must appear, but in that appearance, neither the author nor critic are subject to a disappearance, an ebbing into the image they seek. Indeed, in a suggestive homology between the novel and the critic as subject, the critic *must* hold the book away if criticism itself is to find its full status as concrete “form.” While a gliding and mobile form of perception at first seems ineluctable, Lubbock seizes the object of his failed vision. As in James’ notion of the art of fiction which “converts” passing impressions, the momentary sight is transformed into a more sustainable image, one that might be divided from the reader. It is in

becoming a “whole”, separate and beheld, that the novel gains precisely the static, immobility of *theoria*.

The writer’s relation is not adumbrative, but one of an authoritative gaze standing outside of the visible world. James maintains in his 1908 preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880), a novel which emphasizes the new scenic paradigm of character, that “the house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of individual vision and the pressure of the individual will” (7). There is a depersonalizing “pierced aperture” through which he sees, with a “field-glass” no less; the novelist observes; there is “the posted presence of the watcher” (7). The status and force of the individual in that moment is paramount, for what the novel most guarantees is the author’s seclusion, his position on the other side of the aperture. The author “is so far from telling a story,” Lubbock argues, that “the scene he evokes is contemporaneous, and there it is,” for we now “follow the direction of his eyes” (63, 113).

#### *To Make You See*

It is the watching self-presence of the author that Conrad most doubts in his own account of his beginnings as a writer. As I have already described, he was one who saw “no vision of a printed book” before him as he sat down to write, but was rather compelled to write, not in an act of foresight, but by the force of a daydreaming dilating into the past in order to find companionship with specters. Conrad’s call “to make you *see*” stands somewhere outside of the theory of the English novel as it moves from Besant and James to Lubbock. Rather than an objective form, his account of the novel continually addresses solidarity and kinship, the relation between subjects and that which makes their relation possible: the capacity to share a “presented vision.”

It is crucial to cite Conrad’s statement on his task as an author at length, if only to emphasize its radical departure from English formalism, the way in which the presentness of the vision *is* its presentness before a community:

To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment. In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one may perchance attain to such clearness of sincerity that at last the presented vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth, shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.

What James calls “the needs of individual vision and pressure of the individual will” have value here only insofar as they move the beholders into the collectivity which now subsumes the writer himself—“the single-minded attempt” is transcended into co-feeling which now validates the writer’s attempt, recalling an Aristotelian sense of catharsis. The affective truth of written technique is so “clear” and “sincere” in its attempt to “show” the visible world, that the text binds itself to the world of men its very substance. It is beheld by the reader in a “feeling of

unavoidable solidarity,” without aesthetic distance, as if transcending the constraints of language itself in order to enter into direct vision of the artist’s intention.

In courting the reader’s sense of feeling relation, Conrad’s presented vision invokes an imaginary sphere where all men may meet without division. In other words, vision in Conrad becomes the tropological means of authorizing the possibility of his address: the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* must be understood as rhetorically sealing the identity of the novel it introduces, offering retroactive verification of its own narrative authority to depict a culture Englishmen in its solidarity. Despite his sense of the novel as an immediate perception, such a capacity seems in part to be the *effect* of visual tropology. The trope of vision in Conrad’s preface constantly attempts to schematize its own guarantee, vision arising as the promise of a community unburdened by nationality, a nearly Platonist call for things-in-themselves which all men may view together as one (Goldknopf had called the essay “Platonist” without asking after the personal necessity for such a move). Conrad is aware of a certain impossibility and must repeatedly draw upon a sense of “conviction” and “belief”—the noumenal has fallen into the phenomenal and is not unmediated by fellow-feeling. As I will explain more fully in the following chapter, this sense of conviction in Conrad is an elaboration of what in the rhetorical arts is known as “embodied argument,” a sense of persuasion that works upon the physical level and speaks not to reason, but to the body. As the epigraph reads to *Lord Jim*, a novel which restores to a dejected character the redeemed status of “one of us,” “my conviction gains greatly the moment another will believe.”

As the preface draws to a conclusion, Conrad thus posits the novel as an oneric moment by which men, “busy at work”, pause in their labor to share in a collective and arrested vision of the “form and colour” of the phenomenal world. There is *now* something before the reader, an image whose reality cannot be refused and whose validity cannot be denied. As Michael North argues of this moment, retrieving a central place for the preface in the history of the novel and novel theory as a history of “dialect,” Conrad pleads for “a potential sense of kinship in the audience by which it can recreate and re-experience his experiences” (38). Understood in that way, as a plea for intersubjectivity, the object of what Jameson calls Conrad’s “virtual remaking” cannot be limited to sensory experience. Indeed, as I have already begun to suggest, questions of visual representation become more complicated as one begins to consider the ways in which Conrad’s chief aim as an author was the fictional negotiation of the biographic past, Conrad’s own self-conviction perhaps being the novel’s truest object.

#### *The Future Anterior Image*

To understand the tension between the autobiographical self and the audience before whom a past vision is to be realized, and *how* such a vision is possible, one must return to the question of the temporality of Conrad’s declaration, to the novel as an historical preservation. One senses within Conrad’s declaration what Cesarino calls “the scattered pieces of past life that might redeem the amorphous and meaningless flux of time,” and the degree to which *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is for Conrad a question of a memorial edifice to be reconstructed and lived in once more. Wolfgang Iser would perhaps understand the phenomenology of this inhabitation as “irrealization”, the reader being “absorbed into an image” and attempting “to ideate that which one can never see as such” (137). Iser continues:

The schemata give rise to aspects of a hidden, nonverbalized “truth,” and these aspects must be synthesized by the reader, who through a continual readjustment of focus is made to ideate a totality. His viewpoint is “on this side of all things seen”—in other words, he is outside the text—but at the same time it is

sufficiently shaped by the schemata to deprive him of the total freedom of choice he would have in the real world. The process of image-building begins, then, with the schemata of the text, which are aspects of a totality that the reader himself must assemble; in assembling it, he will occupy the position set out for him, and so create a sequence of images that eventually results in his constituting the meaning of the text. (141)

In that same way, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* attempts to render vividly—and thereby preserve—the memory of an English community at sea on the other side of its radical social and psychological upheaval. The schemata of the text constitute a “sequence of images” to be assembled by the reader in an act of synthetic judgment—the reader will ideate a totality insofar as it *is* the lost community, one which the reader might occupy through reading as image-building. To “see” for Conrad is a commemorative act which binds the reader to a collective past imagistically rebuilt. Written language is itself wrought from shorn fragments of the past—not simply past experience, but what he calls “old words” whose significance has been forgotten.

Yet, if reading is “to ideate that which one can never see as such,” to what extent is Conrad’s theoretical project troubled by the syncopated temporality of *Almayer’s Folly*, a failure to stay on the beat of the present moment, a force which pulls Almayer away from the present at once into the future and into recollecting the past? Can the reader simply “see” what is no longer there or is ideation rather a moment of “seeing” what was never there and can never be there as such? What becomes of the project of reconstruction and representation if, as Iser suggests, the act of image-building is always-already incantatory, a word in the midst of becoming an image and therefore illuminative of its division from that which it struggles to reclaim?

The space of literature, as an incantation, would be in this way what Walter Benjamin calls *Bildraum*, or “image-space,” a space that “wants to be extended” and “to exceed its confines into happiness.” The novel’s quasi-mystical promise lies in its other side, its movement towards a redemptive elsewhere. There is an ironic temporality of the Conradian image, or as Charles Baudelaire might say, “the absorbed intenseness of a resurrecting and evocative memory, where a memory which says to every object: ‘Lazarus, arise!’” (408). (There’s something amiss in the preceding sentence. Indeed, that is the Conradian novel’s incantation: Conrad strives for a written technique that might afford the novel the purposive certainty for which he longed as a writer, retaining, representing and ultimately, retroactively envisioning images of a communal past to be constituted in and as the moment of the reader’s novelistic vision. In *Heart of Darkness*, the speaking voice of Marlow will sound out in the dark, inciting a drama that the reader might claim as his own, both writer and speaker receding into that community.

As the written word is argued to struggle towards becoming an act of physical vision—“above all, to make you see”—Conrad’s theory of the novel becomes burdened by difficult and unexplained circularities, problematizing both his sense of time and the subject who experiences it, working towards a sense of anterior responsibility that will contribute, as I will argue in Chapter Three, to William Faulkner’s radical revision of the subject of narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*. As Conrad continues to write in the preface:

The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form . . . if one be deserving and fortunate . . . one shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in



joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world. (*Darkness* 281)

One begins to sense the ways in which the problem of time in Conrad *is* the problem of relation: the instant is non-identical; the novel pushes towards a place where that identity or time being-at-home with itself, the experience of belonging in and to the present, might be possible. Yet, the possibility of one term continually turns against and vitiates its ground in another. Conrad asserts that individual sensory experience is brought to representation and then beheld by the collective as that which exposes them to their condition *as* a collective. It is here in fact that Conrad defines the collective. It is not a plurality, but an eradication of difference, a binding together in the singular feeling that now resides *outside* of its participants as a mutual object. It is an experience which relies precisely upon the possibility of fiction's opening, the lining between "in" and "out" becoming gliding and mobile. In that moment, the "rescued fragment" is revealed to have been always-already a collective property. Watt argues that Conrad undertakes the task of rescuing the "evanescent concrete particular" so as to show it be a part of "the collective "repertoire of experiences" (110). To go further, it is as if novelistic representation discloses—or wishes to imagine the phantasmatic possibility of disclosing—the collective, *a priori* ground of all individual sensation.

This aesthetic project, the disclosure of collectivity in the act of sensation, is negative, for immediate sensation, as at once a form of "rescue," can only be a spectral form of experience, a form of remembrance always referring backward beyond the individual as a fragment of an anterior lost whole. For Conrad in this moment, it is as if no one can ever really see for the first time, challenging Jameson's notion of Conrad's sensory absolute, an immediacy of present-tense vision. As a form of "rescue", seeing in the present is at once a pulsating return, a diachronic split that throws the seer elsewhere into that which he never saw as such. Conrad rather seems to suggest that one must *give over* vision in its auto-circuit to one's *heart*.

The "heart" is a recursive figure in Conrad's opus as the true repository of an impression and that which simultaneously precedes it, unviolated and inviolable by worldly experience. One gives over one's vision and one's heart as a remembering apparatus for the collective and that such a gesture is, paradoxically, the ground of identity. Again, such a theory is necessitated by his project and his dilemma. The recognition of identity *is* its ebbing return into the collective.<sup>8</sup> It is as if—one feels the pull of fiction against the objective in that regard—in the feeling of being-moved by literature ("to make you feel") and in a way that *registers* not the objective face of things, but their concealed affective truth, beyond logic and reason as they dictate the *absence* of the literary image, that solidarity will be experienced as a form of a return to its lost *a priori* status.<sup>9</sup> Thus while "solidarity" is described as the resulting image of literature, it is at once its mysterious origin, a sensation prior to the novel as its collective ground which one inhabits. The novel is a re-collective (non-originary) sensation; one's own sensation, in a way that will become central for a consideration of Faulkner, is not fully own's own to have to or to give.

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<sup>8</sup> In a radical revision of Hobbsean contract theory, the individual is *not there* to be subsumed—*without* belonging in the moment of the mutual image, there is only negation, an individual who is not-yet. Sharing gives the individual to himself.

<sup>9</sup> See *Conrad's Romanticism*. As I will return to in Chapter Two, Conrad recalls the aesthetic project of Rousseau and his notion of history, outlined in *The Reveries* and *The Confessions*, as that which is based not upon fact, but upon sensibility or what he calls the "truth of feeling" as it draws from fiction, feeling as it must fictionalize to represent itself. It is a sense of history that is closely associated with Rousseau's theory of music and Conrad's sense of sonority.

Conrad thus struggles in the preface to articulate the means—repeatedly likened to a form of vision—of securing the transformation of individual experience into that of the collective, suggesting that the artist first “descends within himself” to there find “the terms of his appeal.” If the heart is always-already wrought from the bonds of the collective, that descent is never fully inward. Given the biographic basis of Conrad’s novels, the precise origin of the “rescued fragment” becomes more complicated, as does its destination. Just how group “solidarity” is to emerge aesthetically and politically from such a basis remains unanswered by the most direct claims of his Conrad’s aesthetic program. Given that Conrad wishes to express himself to a group of English readers with whom his solidarity, as a foreigner and former exile, can only be tenuous and under pressure, how is one to understand, on an aesthetico-political level, Conrad’s theory of the novel as at once preservative of a personal past *and* generative of the solidarity that binds “all mankind to the visible universe?” Why does vision, above all, mediate, demonstrate and secure this dual possibility?

The preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* in fact registers deep tensions that continue to haunt the Conradian novel and its avowed aim, “above all, to make you *see*.” The task, he explains, is to uphold “the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood,” a phrase which aptly communicates the ebbing of the personal into the collective, if not also the biographic into the fictional: the fragment originates in the author’s own experience only then to be documented by novelistic prose and thereby become visible to “all eyes.” Implicit in his sense of the novel as a “rescued fragment,” however, are two competing desires—a commemorative impulse and a program of sensory immediacy, the novel arising as an irreconcilable third term, the dialectic tension between two temporal modalities. In reading, something unremembered by the individual flashes up, as Benjamin might say, “in a moment of danger” in order to reveal the collectivity to itself. What one relinquishes, when reading-as-seeing, is precisely his or her status as an individual, being-moved towards the shared image, beheld in common as the trans-individual core of feeling.<sup>10</sup> The individual is, for Conrad, never simply a bearer of personal memory, an *a priori* entity for whom memories and sensations then “happen.”

This is precisely the problem of subjectivity that *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,” Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim* negotiate in representing “character,” characters being not what Besant “figures” (clearly outlined, whole unto themselves), but being only in their relation to haunting memories of others (not only are fates and identities linked, but there is a pulsating atmosphere that moves between individuals). To see, for Conrad, is to remember others, and to remember others, is to be. Recollection is thus the form which social responsibility takes for Conrad (and Faulkner after him), being that which forces Marlow to find his vocation in remembering Kurtz and “to remember Jim, frequently....” Indeed, Marlow must be situated in profound recollective repose before these novels may even begin. As we shall see, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* actively constructs the shape such a recollectivity might take. *It takes on the form of subjectivity itself*, a subjectivity that is, as Melville might suggest, a “visible image” peopled by those who are “flitting through it” (and often *acoustically* so, as haunting voice exerting pressure upon the image). *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is a novel that begins constructing the theory of narrative necessary to Conrad’s peculiar form of characterization. With the preface, Conrad asks how the subject itself comes to be in the act of image-building and how it is inextricably bound to memories that it does not determine, yet “people” its domain by making its capacity for sensation possible. Sensation for Conrad is referential, one feeling *afterwards*, in the form of repercussion.

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<sup>10</sup> Contrary to modern political theory since Hobbes’ *Leviathan* which maintains an individual who then relinquishes itself to the collective, the individual is not prior to the moment of collective vision.

Such is “character” for Conrad, not an outlined “figure,” but a personal necessity which gives rise to a radical reformulation that will reshape the novel.

To understand the stakes of “sharing” an image—transferring oneself over to it as a mutual object—one must first return to the status of building an image never seen. Indeed, just as the subject is, for Conrad, constituted in and as an act of memory, there is a tension within the phenomenology of the novel as re-building an object once seen and building an image that has never been seen as such. Iser’s image-building is at once representational *and* generative; in that same way, one might say that commemoration and immediacy are desires which sustain each other in their effort to attain “solidarity” between author and reader. The novel is, Conrad writes, a memorial to “the moulders of my youth, the companions of the best years of my life”; yet, it is precisely that memorial image which is to be revitalized before the reader, binding him to the visible world. It is a particular kind of immediacy of vision which Conrad claims the novel will enact, one which he continually connects to a sense of personal and communal preservation. To what degree, then, is the novel’s (re)presentation of English community a kind of futuristic after-image, a fantastic and phantasmal refraction of a bond that never was but *will be* in the moment of the act of reading?

The tension between present-tense immediacy and past experience is not to be separated from the tension between the collective and the individual, or rather belonging and non-belonging, non-being, absence, and exile.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, insofar as it is said to resuscitate a vivid, quivering image before the reader, is *itself* the moment of solidarity between the individual—the novel is a bond. In its recourse to an aesthetics of immediate vision, the novel attempts to incant the collective which, at the same time, Conrad claims as the condition of the novel’s reception. In producing a historical document, writing might circle back to its origin to guarantee its own futural possibility, an “I will become” that lies on the other side of writing, a futurity that is, however, at the same time a foundational necessity for writing’s enactment, an “I must have been what I will become” for the novel’s fulfillment to be possible.

Conrad asserts that the novel merely reflects an already existent solidarity, that it is because of this solidarity that the novel can be recognized by its reader. Nevertheless, he wishes to generate nothing less than the possibility of the novel’s own absolute reception, his national belonging and kinship with an English audience. The novel becomes a means of transforming the personal past *into* a common cultural and national inheritance. It is the virtual image of an otherwise spectral membership in an English collectivity on behalf of an author who once jocularly referred to himself as “a sort of freak, an amazing bloody foreigner writing in English” (Greaney 1). Indeed, as one reconsiders the historical-theoretical context of the Preface, this question of national belonging and the novel as binding “innumerable hearts” can only be understood as a furtive response to Conrad’s (dis)placement within the English tradition. In the

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<sup>11</sup> See Jean Pierre-Vernant “The Birth of Images.” This same duality circumscribes the Greek notion of a phantasmatic image or *eidolon*. It “manifests both a real presence and an irremediable absence at the same time. It is this inclusion of a ‘being elsewhere’ in the midst of ‘being here that constitutes the archaic *eidolon*, less an image in the sense in which we understand it today than as a double. This double is not, in fact, a representation of the subject through and through it is a real apparition that actually introduces here, in this same world in which we live and have eyes to see, a being, which in its temporary form of the same, shows itself to be fundamentally an other because it belongs to the other world.” When the Homeric sense of an apparition is drawn into philosophic discourse by Plato, there is a change in register and it is now defined as a “second like object” (in *The Sophist*). It no longer “bears the mark of absence, of elsewhere and of the invisible, but rather the stigma of really unreal nonbeing”. It “comes to circumscribe the space of the fictive and the illusory between the two poles of being and non being, between the true and the false.”

course of his meditation, Conrad stands both within and without the English critical tradition he continues. He wishes to append it, but in so doing, only seems to highlight an incontrovertible break.

*Beyond Representation: The Incanted Image*

Echoing the 1897 preface, Conrad writes in his 1905 essay devoted to James that the novel is “rescue work,” “this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only permanence in this world of relative values—the permanence of memory.” This phrase is an unusual formulation, one which suggests an impossible forgetting, holding its object so present that it cannot slip into the past; yet the value of presence is inscribed by *loss*, being not a permanence of perception, but of memory, a vision turned toward that which is no longer there.

With an emphasis upon the “permanence of memory,” Conrad’s desire for sensory immediacy becomes deeply unstable. It is a longing irreducible to a nostalgic “remaking” of a material world that was once more immediately accessible to the senses. Indeed, if “the task, approached in tenderness and faith, is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes and in the light of a sincere mood,” it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the avowed present-tense temporality of Conrad’s vision, a temporality advocated by Lubbock as the novel’s “there it is” or by James as the “concrete image.” Rather, past and present collide to produce a third term, what Conrad describes as the “rescued fragment”—it is the temporality and materiality of what one might call an *incanted image*.

The incanted image is a fragment of experience which, re-visualized, works to undo divisions between men. The rescue is neither a simple act of preservation nor a resistance to stratification, but rather a revision, recasting the sensible object as a shared frontier between novelist and reader who, only then, becomes a member of an itinerant community held by an act of vision. The incanted image is not unidirectional, but a co-creation—“my task is...above all, to make *you* see”—emerging in a social space in which not only an “I” and “you” can be assumed, but can hold the same line of sight. In that line of sight, they find their solidarity only as long as reading can sustain it, sharing in that quality of what Benjamin describes as the “rescue...of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost” (--). Yet the Conradian image must be understood as incanted not only in its fragility, but in the tinge of pastness to which Conrad constantly returns—it has been “rescued.”

Such rescue is not, therefore, a *representational* project: in contrast to James’ notion of the novel as history, the past must not only be represented, but *redirected*. Such redirection again points to the problem of image-building a dialectical edifice that is at once memorial *and* incantative or, to use the terms offered by Baudelaire, “resurrective and evocative,” a past which he notes “will become the present.” This transformative nature of incantation will be central for understanding the burden of social memory in *Absalom, Absalom!*. As Rosa Coldfield tells the story of Thomas Sutpen, his ghost arises as an image before Quentin. She and the novel narrate, not so that Sutpen may be represented, but transfigured in the space between narrator and seer, teller and listener, writer and reader. In both works, the novel becomes a site of virtual fragments, fragments that are, quite literally to be *refashioned* by written prose.

As Watt suggests, “Conrad could only construct his imaginative edifice on the foundation of some preexistent real features in the landscape of memory,” testifying to “something much deeper and more private than a concern for documentary realism” (years, 93). This “something

much deeper” begins to touch upon a prevailing tenor of longing throughout the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, one irreducible to the spectral sphere of “libidinal gratification” or a sensorial indulgence against the repression of the aesthetic in modernity. A purely ideological reading evades that dynamic of propping up the past as visible fragments as they may incant an impossible place in an impossible future. “Conrad’s sensorium virtually remakes its objects”, Jameson suggests; yet, can one begin to think of such virtuality, the imaginary edifice wrought by prose, as an impossible place of inhabitation? One might begin to imagine a theory of the Conradian novel driven by affective loss, an aesthetic melancholy that in mourning a capacity for sense perception, mourns objects that it cannot fully avow—losses of nation, language, and community.

Unlike James, Conrad calls not for “scenic art” as it might more aptly and impersonally render the visible world and its inhabitants, but a sense of intimacy that “knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts,” binding “the dead to the living, the living to the unborn.” A longing surrounds that call: to “see” is to inherit what knits the writer and reader to those no longer there. It is a strange sense of “kinship,” this mutual carrying around of the dead, facilitated by the medium or mediumism of the written word as it strives above all, to make you see. There is in that putative vision that which binds the writer and reader to those who never were there, to a community *in potentia*. Vision promises an incantative futurity, one that revises past loss, but it flits, refusing its position in what James calls “the gilded frame.”

#### *The Silence of the Image, or Absorptive Solitude*

As I have already begun to suggest, writing emerges in Besant and James as introspection, the act of observation ultimately turning the writer away from participation in the phenomenal world. Conrad’s sense of solitude cannot be subsumed by this decisive act of self-absencing, challenging its force in the novel and the theory of the subject its supports. While I have positioned the place of Conrad’s preface somewhere longingly outside or alongside of the English critical tradition, however, he writes, at the same time, from a location of solitude that is a dislocation from the discourse surrounding history of the modern European novel. It is a place which George Steiner would perhaps call the “extraterritorial.” In that regard, Conrad literally writes from no place, a place outside of national belonging, making the desire for the incanted image that much more acute. Conrad’s extraterritorial status makes what he refers to as his “solitude” irreducible to what Joseph Warren Beach calls in *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novel* (1933) the “exit-author.” It is irreducible to, as I began to problematize in the introduction, Benjamin’s theory that “the birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual.”

Jameson remarks upon the Flaubertian novel as being written in the absence of God and a public. Indeed, as Flaubert writes of his composition of *Madame Bovary* in an 1852 letter to Louise Colet, “What strikes me as beautiful, what I should like to do, is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments, which would hold together by itself through the internal force of its style... a book which would have practically no subject” (90). Novelists “avoid amusing the public with ourselves...and with the personality of the writer, which always reduces a work” (92). His principle is that “you must not *write yourself*,” for “there is not in this book *one* movement of my name.” “[I]mpersonality is a sign of strength,” he writes. “Let us absorb the objective; let it circulate in us, until it is externalized in such a way that no one can understand its marvelous chemistry” (93).

Conrad writes not of absorbing the object, but of an agonizing solitude of writing that “absorbs.” He writes in French of (English) novelistic production, what registers an agonizing distance from language: “La solitude me gagne: elle m’absorbe. Je ne vois rien, je ne lis rien.

C'est comme une espèce de tombe, qui serait en même temps un enfer, où il faut écrire, écrire, écrire." Indeed, Faulkner will experience this same compulsion towards writing in his painful turn from poetry and towards the novelistic commemoration of the figures and voices of his youth, writing becoming an explosive act of memory in which characters in turn begin to remember, throwing the novel into a miasma of reduplication. Conrad and Almayer only become companions when he starts writing about him, a push and pull in the scene of composition.

"Solitude" is a term that Conrad does not fully define, yet it arises symptomatically in the moments when his project seems most unfulfillable and most compulsive. As Blanchot writes of the "essential solitude:"

...perhaps it is only when we experience what the word solitude means that we learn something about art...It ignores the easy isolation of individualism, the desire to be distinct. It is not dissipated by the human contacts our daily occupations entail. He who writes the work is set apart, he who has written is discharged. (97)

Neither James' "posted presence of the watcher" with the strength of "individual will" nor an isolation that forestalls aesthetic creation can aptly communicate Conrad's solitude as a paradoxical compulsion towards de-individuation, the ebbing of the watcher into that which he views. An absorptive solitude drives his prose—"où il faut écrire, écrire, écrire"—an absorption that tends towards collapsing Alberti's visual pyramid, the writer phantasmatically merging with the written object. Write, write, write, as a gesture, suggests the degree to which prose ravel *outward*, away from the subject who writes, away from his solitude, and towards a position of belonging: it is world-building alongside of a world from which the writer is displaced. Yet, for Conrad to be absorbed in *solitude*, and *from* that position to write out to others, can only be to distance himself from that which he joins, a tension which, continually makes itself felt in his narrative technique. It is the same technique that begins *Almayer's Folly* with an incomprehensible voice, "Kaspar! Makan!" and tends towards dilating time away from "setting" and novelistic "taking place," setting the reader apart.

This paradox of a solitude that writes *out* to others, in a hallucinatory shared image, recalls what Iser calls "irrealization" or "absorption"—the reader takes leave of the ordinary world in order "to ideate that which one can never see as such"—yet, it points to the particularity of Conrad's aesthetic project: he recoils in isolation in order to write his way into the community of men. The aesthetic enworlding that is reader responsiveness meets in Conrad a precise demand: Conrad continually *draws in* his reader, not as witness, but as kin, and in so doing, the shape of the novel becomes a newly possible place of belonging. As biographer Norman Sherry writes of Conrad's decision to leave Poland for France:

...behind him already was more tragic experience than is given more to many men in a lifetime: he was moved by the unlikely impulse...to become a seaman; and not yet seventeen, he was stepping alone into a new existence. This action, in its essentials; was to become a characteristic one of Conrad as intervals during his life. (17)

Indeed, the action seems to characterize Conrad's turn to novelistic expression, for the artist in prose, Conrad asserts, finds in solitude the material that "knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts."

To return to Conrad's isolation from the dominant account of modernism, in an early essay, "History and Criticism" (1976), Jameson suggests that modernism begins with *Madame Bovary* as the first "visual text" to fade "into the silence and solitude of the individual writer,

confronted with the absence of a reading public as with some form of the absence of God.” The fading of the novel into silence, Jameson insists, is simultaneous to the novel becoming a concrete image, the solitary writer crafting the “art sentence” from which the judging, determining and authorial presence of the writer withdraws. The art sentence is a “precious object” and is “fashioned one by one;” it is no longer of a provisional, spoken characteristic dependent upon the model of storytelling around the hearth. The novel’s image *is* its silence, and in being silent, in being visible, it finds its autonomous solitude. As Flaubert’s comments above indicate, aesthetic perfection is the goal, one reachable only through the art work’s total self-sufficiency, its silent autonomy. Lubbock had ratified that same account of the silence of the modernist novel as the dictum, “to show and not to tell:” “It a question of the reader’s relation to the writer; in one case the reader faces the storyteller and listens to him, in the other, he turns towards the story and watches it.” In his emphasis upon vision, Conrad hopes to turn the reader away from listening to the author and towards watching the image; yet, Conrad effectuates this turn *so that* a relation might be possible. In other words, he has a quite different goal.

Conrad’s image is an alternative form of silence, a repressive or “displaced” one which continues to reach out, address and make an “appeal.” With that appeal and reaching out, Conrad’s writerly solitude, generating an image to be shared unequivocally by other men, is a caesura in the dominant account of the modern novel insofar as it positions the novel as the result of neither alienation nor ontological isolation. While Lubbock’s dictum may read as a version of Conrad’s own “above all, to make you see,” it cannot account for what Lubbock himself cannot see—the paradox of seeing in Conrad’s sensorium: the artist must recoil in silence and solitude in order to pass into a vision of virtual kinship. “The artist descends within himself,” Conrad writes, “and in that lonely region of stress and strife...he finds the term of his appeal.”

This appeal is that of a “presented vision”, one that awakens “in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity.” Edward Said thus suggests of Conrad’s maxim that he longs “to transcend the *absence* of everything but the words, so that we may pass into a realm of vision beyond the words.” This realm, or what I have called a memorial edifice, is one which unites not only subject and object, but the writer and other men in the absence of speech. Said writes:

There, rifts in the community of man, or in the damaged ego, are healed, and the space separating ambition from activity is narrowed. Retrospective time and events are corrected for divergences. Or, still more radically, the writer’s intention of wishing to say something very clearly is squared completely with the reader’s seeing—words bound to the page, are, by the labors of a solitary writer, become [sic] the common unmediated property of the reader, who penetrates past the words to their author’s visual intention, which is the same as his written presentation.

It is here that Conrad’s emphasis upon vision makes its most decisive break from the English critical tradition and the emphasis upon impersonality in the account of the modernist novel. Conrad’s preface is less preoccupied with appealing to vision as a means of defending the artistic seriousness of the novel than it is with the mechanism of writing as a means of broaching the distance between men. It is a mechanism that is the only available means of redressing the rifts effectuated by the shift away from what Jameson describes as a pre-capitalist mode of relating to other within the world. Not only does a transcendental collectivity seem to be on the other side of writerly isolation (the promise of a “presented vision” to be shared by reader and writer), there is a deep anxiety concerning that vision’s possibility. This anxiety constantly underwrites and

determines Conrad's lonely retreat, making it difficult to understand his solitude as simply one moment within the history of the modernist "exit-author" who enters into a neutral, non-determinative relationship to the text.

### *Homelessness*

As Luckács suggests in *The Theory of the Novel*, a study of the origins of the novel in the fall of "integrated civilization", the novel is the form that the rift between subject and object takes in modernity. "[T]he novel form is, like no other, an expression of...transcendental homelessness." In what he calls a "historico-philosophical dialectic," the novel-as-form speaks to an "unbridgeable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure, between self and world." Life has lost the "immanence of essence," essence as it was to the world of the Greeks and epic:

...everything occurs within it, nothing is excluded from it and nothing points at a higher reality outside it; [it is] completed because everything within it ripens to its own perfection and, by attaining itself, submits to limitation. Totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogenous before it has been contained by forms; where forms are not constraint but only the becoming conscious, *the coming to the surface* of everything that had been lying dormant as a vague longing in the inner-most depths of that which had to be given form; where knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness, *where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible* [emphasis added].

One begins to understand the burden upon visual immediacy throughout Conrad's preface. In a way that echoes Flaubert's dedication to self-contained style only to radically depart, Conrad writes: "A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect." Conrad here defines the novel in terms of what Luckács calls "the meaning of the world made visible," the absolute presence of the meaning of the world before its beholder. As Luckács would perhaps note, that "single-minded attempt" is an always-already failed enterprise, the novel being distinctly on the other-side of a historical transformation. Conrad's theory of the novel can only be in this way a longing theory, or rather, becomes a theory of longing. Even in his most declarative moment, Conrad defines the novel in terms of its impossibility, for the novel, Luckács insists, is the "product of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given." As I will discuss in Chapter Two, critics thus regard Conrad's turn to the storytelling voice of Marlow, in the works immediately after the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, as a nostalgic return the storyteller as described by Benjamin, the storyteller being a pre-novel figure who guarantees the givenness of meaning by his very presence.

In Conrad's Preface, however, it is the trope of visibility that constantly registers the incantatory demand for the direct givenness of meaning to the world, a realm where, Luckács writes, "forms are not constrained but only the becoming conscious, the coming to the surface of everything that had been lying dormant as a vague longing in the inner-most depths of that which had to be given form." Indeed, the very presence of a preface suggests that form can no longer carry, as Conrad wishes, "its justification in every line." Without that justification, Conrad's theory of the novel, as that which binds all men to each other and to the visible universe, cannot be understood outside of his theory of writing as a medium that aspires to erase its own mimetic status, or as Said suggests, to become fully the thing it represents.



Conrad's preface poses a dual problematic—the problem of writing *is* that of national belonging. Conrad longs for the written form to lie “dormant” in the world, as if to reverse the order of representation such that representation originates in the presence of the object, as what Lukács calls its “becoming conscious,” and not in subsequent loss. As Lukács suggests, the form of the novel is always-already a rift in the primary visibility of meaning and justification to the world: Conrad can only long for the body of writing to merge with the visible world, which is to say, the national community it represents; he longs for a necessary relationship between the world and the novel-as-form, between writer and other men, between author and nation. Conrad's concluding *fiat lux* can only be read as a plea for belonging: “And when it is accomplished,” he declares, “—behold! all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest.” One can hardly tell if Conrad still speaks of the novel or what he calls the “visible universe,” or if the two have been collapsed, and that collapse, in part, seems to be the final aim: a “return” to some moment before the sundering of collective and individual, and subject and object, or the object and the subject's means of representation, the writer attempting to find a means of representation that might undo its own necessity, re-presenting the mysterious object as such.

#### *The Excess of the Image*

Conrad's preface confronts the impossibility of his rousing aesthetic aim; indeed, what I am calling Conrad's incantation of a surrounding vision, is one that can never fully erase the words on the page, tending to re-vitiate subject and object. The rifts addressed by Conrad's work and aesthetic program—the two often diverging in important ways—are not simply to be located in the external world of historical transformation, nor even in the ego which has internalized its structures. There is a technical problem, a rift that inheres in the means of broaching all other rifts. The technical dilemma of writing which, as I described in the Prelude, is a hallucination of another world that cannot be sustained, compelling the writer elsewhere only to withdraw its object in a way that cannot be accounted for the by one who undergoes it. This dilemma constantly enfolds and returns to re-condition those of the internal and external world. What Jameson calls “the repression of the aesthetic” is, paradoxically, assuaged by a medium that must simultaneously turn against itself, a medium that shares in its own repression, what Derrida calls “the repression of writing as the repression of that which threatens presence and absence.” Conrad writes what appears to be a manifesto of the written word's transformation, writing wishing to become something else.

If Conrad continually merges with the body of writing, as we witnessed with *Almayer's Folly*, this transformation is on behalf of the author as he himself might transform. Conrad's aesthetic credo demands nothing short of writing's absolute transformation into a shared heart that need not *speak* the nature of its bond. That plea on behalf of the Polish novelist, who had experienced exile and who makes an entreaty to a new-found English community in a third language, is not fully reducible to problems of ideology and ontology: it is, to some degree, overdetermined by problems of national origin and the inhabitation of a foreign language. Lukács' ontological account of the novel, as a sundering of subject and object, is re-accentuated by a personal history of exile.

Conrad addresses the problem of a “natural” bond between men and other men: he is a Polish author who writes to English audience by way of a foreign tongue and from a place of national dislocation. What Said calls Conrad's desire “to say something very clearly,” as a product of the “radical doubt of the mimetic power available to written language,” is perhaps more precisely a radical doubt of the power of expressing belonging to the community wrought

by the English language. There is within Conrad's most known credo the generative force of a third term—writing itself—by which the artist's visual intention is not only discerned, but silences its difference to become what Said calls "common unmediated property" (--).

One must here more carefully attend to transferential function of the Conradian maxim, for not only is the act of reading constantly transferred into other modes of perception—"hearing" and "feeling"—but those perceptions themselves are, in the end, to culminate in "seeing." In a synaesthetic moment, the "ring" of words and what Conrad calls the "magic suggestiveness" of their "music" are *at once* the written format's transmutation into image. *There is a "sound" of written language that desires vision*: Conrad aspires to a form of hearing, a form of feeling, and a form of reading that are recoded as a shared vision. The "light" of magical and musical suggestiveness is the experience of the "common unmediated property" of language itself.

This desire seems to challenge the death of the author and to reveal its supposition in neutrality. As Conrad forces one to ask, *who* can exit from the text? *Who* can find silence and solitude? Just after his analysis of Conrad's credo, Beach notes an agonizing struggle with writing: "This may be partly because Conrad was writing in a foreign language, one he had learned to speak since he came to man's estate, in which he was perpetually liable to little slips in idiom, and which he pronounced so badly—so frequently misplacing the accent—that it was hard to understand him when he read aloud" (339). To what degree does Conrad's desire for a "presented vision" suggest a need to craft not only a realm in which signifier and signified are rebound, but a transcendental space of kinship untroubled by the problems posed by foreign origin and indeed, foreign voice? Is what Conrad calls the written word's aspiration to "the magic suggestiveness of music," one which then sheds upon language a "light," in fact a kind of a neutral written voice, one that is so undetermined by national origin that its referent might be seen by all men and in all times?

"Above all, to make you see"—the clearness of vision that links Conrad inextricably to his English reader—is not a purely metaphysical claim, but a deferred future of national belonging that promises to undo the psychic threats posed by the condition of extraterritoriality. The novel is to become a real space, without border, affording the privileges of national identity without condition. His theory of seeing, as a collective and *a priori* experience that is anterior to the individual and then rescued by the novel, mitigates the threat of isolation. The object of onerism is not to be located in the "sunshine and shadows" around which men gather in the preface's concluding image: Conrad incants, above all, *that* these men stand together to see; he incants their collective silence insofar as it might command mutual understanding. It is an understanding wrought not by discussion, nor even by language itself, but by the physical eye that sees beyond place, meeting the gaze of the other in their shared object. Indeed, Conrad seems to believe that the written status of the novel can negate itself to become pure, present-tense image, Conrad entreating the reader to pause for a moment and merely look, as if this is to become coextensive with the act of reading itself. He wishes to adopt and then erase writing as a medium until the novel is finally figured as if a pair of eyes. Incantation begins as words which then transform into their long sought after referent. The novel is dialectically undone.

The incanted image is not without its excess or its unsynthesized remainder. It is not a purely visible trope, but *a vision to be heard* as the clearest voice of communication. Conrad emphasizes vision in the critical summation of his own work; yet, there lies within that vision what I will call an "acoustic displacement," a sound that is the other side of? the silence of the image and the silence of the written word. It is a dimension that drives the first words that fall

not only upon the world of *Almayer's Folly*, but Conrad's fictional world as such, the first line of the first novel being a misapprehended, foreign voice calling from without, one that prevents the reader's access, demands the listener's return, and indicates their inward split: "Kaspar! Makan!" Everywhere within and beside the visual assertion are sounds, noises, and voices, a dimension that tends towards haunting and disrupting the written image that effaces it.

There is a peculiar narrative voice that arises from Conrad's sense vision, a sense of vision for which problems of spoken language do not fall away, but are rather acoustically redirected, repositied, and maintained. It is that persistence of an acoustic remainder that will in fact formulate Conrad's sense of narrative voice: there are narratological vicissitudes within Conrad's theoretical predicament; his troubled theory of the novel is perpetuated by a conflicted technique. As for Faulkner after him, the acoustic remainder defines narrative voice as driven by an anterior responsibility: the subject of narrative "hears" the voices that have been otherwise effaced, becoming-subject to the things it has heard once before and at times, never heard as such.

It is the attempt at acoustic effacement, which then arrives at its own impossibility, that emplots the journey of the ship in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. It drives its excessive continuation into the next work, the sonic irreconcilability of the image that is Marlow's narrative in *Heart of Darkness*: he will hear Kurtz's last words, but cannot see "some image" at which he cries, the novel foreclosing omniscience; he will hear shouts from the jungle, failing to see their source. Marlow is, as Watt notes, "the sort of Englishman Conrad would have like to have been," yet he everywhere hears the pressure exerted by his own nation's exterior. It is central that Conrad gives the reader the story not as its immediate witness, but rather in the recollections of Marlow. As he tells the story of his journey in the Congo aboard the *Nellie*, his narrative voice can only be understood in relationship to that which he had heard, making his voice what I will argue to be a repository of listening, or more precisely, *having heard*.

Conrad seems to be keenly aware of this tension in *A Personal Record*. While it is traditional to begin a memoir with a personal chronology, Conrad eschews any attempt to speak in his own voice and in a way that concerns the factuality of his own person. Rather, he mediates on how the Author—as a kind of second and third person—is to find the means of persuasion, and to modify and mould accent so as to reach his reader. He begins his memoir with a mediation on persuasion and the novel, his most extensive, yet cryptic commentary on the phenomenology of narrative voice and its dialectic tension with the phenomenal voice of the writer:

You perceive the force of a word. He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word. The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense. I don't say this by way of disparagement. It is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective. Nothing humanely great—great, I mean, as affecting a whole mass of lives—has come from reflection. On the other hand, you cannot fail to see the power of mere words; such words as Glory, for instance, or Pity. I won't mention any more. They are not far to seek. Shouted with perseverance, with ardour, with conviction, these two by their sound alone have set whole nations in motion and upheaved the dry, hard ground on which rests our whole social fabric. There's "virtue" for you if you like! . . . Of course the accent must be attended to. The right accent. That's very important. The capacious lung, the thundering or the tender vocal chords . . . . Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world.

What a dream for a writer! Because written words have their accent, too. Yes! Let me only find the right word! Surely it must be lying somewhere among the wreckage of all the complaints and all the exultations poured out aloud since the first day when hope, the undying, came down on earth. It may be there, close by, disregarded, invisible, quite at hand. But it's no good. I believe there are men who can lay hold of a needle in a pottle of hay at the first try. For myself, I have never had such luck.

And then there is that accent. Another difficulty. For who is going to tell whether the accent is right or wrong till the word is shouted, and fails to be heard, perhaps, and goes down-wind, leaving the world unmoved?

Conrad meditates on the possibility of hearing as a unified national body and “sound alone” as it has “set whole nations in motion.” In meditating on this power of sound, Conrad moves into a startling and performative negation: he has “never had such luck.” Both the impetus to write and its measure of success come from an outside imperative. In a way that cannot be circuited through the rhetoric of impersonality, his first autobiographical gesture is not to say “I,” but to deal in the question of accent and finding the “right word.” It is as if, at the level of grammar—one that refuses to speak in Conrad’s own voice as an “I” until the moment of avowing failure—Conrad asserts that he must *speak as someone else* if he is to find the means of moving the world to unison. He must find an alternative accent, the right sound, the right voice, a voice which can in no way be his own. Sounding-out poses an incredible risk, for there is the possibility of errancy, the ability of sound to be misdirected, to move in a direction which the Author can neither predict nor command. It is sound for which the writer must, to some degree, “Wait” in regard to its trajectory, “wait” being a word we will find to be at the heart of the Conradian project. As I will now show, the force of “waiting” in relationship to location of narrative voice (who speaks and as whom?—these are questions that are never fully answered by the Conradian novel) is precisely what drives the unfolding of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and the appearance of the character from whom the novel takes its name, James Wait, the West Indian sailor aboard ship. Narrative voice only emerges through a patient act of listening, of waiting for the voice as it circulates from elsewhere.

## Chapter Two: Waiting for the Voice: Echo, Trope, and Narrative as Acoustic Displacement

Let us call consciousness of this halo of relations around the image by the name of 'psychic overtone' or 'fringe.'

—William James, *Principles of Psychology*

From that evening when James Wait joined the ship—late for the muster of the crew—to the moment when he left us in the open sea, shrouded in sailcloth, through the open port, I had much to do with him. He was in my watch. A negro in a British forecabin is a lonely being. He has no chums.... But in the book he is nothing; he is merely the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action.

—Joseph Conrad, "To My Readers in America"

The work of art is solitary: this does not imply that it remains incommunicable, readerless. But he who reads it participates in the work's claim to solitude, just as he who writes it incurs the consequences of solitude.

—Maurice Blanchot, "The Essential Solitude"

### *Phonographic Desire*

In his 1936 essay "The Storyteller," Benjamin suggests that the birth of the novel is the "coming to an end" of "living speech." Benjamin at once recalls and departs from Plato's most famous indictment of the written word, appealing to storytelling as a communal bond, one solidified by a continuum between past and present:

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual. ...To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life.

Narrative as living speech is deeply embedded in the community from which it arises, one which is promoted and sustained by the storytelling event. As the acoustical event passes away, Benjamin suggests, the ethical-affective bond of a storytelling community vanishes with it into the isolation of the solitary individual writing. The spoken word transmits a chain of experience to those who are otherwise distant from its effects; listening first-hand is as ethically present as witnessing itself, binding those who hear the story to the past and to each other.

As I noted in the introduction, critics turn to the figure of the storyteller as they account for Conrad's "return" to the pre-modern storytelling event with Marlow—the directly discoursing narrator of "Youth," *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Chance*. As Frederic Jameson writes of this exceptional literary device, "the representational fiction of a storytelling situation organized around Marlow marks the vain attempt to conjure back the older unity of the literary situation of which narrative transmission was but a part, and of which public and bard or storyteller are intrinsic...components." For Jameson, Conrad appeals to the storytelling voice as that which gives veracity, presence, and communally sanctioned authority to what is otherwise constituted and received in reciprocal solitude. "The book or printed text is wrenched from its concrete position within a functioning social and communicational situation, and becomes a free-floating object, which, as Plato observes, 'has the attitude of life, and yet if you ask it a question it preserves a solemn silence.'" The printed text "always gives one unvarying answer."

In his comments upon the early generic development of the novel, Tony Jackson locates a central problem for the self-authorization of narrative and with it, “the attempt to imitate the immediate personal presence of the oral storyteller, the mythic narrator in whom what is said is guaranteed simply by the nature of the sayer” (35). Drawing from Benjamin’s assertions about the storyteller, Jackson concludes that:

the authority of the originary narrator, the storyteller, is based upon an evident, personal knowledge gained from travel and experience. The first novelists who consciously strive for some form of realistic representation seem acutely aware of what they might lose in not having the face-to-face, teller-listener relationship of oral narrative, and they take pains to establish their authority in storyteller fashion. (36)

It would seem that Conrad takes similar pains with the introduction of Marlow, critics having overwhelmingly approached the motive behind his voice as a drive towards authorization. “Certainly,” writes Ivan Krielkramp, “the opening of *Heart of Darkness* fleetingly permits a comforting and even sentimental alliance of the reader with the represented figures of storyteller, as if to read the novel were to join this verbal community.” Posing an important question for Jameson’s reading of Conrad, however, Krielkramp notes a highly performative scene of discursive transformation at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*, one by which the storytelling voice comes to signify a force to be distinguished from authorization. It is a transformation that is perhaps most Benjaminian in its ambivalence, registered only at the level of trope as the men sit aboard the *Nellie*, providing the setting for Marlow’s uneasy tale. Just before Marlow erupts into the novel, the narrator’s attention is drawn to The Director of Companies: the listeners “watched his back as he stood in the bows looking seaward” (*Darkness* 3). The reader is prepared for a traditional oral event, yet “the detail of the Captain’s back, however,” Krielkramp writes, “immediately heralds a narrative strategy Conrad uses through the rest of the novel, not to comfort a reader in the persistence of familiar structures of realist narrative, but to question those structures” (227-229). Such synecdoches are “signs failing to evoke anything or anyone beyond themselves.” We are asked to gaze upon the Director’s back, an authority figure who has turned away from the audience in silence, preoccupied with thoughts that remain inaccessible.

Given as we are this man’s “back,” and not his whole body, Krielkramp cites the power of the recently invented phonograph to tear the speaking voice from its original speaker so as “to offer but a piece of him” (227). In September of 1898, ten years after the perfection of the device, Conrad had encountered the phonograph first-hand during a visit to a radiologist. The doctor showed an astonished Conrad an X ray and played for him a recording of the Polish pianist, Jan Paderewski. In a letter to his editor, Edward Garnett, Conrad writes of this remarkable experience just before beginning *Heart of Darkness*:

All day with ship-owners and in the evening dinner, phonograph, X rays, talk about *the* secret of the Universe and the non-existence of, so called, matter. The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness. ... And, note, *all* matter (the universe) composed of the same matter, matter, *all matter* being only that thing of inconceivable tenuity through which the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound, light, etc.) are propagated, thus giving birth to our sensations—then emotions—then thought. Is this so? (*Letters* 143)

This sense of “vibrations” and “inconceivable tenuity” beneath all things, Krielkramp suggests, had a penetrating effect upon Conradian technique. Like the “back” which turns against the

listeners, “‘voice’ in *Heart of Darkness* is not an expressive trace of the fully human, but a material sign, a part-object standing for nothing beyond itself” (229). After Marlow finally encounters the voice which he has for so long sought, he is presented with Kurtz not as fully authorized voice or presence, but a failing one transmitting only the dying anaphora, “The horror! The horror!” The narrative technique which facilitates the voice of Marlow, on another level, asserts its coming to an end as the site of a continued and verifiable authority.

In his letter to Garnett, however, one senses a deeper predicament grounding Conrad’s reconsideration of narrative technique. As he considers the force of “vibration,” he is more ambivalent in tarrying with the negative than Krielkramp suggests. As Conrad continues to write to Garnett, “It was so—said the Doctor—and there is no space, time, matter or mind as vulgarly understood, there is only the eternal something that waves and an eternal force that cause the waves—it’s not much—and by virtue of these two eternities exists that Corot and that Whistler in the dining room upstairs... (*Letters* 143).” It’s not much, yet it is *something*. The Doctor explains that, yes, even this music on the phonograph and “your Nigger,” gesturing to Conrad’s recently published novel, are waves or vibrations. With this impalpable *something* beneath the claim of any storyteller, one can detect Conrad’s own understanding of the capacity of the novel beginning to shift. Conrad asks, what is behind it, what drives it, and more centrally, what *carries* it to others and thereby mediates two poles of silence and solitude, the writer and reader? The novel *vibrates*. There is an impersonal “it” behind it that speaks and writes, just as William James had recently discovered an “it thinks” at the heart of consciousness in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890).

It is by way of this impersonality that one might consider Conrad’s most cryptic assertion about his project in an 1908 Author’s Note to *Heart of Darkness*. There, Conrad discards the emphasis upon vision to insist upon what he calls “another art altogether.” “That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck.” On a physical level, Conrad exhibits a keen sense of what psychoacoustics now calls “echoic memory.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, on an phenomenological level, there is in Conrad’s insistence a part-object of vibration with a tonality of its *own*. It is a force behind the voice that does not vanish all together, but rather *reaches* the reader in a most uncanny persistence.

The romantic “idealization” of sound, Steven Connor writes, “stressed the capacity of sound both to pervade and to integrate objects and entities which the eye kept separate” (57). From within a romantic sensibility, Conrad begins *A Personal Record* (1917), a memoir about the composition of his first novel, with a meditation on the capacity of the speaking voice to make a suggestive claim upon a “you,” a listener other upon whom the voice as part-object is impressed:

You perceive the force of a word. He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word. The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense. I don’t say this by way of disparagement. It is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective. Nothing humanly great—great, I mean, as affecting a whole mass of lives—has come from reflection. On the other hand, you cannot fail to see the power of mere words;

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<sup>12</sup> A mental echo is heard after an auditory stimulus. In contrast to “iconic memory,” or short term visual memory, echoic memory lasts for several seconds. Echoic memory does not only allow one to repeat back a series of numbers, but is the span in which some of the most mysterious effects of music are thought to occur, allowing one to perceive a continuous, self-referential, and connected language of sound.

such words as Glory, for instance, or Pity. I won't mention any more. They are not far to seek. Shouted with perseverance, with ardor, with conviction, these two by their sound alone have set whole nations in motion and upheaved the dry, hard ground on which rests our whole social fabric. There's "virtue" for you if you like!... Of course, the accent must be attended to. The right accent. That's very important. The capacious lung, the thundering or the tender vocal chords.  
(*Personal 2*)

Conrad begins his memoir not with a meditation on personal origins, but rather with the *direction* of the author's voice as a part-object. He moves from "argument," to the "right word," to the sound of the voice that carries that word. The range of hearing approaches more intensely the "impalpable substance" he had found in the vibration. There is a level of hearing that reaches the reader on the most basic, a-conceptual level. The part-object of vibration has for Conrad a central force of depersonalization; an autonomy unto itself that does not merely echo its origin; it takes leave of the subject.

In a way that is crucial to understanding how Conrad's declaration functions, the author sounds not unlike the anonymous frame narrator of *Heart of Darkness* who will "return" to the diegesis to interject only after the reader has been sufficiently lulled by Marlow's narrative:

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river. (26)

The voice does not simply take leave of the body, for, as with the epiphany of a vibrational force behind the work of art, there are doubts about its having ever originated there. The voice is transitive, self-reflexive and with its *own* force, inhabiting the body, its uncanny medium.

As Krielkramp remarks of that moment, "the frame narrator's narrowing of focus from 'the sentence' to 'the word,' in his effort to pull from Marlow's speech a 'clue' that will operate as a traditional synecdoche and conjure the whole, seems a necessary response to a narrative technique that disavows the natural connection between a speaker and his words" (230). *Heart of Darkness* begins in the Benjaminian realm of living speech only to "[empty] out into a solipsistic, isolated perception of voice-without-body that is only occasionally interrupted by fleeting reminders of the shipboard community" (230). Yet, in Conrad's dialectical account of the power of the single word in *A Personal Record*, there *remains* the problem of the body, the capacious lung, the tender vocal cords, and the right accent as they impress themselves upon the body of the listener. There is not a disembodiment, but rather the question of the *proper body* to house the voice and give it a life for others and thereby set the nation in motion. Part-objects of the author's body in its vocal capacity point not to an absent whole, but to an anticipatory one, on the other side of vibration: such a body can be redeemed only in the moment of the listener's regard for the story being told. Unlike Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1896), one influence on *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad continually returns to the anonymous narrator who is, above all, a listener, in order to gauge the effect of Marlow's voice upon him. In the prologue to Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, Douglas will turn his back upon the audience seated round the hearth, upon the storytelling scene as such, just before James launches into an incredible feat of *écriture*, the governess' manuscript. He never circles back to the storytelling scene around the fire where listeners had demanded "an early hearing" of it read aloud. Where the storytelling



voice in James fully departs, Conrad continues to remind, punctuating Marlow's account with the story-listeners, as "fleeting" as such punctuations may be.

In a way that has not been adequately understood, the anonymous narrator of *Heart of Darkness* "frames" the event of Marlow's voice in a literal way, becoming the site, the body for this narrative that "shaped itself" in the "heavy night-air of the river," heavy with vibrations that seek a physical destination. Conrad both begins and ends the novel with the narrator, his having caught the tale as if by contagion, gazing upon London as a heart of darkness and thereby taking on the responsibility of Marlow's voice as an inheritance, or what Peter Brooks calls "implication" (*Darkness* 384). It would seem, then, that not disembodiment, but a synecdochal chain of embodiment linking the words of one to the body of another, the coming to an end of living speech in its contact with inscription—not simply a beauty emerging at the point of what is vanishing, but with it, a newly physical imperative—drives the "return" to phenomenal voice. The emphasis upon disembodiment in an acoustical consideration of Conrad's technique only circumvents Conrad's most compelling demand upon the body of the reader.<sup>13</sup>

The "Word" that falls vibrationally upon his or her ear must be located within Conrad's literary trajectory, biography, and his agonizing struggle with composition. Conrad was impressed by the phonograph, but surely other novelists had encountered this machine, quickly popularized at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Is there not a suggestive relationship—an echo-effect that will preoccupy this present chapter—between a series of tropes that, as Krielkramp writes, "[govern] the representation of phonographic sound," the "phonemes detached from any represented objects or persons" (231) and Conrad's early concern for a novelistic aesthetic that might reorganize the embodied fragments—lung, vocal cord, accent—of authorial voice, essentially departing from one body in the moment of inscription and housing itself in another in the moment of reading? How is one to interpret Conrad's most axiomatic call in the 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* that the novel upholds the "rescued fragment" of human experience?

This early novel is filled with light, sounds and voices; it is an archive of sensory experience. In other words, while Conrad had not yet visited the radiologist, his logic and characterization of the novel are already akin to the contemporary discourse surrounding the phonograph noted by Krielkramp, that it was "not a useful record of the voices, images, and memories of human history, but only 'a museum of odds and ends of form and speech'" (222). While it is likely Conrad had heard of the new device, he had not yet had his epiphany of its capacity when writing *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. Yet, rather than understanding the 1897 preface and its emphasis upon vision as pre-phonographic, *we need to understand* the preface, in its regard for "fragments," *as driving* towards the phonograph, containing within itself the phonographic possibility. On the one hand such a drive poses an alternative way of thinking through the novel and its relationship to cultural "influence," but perhaps more centrally, it provides an opportunity to think through the particularity of Conradian technique, an experimental narrative voice that was driven by both desire and a pressing socio-cultural need.

In order to understand phonographic vibrations as they solidified a longing already present in Conrad's earliest considerations of novelistic practice, one might consider the

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<sup>13</sup> See Vincent Pecora's "Heart of Darkness and the Phenomenology of Voice" (ELH, Vol. 52, No. 4 [Winter, 1985], 993-1015) and Bettye London's *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990]). Both works emphasize the role of disembodiment.

<sup>14</sup> Krielkramp notes the representation of the phonograph in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*.

phonograph as it interrupted Platonic metaphysics in the history of philosophy. In 1934, Adorno writes “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” calling the device “an artistic product of decline.” The nineteenth century had “good reasons for coming up with phonograph record albums alongside photographic and postage-stamp albums, all of them herbaria of artificial life that are present in the smallest space and ready to conjure up every recollection that would otherwise be mercilessly shredded between the haste and hum-drum of private life” (*Music* 278-279). The machine is adequate to what is already artificial about modern life; yet, in the ambivalence of the dialectic, Adorno seems to suggest, the phonograph undoes the problem of signification, essentially replacing the body of the speaker with a more perfect body that cannot be separated from its signs. Adorno suggests that the phonograph’s “writing can be recognized as true language to the extent that it relinquishes its being as mere signs: inseparably committed to the sound that inhabits this and no other acoustic grove” (*Music* 280). In that inseparable commitment, the phonograph makes of signs *not-signs*, makes them an infallible “true language” and “the sounds of creation.”<sup>15</sup>

Adorno’s description resonates with Conrad’s sense, in the opening paragraphs of *Personal Record*, of “the force of sound” and the “right Word” as a first word, one which names, just as a *fiat-lux* language of the Old Testament gives being.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the most central, yet perplexing tropes of Conrad’s theory of the novel are emphasized by Adorno as well, suggesting a theoretical kinship. Adorno concludes his most cryptic essay on the phonographic inscription with a proclamation about restoration, that “art-works become true, *fragments* of the true language, once life has left them.... It would be then, that, in a seriousness hard to measure, the form of the phonograph record could find its true meaning: the scriptural spiral that disappears in the center, in the opening of the middle, but in return *survives in time* [emphasis added]” (*Essays* 280). The phonograph is dead, he writes, yet “the dead art *rescues* the ephemeral and perishing art as the only one alive [emphasis added]” (*Essays* 280). “It is time as evanescence, enduring in mute music” (*Essays* ---). There is a messianic return of phonographic sound, a return that makes signs more alive in after-life, designifying them by attaching them to an absolute, what is, dialectically, a nearly naming capacity of genesis. Most importantly for our purposes here, one begins to hear Conrad’s 1897 sense of the novel as the site of rescued fragments. This sense is

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<sup>15</sup> In “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873), written four years before Edison’s invention, Nietzsche is less hopeful about the possibility of inscribed sound (Chladni figures) offering a preemptive critique of Adorno’s redemptive reading of the phonographic sound as “first language.” In Nietzsche’s conception of metaphor, there is an absolute *distance* at the heart of what appears to be causal relationship; thus in the way that one cannot travel “back” via the sound-figure to hear sound, one can do no better than metaphorize when using language. It is at best a “stammering translation.”

<sup>16</sup> Yet, both Adorno and Conrad’s sense of a “true language” is also romantic in origin. Consider Rousseau’s theory of melody, as articulated in “The Essay on the Origin of Languages” (1781), and his theory of *sensibilité*, as elaborated in *The Confessions* (1782). For Rousseau, a melodious first speech of the human race corresponds with childhood as a period of a linguistic “transparency” (see Jean Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*). Figurative speech is a language of feeling that links heart and heart, and thereby promises a return to unobstructed origins. As Jacques Derrida writes of Rousseau, “the ideal profoundly underlying this philosophy of writing is therefore the ideal image of a community immediately self-present to itself, without difference, a community of speech where all the members are within earshot” (*Grammatology* 136). Rousseau’s romantic philosophy of language is manifest not only in Adorno’s sense of music as “non-signifying language,” as he argues in his essay “Music, Language, and Composition,” but in his messianic theory of phonographic technology as a “return” to first language. The Rousseauvian sense of a return to the ideal community of speech will prove crucial for our discussion of Conrad’s theory of writing.

phonographic in desire, a desire that cannot be separated from the call for a true language that survives in and as the reader's unambiguous and therefore extra-signifying reception.

Such reception is affective in nature, yet most readings of *Heart of Darkness* emphasize the epistemological registers of the novel's central epistemological enigmas—why does Marlow follow Kurtz? Who is Kurtz? What does he see in his final moments?—and thereby negate their affectivity, indeed their physiology. Kurtz's last words, as Krielkramp observes, phonographically repeat within Marlow's consciousness at the end of *Heart of Darkness*; yet, in physically "keeping" these words as his own, Marlow intercepts Kurtz's Intended as their destination. There is a refusal to *recognize* the desire surrounding such physical containment of the trope, a refusal that is most forceful in recent attempts to redeem the phenomenology of a "disembodied voice" in Conrad. As Vincent Pecora remarks of Marlow's final lie to the Intended (Marlow tells her that Kurtz's last words were her name):

and Marlow, in his attempt to rehabilitate Kurtz's last words, to *mend* that epistemological break, only reveals the more powerfully what Nietzsche had called a "metaphysical need": "This type of man *needs* to believe in a neutral independent subject, prompted by an instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified [...]." It is through Kurtz's voice that Marlow is able to satisfy this need, and it is in Kurtz's memory that Marlow's lie, so otherwise repulsive to him, is "sanctified. (Pecora 1006)

Marlow's need is rendered transparent, one that both he and the critic affirm only to deny, making his tale a moral-heroic one, effectively removing what is a compulsion for Marlow to tell of Kurtz again and again. For does not Marlow rather "steal" the final words intended for the Intended, to keep as his own, insinuating his very body between them? His desire thwarts their destination as it is intended by the currents of normative discourse. His spoken discourse, his will towards storytelling, then, becomes the only erogenous zone which temporarily effectuates the fulfillment of desire. When speaking Kurtz's last words aboard the *Nellie*, he becomes their body *for* Kurtz, sealing their bond as one of intimate necessity—Marlow, in keeping the final words as his own against their intended destination for the Intended, becomes in the most literal sense, their mouth—he must speak for Kurtz to live on as an object of desire.<sup>17</sup>

To hear the erotics of his lie, however, is to be *incited* by a text that courts the body of the theorist-as-reader, just as it had courted Marlow. This process is embedded in Kurtz's final words as Marlow draws near: "he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: 'The horror! The horror!' I blew out the candle and left the cabin..." (*Darkness* 112). Marlow, on the other side of Kurtz's utterance, effectively breathes out the same air which he had just inhaled as Kurtz's cry. But the space of breathing in and out is not merely between Marlow and Kurtz. The colon before the last words marks a breath in the frame narrator. Marlow pauses to breathe in again once more on the *Nellie* before he exhales the final words for his listeners. The narrative aboard the *Nellie* can only reproduce and re-circulate the air—the reader becomes complicit in that "theft." On another level, there is a fracture in the heteronormative bond, in the sense that the Intended does not receive the words that ostensibly "belong" to hear. That fracture is pronounced only at the level of narrative discourse. The part-object voice of Marlow is, then, a technical or narratological expression of several layers of exclusion. In order to receive Marlow's desire, the reader must read with his or her body, becoming in effect, an enunciative site of a "continued vibration that would hang in the air and dwell in the ear after the last note had been

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<sup>17</sup> For a reading of the mouth as erogenous zone in Conrad, see *One of Us: The Mastery of Joseph Conrad* by Geoffrey Galt Harpham.

struck.” The reader becomes the secondary embodiment, a phonographic chain of embodying voice and embodying desire. It is a continuation that resists *Gestalt* as what René Girard names “triangular desire.”<sup>18</sup>

One would make a mistake to provide a merely epistemological or even chronological account of the phonographic nature of Conrad’s theory of voice. As I will explain, it is tropological, an acoustical movement of tropes, a “turning” of phrases, from work to work, body to body). His theory of voice should not be located simply in terms of his haunting experience with the device in 1898: the desire for the technology and the epiphany of vibration were already evident in the 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*. In other words, with his demand for rescued fragments—and a demand for still more, for unmediated kinship—Conrad was working from within a phonographic desire.<sup>19</sup>

From within the ontological theory of technology, the ambivalent emergence of Marlow and with it, a new theory of the novel as impalpable “vibrations”—acoustical fragments—cannot be understood outside of Conrad’s earlier narrative innovation in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* The radiologist notes Conrad’s just published novel, providing the “substance” of Conrad’s epiphany that the work is in fact nothing that can be seen or distinctly held. Yet, the epiphany of the phonograph solidifies and gives new direction to Conrad’s sense of the novel as it had already been articulated.

In what follows, I will discuss Conrad’s narrative technique as it was developed in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* in terms of this “destining far in advance” of acoustical rescue, a phonographic desire, and a desire for a disembodied origin and with it the re-embodiment by the reader as a “sinister vibration.”<sup>20</sup> It is sinister, perhaps, in its capacity to defy the author’s physical body, depending on his death for its effect. With Conrad, however, one must ask, what

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<sup>18</sup> “In most works of fiction,” Girard writes, “...There is no mediator, there is only subject and object. When the ‘nature’ of the object inspiring the passion is not sufficient to account for the desire, one must turn to the impassioned subject. ...But desire is always spontaneous [in most works]. It can always be portrayed by a straight line which joins subject and object” (*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965] 2). In *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion* (1915), Ford Madox Ford, Conrad’s close friend and collaborator, will further develop a triangulated voice, invoking his reader as a silent listener: “So I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul beside me. And I shall go on talking, in a low voice while the sea sounds in the distance and overhead the great black flood of wind polishes the bright stars.” The story of the narrator is inextricably bound to this story of another, the story of Edward; the autobiographical “I” cannot declare itself except through fictional negation of claiming to be the story of another. What begins to make itself *heard*, along this axis of the reader’s incantatory listening—“Oh, silent listener, you don’t tell me anything”—is a desire that cannot be named *except* at the phenomenal level of reading. In silent listening, the reader shelters the desire, becoming a body for “it”—a repeated trope in the novel—while the narrator must refute his object of desire. “The impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator” (Girard 10), which in this case is the reader him or herself.

<sup>19</sup> As Krielkramp shows, Conrad would have been aware of the device before visiting the radiologist. More importantly, however, is the ontological point as represented by Jean-Louis Baudry in “Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus.” He argues that cinema is not to be understood as an invention *per se*, but a prosthetic fulfillment of a desire that had been in existence at least as long as Plato’s allegory of the cave.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger theorizes technology not as invention, but as a “destining far in advance.” Asking what is responsible for a “sacrificial vessel,” Heidegger writes in “The Question Concerning Technology” (1962) that “it is that which in advance confines the chalice within the realm of consecration and bestowal....With the bounds the thing does not stop; rather from out of them it begins to be what after production, it will be [*Mit diesem Ende hört das Ding nicht auf, sondern aus ihm her beginnt es als das, was es nach der Herstelleng sein wird*]. That which gives bounds, that which completes, in this sense is called in Greek *telos*, which is all too often translated as ‘aim’ or ‘purpose,’ and so misinterpreted. The *telos* is responsible for what as matter and for what as aspect are together co-responsible for the sacrificial vessel does not stop.”

is this physiological effect if not *at once* the ethical creation of community bound by “true language” unburdened by signification? It is a language that, in its herbaria, dialectically becomes first language, undoing a fall into signs, vibrationally inscribing itself within the body of the reader without division. In other words, unlike the phonograph in *Between the Acts* which “moans...*dispersed are we*,” the phonographic desire in Conrad courts an uncannily belonging premised upon voice taking leave of the author’s body. The problems of such a body, as I will show, are displaced within the diegesis and, in particular, its non-European domains, as an otherness at the fringe of communication that echo Conrad’s own origins.

This chapter, therefore, will bring Conrad’s condition of exile to bear upon the development of narrative voice in Conrad’s early fiction. The novels composed between 1896 and 1900 are rich in voices and sound; it is the period in which Conrad was most arduously consolidating his identity as a writer and his relationship not simply to style, but his “voice” as an English author, the possibility of adopting and mastering its timbre, particularly as it might be registered at the level of written discourse. Derrida asks “if there is a timbre and a style, will it be concluded that here the source *presents itself*? ...And this is why *I* loses itself here, or in any event exposes itself in the operation of mastery. The timbre of my voice, the style of my writing are that which for (a) me never will have been present. I neither hear nor recognize the timbre of my voice. ...I am blind to my style, deaf to what is most spontaneous in my voice” (*Margins* 296). In other words, the location of self-hearing is, paradoxically, only possible in an other, hearing the moment of “I” losing itself. This chapter brings Conrad’s experiments with narrative voice and indeed, with an entire acoustic sensorium of novelistic practice, to bear as his most lasting onto-aesthetic claim, that the novel “would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck.” Rather than a linear history, I will allow works to “converse.” To read Conrad is to read for resonance, what I will demonstrate as a particular acoustical modality of moving between works and written events, the acoustical rescue of tropes as fragments of discourse. Tropes tend to hang in the air and it is that “substance” that composes authorial voice. To allow Conrad to speak to the history of aesthetics in this way is to recuperate his position within the history of the modernist novel. Conrad was seeking a form of neutral acoustical rescue that might unproblematically link author and reader, but in doing so, he generatively confronted limitations, crafting an impossibly a-signifying language unburdened by the physical, an attempt that would radicalize the novel and its possibilities.

#### *Listening at the Limit of Action: The Registering Temperament*

It is customary to consider Conrad’s 1897 preface independently from *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* One cannot grasp what Conrad means—or would like to mean—by a novel that is guided by a “registering temperament” and in so being, upholds the “rescued fragment,” without a nuanced sense of how the novel itself unfolds autotelically as a theory of novelistic practice. It is a portrait of the artist: “A gone shipmate,” the anonymous narrator concludes as he walks away from the ship, “like any other man, is gone forever; and I never met one of them again. But at times the spring-flood of memory sets with force up the dark River of the Nine Bends” (*Narcissus* 107). One might recall Conrad’s sense that the novelist must “snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life...” Between novelistic practice and theory, then, there is a suggestive transference of power, one that thwarts an otherwise uncomfortable ambivalence: memory “sets with force” and rushes upon the subject, what Nietzsche calls in *The Birth of Tragedy* “*Rausch*,” both noise and rush. The novelist must attempt to dam its power by objectifying it and, in essence, turning it into a formalized object of writing. In other words, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* tells the story of becoming-writer.

As one contemporary reviewer remarks of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, "this tale is no tale, but merely an account of the uneventful voyage of the *Narcissus*.... There is no plot, no villainy, no heroism, and, apart from storm and death and burial, no incident" (*Companion* 57). Marlow's quest for Kurtz will be slightly more activated, yet the journey being continually punctuated by long periods of idleness and waiting. The *Narcissus* disembarks from Bombay for England with no cited goal other than to arrive at its destination and with no disclosed cargo other than the men aboard ship. Most notable among the ship's men are Singleton, a helmsman who in his patient silence and stoicism will become the novel's preeminent source of value. His impenetrable capacity to work and above all, to withhold and withstand, opposes him to the other men aboard ship, in particular, to James Wait, an ill West Indian sailor who \_not without sound and fury, is bedridden for much of the journey before dying, and to Donkin, an idle deject from an American ship who attempts to stir the men towards mutiny. After the ship departs for England, a tempest has all hands bonding together to rescue Wait, as he screams, bangs, and sounds-out, from drowning in his cabin. Their emergent bond is temporarily challenged by Donkin's "poisoned loquacity," which pulls the men towards refuting the given sense of order until Wait dies. It is a death around which the men psychologically converge just before the ship docks in England.

Critics tend to approach the novel as an allegory for a Victorian work ethic on the brink of destruction, inattentive to the vicissitudes of narrative voice as they collaborate with the plot, not simply serving as their medium.<sup>21</sup> At the formal level, most consideration has been given to the narrative voice in its inconsistent wavering between the first and third person and as an innovative rejection of the standards of Victorian omniscience. Levenson has compellingly redeemed this novel and its preface as a central beginning in the history of modernism in England, arguing that with the "registering temperament," Conrad works towards a "narrative consciousness," one that justifies the tension between the first and third-person voices of the novel. The narrator's primary commitment is to "registering" the men as they had been aboard ship, as what Bertrand Russell might call "sense-data;"<sup>22</sup> he accesses a series of phenomenal exteriors as the crew speaks in variant tones and changes shape beneath the fluctuating light of a sky and sea. The world of the novel and the world of the ship are above all a sensorium, the novel documenting the appearance of men within a physical world in the midst of impressing itself upon a sensitive temperament. Levenson synthesizes Conrad's formal decision with the hermeneutic necessities of plot, Conrad's attempt to "uphold" the value and virtue of a passing way of life against the forces that assail it:

Devotion to the visible universe stands at some point in need of a witnessing consciousness which can organize surface reality and ratify its meanings.... Invariably [the first person narrator] appears in the middle or at the end of a paragraph, delicately altering perspectives; with his appearances, the text struggles towards self-consciousness, towards a reflecting human presence which

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<sup>21</sup> See especially the readings of the novel in Ian Watt *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* and Albert Guerard *Conrad: The Novelist*. Stephen M. Ross rightly critiques Guerard's general critical approach as owing to a "psychologist's faith in the presence of a unitary 'unborrowed personality' that un.masks itself in voice" (Ross 7). One might extend this claim to argue that "voice" does not emerge as problematic in itself for Guerard, only the content it supposedly carries—it speaks, but is not spoken.

<sup>22</sup> One might argue that Conrad originates the techniques that will culminate in Woolf and Joyce. For a discussion of sense-data and modernism, see Anne Banfield *The Epistemology of Modernism*, a text from which Conrad is absent, despite his influence on Woolf and an early development of a literary practice that both documents and processes sense-data.

will ensure due consideration for the unreflecting, the unconscious, the merely factual. (9)

The novel ushers in a new narrative voice as an epoch is drawing to a close, wishing to preserve a mode of being in the world—a way of working, communicating and stoically embodying the values of the past—even as it feels and renders its twilight. In a way that has not been fully understood, in crafting a “reflecting human presence,” Conrad’s novel is at once a theory of writing and a theory of memory. As the novel ends with the narrator’s having been “hailed” by the act of narrating the lives of his mates, the novel drives towards the possibility of recollection. Yet, he is not an historian; his narrative cannot be said to belong to the order of historical analysis as described by Foucault, “the system that makes it possible to snatch past discourse from its inertia and, for a moment, to rediscover something of its lost vitality” (*Knowledge* 123). Conrad works at the level of subjectivity, not system, the becoming-conscious of a single narrator who only then becomes a “who” and in that same instance, may become representative of others. One must understand all that occurs in the novel at the level of plot—and in the theoretical preface that later ratifies it—as driving towards that subjective, yet communal *telos*. The novel poses a theory of subjectivity as a sedimentation of the memories of others, one that is contemporaneous with Freud’s discovery of the unconscious. As Genette suggests of Proust’s *Remembrances of Things Past*, which ends with the fictional Marcel’s desire to write, Conrad’s novel progresses “as if the story time were tending to dilate and make itself more and more conspicuous while drawing near its end, *which is also its origin*.” The “hero” is “beginning to become the narrator.” He remains an unnamed sailor who participates in life aboard ship chiefly through perception; he lingers on the fringe of the diegesis only to address his mates as the novel concludes, yelling “So long!” as they wander away from the dock. It is his only moment of reported speech. The narrator is rather a sensitive ear that sustains the voices of others; they accumulate and culminate in the desire to narrate and the novel itself.

Although the narrator speaks of a memory setting “with force” upon him, there is no formal epiphany of writing or conversion to documentation. There is only the forward motion of the ship itself; as the ship docks, remembrance is the only position available for this narrator, as it appears to resolve the ambiguities of his being aboard ship. There is a way in which the narrating function in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* gives itself over to the lost bodies of others, a form of subjectivity which, like the novel, must itself be understood as a form of “rescue work.” While this temperament is an elaboration of James’ sense of the novel as a “center of consciousness,” the objective of the novel, as Conrad asserts it in the preface, is not merely an impressionistic one, but an ethical one.

*The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* documents an ethos, attempting to commemorate the vicissitudes of an intersubjective bond at sea. As the narrator is rarely allowed the privilege of accessing an interior space of character, the question arises as to how the documentation of a bond is to occur without a consciousness that can witness the inner life of characters as they register each other.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the reader is told that the men are “forgetful” which suggests a cognitive deficiency, one that renders them ill-equipped for the act of rescue. In the preface, Conrad does not account for how the act of registering, delimited by the scope of a single consciousness, is to achieve that rescue on behalf of others, nor why, on a technical level, the project of registering and rescue must be co-extensive. Registry is an apperception before the synthetic moment of moral cognition. It cannot suffice to “uphold” the world, and lend it and its

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<sup>23</sup> The narrator at times violates interiority, most notably on Wait’s deathbed to see his dream-images, but never in the shipmates thoughts of each other.

inhabitants their proper place in history; yet registry must, in a way that Conrad does not explain, remain the cursory locus of narrative activity, taking place prior to rescue itself.<sup>24</sup> It is in the interval between registry and rescue that Conrad is negotiating and consolidating the function of narrative voice, generating the conditions of “narrative consciousness” and with it, the emergence of his most important narrator, Marlow.

As Levenson proposes of Marlow, “he completes what was inchoate in *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*” and embodies the psychologist premise, namely that the meaning of a phenomenon is in its presence to a mind” (20). Yet, Marlow’s voice is nothing if not a gesture of incompleteness, a puzzling will to continue what is already in *medias res*: “And this also, has been one of the dark places of the earth,” his tale in *Heart of Darkness* begins. To the extent that Marlow spins yarns, being one who tells stories again and again, Marlow continually submits what he has seen and heard if not to permanent rescue, then repetition, what can only take place in the moment of storytelling. Marlow is the keeper of Kurtz’s dying words; yet, these words fail to offer what Brooks describes as “that summary illumination that retrospectively makes sense of all that has gone before,” to offer precisely the “wisdom” Benjamin describes as maintained by the functional aura of the storyteller (*Darkness* 380). Kurtz’s final words are a kind of “story,” but in their anaphora, they have neither beginning nor end except that of a circular return, gesturing within themselves to a force of repetition. Marlow’s primary experience of these words, not simply the tale which represents it aboard the *Nellie*, is inconclusive, marking it as an epistemological failure and or what Brooks calls “unreadable” and therefore, not fully objectifiable. As Brooks suggests, “repetition appears to be a product of a failure in the original telling...just as, in Freud’s terms, repetition and working through come into play when orderly memory of the past—recollection of it *as past*—is blocked” (*Darkness* 383). There is a phonographic compulsion to repeat the very force of the last words, Marlow hearing them resoundingly present within his consciousness as he encounters Kurtz’s Intended. These words fail to become sufficiently past and “set with force,” as the conclusion to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* has it. By that force—the will to “snatch from the remorseless rush of time,” remorseless both in its ambivalent evasion of solidity and in its refusal to become properly past—Marlow, as the embodied future of *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* must subsume each new ship and each new mate under the force of a will to continue what has already occurred, for “we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences” (*Darkness* 7).

It is a form of storytelling that develops from both the technical and ethical priorities of *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus.’* Within this form, registering remains an anterior process, Marlow seeming to retrieve, through an affective-linguistic matrix, sense-data in the moment before it became hermeneutically present to the more abstracting capacities of cognition. There is in Marlow’s narrative *fort-da* a functioning acoustic and “optical unconscious,” as Benjamin might say, Marlow hearing and seeing what is seen only at the brute level. The dialectic between registry and rescue is one whereby he attempts to resuscitate an originary sensory “substance” of each story with each retelling.

Marlow, however, is most commonly read as a narrative-function, rather than a subjectivity or even a self. Indeed, between the four novels in which he appears, the reader is given little evidence of his origins, hopes, and desires—his importance lies in what he achieves

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<sup>24</sup> Yet one might infer the nature of the relationship between a fleeting impression and a form of retrieval from Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1868). In the famous conclusion to this work, he calls for poet and critic alike to fasten upon, as Baudelaire’s sketch artist, the eternal in the transitory.



at the level of narrative, how he mediates the stories and functionally relays and bars knowledge of events. While not interpreting Marlow's narrative technique in terms of the dyad of registering and rescue, Watt offers a seminal account of a process of "delayed decoding" whereby Marlow narrates a series of stimuli, only to, after an extended account that leaves the reader waiting for explanation, relay its meaning. A well-known moment of delayed decoding occurs when Marlow approaches the Inner Station where Kurtz resides, seeing from a distance a series of "knobs" seated upon poles:

You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing—food for thought and also for vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. (*Darkness* 57)

In this unfolding drama of vantage and inspection, frequently associated with Conrad's "impressionism," delayed decoding incites the reader to register events, just as the consciousness which had originally perceived them. Marlow, though he has already experienced an event, retains as his narrative strategy a processual transformation of sense-data into both an object and the concept. His is a story without preamble, beginning in *medias res* as though vocalizing a stream of words already in continuation, and ending with no peroration. With the irruption of his voice, he seems compelled to reactivate sense-data, yet there is no outside narrative that explains his motive, the reader only able to witness its effects. Marlow already knows the true identity of the "knobs" on the poles, but withholds from his audience their view, recreating the moment in the order of his perception and thereby surprising the reader and listener as he himself had been surprised. It is an "apparent need to come back to the starting point," as Blanchot might say, "To be part of that which enables words to become images," to register again what has been once, and so many undisclosed times, registered before. Marlow's act of "registry," then, is located at the site of a crucial transformation between the word of one, and the image beheld by another.

As suggested by the 1897 maxim, the Conradian speaking voice incites the image, and in fact, depends upon it for its aim. In that moment, the vital impressionism of registry exceeds itself toward another project: delayed decoding facilitates an affective identification between teller and listener. Such identification is rooted in a form of argument that cannot make itself believed through what P. Christopher Smith might call the "disembodied." Disembodied argument, Smith notes in Aristotle, is a form of proof which, as in geometry, "proceeds from physical hearing of the voiced word and moves, first, to seeing a written word and silently imagining what it pictures, and ultimately to envisioning a purely intelligible reality with a pure, unaffected intellect" (219). In contrast, embodied argument deals in realities that must be undergone by the listener. Smith writes:

[W]hat someone undergoes in embodied argument and rhetoric is much more than a change of mind from dissent to assent, from "I don't see it that way" to "I do." On the contrary, it is a change of heart, a change in how one feels about

something, which is to say, a “gut” change something even from rebellious refusal to consent... This response is not just intellectual. On the contrary, such hearing is in a fundamental sense, visceral. (220)

It is embodied in the sense that the very tones of voice speak not the understanding, but to the feeling. As in Conrad’s theory of the novel, there is hearing, feeling, and then seeing. There is a rhetorical seduction of his hearers and readers, Marlow recreating the scene, at the level of the listener’s physiological experience, so that his surprise becomes the listener’s own—the listener might throw his head back in the way Marlow did as he cognitively sealed upon the “knobs” as heads; there is a physio-affective mimesis, a “belief” at the level of embodiment. On another conflicting level, the act of “registering,” the border between perception and cognition, accesses what Marlow has not—he is not shocked, concerned only with his perceptual error within the logical process of decoding. For Conrad’s critique of the colonial project to emerge, without recourse to a direct moral condemnation, “registry” remains a cursory narrative event. Marlow seeks identification on the part of his listeners, yet he does so at the expense of a tropological brutality. There is, then, a cognitive dissonance on the part of the reader and listener who affectively identifies with Marlow, yet is shocked by his disaffected reason in the presence of horror. Such dissonance would have been particularly challenging for the first readers of *Heart of Darkness* in *Blackwood’s* magazine. Such readers had picked up the issue in the hope of finding an adventure tale. Yet, Marlow also seems to make a direct plea to that same body of readers. Marlow is not “arguing” in the classical sense; he is telling a story; yet, in moving from hearing to feeling to seeing, he marshals the affect of his listeners. What that movement suggests, is the possibility of reevaluating delayed decoding as a rhetorical figure, one that seals upon not belief in an argument *per se*, but in the possibility of affective identification as such. In other words, it is the means of the moment of consent—given without one’s knowledge, recognized as given only in its effect—that offers its own proof, proof of a bond, one now irrefutable because it has been experienced at the most visceral level. This embodiment by a group of listeners has consequences for a narrator who is, as Watt notes, the sort of Englishman Conrad would have liked to have been.

Conrad, as I have suggested, was writing from a premise inassimilable to the tradition of the novel, his maxim being grounded neither in an authorial personality which “tells” nor in its Flaubertian evacuation which “shows.” The latter, culminating in James’ scenic art which lodges point of view within the novel itself, is the result of the former pushed to its logical conclusion, essentially reversing the location of point of view from outside to an auto-telic inside. If Conrad remains outside of the bifurcated tradition of the novel, it is because “point of view” as such is no longer at stake. Rather, Conrad’s maxim, grounded in the processual movement of hearing to feeling and then seeing, poses a haunting return of the pre-modern oratorical arts as the conjuring of a third-space between speaker and listener, reader and writer, or what I call the incanted image. By definition, such an image occupies no locus or focality. It is a force of persuasion which roots argument within the affect of the reader as it then reaches out, transversely, to a shared space—it requires on the part of reader, writer, and the novel itself an auditory permeability and transformativity, the functional ground of the rhetorical arts. Conrad’s practice raised the possibility of an acoustical-image that is not broached by the Aristotelian theory of drama and it is one which must be considered at length, for it will not only set the stage for the relationship between seeing and hearing in Faulkner’s prose in Chapter Three, but will point outward, to a relationship with the world.

*Sub Hypos, or The Third Voice*

Beginning to observe the function of the art of rhetoric in Conrad's prose, Jameson argues in "History and Criticism" that the Conradian novel remains essentially pre-modern in nature, unable to become a Flaubertian "visual text" unadulterated by the speaking voice. It "only too clearly reflects the British class compromise, in which the older feudal democracy is able to maintain its control of the apparatus of the state to the very middle of the First World War." Noting a relationship between seeing and hearing, Jameson writes:

The English novel—all the way to Conrad and Ford and beyond—is irrepressibly spoken—elegant or chatty, Ciceronian or intimate.... Such narratives ... have their readership vividly built into them; and one cannot read them without at once visualizing the drawing rooms and Victorian furniture in which they find their natural setting. The great English novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are thus forms of direct and quasi-immediate social communication and embody an aesthetic essentially oral in character: hence the linguistic properties in them, which are those of the spoken rather than written composition, and where the sentences are not conceived as precious objects to be fashioned one by one, but rather emerge and disappear with all the permanent provisionality of spoken communication, telling, digressing, repeating, exclaiming, rambling, and apostrophizing.

The storytelling voice, in other words, directly conflicts with the "visual text" Jameson finds in Flaubert. The voice "runs on," suggestive of a personal and emotional excess, a resistance to closure. There is a permanent provisionality that cannot be limited to or organized by the rules regulating figures; it is a chattering, laughter, idle talk, or in the case of *Heart of Darkness*, the talk that takes place in the time of waiting. This account seems to miss *how* such a voice addresses its reader. A "vivid readership" is the material result of Conrad's rhetorical strategy and not rather its condition as truth. One must begin to ask after Conrad's personal predicament—his extra-territoriality, writing to an audience whose proximity is not secured in advance—and how that predicament determines the novelistic function of rhetoric as the art of persuasion, a spoken art that drives towards the reader's visualization. The end of embodied argument is precisely that there is now a "quasi-immediate social communication." "Readership" is not the vivid condition of storytelling, but its aim. Orality—and as I will return to, its relationship to an a-semantic "fringe" of sound—consolidates the bonds of readership, the possibility of vividness as it might establish their reality.

One might begin by considering in Conrad an aesthetics of listening organized by, and ultimately collapsing, the distinction classical Greek aesthetics makes between mimesis and diegesis. As Plato argues in *The Republic*, a poet either speaks in his voice ("simple narrative" or diegesis) or in the voice of another through imitation. "The discourse that can be attributed to the poet (that is, the diegetic discourse) does not imitate any speech but it is still regarded as emanating from a speaker ("the poet is the only speaker"). The discourse that a poet attributes to someone else (that is, mimetic discourse) is always doubled voiced in the sense that the poet is still its origin, but we regard the speakers as *personae* other than the poet" (Ross *Voice* 5). In his account of Homeric epic, Plato insists upon a division between the diegetic and the mimetic, attempting to subdue all forms of the imitative except in the imitation of the "good man" (which seems, by his account, to undo itself dialectically as mimesis, for the speaker in this ideal realm is already himself, good).<sup>25</sup> Within Plato's theory, then, the line as it moves in one direction

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<sup>25</sup> For a deconstruction of the relationship between Homeric poetic voice and Platonic philosophic voice, see Ramona Naddaff *Exiling the Poets*.

between poet and *personae*, truth and its verisimilitude, the simple and the imitative, is already unstable in the argument that is meant to sustain it. Plato's account of poetic speech, as I will return to in Chapter Three, emphasizes *pedagogy*, that the soul of the listener might "learn" and thereby transform itself around that which it hears—if it could not transform, the imitative would pose no danger. There is porousness in the soul of a listener, discourse being described as literally "pouring" into the ears in a direct access.

Much like the confusion between the mimetic and the diegetic in Platonic poetics, the aesthetics of rhetorical listening is chiasmatic in Longinus' *Sub Hypsos (On Great Writing)*. "Cicero, to me, is like an enveloping conflagration which spreads all around and crowds upon us, a vast and steady fire which flares up in this direction or that and is fed intermittently" (21). Neither point of view, as the position from which the story is narrated, nor focalization, as the primary selective consciousness of a story, can account for Longinus' sense of being *surrounded*, a condition which, in the rhetorical arts, poses an affective confusion between teller, listener, and discourse itself. It is a confusion in which persuasion is garnered and such persuasion, Longinus argues, is owed precisely to a movement from listening to *visualization*. It is a visualization, however, that exceeds Plato's metaphysical account of the *logos* as it gives rise to the *eidos*. "The more dynamic phrase catches our ear; our attention is drawn away from the argument's proof and we are startled by an imaginative picture which conceals the actual argument by its own brilliance" (27). The art of rhetoric begins with the sense of hearing only to "draw" the listener away from its presence towards an affective visualization of its content, the incanted image. In such an image, authorial personality neither hovers over the discourse in a position of mastery nor is absented from a self-mediated textuality. There is rather a third position, not only in the movement between hearing and seeing, but between speaker and listener, writer and reader, along the axis of a shared visualization.<sup>26</sup> This axis might be the only way to render the rhetorical figure that Longinus names "*diatyposis*," a figure which seems not only to exceed *energia* or "vividness" in its ecstasy, but to be acoustical in its origin and force. Written subjectivity is not fully absented from the scene, becoming not "impersonal," as in the Flaubertian tradition, but *trans*-personal and substitutive. The audience is affectively placed in the midst of an *action* simply through the effect of listening.

"Action," Aristotle suggests, is the essence of tragic affect. Present within his definition of action is a transferential hearing that moves the audience to fear or pity:

It is possible for the evocation of fear and pity to result from the spectacle, and also from the structure of the events itself. The latter is preferable and is the mark of a better poet. The plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, anyone who hears the events which occur shudders and feels pity at what happens.

While Aristotle turns to a model of hearing in this moment, the ultimate move of the *Poetics*, Smith argues, is essentially to marginalize acoustical experience and its ritualistic elements and replace it with theoretical insight and the perception of a whole, moving from the "*akoustous*" (audience) to the "*theotistic*" (spectator) (Smith 272). Nietzsche will later de-marginalize hearing-without-seeing, rescuing the artistic faculty of perception itself from Aristotle's emphasis upon moral catharsis. Nietzsche names it "aesthetic listening," a faculty that appears to have as its sole goal the artistic transformation of listening into hallucinatory images (a theory of

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<sup>26</sup> For Longinus there was not yet any distinction between hearing and reading, since written texts were read aloud, but it is one that will be important for our understanding of Conrad as he attempted to redress the rifts introduced by modernity.

the origin of theater in the chorus independent from performing bodies—it is as if those bodies disappear and are obscured by those incanted by the listener). It may at first appear that Conrad adopts the Aristotelian order of tragedy: in delayed decoding, Marlow’s listener and Conrad’s reader physically “shudder” at the moment of surprise (Nietzsche jocosely asks whether catharsis is a moral or “medical” phenomenon), and the shudder is, as Aristotle suggests, issued by means of the “structure of the events themselves.” It is one whose culmination is painfully delayed, a pain redoubled by the pleasure of finally “knowing” that the “knobs” are heads, if only because it quickly turns upon itself to become horror and moral outrage. This delay produces both a rhetorical and poetical affect—one is seduced into the veracity of Marlow’s tale by virtue of its objectivity, yet inundated by a cognitive dissonance. The tragic seems transferred from the events into the order of perception *itself*, the audience failing to reconcile its conflicting responses.<sup>27</sup> As Aristotle continues, under the rhetorical elements of “diction and reasoning” fall “those effects that must be produced by language; these include proof and refutation, the production of emotions (e.g. pity, fear, anger, etc.).” Yet “structure,” dictated by the art of the poetic, secures belief. One feels before one believes, or believes because one feels. Aristotle ceases his poetics in the face of this synchrony; he admits that to describe what enables tragic emotion to be evoked on a linguistic level, his argument must refer itself beyond the realm of poetics and enter that of rhetoric, setting aside his investigation because it belongs “to another art” (a curious antecedent to Conrad’s own notion of “another art altogether,” the acoustic arising in both instances at the limit of *theorie*).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the characteristic separating poetic and oratorical images, Longinus suggests, is ultimately “actuality and probability.” Unlike the poet, the orator aims at persuasion and “vividness,” a transformative seduction of the emotion and imaginative capacity of his hearer in *diatyposis* as narrative incantation.

Is not Conrad’s theory of the novel precisely that incantatory suspension of the optical and the acoustic? Marlow’s voice literally fails to accompany the image he incants for the reader. As I will return to, it is precisely the dissonant matter of colonialism that sounds out from the fringe of the visible in *Heart of Darkness*, what forces Marlow, in hearing-without-seeing, to recognize the dehumanizing reality of colonialism. With the voice of Marlow, Conrad make recourse to *diatyposis* when he could have provided, as Chinua Achebe argues he ought to have in “An Image of Africa,” a first-person voice that directly condemns Kurtz’s barbarism. His seduction of the reader resides precisely in the suspension between the optical and the acoustic. For Longinus, *diatyposis* can only be described as a form of hallucination that begins with *the writer himself* whose “mind itself travels along in the chariot and shares the perils of that winged team’s flight” and “sees the Furies, and very nearly compels his audience to see what he has imagined” (24-25). “Do you see how he takes ahold of your mind and makes you see things you

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche argues that we now “listen to tragedy solely as moral beings. Never since Aristotle have we been given an account of the tragic effect from which we might infer any artistic states or aesthetic activity on the part of the listener” (*The Birth of Tragedy* 106). In this moment in Conrad, however, the aesthetic effect quickly becomes the moral effect, the moral finding its force in the aesthetic.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Smith shows that Aristotle turns away from the acoustical between *Rhetoric* and the more visually centered *Poetics*, corroborated by Adriana Cavarero’s account in “The Devocalization of Logos.” Cavarero argues that *logos* was originally defined by Aristotle as *phone semantike*; yet, the history of philosophy gradually deemphasized *phone* as ancillary to *semantike* in favor of a silent mode of thought. It is an identification with the more rational function of speech, the marshalling of the *logos* one finds in the *Politics*, in which Aristotle’s most famous claim that “man is the rational animal” or rather, the animal with *logos* (*For More than One Voice* trans. Paul Kottman [Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005]).

only heard?” At stake is the invention of a certain reality of experience through the acoustical generation of affect. Longinus writes:

a most effective way of attaining weight, dignity, and realism is provided by imagination. Some call it image-making. In the general sense, any thought present in the mind and producing speech is called imagination, but in its now prevailing sense the word applies when ecstasy or passion makes you appear to see what you are describing and enables you to make your audience see it. You will be aware that imagination has a different aim in oratory than in poetry. The poet seeks to enthrall, the orator aims at vividness.

The difference between being “enthralled” and “vividness” is topological, the first being an act that happens “to” the listener, while the latter is a tertiary space between teller and listener, a space that seems to draw its life from two subject positions. In such “image-making,” the object of vision is not an image *per se*. It is an unfolding drama in which teller and hearer affectively co-function, moving through a topos, like those of the ancient art of memory that is neither fully here nor there.<sup>29</sup>

*Hypsos* is a term in Longinus that is notoriously difficult to render, being translated either as “greatness” or, when received through the Kantian tradition, the “sublime.” As Marlow sits upon a veranda in utter darkness in *Lord Jim* (1900), Conrad exceeds the compromise described by Jameson, gesturing to *hypsos* as it is lodged in an acoustical desire, the same desire against which Plato cautions when he bans “narrative by imitation”—the listener’s soul is in danger of being molded to that which he hears. As Greaney writes, drawing from Derrida’s image of the ear as “tympany:”

Given that many scenes of overhearing in Conrad take place on the veranda, one might...term the veranda the ‘ear’ of the building: like the ear, the veranda is both limit and passage. It is the venue for overhearing, tales of hearsay, and is the structural equivalent of the ear, neither inside nor outside its parent structure. It is a supplementary space, both extending and complementing the building. The veranda is the venue for storytelling but also the site of overhearing where inside and outside, culture and nature, overlap. (26)

The veranda, he continues, is “a zone of cultural privilege but linguistic instability.”

Acoustically, however, it is the passage in which listener tends towards disintegrating into that which he hears: on the veranda, storytelling and overhearing take place at night and in what Conrad takes pains to extenuate as *darkness*—the reader sees not faces, but the burning embers of cigars. Inhabitants themselves become all ear and porously receptive, poised at a site of transformation, as when Almayer sleeps upon his veranda to listen to approaching men in the water. With Marlow’s irruptive entry in *Lord Jim*, “something is being told,” to borrow Barthes’ expression from “The Grain of the Voice,” “which I must receive without disguise: nothing but the voice and the telling.” The reader is compelled at once into imagining a voice alone and submitted to a tunefulness of narrative discourse, one that builds the acoustical *conditions* of what will become Marlow’s refrain throughout the novel, that Jim “was one of us”—the listener must be destabilized in relationship to himself, must become all ear and experience a disintegration of “us” in order for its terms to be reconstructed by the storytelling event.

The anonymous narrator in *Lord Jim*—who remains a vestigial function of the nineteenth century novel and an instructive presence preparing one to negotiate Marlow—teaches the reader how to *believe* in such a refrain, “one of us.” The frame-narrator extracts our consent to the

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<sup>29</sup> See Francis Yates *The Art of Memory*.

diegesis just before slipping away altogether; he can only be “the privileged man” who listens on the veranda and later receives the letter from Marlow bearing the conclusion to Jim’s story otherwise withheld by Marlow. The novel—an experimental form at the cusp of the twentieth century—is then, an *effect* of the narrator’s disintegrative listening to Marlow. As such, the novel is the “wandering tale,” as Conrad calls it, a deconstruction of the nineteenth century novel as born out of the acoustical event. There is another kind of listening to storytelling that hears neither veracity nor authority.

Conrad composes a musical scheme—himself caught up in a force of the musical properties of language—rushing through alliteration and assonance until a new voice—“a quite different way of listening” and “an another art altogether”—unverified by the dictates of nineteenth century realism, emerges on its other side.<sup>30</sup> It is a voice that does not offer itself for verification before “the men who wanted facts:”

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow’s body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past.

The voice which guides the scene at the level of narrative discourse takes precedence over the image as it falls into invisibility. As Longinus repeats, great writing is “word-music” which, through the “arrangement of words,” “stir[s] the emotions of an audience and take[s] them out of themselves.” It compels “him who hears it to...identify himself with its tune” (51). There is in that musical break a cessation of action itself, a pause: Marlow’s face as the location of voice seems to be overtaken, Marlow and the narrator waiting in relationship to a voice that comes from elsewhere, working upon not simply the listener, but the speaker himself in what Denise Riley might call “auto-ventriloquy.”<sup>31</sup> *Hypsos*—is it not the force of language apart from an intentional subject that Longinus seeks to define?—exceeds both rhetoric and poetics, beginning where Aristotelian paradigms end: it “does not persuade; it takes the reader out of himself,” as Nietzsche seems similarly to suggest with his order of aesthetic listening as deindividuation.

Conrad asks that his reader first “hear” such a voice; yet it is with a concomitant motion of self-removal, a self-absenting of both teller and listener, that Conrad himself exceeds poetics, rhetoric, semiology, and narratology. On the veranda, this voice is *not present*. It seems to collapse the moment of speaking into a place that is not proper to it, towards which it is pulled, backwards as it were, behind the moment the speech. Affective veracity, mediated by a voice that now floats transitively between body and body, becomes the end of story as such. There is a voice which *seeks*, seeks a self-coincident location.

How does Conrad get from the 1897 preface, that asserts, “above all, to make you *see*,” to this moment of a lulled hearing in darkness? How does Marlow become both necessary and possible as a spokesman, a body through which can only be called a *third voice* that might move and move others “out of themselves?” Conrad says little about the genesis of Marlow, except to

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<sup>30</sup> This scene is remarkable preparation for “Faulknerness.” Faulkner will reproduce and augment the following passage in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

<sup>31</sup> See Denise Riley and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Force of Language* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

write of him in a 1917 Author's Note as a "whispering 'daemon'" who "haunts my hours of solitude, when, in silence, we lay our heads together in great comfort and harmony; but as we part at the end of the tale I am never sure that it may not be for the last time" (9-10). Marlow is an "understanding man" (10). Yet, Conrad "is equally noncommittal about Marlow's literary function," Watt writes (*Conrad* 201). It is crucial that Conrad would evade justification except through his own haunting experience. It is precisely the "harmony" experienced by Conrad that gestures both to Marlow's phatic function—"he was one of us"—and its aesthetic excess. One must recall Conrad's uncanny epiphany of voice as vibration: Marlow, a spokesperson, an agent of *hypnos*, is a sonorous backdrop against which the action is to take place; one listens not to him, but *through* him, just as waves are the impalpable substance that carries all sound and voice. Such a voice then, is the only available, self-convincing site for working-through Conrad's continued project of English solidarity, a choric narrative voice.

#### *Choric Voice*

After nearly eleven thousands words of unbroken narration by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, the anonymous narrator aboard the *Nellie* interjects. It is a passage to which we must return with new attention and not simply because the emergence of Marlow in *Lord Jim* will echo it:

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river. (*Darkness* 27)

It is as if Conrad posits the origin story of the voice as such, a first hearing and a first speaking. Yet, even in this primary moment, there is an intransitive elsewhere that seems to speak from behind the scene, challenging the fitful symmetry between logocentrism and phonocentrism. There is a *phone*, but it is at odds with the rational aim of the *logos*. There is a *pathos* of the individual speaking voice, but it "sits apart," outside of the scene in epistemological remove. The force of this scene might be re-routed through the 1897 preface where Conrad writes of the registering temperament's relationship to "the magic suggestiveness of music," echoing Pater's own notion that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."<sup>32</sup> Conrad does not critically elaborate upon the possibility until the 1908 preface to *Heart of Darkness*. In pursuing the transferential and delayed motion of "a sinister vibration that would hang in the air and the ear of the reader long after the last note had been struck," the separation of an auditory event from its source, Conrad emphasizes a *phone*, an affective property of voice that is not in service of the *logos*. Yet, in doing so, Conrad recalls the acoustical function of the Greek chorus as retrieved by Nietzsche contra-Aristotle.

*The Birth of Tragedy* will prove important to our pursuit of the acoustical in Conrad and its effects upon novelistic form. It is a work drawn from Nietzsche's negotiation of Schopenhauer, an author of whom Conrad was himself a rigorous reader.<sup>33</sup> Like Marlow in

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<sup>32</sup> In "The Philosophy of Composition," Edgar Allen Poe will locate the most "suggestive" or mysterious effects of "The Raven" in its musical refrain. Poe's essay will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>33</sup> See George Butte "What Silenus Knew: Conrad's Uneasy Debt to Nietzsche." Butte argues that Conrad's texts betray an intimate knowledge of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Spring, 1989), pp. 113-208. Also see Pecora's "*Heart of Darkness* and the Phenomenology of Voice." Pecora writes of the relationship between Conrad and Schopenhauer's theory of voice: "For Schopenhauer, we cannot approach the subject in itself and apart from all objects of knowing and willing, that is, as a 'self-existent unity.' It can exist only



repose, the chorus constitutes a transference backdrop, the chorus drawing its own strength from the story it tells even as it is to move others. As Nietzsche writes, in a way that suggests the displacement of real bodies by the hallucinatory ones generated by the listener, “the tragic chorus of the Greek’s is older, more primordial, and indeed more important than the ‘action’ itself.” Tragic affect is communicated not at the level of plot, but through the chorus as it absorbs the action through its own singing and seems to see its own object, a hallucination that is acoustically “caught,” as it were, by the audience. Even while Marlow will exclaim “Do you see the story? Do you see anything?” to his listeners in *Heart of Darkness*, the “faint uneasiness” inspired by the voice has affected them: the narrator “listens, on the watch,” not yet transformed, not yet fully incited into the choric paradigm of storytelling that has returned to *occupy* the novel and narrative as a site of the *logos*. If we are to believe Blanchot’s history of the novel, that its origin in an epic voice that is then promptly put to an end by realism, the narrator of *Heart of Darkness*—Marlow’s listener—is still functioning in what Nietzsche describes, contemporaneously to realism, as “critical listening.” Nietzsche similarly describes such listening attuned only to meaning as a death, not of epic singing, but of the Dionysian function of the chorus. The frame narrator is in the midst of a transformation, being incited into another order of hearing that cannot comfortably “watch” events.

Yet, the *theoretical* invisibility aboard the *Nellie* is not incommensurate with Conrad’s demand that the novel “above all, . . . make you *see*.” As Nietzsche goes on to suggest, the original chorus served a visionary and incantatory function, moving from hearing to seeing. Nietzsche remains uncertain as to where such images were to be located or in what subject position they originated, the images occupying precisely a transitive, third space. He does not posit the genesis of the shared image in the moment of artistic production. The chorus shares in a transverse suffering felt only as an effect:

...the stage, and the action, were fundamentally and originally conceived only as a vision, . . . [T]he sole ‘reality’ is the chorus, which generates the vision from within itself [*der die Vision aus sich erzeugt*], and speaks of it with all the symbolism of dance, sound and words. In its vision this chorus beholds is lord and master, Dionysus, and hence it is always a chorus of *votaries*: its sees how he, the god, suffers and is exalted, and it therefore does not *act* itself [*und handelt deshalb selbst nicht*]. . . *Sharing his suffering*, it is also *wise*, heralding the truth from the very heart of the world.

The “action” of tragedy is the movement between chorus and vision, the unity of the Dionysian (musical) and Apolline (visionary/illuionary) impulses. In the *Trauerspiel* work, Benjamin will critique Nietzsche on precisely this point: “It is not possible to make the chorus, which intervenes in tragedy in a considered and reflexive way, at the same time into the subject which experiences the visions; especially not a chorus which would be both itself the vision of a mass of people and the bearer of further visions” (104). In this way, the lack of a “considered and

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in dual nature as the subject of all knowing and as an objectification of the will. Only in a footnote does Schopenhauer reveal what at the same time sustains his faith in that subject, and prevents him from going any further in his reasoning: if we attempt ‘to know ourselves fully by directing our knowledge inwards, we lose ourselves in a bottomless void; we find ourselves like hollow glass globe from the emptiness of which a voice speaks. But the cause of this voice is not to be found in the globe, and since we want to comprehend ourselves, we grasp with a shudder nothing but a wavering and unstable phantom.’ The voice that speaks from the emptiness here, like a voice in the desert, is even in Schopenhauer’s formulation at once present and absent: it emerges ‘from the emptiness,’ yet it cannot be traced to a source within the ‘globe’; it ‘speaks’ yet cannot be grasped.” This intransitive “it speaks,” I contend, is the tragic function of Marlow as he reaches out to the reader’s affect.

reflexive” chorus grounds Benjamin’s critique of Nietzsche’s a-historicism: “Nietzsche’s renunciation of any understanding of the tragic myth in historical-philosophical terms is a high price to pay for his emancipation from the stereotype of a morality in which the tragic occurrence was usually clothed” (102). Liberating tragedy from morality, Nietzsche argues that only as an “*aesthetic phenomenon* that the existence and the world are entirely *justified*.” Art does not educate or make one more moral. In being divested of morality, Benjamin argues, the Nietzschean sense of the chorus is divested of the historical-philosophical dimension, being a “purely aesthetic creation” (*Tragic* 102). At stake for a consideration of the novel is Nietzsche’s insistence that the “public at an Attic tragedy found itself in the chorus of the orchestra, and there was at bottom no opposition between public and chorus; everything is merely a great sublime chorus of dancing and singing satyrs,” such that “the world of the stage...is a vision of this satyr chorus” (Benjamin *Tragic* 103). Benjamin rejects such an “extreme emphasis on the Apolline illusion: “Above all, there is no kind of unity between the choruses and the public. This needs to be said, insofar as the gulf between them, the orchestra, does not demonstrate it by its very presence” (104).

Benjamin seizes upon this physical divide; yet, there is an affective dimension of the incanted image, which for Nietzsche seems to supercede it. Nietzsche’s understanding of the chorus, particularly as it informs Conrad, is the vision of the chorus being generated from “within itself,” only for that interior space to be revealed to have been elsewhere, in the heart of the world for which the chorus now emerges as a representation: “it” speaks. It is in this way that Nietzsche recalls the romantic function of the imagination in Rousseau’s “The Essay on the Origin of Languages,” an essay in which Rousseau casts one of the most seductive myths of humankind’s beginnings in dispersion. One has “no society other than that of the family, no laws other than those of nature, no language other than gesture and a few inarticulate sounds.” With articulate speech arises the capacity for projected *likeness* and what Rousseau calls “social affection.” Speech, in its primary musicality, is the origin of imaginative “comparison” and with comparison arises the ability to be transported out of oneself, by way of the ear, into the affective being of another. In the moment of comparison, there is a sound in excess of vision, an image that can only be accessed on the other side of hearing. As Rousseau asks, “How could I suffer when I see another suffer if I do not even know that he suffers, if I do not know what he and I have in common?” (268). Listening provides such access. It is, in a Rousseauvian oral community, a generative act, for he who “imagines nothing feels only himself.” The social for Rousseau begins as an imaginary incited by sonority, for how is it that we are moved to pity? “By transporting ourselves outside ourselves; by identifying with the suffering being. We suffer only to the extent that we judge it to suffer; we suffer not in ourselves, but in it”—in listening, a form of transport, community is born (Rousseau 268). “La pitié, bien que naturelle au cœur de l’homme, resterait éternellement inactive sans l’imagination qui la met en jeu. Comment nous laissons-nous ému par la pitié? En nous transportant hors de nous-mêmes; en nous identifiant avec l’être souffrant. Nous ne souffrons qu’autant que nous jugeons qu’il souffre; ce n’est pas dans nous, c’est dans lui que nous souffrons.” Rousseau emphasizes a “him” in whom one suffers; yet in Nietzsche’s sense of choric voice, a mode of transport, there is a further transferential delay between chorus, audience, and the incanted image; there is no agent and yet “it” moves. As I will return to, such anonymity in Conrad cannot be fully subsumed by the rhetoric of impersonality, for it hangs suspended between two subject positions, drawing its life from the one who sounds and the one who receives.

Conrad was seduced by Nietzsche's sense of a Schopenhauerian—if not more silently romantic—*movement* from an anterior suffering from the chorus to the audience. It is “there” that Conrad's task of “the worker in prose” is articulated. Nietzsche poses a primordial origin story of the novel, the incantatory foundation to which Conrad returns when he writes that “one shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.” Conrad echoes Nietzsche's own adoption of Schopenhauer:

the attempt is made to show the god as real, and to represent the visionary form as well as its transfiguring frame in a form visible to *all eyes*: this is the beginning of the ‘drama’ in the narrower sense. Now the dithyrambic chorus is given the task of stimulating the mood in such a Dionysiac way [*die Stimmung der Zuhörer bis zu dem Grade dionysisch anzuregen*] that when the tragic hero appears on stage they do not see, for example, the awkwardly masked man, but rather a visionary form born, so to speak, out of their own rapt vision. (*Tragedy* 45)

Can this aesthetic theory of a man who disappears behind the voice be brought to bear upon Conrad's extra-territoriality? Marlow repeatedly disappears between the force of his voice, figuring, as if in an inverse prosopopoeia, the phonographic desire for the voice to take leave of its origin. As the masked man dissolves, like Marlow's face in a shadow, an anterior mood—*Stimmung*, related to *Stimme*, or “voice”—hangs between chorus and audience; it cannot be located in either subject position. As Conrad will articulate that premise, “the task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood.” The voice of Marlow is caught in a dual desire, both to be and to disappear, to momentarily rise up so that an alternate form or image might emerge in its place.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha allows one to understand that such an incantation as an aesthetic production is not in itself neutral:

In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjection, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.... It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside *objets d'art* or beyond the canonization of the “idea” of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced by the act of social survival. Culture reaches out to create a symbolic textuality, to give the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasure. The transmission of *cultures of survival* does not occur in the order *musee imaginaire* of national cultures with their claims to the continuity of an authentic “past” and a living “present”... (172)

The “uneven, incomplete” voice with which the displaced speak—Conrad's narrative *production* is a culture of survival. The “present vision” towards which *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* drives is the promise of the “aura of selfhood.” The generated image, as an object of shared vision, “reaches out” and promises symbolic if not material pleasure in belonging. In his assertion that the novel is a rescued fragment, Conrad claims to offer precisely that archive of “authentic past” to be continued as “living present.” Yet, such a continuation returns to my assertion in Chapter One, that the Conradian novel is (re)presentation of English community as a futuric after-image, a fantastic and phantasmal refraction of a bond that never was but *will be* in

the moment of the act of reading—the material of aura, where lacking in the novelist, is generated from out of the reader himself. Rather than beginning from the premise of intimacy with his audience—as Jameson contends in his reading of Conradian rhetoric—Conrad works towards its possibility, visualization being the affective site of its choric production.

*Mimetic Narrative, or Watching Silence*

Before the loquacious Marlow becomes possible as a narrator, Conrad is drawn to a silence in narrative that seems at once to prepare the emergence of his voice, and that silence continues to surround Conrad's own negotiation of his project. The two poles within the Conradian acoustical sensorium, an extreme verbosity and an equally extreme stoic reticence, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, I would suggest that there is within Marlow's voice a central silence, one that drives *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* in its driving towards the communal bond secured by the possibility of narrative itself, i.e. the narrator's beginning to become a narrator as a national past "sets with force" upon him. There is a silence in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and it is a "forgetting which speaks," as Blanchot might say, in and as the emergence of Marlow.

While *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* has been received as a commemoration of a Victorian bond at sea, an alternative emplotment—as a meaningful organization of eventuality or an unfolding in time driving towards a *telos*—occurs at the level of its narrative discourse. The narrator privileges the visual over the acoustic in order to endorse both narrative and the phenomenal world as a silent, austere, and visible exterior; yet, the novel ends with his hearing penetrating echoes, not only of the sonic events that occurred aboard ship, but of the history that had made its journey and his narrative possible. One must ask after an alternative "rescued fragment," the novel being an auditory form of rescue, an acoustic care which both reifies and challenges Conrad's avowed aims. The acoustic register perhaps undertakes "rescue work" more than the image itself, such that for Conrad to fulfill his own project of the "permanence of memory," he must continually tarry with his own negated term. While there is an archival gaze in Conrad, an absorptive looking that seeks to sustain the object of vision, it is one that confronts the echoic capacity of the acoustic, its refusal to be stabilized in and as a reified object of memory. It is that tension between sound and image wherein Conradian narrative voice is to be located, waiting within the promise of their resolution.

As Genette writes in *Narrative Discourse*, "voice" in narrative is the subject of the verb's mode of action, "the subject here being not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person who reports it." Stephen Ross describes Genette's use of "voice" not as :

a medium of utterance, but rather a set of relationships among time of narration, implied or actual narrators, and diegetic levels of the fiction's discourse. From this fundamental relationship Genette can derive subtle and elaborate configurations of narrative without pretending to solve the mystery of an author's (or implied author's) assumed presence behind voice and absence from discourse. (Voice 7-8)

There is, however, a differential, a lapse between carrying out and Marlow's rambling carrying on, once we begin to listen to the supposed soundlessness and pure grammatical agency of narrative voice. The particularity of Conradian technique forces one to ask if narrative voice is not rather dialectically related to acoustical voices, both real and imagined, voices that register and speak difference, and bar belonging. A consideration of the relationship between the fate of voice in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and that of narrative itself gives rise to a crucial question not addressed by either Ross or Genette. How is one to understand the relationship between

acoustical voice, as it sounds-out, is heard, and affects, and narrative voice, a neutral figural voice which sheds its acoustic associations to become a silent written category signifying the presence of a grammatical subject? In a way that prepares both the storytelling practices and the ways of listening of Marlow, narrative voice in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is neither neutral nor given in advance, but rather seems to develop in the course of its acts of listening to the diegesis—such collaboration not only transforms the domain of action, but has consequences for the narrative voice which might account for it and the act of reading itself.

As the tempest that reeks havoc on the ship is resolved, Conrad's sense of narrative discourse itself arrives acutely on the other side of the nineteenth century—"a modernist narrator on a Victorian sailing ship", as Levenson calls it—the novel vacillating between two voices, the third and first person plural, until the narrating consciousness calls attention to itself as an "I," contemplating the possibility of his singular identity as a narrator and a bearer of memory. The novel documents his discursive transformation as he drives towards the possibility of remembering on behalf of his mates, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* being the story of a narrator who begins as uncharacterized, whose only function is a perceptual one, who then becomes conscious of a desire to preserve the past by means of storytelling. In a way that will become important for Marlow's project in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel which struggles with the problem of memory and forgetting, Conrad posits the subject as a narrating activity, one that drives towards collective memory in its recognition by the individual: the narrator only becomes himself insofar as the novel empties him of prior experience to become a repository for the fragments of others; they are fragments of the phenomenal world which the crewmen themselves do not and will not "hold."

It is in attempting to reconcile the two projects of registering and rescue that the narrative voice shifts between the third person and the first person, which Levenson suggests "amounts to a division of narrative labor." While "the third person narrator provides the precision of physical detail but hesitates to penetrate into the individual psyche," the first person offers "a comfortable indulgence in moral and psychological speculation." The narrator does not simply register the physical world of the sea, but rescues a relation between men at the level of discourse. Brute phenomena must be transformed, incorporated into, and preserved by a larger portrait of solidarity. Narrative takes on the task of documenting sensation, that which brings the men aboard ship together, the narrator recognizing himself at the end as a *corpus* for his mates. Sensation, in other words, has been peculiarly displaced from the men themselves—the bond emerges not in how they see and hear, but how they are compositely seen and heard by a narrator who, in registering, becomes their perceptual prosthetic. The novel documents a bond of which the men themselves are not conscious, and concludes with the group disbanding and forgetting, the narrator alone bearing the coordinates of their relation, a series of the memory-traces of their aspect. The narrator accepts his own consciousness as a sensorial accumulation, his self-consciousness being engendered within and as the burden of rescue.

As I began to posit in Chapter One, the subject is, for Conrad, constituted in and as an act of memory, not an a priori ground for which memories then happen. It is by personal necessity, however, that Conrad crafts a form of narrative subjectivity that is absorptive, porous, and accumulative, that finds itself through the detour of a plurality. The narrator must draw his substance from the sensorium of the ship and cannot exist independently of it—the narrator is, as he will later remark of the captain, "part of the ship's fittings." Conrad's is a radically burdened narrative voice, one that will culminate in Faulkner's more archeological sense of narrative activity, and it is one that seems not to "orchestrate" voices external to it, as Bakhtin argues of

the novel as a genre, but rather to be orchestrated by them. Such orchestration is not simply between the narrator and the voices he reports, but between visible objects, speech, and sound. Conrad's is a sensorial orchestration which challenges the semantic sense of discourse in the novel, for sounds and images, registered by narrative, at times seem to "say" that which reported speech has not. What Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia"—the multiplicity of voices and dialogic social positions which separate the novel from other literary forms—cannot account for affective-acoustic spaces that are near by both the image and the speaking voice in Conrad, suggestive of extra-social encounters between voice and sound, sound and the image, the voice of one and the voice of another, the voice of the author and the ear of the reader. If one is seeking the excess of direct discourse, all that it cannot, does not, and will not say, what one might call, in contrast to orchestration, "accompaniment"—a term drawn from the language of the conclusion to *Heart of Darkness*—is often to be found in the space near-by or just beyond the image. Accompaniment is Conrad's principle and unrecognized narrative innovation.

The highly sensory beginning of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* inaugurates this principle. The novel begins with the narrator's distinct registration of a lamp-light which is then immediately followed by a hum. Sound and vision are continually in diachronic or periodic relation in this novel; a sound follows a vision and a vision follows a sound, sound destabilizing what is registered at the level of vision before the eye can once again consolidate its threat. As the hum approaches the ship, it is against the noise of the new hands that the narrator first perceives "Old Singleton." He is admired by the narrator for what Levenson has called his "mute heroism" and Shaffer, "stoical reserve." Singleton is the only synchronically audio-visual figure of novel, he being at once a figure of light and silence: "Singleton stood at the door with his face to the light and back to the darkness. And alone in the dim emptiness of the sleeping fore-castle he appeared bigger, colossal, very old; old as Father time himself.... [T]he men who could understand his silence were gone." His silence retains: one keeps silent, yet in keeping silent, this image suggests, one "keeps" Time itself, being untouched by the destructive tendency which Conrad calls the "remorseless rush." Singleton ages, as if there should be more to say, but only silence accumulates in the place of speech and becomes more forbearing, more lasting. There is, then, an intimacy between the forbearance of silence and the development of narrative as rescue. The narrative voice is drawing from Singleton its own historical value and temporal posture, which again, is in contrast to a Jamesian narrative voice that seems to predate and outlast its object.

The narrative binds Singleton to the quiet which had determined the ship before broken by sound, and insofar as the narrator is able to "listen" to his silence, Singleton, as registered by the narrator, restores the ship to the order of the visible—he is a silence emerging from out of the noise or sonic interruption of semantic clarity. One recalls that Conrad writes in the preface that he invokes the "magical suggestiveness of music"—in those terms, the hum of the hands is a kind of attack, a note striking, before decaying and returning to silence of Singleton. As John Cage suggests, sound and silence cannot be separated; they must be understood as they are heard, a periodicity.<sup>34</sup> Metaphysics of voice is, however, grounded in their opposition such that "each of the terms must be simply *external* to the other" (Derrida *Dissemination* 103). There is a relationship of accompaniment between voice and silence, one unaccountable in Bakhtin's merely glossic sense of discourse: the silence of the ship is violated by an attack of sound, silence again emerging on its other side. As the novel progresses, Singleton is increasingly

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<sup>34</sup> See "Lecture on Nothing" in John Cage's *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

registered as a silent image not penetrated by sound, dialectically emerging from out of it in order to synthesize and discard its most troubling forces.

This synthesis is an activity which the narrator absorbs into it. In other words, rather than emphasize Marlow as a metonymy for Conrad, one might turn to narrative *functions* themselves in order to locate the pull of desire. Singleton stands alone during the tempest that will wreak havoc upon the ship, the narrative emphasizing his position of silent solitude, a position gazed upon by the narrator alone:

Apart, far aft, and along by the helm, old Singleton had deliberately tucked his white beard under the top button of his glistening coat. Swaying upon the din and tumult of the seas, with the whole batter length of the ship launched forward in a rolling rush before his steady old eyes, he stood rigidly still, forgotten by all, and with an attentive face. (*Narcissus* 55)

In the narrator's reverence for Singleton's silence, he becomes a purely visible tableau. He steers the ship in unbroken steadfastness, literally "swaying upon" the "din" of the sea. The chora behind the novel, behind language itself, is transformed by Singleton's gaze of mastery into a mirroring surface. Singleton, alone and aft, occupies a space and time that has already vanquished by the din of new men and their values; yet, that lost space and time must be rendered, absorbed and, as Conrad suggests in the preface, "held up" by narrative. His gaze is dialectical, transformative, and subsuming. From a technical perspective, narrative becomes its mnemonic substitute. In nearing upon a free indirect discourse, the narrative seems to exceed Singleton's "unthinking" consciousness, articulating the thoughts and feelings that he cannot have insofar as he is without memory or recognition of his own generation.

Despite this kindred relationship between narrative and its object, there is a persistent and unresolved tension between the nineteenth century movements of plot and the twentieth century narrative voice that accounts for it. As one contemporary reviewer writes in the *Academy* that "the tale is told in the first person, and though the narrator does not appear by name, abundant passages show that he was one of the common sailors. But the tense, exaggerated, highly poetic diction is not suitable to such a character" (*Companion* 59). The narrator stands in the paradoxical position of commemorating a past he did not fully witness and can only infer from the watchingly silent exterior of Singleton—the narrator is on the ship, but outside its most central location, a troubling in-betweenness that allows him to observe. In being drawn toward Singleton—in drawing itself from the image Singleton and organizing itself as its reflection—it is as if narrative is organizing itself via an epic distance, casting Singleton as a hero that is, at the same time, removed from the location of narrative voice. As Lukács suggests of epic, it is the mode of narrative before the fall of "integrated civilization" into "transcendental homelessness"—"there is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any 'otherness' for the soul" (30). Singleton is an epic soul: "such a soul does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself. Such an age is the age of the epic" (Lukács 30).

While longing grounds Watt's reading of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* as a lament over the loss of community, one must ask after the acoustics of lamentation, as Rousseau himself does when he hears the sonority of the other that moves him to "pity." How is it that the narrative seems to "lament" without make a direct plaint? The reader feels the affective discharge of lament, but only in and as the *accompaniment* of sound and image—in seeing and hearing, the reader is made to feel a structuring lack at the heart of narrative discourse. It is at this level that the novel redeems Singleton's silence, longing for its capacity to at once withdraw from the present scene and bind the fragments of the past together. As it is drawn towards Singleton—

precisely the transferential posture of being-moved that James will not allow, that he does not *require*—there is a silence of narrative voice. It is one that can only be heard as a lament, sounding out that it cannot speak or name its desired solidarity, functioning as a kind of real behind the imaginary and the symbolic. Singleton’s diegetic silence synthesizes and binds the him to the phenomenal world, as “the whole batter length of the ship launched forward in a rolling rush before his steady old eyes,” as if in an extension of Singleton’s physical being, a being at home with the sea even as the surrounding scene exerts the pressure of fragmentation.

The silence of the incanted image of Singleton, however, allows the novel to establish autotelically its own means and method. The narrator desires Singleton’s posture, to restore the ship to the stillness before its occupation by the new hands. The narrative is enthralled away from itself and Jamesian integrity—the center of consciousness depending upon the opposition between inside and outside—into a triangulation of narrative voice, sound, and silence. Such silence cannot be localized in either Singleton or the narrative voice which speaks of him, becoming itself a transverse third space composed, as it were, by an impersonal longing that radiates between watcher and watched, narrator and reader. The triangle, Girard argues, is a primary organizational force of desire in the novel and is the location of what I have called the third voice. “The triangle is no *Gestalt*. The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localized anywhere” (2) Desire cannot “be portrayed by a simple straight line which joins subject and object” (2). While Girard understands the triangle at the level of character, there is in Conrad an aesthetic triangle at the level of discourse. With the emergence of Singleton, a third term of silence is “radiating toward both the subject and the object” (Girard 2). It is in desiring it, that the narrator stands at some distance from his object, for as Bakhtin suggests, it is precisely distance and impossibility which conditions epic narrative:

...the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and value plane, separated by epic distance. The space between them is filled with national tradition. To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one’s contemporaries (and an event that is therefore based on personal experience and thought) is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of epic into the world of the novel.... In the past, everything is good: all the really good things (i.e., the “first” things) occur only in this pace. The epic absolute past is the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times as well...It is walled off absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and listeners are located. This boundary, consequently, is immanent in the form of the epic itself and is felt and heard in every word...There are no loopholes in it through which we glimpse the future; it suffices unto itself, neither supposing any continuations nor requiring it.... One can only accept the epic world with reverence; it is impossible to really touch it, for it is beyond the realm of human activity, the realm in which everything humans touch is altered and re-thought. Thanks to this epic distance...*the epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image*, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluation present [emphasis added]. (17)

The narrative discourse of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* straddles the world of the epic and the world of the novel, the novel being precisely that which brings heteroglossia to the monologic form of epic. In what Bakhtin calls “absolute past,” the epic singer can never be on the same plane as the hero, only on the same plane as the listener. Yet, in identifying itself, its own



technical devices, with Singleton, the narrative attempts to re-instantiate the lost world of the hero through its tale of a crew of Englishmen on a journey home to England: Singleton, as the single source of the values of the past, exudes national beginnings, bound to the ship that is itself bound for England. Narrative draws from and vivifies a sense of national tradition “felt and heard in every word,” the tradition of which Singleton emerges not just as a representative, but its very *source*, he being “as old as Father time himself.” National tradition is felt and heard in every word which “renders” and “holds up,” as Conrad asserts his task, a silence before articulation, before a fall into language—he is not merely alone, but “unthinking.” Singleton need not articulate the thoughts that he does not have. His is an *absolute silence*. The silence of nature is, Benjamin writes in “On Language,” “a deeper inclination to speechlessness (in all mourning) which is different from an inability or disinclination to speak. It mourns because it feels itself known by the unknowable.” It is the transcendental category of a true language that precedes all speech, all national language; it is not a voice that keep silent, but rather a primary voicelessness, a voice that is not yet, for there is not yet any separation between subject and object, no need for expression and articulation, as with Adorno’s most profound sense of the overturning of signification. There is a reflective-function of narrative, an acoustic mirror, as Kaja Silverman might say, one that circles back from its object to narrative voice.

This demand for a narrative voice that might strive towards the acoustical valence of silence is felt in the earliest draft of *Lord Jim*, “Tuan Jim: A Sketch,” which Conrad began composing as early as 1896, a year before writing *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* While this draft will be heavily revised, it bears within itself the core Conradian impulse to strive for a silent mirror of the novelistic world: “And under the cloudless sky the calm sea stretched its motionless and smooth surface.” Beneath this image pulses a phonetic material, a lamentation, emitted by the written medium itself, for the manuscript was scrawled, with what must have been extraordinary urgency, on the blank pages of an old family volume containing Polish poems transcribed by Conrad’s grandmother. The manuscript “speaks,” in other words, a displaced national language and its literary tradition (Conrad would never compose fiction in Polish). The draft was put away several times, underwent an agonizing process of composition, and was not finished until after *Heart of Darkness*. The final printed version of *Lord Jim* maintains the draft within itself as a vestige: it begins in a third-person voice only to then abruptly change course, handing itself over to the directly discoursing voice of Marlow, who nowhere appears in “Tuan Jim: A Sketch.”<sup>35</sup> As the story of Jim begins to unfold in the first manuscript, there is not yet an acoustical irruption out of silence: “there was not a wave, nor an undulation, nor a ripple nor a splash,” the narrator remarks of the mirror of the sea. Conrad returned to the draft after writing *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* abandoned it, and then returned to it once again after writing *Heart of Darkness*—it is only then that the acoustical erupts, for in the final printed version, in the moment Jim moves towards his inexplicable decision to abandon ship, the still surface of absolute silence falters. The scene at sea begins to “vibrate” and “hum.” “What had happened?,” an anonymous third-person narrator now asks of the event, unable to answer his own most pressing question after he had just been lent the powers of omniscience. Conrad was working through a force a sound and that same force was working over narrative authority; the acoustical

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<sup>35</sup> *Heart of Darkness* likely gave Conrad the impetus to transform *Lord Jim*, which began as a third-person tale, into the directly discoursing narrative of Marlow. In *Heart of Darkness*, we witness Conrad working-through a critique of third-person omniscience, the novel ending with the impossibility of the authority upon which it relies. *Lord Jim* bears that break within itself and in fact, the manuscript chronology suggests that Conrad introduced Marlow into *Lord Jim* only after writing *Heart of Darkness*.

excess of image registers an increasing lack of belief in a voice that might speak veracity and assurance, the plight of Jim himself.

It is in *Lord Jim* that the valence of Singleton's silence transforms: the absolute silence of nature become *reticence*, an inability to speak in a withholding crisis in communication. As Jim sits on the witness stand, he looks at a man who is watching him:

This fellow—ran the thought—looks at me as though he could see somebody or something past my shoulder. He had come across that man before—in the street perhaps. He was positive he had never spoken to him. For days, for many days, he had spoken to no one, but had held silent, incoherent, and endless converse with himself, like a prisoner alone in his cell or like a wayfarer lost in a wilderness. At present he was answering questions that did not matter though they had a purpose, but he doubted whether he would every again speak out as long as he lived. The sound of his own truthful statements confirmed his deliberate opinion that speech was of no use to him any longer. That man there seemed to be aware of his hopeless difficulty.

Speech is now necessitated. As Jim sits before a court to tell the “truth of his experience,” the narrator now watches a not-yet named man watch Jim, witnessing, in the novel's only moment of interior monologue, the emergence of a form of silence that cannot be synthesized into the placid certitude at sea before the event. Absolute silence finds an object and in finding an object, it is fractured. The sound of external speech falls short of intention and what he wishes to say clearly.

Jim's peculiar silence cannot be integrated into the historiography of the novel as the genre of solitude. A form of silence has emerged that desires a *surrogate* voice as Jim's own voice fails. This man—Marlow—hears what others cannot. He hears the plight of extraterritoriality; he completes its silence and, just as Conrad feels himself laying with Marlow “in silence,” he becomes its spokesperson within the world of men. Narration in *Lord Jim* now abruptly changes course to hand itself over to his directly discoursing voice. This man is in “profound repose” as he sits on the veranda to tell the story of Jim, for Jim's silence is moving through him, converted, upheld, transformed into a true language that only now, will be understood by the men who sit in the dark to hear the tale of “one of us.” Not only does Jim not speak in the courthouse, he cannot make himself heard by the men who wanted facts. There is misunderstanding, miscommunication, and above all, misrecognition as what was once the mirror of the sea, reveals a hither side of invisibility that cannot be narrated. “There is something else besides, something invisible,” the anonymous narrator senses before Marlow appears, a loss that drives silence and cannot be articulated. Authorial voice is thereby distanced from its own most important claim—it waits to be restored by Marlow. He becomes Jim's voice for him. In telling his story, he redeems Jim as “one of us” which is at once the redemption of the true language as silence itself.

There is constitutive relationship between narrative discourse and its object, silence. In negotiating silence, Conrad is negotiating the desire to speak as another, crafting a form of narrative as spokesperson. Indeed, as Singleton is “forgotten by all,” his ethic of silence is not just represented, but monumentalized in and as narrative: the narrator alone turns his gaze to watch Singleton watch, desiring to take the elder's eyes as his own. The reader witnesses narrative transforming into Singleton's gaze, for rather than articulating in free indirect discourse the consciousness of Singleton as he steers, the narrative recreates the object of its vision, painting it before the reader as an image, encapsulating not only Singleton, but all that he sees, all that he cannot and does say. The din of the sea is literally resolved into and by his image, or

perhaps more precisely, by the narrator's own mode of watching silence as a fragment of true language. Such vision cannot be reduced to the novel's impersonal tradition of showing. Again, the pole of action has been reversed; as much as narrative now listens, rather than "saying," it "sees" and does not show. The narrative is not merely meditative, but a sensitive apparatus absorbed, taking in and transposing the world it registers in the place of Singleton. There is something of the stoic reticence of Singleton that the narrative wants for itself; there is a silence it longs to sustain at the discursive level. It is a voice that desires the end of its own being, engaged in the paradoxical project of representing its own undoing.

Conradian narrative voice mimetically develops in the act of absorbing. The silence of Singleton, withdrawing into the narrator, and into narrative voice itself, undoes "a stormy chaos of speech where intelligible fragments tossing, struck the ear":

One could hear:—"In the last ship"—"Who cares? Try if on any of us if—." "Knock under"—"Not a hand's turn"—"He says he is all right—"I always thought"—"Never mind...." [...] [Singleton] stepped forward impassive and big. The noise subsided like a broken wave.... [...] They were expectant and appeased as if that old man, who looked at no one, had possessed the secret of their uneasy indignation and desires, a sharper vision, a clearer knowledge. And indeed standing there amongst them, he had the uninterested appearance of one who had seen multitudes of ships, had listened many times to voices such as theirs, had already seen all that could happen on the wide seas. They heard his voice rumble in his broad chest as though the words had been rolling towards them out of a rugged past. (*Narcissus* 79)

Singleton is a force that absorbs and abates. Narrative voice is not prior to that diversion of sound away from silence, but rather constituted by it. It is as if "listening" to such sounds no longer remains the model, for what is heard is not the *logos*, but its excess—that which must be absorbed and discarded. The discourse which Singleton confronts is what Mladen Dolar might describe as "not a function of the signifier, since it presents precisely a nonsignifying remainder, something resistant to the signifying operations, a left-over heterogeneous in relation to the structural logic which includes it" (11). In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues for the "absorption" of sound into the visible aspect of Conradian prose. His narrators often turn their ears towards surrounding sounds, as in *Typhoon*, a novel in which Jameson notes sound's resolve into image, making it the "repressed content beneath the formalized surface" of syntax and ship, analogous in their repressive instinct: "suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a door, exploded brutally... while the slim high hull of the steamer went on evenly ahead, without a sway in her bare masts, cleaving continuously the great calm of the waters under the inaccessible serenity of the sky." The repressed content of this image, Jameson argues, is the sphere of labor, sound "marking the presence beneath ideology of that labor which produces and reproduces the world itself." Audible objects "secretly unravel" infrastructure in order to "absorb it...into the realm of the image." The sentence, the text, and the image can now be consumed by the reader as an "art-commodity," a pure sense datum (201-204).

Yet Jameson's account negates mimetic desire. The narrative attempts to incorporate the physical value of physical Singleton's silence at the technical level, for while remarking that "the thoughts of all his lifetime could have been expressed in six words," the narrator does not repeat them, leaving these words as a suggestive lacuna. In rendering the eclipse of Singleton's values, Conrad performs a new mode of narrative, one that is in marked contrast to the conventions of

Victorian omniscience, conventions which *would* allow for uttering those six words. Just as Kaspar Almayr is called to dinner by an untranslated voice yelling, “Kaspar! Makan!”—“he took no further notice of the call,” looking “fixedly at the great river that flowed...before his eyes”—Singleton concentrates his unlistening gaze upon the image of the sea: “the whole batter length of the ship launched forward in a rolling rush before his steady old eyes, he stood rigidly still” (*Narcissus* 55). Narrative technique shares in that fixed gaze, drawing from Kaspar and Singleton a silent inability to hear, the written word here allegorized as that which flows “before the eyes.” The narrative penetrates Singleton’s silence to become its missing recognition: “Yet he was only a child of time, a lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation. He stood, still strong, as ever unthinking; a ready man with a vast empty past and with no future.” The narrative drive here *recognizes* itself. Singleton is without self-consciousness of his own status as a “rescued fragment” and cannot tell his own story. With a “vast empty past” and “no future,” he has no use for narrative as that which propels the values and feelings of the past into subsequent generations. Idealized, narrative stands in his place.

“Devotion to the visible universe stands at some point in need of a witnessing consciousness which can organize surface reality and ratify its meanings,” Levenson writes of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*. Narrative is functioning through suggestive transposition. In being transferred from story to discourse, silence is rescued, taken on as the disposition of narrative. Neither a figure nor character, the narrator is in this moment rather an acoustic mirror, an apparatus for witnessing the unshaken image. Lacan writes that the mirror-stage is “a coming into being of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality” (*Ecrits* 94). The impersonality of showing cannot account for a force of narrative desire, discourse resolving its discordance, drawing itself and strength from its object. As he or rather “it”—for the novel will unfold precisely as the coming to self-conscious subjectivity of the narrator, his pronunciation of “I”—watches Singleton watch, the narrative impulse witnesses its own incitement, recognizing not simply its origins, but its demand. This has consequences for the reader who is one point in the triangulation, one without whom solidarity itself cannot be realized.

#### *Wayward Voice*

The fictionalized autobiography of Conrad cannot suffice as the means of solidarity between epic past and audience—he is not Singleton, nor can he be. The narrative is thus prevented from becoming a first person *recit*. Yet the narrative registers an ebbing of the first person voice away from itself, one that cannot be understood merely through what Levenson calls the “psychologist premise.” Narrative voice in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*—as a form driving towards self-consciousness—is never fully certain of where it stands in relationship to its object, the community of men it documents:

*They* watched the weather and the ship as men on shore watch the momentous chances of fortune. Captain Alliston never left the deck, as though he had been a part of the ship’s fittings... and he never took his eyes off the ship. He kept his gaze riveted upon her... *We* all watched her. Less perfect than many perhaps, but she was *ours*, and, consequently, incomparable.... *The men*, knitted together after into a ready group by the first sharp order of an officer:—“Keep handy the watch,” stood admiring her valiance. *Their* eyes blinked in the wind... [emphasis added].

As Levenson writes of this vacillation between the first and third person plural, “the text struggles towards self-consciousness, towards a reflecting human presence which will ensure due

consideration for the unreflecting, the unconscious, the merely factual” (9). Nevertheless, while *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* seeks to retain, in an act of preservation, what others forget, at the level of grammar, this scene of watching Singleton’s riveted gaze registers an alternative drive, a drive that frustrates and thwarts its more direct content. As the passage begins, the ship and the men are perceived by a third person who is outside of the scene. Watching confers upon the narrator belonging, transforming him into a “we,” until he is “knitted together” with those whom he no longer watches, but watches-with. The gaze oscillates; there is a seeing and being seen; he too becomes a part of the “ship’s fittings”, but only for a moment, until that bond is dissolved as quickly as it had been solidified. The narrating consciousness is once again placed outside of the scene.

Within narrative voice, there is a pivoting motion or what John Palmer calls “waywardness” (Shaffer 59). Yet it is waywardness both within and outside of the scene, the narrator being at once a participant and an observer, the narrative divested of its center. In Woolf’s fictional dialogue, “Mr. Conrad: A Conversation,” Penelope defends such waywardness: “Conrad is not one and simple; he is many and complex.” Neither authorial nor narrative voices are singular. A purely narratological consideration of voice is problematic in that regard, for as Watt notes of the widely criticized passage just after the storm subsides:

[t]here must be a plurality of voices, and not an individualized narrator, because the function of a chorus in general...is to achieve what Yeats called “emotion of multitude”... [T]here must also be an intensified musicality because the hieratic repetition and balance of cadence and rhythm is itself the formal expression of Conrad’s controlled exaltation at the prospect of the laborious but triumphant monotony offered by the tradition of increasing human effort. ... In this and other choric passages Conrad *is not technically speaking in his own voice* [emphasis added], since the whole novel is told by an unnamed and uncharacterized narrator; and when the narrator pauses to generalise about the experience as a whole, it is surely appropriate that his invocation of solidarity should be pronounced in a noticeably more distant and elevated voice. (99)

There is a mobility of narrative voice: the prose is musical, yet pulling towards silence; the voice is distant and elevated, yet invocative of solidarity and the affectivity of the multitude. To what degree do musicality and silence become analogues of each other, the rhythmic flow of prose being an uninterrupted mediation of value between novel and reader? What must be negated by the musicality of the prose, as the voice of the multitude, in order to establish the means of persuasion? As Michael Gorra suggests, “fractured and choral, limited and omniscient, the tale’s narrator roves as freely from person to person as in other novels Conrad will move through time, a voice manifold and yet one that defines everything about this world but his own individual place within it. He speaks for every sailor aboard. He speaks for the ship” (9). Yet, one must ask how the possibility of “speaking for” the ship is secured. What does it mean that the narrator must first negate his individual history—itself a “vast silence”—in order to become not simply the novel’s redemptive angel of history, but its phenomenal voice of solidarity?

As long as “solidarity” with Englishmen is its goal, the narrative is prevented from becoming a first person *récit*. It in fact registers a certain ebbing of the first person voice into the third. While narrative voice vacillates between “we” and “they”, neither category, first or third, adequately captures that *force of absorption*, the narrative voice as it moves away from itself, identifying with one object while refuting others. It announces in that mobility never having been self-identical, the novel being the tale of how neutral narrative voice, as “the subject of the verb’s

mode of action,” came to be. There is the turning of the trope, a repercussive or wayward motion of narrative voice into phenomenal voice, away from the novel and toward the Conrad of the 1897 preface. As he undertakes the task of ratifying his novel, he repeats the discourse of the scene aboard ship, citing “the invincible conviction of solidarity that *knits together* the loneliness of innumerable hearts.” As the narrator himself remarks, “the men [were] *knitted together* after into a ready group by the first sharp order of an officer.” *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* can no longer be reduced to a commemoration of a “vanishing phase in the history of the sea,” nor an ideological response to socio-aesthetic fragmentation under industrial capitalism (*Narcissus* 166). The development of narrative voice in “*Narcissus*,” a culture of survival, is implicated in a series of psychic and affective upheavals—the technical excess of the negotiation of Conrad’s precarious sense of belonging, narrative as it might speak and become convinced of its own place in regard to the world it represents—it is double voiced.

As I have already begun to suggest, however, Conrad harbored extreme doubts as to his ability to convince, doubts that plagued the faculty of expression in particular. Conrad’s letter to Meldrum written when he was unable to complete *Lord Jim* (a novel which will unfold precisely as the undoing of omniscience by an auditory collaboration) is a tortuous account not of what Jameson calls “direct and quasi-immediate social communication” nor of a narrative that has its “readership vividly built into [it].” It is an account of a structural doubt, of a text imbued with distance from the persuasiveness and the desire to marshal belief, not simply in the reader, but in his own authority to command an audience, an audience which includes the writer himself:

*I never mean* to be slow. The stuff comes out at its own rate. I am always ready to put it down; nothing would induce me to lay down my pen if I *feel* a sentence—or even a word ready to my hand. The trouble is that too often—alas!—I’ve to Wait for the sentence—for the word.

What wonder then that during the long blank hours the doubt creeps into the mind and I ask myself whether I am fitted for that work. The worst is that while I am thus powerless to produce my imagination is extremely active: whole paragraphs, whole pages, whole chapters pass through my mind. Everything is there: descriptions, dialogue, reflexion—everything—everything but the belief, the conviction, the only thing needed to make me put pen to paper. (*Letters* 27)

The work passes in his mind, but not yet “fitted” for the work, a suggestive echo and retroping of the “ship’s fittings.” Waiting for the word suggests the word made flesh, a Word that brings into being the work as such—belief lies somewhere other than in the writer, however, and promises to *constitute* the work. Conrad waits for the fragment of true language. But again, feeling predates belief. Like the voice of Marlow as he sits in profound repose upon the veranda in *Lord Jim*, fading into the dark of night, the work “comes out” intransitively, awaiting the affective embodiment of belief, belief in being fitted to that which comes from elsewhere. The voice of Marlow “waits” for its reception and where his body can no longer be seen, the listener becomes its location, pulled into intimacy by tones that reach it from the outside. As with the haunting, micro-materialized vibrations that forced Conrad to re-imagine his novelistic project, there is powerlessness of the agency “behind” voice, not a Platonic ownership of voice by a functional agent. Choric voice is above all *responsive* to a vision that exceeds it. Conrad’s imagination seems to see the moment of the voice being sealed to the body that will produce the work, and belong to it on its other side, mediated by the reader—to make *you* see—and his own act of belief. The Conradian novel is future oriented, moving towards a veracity that will be secured by the reader’s experience.

The affect of the author is supplemented, lying in the body of the reader as its continuation and after-life. The author's voice is the acoustic limit of the subjective, the writer feeling within himself the ebbing away of his own voice, returned to him by the act of reading. The author is rendered a waiting subject, the future anterior, requiring from the reader the affective location of belief in which the "work" will become possible. "It is certain my conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe," reads Novalis' epigraph to *Lord Jim*. Personality and identity are products of proof, waiting in and as the other side of the reader's experience. As Barthes suggests in "The Death of the Author," "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (*Image* 142). Does not such loss include the wayward voice moving out from its originary location in the body? To write bears the promise of being unbound from the difference inhering in the body of speech. What Said calls Conrad's "wishing to say something very clearly" assumes a new register for the author who once wrote to Cunningham Graham, "But you know I am shy of my bad English. At any rate prepare for a 'b—y furriner' who will talk gibberish... at the rate of 10 knots an hour." How might the critic hear such registers, what Derrida calls "harmonics" or "corridors of meaning," within the novel and the voice of the author itself?

*Reworking: The Voice of Mastery*

In *A Personal Record* Conrad tells the story of writing his first novel, recalling an early acquaintance with English literature in the Polish translations of Dickens, an author known for his attempts to render the sound of talk and an English vernacular voice. Conrad's experience with the tradition and thereby, his beginnings as a writer, are mediated by an acoustical imaginary. Conrad marvels at "how Mrs. Nickelby could chatter disconnectedly in Polish and the sinister Ralph rage in that language." In lieu of a direct account of writing, Conrad offers an extensive detour into his reading history, apologizing afterward for not staying on course. While Conrad will never write the kinds of synthetic, theoretical prefaces for which Henry James is so well known, his lack of clear statement emerges as a kind of statement on the nature of his fiction. Indeed, the autobiographical impulse is as central to the consolidation of authorship as novelistic practice itself. What Conrad offers in *A Personal Record* is a dynamic theory of authorship that cannot fully observe itself, a *restaging*, rather than a theorization, of his most central predicament as an author.

A consideration of Conrad's linguistic negotiation of English cannot be separated from that gesture, from reworking and revision as principles of his fiction. While Conrad believes that Dickens was his first acquaintance with English literature, he makes a characteristic revision within the text, reworking the memory. It must have been during his exile in Russia as a child. He had stolen into his father's office for some illicit reading of Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a play his father had been translating at the time. As Conrad narrates this memory, his interest in English literature—and the English language—becomes intimately bound not only to the solitude of exile and a loss of kinship, but to problems of writing and with it, authority and authorization:

It must have been during our exile in Russia, and it must have been less than a year after my mother's death, because I remember myself in the black blouse with a white border of my heavy mourning. We were living together, quite alone, in a small house.... That afternoon instead of going out to play...., I had lingered in the room in which my father generally wrote. What emboldened me to clamber into

his chair I am sure I don't know, but a couple of hours afterwards he discovered me kneeling in it with my elbows on the table and my head held in both hands over the MS. of loose pages. I was greatly confused, expecting to get into trouble. He stood in the doorway looking at me with some surprise, but the only thing he said after a moment of silence was:

“Read it aloud.”

Luckily the page lying before me was not overblotted with erasures and corrections, and my father's handwriting was otherwise extremely legible. When I got to the end he nodded and I flew out of doors thinking myself luck to have escaped reproof for that piece of impulsive audacity.... If I do not remember where, how and when I learned to read, I am not likely to forget the process of being trained in the art of reading aloud. My poor father, an admirable reader himself, was the most exacting of masters (*Personal* 74).

There is an intimacy between writing and speaking in this regard. The scene of reading aloud is positioned by Conrad as one origin story of his authorial sensibility. “Blots,” erasures and palimpsestal texts will occur time and again in Conrad's novels, in particular, at the end of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* when Singleton is asked to sign his name. The clerk tells him to “make a mark” and in a kind of hieroglyphic return to first writing, Singleton “painfully sketched in a heavy cross, blotted the page” (*Narcissus* 105). He leaves the office to be scorned by the clerk as a “disgusting old brute” while the narrator recognizes Singleton as the “patriarchal seaman.” It is an exit which seems to register Conrad's ambivalent relation to written mastery itself. In letters to his editors and publishers, Conrad often curses the poor conception of his manuscripts and periods of near inability to write a sentence or even make a mark on the page. He writes to Edward Garnett of an intransitive composition that evades design: “Things get themselves written—and you like them. Things get themselves into shape—and they are tolerable. But when *I* want to write—when *I* do consciously try to write or to try to construct, then my ignorance has full play...” (Guérard *Conrad* 64). Indeed, a central paradox of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is that a written medium attempts to commemorate and venerate Singleton in his silence, a man who, though he reads, has no use for or aptitude for speech or writing.

Conrad seems to share in that ignorance; yet, rather than narrating it as a pre-symbolic containment—“Singleton” as monadic, self-reflexive and self-mastered—Conrad's personal ignorance is experienced and claimed as a failure, a tragic distance from its own object that has no choice but to write and write again, a revisive impulse that is deeply bound to a linguistic estrangement. Indeed, in 1899, a period which Watt has called the “doldrums” begins. Conrad finds himself horribly stalled in his progress on *Lord Jim*. It is in that context that he writes “What wonder then that during the long blank hours the doubt creeps into the mind and I ask myself whether I am fitted for that work. The worst is that while I am thus powerless to produce my imagination is extremely active: whole paragraphs, whole pages, whole chapters pass through my mind” (*Letter* 27). The authority to write is outside of him and hovers impersonally within the English language as such, refusing to transfer its actant status to the one who writes. Is he “fitted” for this work, Conrad asks himself. Yet, one recalls that it is only two years before writing this letter, in the highly remarked upon moment of narrative vacillation between “we” and “they,” the narrator of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* sees Captain Alliston as “part of the ship's fittings.” Ship and work seems to collide in Conrad's imaginary; he remains separate



from the space of literature as one which he brings into being. At once, he incants the possibility of a space of belonging—“fitting” into the work—and that space’s distance.

In the story of reading the Shakespeare manuscript aloud, however, Conrad’s father emerges as the “master” of the same torturous act that hunts and impels him. It is a form of writing reified by a dramatic speaking voice. Conrad must literally perform his voice in the presence of patriarch: as he reads aloud, he must demonstrate how well he can read and, in the same breath, how well he can embody the Shakespearian characters on the page. This scene of performance is intimately associated in Conrad’s memory with the foreign voices of Dickens, voices which seem, at the same, so naturally “Polish” and therefore to speak from a position of sameness. His father has the means of “translation” as bestowing similitude; he has an absolute grasp of the voices that give Conrad such pleasure and yet remain inaccessible. Spoken English emerges a cathected object mediated by a written translation which both gives access and bars. An acoustic shadow is cast upon his future writing in English.

Some of Conrad’s earliest experiments in written English are two journals documenting his 1890 experiences in the Congo, a journey with the French merchant marine that will be reworked as *Heart of Darkness*. These journals are suggestive of Conrad’s relationship to written English, a relationship that will be transferred into narrative technique itself (an extraterritoriality which, as I suggested in Chapter One, is registered by Almayer’s syncopated experience, one that speaks of a dislocatedness within present experience). Conrad wrote these journals, aids to memory, in *English*, an imperfectly mastered language, when at the time he was most certainly speaking French, a language in which he was fluent. The nature of these notebooks is central to a consideration of the relationship between his prose and the English language. One notebook concerns details of the ship; the other is a diary of the landscape and experiences. While the practical reasons for the notebook are clear, “the reasons for keeping the first notebook, the diary proper, are less evident,” writes Conrad’s major biographer Zdzislaw Njader. Why would Conrad document what he saw there, if it was simply a diary, in English? Would not Polish or French serve as a better aid? Njader continues: “I believe Conrad made these notes with the intention of using them later to refresh his memory. He had by that time written a few chapters of *Almayer’s Folly* and was beginning to learn that his imagination must be firmly supported by his own reminiscences” (*Darkness* 252). While the reworking of reminiscence figures in all of Conrad’s fiction, in the diary such reworking is taking place at the most fundamental level. He is taking as its object not simply the one who remembers, but the one who experiences, namely the one who *will be* the one who writes fiction in English. In reading the diary in particular, riddled with grammatical and phonetic errors, the questions arises: does one witness a beginning of an English imaginary as it mediates the development of Conrad’s novelistic practice? As Conrad maintains in a 1918 letter, “you may take it from me that if I had not known English I wouldn’t have written a line for print, in my life” (*Collected Letters* 227). The Congo diaries are perhaps one beginning of an active construction of a personal English past to be recalled, a past that is creating itself in learning language, one that is to be reworked and reified in and as an English fiction. One might conceive of the act of “rescue” with an alternative force, not just maintaining the past, but transforming it and reinventing it.

The significance of this English imaginary for his technique goes still further. A mysterious pull towards the English language makes itself felt in Conrad’s impulse to revise, both in self-writing and novelistic practice. As I discussed in the Prelude, the most radical and influential intervention of his fiction in the history of the novel will be problematizing temporality, a fiction that is discordant with flashbacks and pulling back so as to pull forward. In

other words, the problem of national language is at the center of Conrad's contribution. One might speculate that were he to have written in Polish or even French, the Conradian novel—and therefore Faulknerian novel, as I will turn to in Chapter Three—would not have been. Conrad's self-doubtful acquisition of the English language mediates both the sense of temporality in his work and the flexible or wayward structure of narrative voice that accounts for it. Conrad's "voice" as an author is determined by his acquisition of English; yet his English voice, insofar as the scene at his father's desk narrates its emergence, is not only impelled from without—generated by the imperative and nearly interpellating demand, "read it aloud"—but is an axis of exile and fantasies of mastery. How is one to hear the waywardness of narrative voice in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* in that regard, particularly insofar as it is a novel that seeks the company of Englishmen? The narrative voice is both proximate and distant, marked by the ambivalence of "we" slipping into "they" and back. "English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption," Conrad writes in *A Personal Record*. "The merest idea of choice had never entered my head." Though he elsewhere notes the "strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself," he will never be able to speak English aloud without some sense of the shame he exhibits in the letter to Graham. His sentiment, "l'Anglais m'est toujours une langue estragère," registers a double displacement from a home in language, just as the present continually becomes syncopated, lapsing backward and unable to maintain its hold on the objectivity of the world. Such a displacement is tellingly replicated by Woolf's "Mr. Conrad: A Conversation." "For after all these years I cannot think of him as an English writer," David remarks. "He is too formal, too courteous, too scrupulous in the use of a language which is not his own" (80).

In a "Henry James: An Appreciation," an essay dedicated to an author who embodies a more perfect assimilation to the literary culture of England, Conrad directly speaks to the problem of authorial voice, marveling at James' uncomplicated and unmediated relationship to writing. In this essay, Conrad introduces visual tropes into what is already a triangulated relationship between speaking, reading, and writing as it works toward the enigmatic acquisition of authorial voice. It is in this context of admiring the work of James that he will echo the central tropes of the 1897 preface, declaring that James undertakes "rescue work...in darkness" and that he "snatch[es] vanishing phases, disguised as fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen" and endowed with "the permanence of memory." In its pleasure, language "disguises" vanishing phases, thereby ushering the evanescent into enduring objectivity.

What should give one pause, however, is the return of the trope "rescue." Conrad worked within a series of tropes by which he appears to have been inexplicably moved. Tropes, given that they are in language, are originless and improper to the one who always-already cites. Conrad was continually working-through the significance of these terms, negotiating and redoubling such that any consideration of his textuality immediately becomes intertextual and echoic, particularly as he returns to tropes from works within his letters and memoirs, adopting them as registers of his own experience. Conrad continues:

I do not know into what brand of ink Mr. Henry James dips his pen; indeed, I heard of late that he had been dictating. ... The stream of inspiration flows brimful in a predetermined direction, unaffected by the periods of droughts, untroubled in its clearness by the storms of the land of letters,... never running back upon itself, opening new visions at every turn of its course through that richly inhabited country its fertility has created....

The artistic faculty, of which each of has a minute grain, may find its voice in some individual..., *gifted with a power of expression* [emphasis added].... He is so much of a voice that, for him, silence is like death. (*Notes* 22)

The voice of James is nearly nation-building, creating a “richly inhabited country;” it is a messianic beacon around which the mass of men “cluster” to watch the “last flicker of light.” One hears echoes of Marlow’s regard for Kurtz as “pure voice” in *Heart of Darkness*, a novel that is chiefly about an Englishman’s journey into colonial Africa to hear the mysteriously powerful voice of his predecessor. “I had never imagined him as doing, you know,” Marlow says, “but as discoursing. ... The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words, *the gift of expression*, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating *stream of light*... [emphasis added].” This “gift of expression” is ambiguous, both exalted and contemptible. Like the English language which Conrad feels “chose him” and drives him to write (the very act that will torture him and fill him with such shame), the “ability to talk” both attracts and repels. This “gift of expression” is exalted, yet Conrad’s tropological return registers a temperamental negotiation of that gift’s unattainability. To refer and refer again to the “gift” that is the voice, registers not only the protraction, overtonality, and overdetermination of his tropes, but a sense that they lack within themselves their own referential power, a “real presence.” In an acoustic intimacy between his characters and predecessors, Conrad hears in James what Marlow hears in Kurtz, and what he wishes to hear from his own body were his reading of his father’s manuscript to transform into *le petit objet (a)* of native English: a supreme faculty of voice and an interrupted movement between mind and composition. James’ language is “lit up.” It is clear language, unfrustrated, neutral, and spoken from within the interior of conception. It is a language which is unmarked by difference which, as Conrad goes on to say, answers the most supreme “call” of fiction, “‘Take me out of myself!’ meaning really, out of my perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness.” The value of “clear” expression is not epistemological: Conrad believes that James has been dictating, which is to say that someone listens to James and transcribes his address. Conrad’s laboring voice as a “furriner” could not have been so well understood.

Tropological repetition—the pull not just to reminisce, but to rework again and again—moves towards the possibility of being fully and finally understood. What characterizes Conrad’s narratives is an ebbing of the first person away from itself; it must be heard in harmonic relationship to his imperative—“take me out of myself” into an “imperishable” activity. Such a relationship gestures to the “shape” of the novel as such, an act of rescue, a *refusal to let certain tropes perish*. Tropes are *the* location in which the physical voice of the author is attempting to resolve itself, to resolve itself in and as the voices of narrative. Fiction promises to register and reattune embodied voice and authorial identity itself, a reflexivity registered in and as narrative technique. Indeed, as Freud insists in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the essential rhythm of repetition is one of mastery. One is “obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of...*remembering* it as something belonging to the past” (19). The pleasure derived from *fort-da* is at once the torment of loss; one stands to gain the object only insofar as one stands to lose it. As readers, then, we are caught in this act of recuperation, shoring up depersonalized acoustical fragments in what is, nonetheless, the personal realm of Conrad’s voice, an object that remains as elusive, that drives reading forward as much as back.

Such a reading appears to be violating the distinction Wayne Booth makes the between the biographical author and what he calls the “implied author,” a kind a virtual presence which

figures and forms fantasmatically.<sup>36</sup> While the grammar of agency is retained, it is displaced onto the text and narrative itself: the function of the implied author to act in place of the biographical author. Yet, one must consider the degree to which texts can *already* be invested in certain forms of erasure, absence and displacement. Indeed as Derrida suggests, the fundamental characteristic of the scene of writing is “*spacing*” both as “linear consecution” and a temporal break with the site of inscription (*Difference* 217). Writing becomes what Barthes calls the “death of every voice, every point of origin.” I take this to mean that one cannot move backward from literature to a self who writes it; yet with Conrad, there is an excessive and multidirectional repetition of tropes of voice—between the biographical and implied author, between fiction and its self-critical commentary—one that suggests spaces within that origin itself, the voice of the author being thrown backward and ahead, interstitially and intervallically.

Such an *interval in the voice* is what Barthes calls “grain,” there being a curious disjuncture between accounts of authorial voice and the phenomenal voice for which it is a metaphor. The grain of the voice is “the body in the voice.” One must take this category further in its consequences for a writer’s voice acoustically conceived: there is a grain of writing. The grain announces a bodily materiality; one can hear the accent and thereby fail to hear the words. It announces the presence of another language as it has adapted the throat and the glottis, coming forth as a “return” and an imprint upon the physical body of the speaker. The grain is that which acoustically speaks *above* speech and yet symbolically *below* it as its condition.<sup>37</sup> Accent has germinated from within the language itself, and then clings to possible articulations. The grain of the voice gives pause to the listener who cannot simply hear the self-presence of speech, but hears an elsewhere within it, the tissue of the physical voice thwarting the production of meaning, calling attention to itself as an object. This grain seems to emerge in Conrad’s writing precisely in the moments individuals must pause to negotiate the terms of address, there being, as I will return to, troubling acoustical signifiers that interrupt communication.

It is in writing away the grain of the voice, in writing himself into the tradition of the English novel, that Conrad will transform it. In this way, one must return to Conrad’s impulse to rework and sustain a series of tropes, such as “the gift of expression.” Conrad’s Author’s Note to *Lord Jim*, written the same year as his preface to *Heart of Darkness*, ends with a characteristic refusal to explain the writerly impetus. He notes an inexplicable return to an abandoned draft, presumably “Tuan Jim: A Sketch,” the manuscript composed on the back-pages of the old family volume of Polish poetry. It was then, he realized, that the tale should be spoken aloud by Marlow and become what Conrad calls “free and wandering.” A *free voice*, a *nomadic voice*. Marlow’s tale will move freely through time and exhaustively call upon his listeners to follow speculative detours in the history of his relationship to Jim. “All these stirrings of spirit were rather obscure

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<sup>36</sup> “Dickens was born in England” can be distinguished from “Dickens makes Pip a sympathetic character.”

<sup>37</sup> This doubleness or interior distance, however, exceeds Bakhtin’s sense of discourse in the novel. Bakhtin suggests that all narrative is “double-voiced,” speaking back its social relation: “Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms of its incorporation), is *another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other; it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other.” This model of discourse demands that the voice of the author be at home within itself before it may “converse.” For the marked voice, however, such self-presence, namely the coincidence between speaking subject and the subject of speech, is the promise held by written language itself.

at the time,” Conrad writes of his process, “and they do not appear clearer to me now after the lapse of so many years.” Again, Conrad reworks. One might understand his failure to explain, shared by Marlow, as part of a more generalized critique of stable structures of knowledge; yet, there is in Conrad’s self-description a resonance between the voice Marlow, the act of writing, and the act of the writer reading himself, a resonance, that troubles the very agency of reworking as such, the subject position that might be said to effect it. Conrad’s Note echoes the words describing the irruption of Marlow’s voice into the tale, for “with the very first word uttered Marlow’s body, extended as rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the *lapse* [emphasis added] of time and were speaking through his lips from the past.” In the lapse between trope and trope, there is an author whose agency has receded; he becomes a listener in relationship to Marlow and thereby to the act of writing itself. In that take-over of Conrad by Marlow’s tropes, and of Marlow’s spirit, Conrad as “author” is submitted to a tropological echo—writing is relating to itself. There is an acoustical lapse in which something is *happening* between writing, reading, re-writing, a return that forces the work not to be objectively “converted into revelations,” as James might say, but rather to be affectively re-effectuated.

Can the “death of the author” encompass the dynamic of this event? Does there not remain a personality or perhaps personae? In *The Force of Language*, Denise Riley writes that “Language is impersonal: its working through and across us is indifferent to us, yet it in the same blow it constitutes the fiber of the personal” (1). In the language called upon to describe Conrad’s project, both the impulse to refigure and what I described in the Prelude as the push and pull force of Conradian temporality are co-present and mutually reinforcing—there is between them a silently structuring linguistic predicament, caught-up in the realm of the personal. “Writing is that oblique space where our subject slips away,” writes Barthes. Conrad has not yet slipped, but *is slipping* away in the trope. It is a space that cannot be stabilized, only *staged*. The challenge posed by reading Conrad, however, is that such space is not empty, but rather resonant of those words, peopled by tropes that impersonally super-add themselves in and as the personality of “voice.” In her reflection on what it is to write fiction, Eudora Welty suggests that such an impersonal-personality of the author’s voice might be best understood as a “reader-voice,” the voice in which the writer reads back:

As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn’t my mother’s voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is *that asks you to believe*, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. (11)

There is in a reading-writing, not merely a double-voice, but a third voice, a third ear, one that traces the limit of the subjective. A feeling resides, not within the writing subject, but within the printed word itself, a word in relationship to which the writer now becomes a listener. The dynamics of belief—as I suggested with my reading of Nietzschean tragedy—operate in a space that cannot be circumscribed within the auto-affective. The reader-voice is a tangent irrupting from self-circularity; it is intimate, but not inside. It is a rupture within the heart of the same from which the “it” of the text speaks, one that turns each writer into a listener. How is one to *account* for this echo, to read reverberation and continuation as a model of identity and voice itself, if precisely it exceeds agency and accountability, and functions as its ground? What I have called an “acoustics”, in contrast to a poetics, is central to approaching writing as productive of

continued vibrations, writing as it can continue to echo, not simply those voices to which it attends, but the voices it has sought to transform, supplement, and forget, those which sustain the possibility of neutral grammatical voice. It is a writing that speaks in the moments when it most claims to erase all sound.

*Acoustic Exteriors and Critical Voice*

In *Discourse and the Novel*, Bakhtin gives the seminal theory of double-voiced narrative. It is “a hybrid construction...that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems.” Marlow is often understood as a spokesperson for Conrad, for he is, Watt suggests, like Conrad a “composite” of both seaman and writer. There is an intimacy between Conrad and Marlow, however; one that exceeds both doubled-voiced narrative and the relationship between the implied author and biographical author. Marlow performs several functions which cannot be fully reconciled:

Conrad smuggled in the ancient privilege of the narrator by the backdoor....  
Through Marlow, Conrad can unobjectionably express the sort of moral commentary on the action which had been proscribed by Flaubert and the purists of the art of the novel.... through Marlow Conrad discovered a new kind of relation to his audience, and one which enabled him to be more fully himself.  
(Watt *Conrad* 212)

One should question the harmony and proximity of these relations. There is a distance that exerts pressure upon the assimilation of Marlow by Conrad. Such distance is felt in the agony that adheres to Conrad’s condition of self-smuggle, i.e. being more fully “himself” by way of Marlow as a spokesperson. In that intimacy, however, there is *at once* recoil from Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, for as Achebe notoriously argues “Conrad’s intention is to draw a *cordon sanitaire* between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator.” It is by means of distancing himself from Marlow, through a series of narrative frames, that Conrad’s critique of colonial logic—a moral malaise and its acquiescence to violence—may emerge. Such critique, Achebe suggests, is ultimately a failure, for Conrad does not *speak-up*, as himself. He does not offer a stable morality to replace Marlow’s malaise. From this perspective, Conrad is in a double-bind, unable fully to critique colonialism without resorting to the first-person motivated moral commentary banished by the art of the novel, i.e. “telling.” It is only in the gesture of self-removal, Marlow “taking his place,” that Conrad may join the English tradition toward which he writes, of which Marlow is a representative.

If one is to accept Achebe’s call for a voice outside of Marlow that might condemn him, the category of critique, in this way, can only come in what James so beautifully calls in his 1914 essay on Conrad’s Marlow-narrated *Chance*, “a definite responsible intervening first person singular.” How then can Conrad’s critical project be kept alive while at the same time acknowledging Achebe’s most central rejection of *Heart of Darkness* as a novel in which “Africa as setting and backdrop eliminates the human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril” (*Darkness* 433-434). An acoustical reading of the novel can only echo Conrad’s linguistic predicament, a predicament which I have been arguing is a *tangent* outside of the assumed auto-circularity of the author’s voice. In order to understand how Marlow can at once be daemon and distantiating, one might turn Derrida’s account of the movement of the *pharmakon* within the *Phaedrus*. Asking if Plato is responsible for the multiple, conflicting and ambiguous harmonics, he writes

that “these links go on working of themselves. In spite of him? thanks to him? in *his* text? *outside* his text? but then where? between his text and the language? for what reader? at what moment? To answer such question in principle and in general will seem impossible; and that will give us the suspicion that there is some malformation in the question itself...” (*Dissemination* 96). Such an intransitive working of language seems crucial to the approach of a text which, like the *Phaedrus*, is a series of “frames” or rather, vocalic removes. Can one attend to the specificity of Conrad’s narrative technique and how *it* marshals a critique of colonial logic? If the “backdrop” of Africa is pulsing soundscape of cries of “infinite desolation,” moans, wails, and music inconceivable to western ears, must not the *cordon sanitaire* be acoustically relocated as one between the grain of the voice and neutral narrative voice itself?

It is in an intransitive unsayability that Conrad’s sense of an acoustical backdrop begins. Marlow reports:

“I went on to the river-side, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear... Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one’s very heart,—its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere near by, and then fetched a deep sigh that made me mend my pace away from there.”

The “hurt nigger”—deconstituted as a someone by the condition of pure injury—audibly stirs at the lining of the individual, exerting pressure upon it; the acoustical follows it and traces out another course. Marlow frequently lingers in an audiotopos—there is a murmur, a stir, faint sounds, silence, and finally, a moan and sigh, all sounds which follow the limits of the voice in its exertion, and then pursue him as he attempts to *move through* space towards Kurtz. These sounds compose a space “near by” the action and the subject itself, constituted by the engagement, an accompaniment, of semantic voice and its exterior. Marlow attends to, yet withdraws from an adjacent space that is, nonetheless, *retained* by his report, what should, by Jamesian dictates, be “unselected” by the novelist. In other words, these sounds seem inconsequential to the central narrative. It is as if prose is not revising itself.

Yet, such sounds—they are not properly “voice,” as they do not “speak” in a precise sense—both incite and fracture a bond of sympathy. They are heard, they affect, yet they cause a detour. The colonized subject is “naturalized” by Conrad’s prose, yet the soundscape with which it is associated is committed to a work that cannot be synthesized by pathetic fallacy as a unity of the individual’s excess in and as nature. As Wordsworth writes in “The Power of Sound” (17--), “Innumerable voices fill/ With everlasting harmony; / The towering headlands, crowned with mist,/ Their feet among the billows, know/ That Ocean is a mighty harmonist;/ Thy pinions, universal Air,/ Ever waving to and fro,/ Are delegates of harmony, and bear/ Strains that support the Seasons in their round...” Romantic sound, writes Karl Zender, “functions as an agency of reconciliation between the self and other” (90). While Marlow hears the wilderness throughout *Heart of Darkness*, it emits sounds that seem to be at the limit of that tendency in romantic thought to humanize nature, nature as it “suggests the possibility that it is congruent with the hearer and responsive to his or her needs” (Zender 90). Marlow will remark that the forest whispered things to Kurtz that he did not wish to hear, suggesting that it was an exteriorization of his own inwardness, acting in the place of the voice of conscience. The forest “speaks” him, yet in tones that are neither harmonious nor equi-vocal.

In this sense, Conrad resembles Faulkner. As Zender writes of Faulkner's turn to disrupting sounds in the major period, "These voices that reside in the air..., begin to remind us less of the muse than of some dark opposite, and in their ability to overwhelm the characters who unwillingly listen to them, they suggest that a tragic incongruity lies at the heart of the individual's relation with the world" (90). Marlow unwillingly registers an acoustic exterior of the colonial project and his own journey. Such sounds do nothing to propel the main action, yet they achieve a crucial narrative *vocation*, as if wrapping themselves around Marlow's storytelling voice and sounding-out a space near by in an accompanying negation. As they journey towards Kurtz's station, Marlow hears what Rilke calls in "On Music" an "audible landscape...which, exceeding us, crowds out." Marlow listens and retells what he heard:

"[A] cry, a very loud cry as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamour, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. ...[T]o me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly and apparently from all sides at once did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence. 'Good God! What is the meaning...' stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims....

There is hearing and feeling, yet no seeing. The sounds, an excess of semantic voice, crowd upon the scene, surrounding it. It violates the journey and Marlow's very being. He *must* attend to these voices, yet he cannot address them. The shriek is acousmatic. In cinematic terms, it is a "voice-off," a voice whose visual source has not yet been seen and thus rears a power as "*part objects* which may be fetishized and employed to 'thingify difference.'"<sup>38</sup>

As Christian Metz suggests, all sounds are "aural objects." "The recognition of a sound leads directly to the question: 'A sound of what?'" As Metz continues, "ideologically, the aural source is an object, the sound itself a 'characteristic.'" This refusal to hear sound as an object unto itself is an adjectivalism and a "primitive substantialism" of western culture. With the sounds of the jungle, their source unseen, "of what?" is precisely the question that Marlow cannot answer. The interior of the jungle exceeds the logic of representation; they are at the limit of epistemology, the acoustic exterior of its violence.

Returning to the barest etymology of "representation," Heidegger argues in "The Age of the World Picture" that representation (*Vorstellung* or set-before) is "to bring what is present at hand before oneself as something standing over and against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship with oneself as the normative realm" (*Question* 131). The shriek will not become a substantialized object "belonging" to a source; it will not be forced into a congruent relationship with the hearer. Yet, such desubstantialization is precisely the ground of Achebe's critique—the cries are dehumanized, unbound from a source that may be recognized as bearing speech, which in the Aristotelian lexicon, means *human* (defined as *zoon echon logon*). One must ask, is there not in the *refusal* of substantiality, an alternative order of meaning emerging at the level of narrative discourse? Confronted with sounds as they soar and surround, the pilgrim *stammers* as if their force has bled into semantic speech, precisely the discourse that requires that they remain external to its own order. Rilke offers perhaps the most incisive account of the a-semantic sound as it resists the normative realm of the object (his poem becoming the inverse of Wordsworth's): "Innermost thing of ours, which,

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<sup>38</sup> A voice calls from off-frame signaling precisely that the viewer's vision is incomplete; it signals that there is something more and that the frame is not a totality, but rather an artificial limit



exceeding us, crowds out,—sacred farewell: when the inner surrounds us, as the most practiced distance, as the air's other side....” As Marlow moves through what is an *acoustic exterior*, one must ask if it is not rather *interior* to the logic of coloniality that now surrounds him, speaking “back” all that he cannot say *as* the limit of direct discourse?

Conrad's impressionism is central in this regard. The reader hears the savage discord from *within* the perceptual apparatus of Marlow—there is something of these sounds that he *registers*, but cannot fully negotiate—he passes-by them; they are heard in movement; they will not be rescued. He is intent on narrative—on seeking, moving towards and retrieving the eloquent voice of Kurtz. He aligns his narrative trajectory with Kurtz, retracing Kurtz's journey being his primary motive. In the course of this trajectory, however, sounds *divert* Marlow. There is a non-identity within the sounds: the reader does not hear, or cannot hear, given the limitations of perspective, the sounds *as such*. Conrad's impressionistic move in this moment is to represent the object in relationship to its receiver. The pure position from which to receive these sounds has been evacuated by the conditions of narrative discourse—the framing which Achebe would have Conrad remove so as to arrive at the first-person voice of critique.

Marlow himself is *deaf* to the violence he preserves, shelters, and keep safe in his voice and in his desire to hear Kurtz. Until the very end, Marlow preserves the words “The horror! The horror!” as his own, for himself. They are words which share the referent of the shriek in the forest, a shriek which designates or names, in sound, the violence of coloniality, the violence of narrative itself and thereby must remain unnarrateable. The novel begins and ends in the drawing room as *the zone* of English storytelling, the location described by Marlow as one in which the fabulation of colonial logic is woven by domestic voices. There, Kurtz's “Intended” asks Marlow to repeat Kurtz's last words; they rise up for him as a catacoustic phenomenon. He refuses to repeat them within her sanctified space—“he said your name.” He draws the *cordon sanataire* to preserve the dream of empire, its fiction, the space of narrative itself. It is only the anonymous listener, i.e. the frame narrator and intermediary of Marlow's tale who, in writing of Marlow (Krielkramp rightly calls him the “scribe”), allows the reader to hear the discord between the colonial Idea and its execution. “What redeems [empire] is the idea only,” Marlow says in a crucial moment of malaise aboard the *Nellie*. “An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea...” (*Darkness* 7). In the shriek, one hears *a sound behind the idea* as its condition. The reader hears all that coloniality—the logic of seriality, inside and outside—must negate to effectuate its own Intended.

Marlow believes in this Idea as he narrates aboard the *Nellie*—*he cannot hear himself*. Does not the reader begins to hear otherwise through the medium of the anonymous listener? As Barthes suggests of “double meanings,” the essence of the tragic, they are more precisely a double listening: “there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him—this someone being precisely the reader (or here, the listener)” (“Death” 148). Rather than the oral tale being, as Derrida might suggest, a moment of “two absolute origins” encountering each other, the one echoing back the other his own identity, the anonymous listener hears what Marlow cannot, tracing out in his listening the exterior of his logic. The anonymous listener hears something in Marlow's retelling for the first time. He hears something in the recollection, in the imitative incantation aboard ship. There is a failure of the impression to fully register the sounds in themselves—they are fundamentally misheard, never appearing as *voices* or *music* for Marlow, but savage discord. The signifier of savage discord, however, rather than being “of” the unseen inhabitants—which in Metz's terms, means they can never be fully verified as

“source”—*echoes back* to the anonymous listener and therefore the reader the savage discord of colonial logic itself. It is Marlow who names them “discord.”

Within the specificity of Conradian narrative technique, the development of narrative frames and with it the evacuation of a first-person voice of the author, then, *coloniality is hearing itself* in the body of the reader. The reader becomes the site, the shelter for coloniality hearing itself—he or she is implicated. In his seminal reading of narrative frames in *Heart of Darkness*, Peter Brooks suggests that the reader is implicated in Kurtz’s failure to transmit meaning in his last words. “The reader’s own incapacity to sum up...is consubstantial with his dialogic implication in the text. The reader is necessarily part of the process of transmission in this tale that is ultimately most of all about transmission” (*Darkness* 384). “Ultimately most of all”—Brooks himself sums up, precisely when he indicates its failure. The acoustics of *Heart of Darkness* is the excess of narrative transmission, direct discourse, and the dialogic circularity of two absolute origins in immediate and dialectical conversation. Marlow cannot *listen* to the event of sound—one could say that he records it, but without any device that might allow him to listen to his record that speaks back an originary violence of his narrating voice. It is a record that is destined for an ear that is other than his own, the auto-affective circle broken. He “runs-on” to others, running on because he cannot sublimate what he has not fully heard.

The redeeming “idea” of colonialism fails to take shape in the reader; yet, it is a critique that happens *only* at the phenomenological level of reading. It is a critique that forces the reader to “hear” as Marlow himself cannot. The novel cannot offer, as Achebe demands, a first person critical voice of protest, because such a voice *is no longer available*—Marlow seeks out Kurtz’s “pure voice,” but encounters only “a whisper what was no more than a cry.” Pure voice has become what Conrad calls in the preface, a “sinister resonance that would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck,” a critique effectuated *in* the space of resonance, in and as the event of reading.

#### *Against Background Noise: Narrative as Acoustic Displacement*

Displacement as it governs representability is central to a consideration of the relationship between the visual and acoustic in Conrad. Affects are retained, yet as Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, they are “detached from the ideas that properly belong to them,” emerging in new form (307). “[T]he dream,” Freud continues, “has above all to evade the censorship, and with that end in view, the dream-work makes use of *displacement of psychical intensities* to the point of a transvaluation of all psychical values.” There are, he argues, “*considerations of representability*.” It must draw from acoustical and visual traces, but “Little attention is paid to the logical relations between the thoughts; those relations are ultimately given a disguised representation in certain *formal* characteristics of dreams.” While the interpretation of dreams through association proposes to locate the displaced psychical value, there is an overdetermination of meaning, origin, and value. In literature, an overdetermination becomes perhaps more complicated, as I.A. Richards was the first to argue, in that reading cannot limit itself to the bio-critical, tracing itself uni-directionally to the psychic life of the writer. There is not merely a veiled meaning concealed in a new form, but a generative work of formation that lives its own life in the diegesis and within the space of literature as an event. Transferences between tropes is equally overdetermined. Words live a tropological life within the *œuvre*, which is itself without normative limit (the critic turning to letters, manuscripts, drafts, marginalia, itself always-already governed by a lacuna).

Conrad’s linguistic predicament was undoubtedly generative, however, shifting the possibilities of novelistic discourse. It cannot be heard in a single direction: the task of criticism

is not simply to transfer, in a reverse course, the displaced psychical value of sound back to an originary value, form, or memory-trace, unveiling a disguised significance. Novelistic displacement is productive and indeed, I have been insisting that narrative voice cannot be except through displacement. To return to the question of a formal work that governs representability, one might ask if there are psychical values that have not simply transferred form, but have seized upon the literary as the possibility of representation. The individual narrative negotiates an avowed voice while at once registering voices that are displaced in order to become *possible*; it is against the “background noise” of displacement that the avowed voice can even be heard. In that same way, the image is surrounded by sounds that allow it to be seen. Such voices and images cannot be approached through a reverse-course of interpretation, undertaking what Freud calls in his essay on negation “listening between the lines,” which is the inversion of value (a “no” means “yes”). The acoustical unconscious in Conrad does not “speak” in any self-present sense and can only be stratified, making itself heard in fragmented form: it makes itself felt alongside of the avowed form as it governs representability and in further dispersed regions incited by the act of reading.

A scene in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* begins to illustrate, quite literally, this predicament of an acoustically (and visually) displaced narrative voice. As Jake and Brett walk into a jazz club, they meet a drummer, a friend of Brett’s, who is not described except when metonymized by what Gary Halcomb calls “the Conradian ‘all teeth and lips:’”

The music hit you as you went in. Brett and I danced. It was so crowded we could barely move. The nigger drummer waved at Brett. We were caught in the jam, dancing in one place in front of him.

“Hahre you?”

“Great.”

“Thaats good.”

He was all teeth and lips

“He’s a friend of mine,” Brett said. “Damn good drummer.”

[...]

“Oh darling,” Brett said. “I’m so miserable.”

I had the feeling of going through something that has all happened before. “You were happy a minute ago.”

The drummer shouted: “You can’t two time—“

“It’s all gone”

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know. I just feel terribly.”

“. . . . .” the drummer chanted. Then turned to his sticks.

“Want to go?”

I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must through again.”

“. . . . .” the drummer sang softly.

“Let’s go,” said Brett. “You don’t mind.”

“. . . . .” the drummer shouted and grinned at Brett.

This moment is perhaps most Conradian in its concern for the space between speakers and listeners, attempting to narrate both the gap between people and the extra-semantic affect that passes between them, in the air, as they speak. There is quite literally an overtonality of semantic speech, both the sound of the speaking voice and the affect which written discourse can register,

but not fully represent. Racially marked speech becomes the repository for what the direct discourse of its central characters cannot say. Jake narrates this excess to some degree, indicating the “feeling” of a nightmare, what he cannot say to Brett in their staccato, stoic phrases. Such a feeling is, for Jake, unsayable. Yet, even narrative itself seems to be aware of its own failure to indicate.

The acoustics of this scene cannot be fully addressed by what Jameson calls Hemingway’s “narrative by omission,” for at the level of sound and its inscription, the scene dramatizes an inclusionary-exclusionary force: the narrative literally and visually excommunicates sonic excess so that neutral narrative voice, focalized through Jake, as well as his own stoic, disaffected diegetic voice, might become possible. As Jake and Brett are caught in a jam, both a musical excess and a black voice crowd upon direct discourse, bracketing each phrase as its enabling exterior. An unsayability, the real of the scene and that which cannot be indicated by the symbolic, is mimed and located in black speech. The speech of the drummer moves further and further from itself, first as a dialect voice, a writing that is sounding out speech, then as a singing, a chanting, until finally it is an ellipsis, a spacing within written discourse itself.

The narrative registers these sounds; it increasingly attempts to banish the language of the drummer to the realm of sound, but the drummer’s voice and music simultaneously exert a pressure upon narrative, surrounding it and vying for its attention. The drummer indicates a rhythm, “two timing,” that is at the limit of narrative temporality—it is pulled in two directions—a rhythm that is at once at the limit of representing diegetic acoustical space. If narrative turns fully towards the drummer, it will negate the spoken scene, falling into the music which will become its primary object. It is in the midst of a struggle to the death. In that moment, “background noise” ceases to be an appropriate designation, for the written finds its limit in its capacity to represent depth and verticality—the narrative struggles to represent what is underneath the spoken as its support, but at the level of inscription, it can only be *just alongside* of it, surrounding direct discourse. It signals an acute danger: for what if narrative were to turn its attention to these sounds and music? The acoustic is the psychic excess of the semantic, pulsing around it and surrounding it, represented so as to be marginalized, performing a narrative and textual “work” that is at once unfulfilled. The acoustical object and the racialized body have been negated, but remain in the narrative in displaced and distorted form; they are “there,” at the margins of narratability. Such marginal work cannot in itself be narrated, but is acoustical, indicating how the reader is to hear the dialogue between those at the center, indicating what they themselves cannot hear and what the narrative itself cannot hear if it is to maintain its semiotic hold upon the affective limitations of its characters.

There are stakes, as Conrad well knew, to establishing acoustical parameters to the scene of dialogue. The sonic margin is at the crux of narrative action in *Lord Jim*, a novel that is *about* the genesis and circulation of the voice—the “giving back” of voice—when the story of a struggle over acoustical sense-data determines the rest of the novel, pushing a chance surprise into a determinant relationship. Seated on the veranda before a group of sailors, Marlow begins to tell the story of his first encounter with Jim, recently tried in a Malay town for abandoning ship. Marlow had sat in the audience of Jim’s inquiry and encountered this young man for the first time in the courthouse hallway. In one of the most commented upon passages of Conrad’s opus, the “yellow dog incident,” Conrad crafts a highly attenuated scene of encounter, one which protracts the space and time of interpersonal contact and its sensory fringes. We are asked to hear the many sounds surrounding the dialogue before these two characters can even “meet,” in what

becomes a frustrating missed encounter, a pause that is for Conrad frequently acoustical in nature.

In the yellow dog incident, a scene of radical suspension of action, Marlow explains that as the attendees filed out of the courthouse, he walked alongside of a stranger, the two suddenly overhearing a group of anonymous native villagers accused of assaulting a moneylender. A woman among this group then “suddenly began to talk in a high-pitched, shrewish tone.” The man walking near Marlow “instinctively looked up at her” which then distracted him from walking and he tripped over a yellow dog walking along the corridor. Marlow continues to describe an unbearable scene of misunderstanding, sequencing events in the order perceived and thereby heightening the reader’s own sense of misunderstanding. We return to the verandah, the ear of the novel as limit and passage:

Whether those villagers had brought the yellow dog with them, I don’t know. Anyhow, a dog was there, weaving himself in and out amongst people’s legs in that mute stealthy way native dogs have, and my companion stumbled over him. The dog leaped away without a sound; the man, raising his voice a little, said with a slow laugh, ‘Look at that wretched cur,’ and directly afterwards we became separated by a lot of people pushing in. I stood back for a moment against the wall while the stranger managed to get down the steps and disappeared. I saw Jim spin round. He made a step forward and *barred my way* [emphases added]. We were alone; he glared at me with an air of stubborn resolution. I became aware *I was being held up* [emphases added], so to speak, as if in a wood. The verandah was empty by then, the noise and movement in court had ceased: a great silence fell upon the building, in which, somewhere far within, an oriental voice began to whine abjectly. The dog in the very act of trying to sneak in at the door, sat down hurriedly to hunt for fleas.

‘Did you speak to me?’ asked Jim very low, and bending forward, not so much towards me but at me, if you know what I mean. I said, ‘No,’ at once.

As with the decapitated heads sequence in *Heart of Darkness*, at stake is a full view. Marlow sees what Jim cannot: the referent of “that wretched cur,” the yellow dog. Jim, however, having just been on trial, can only hear language through the filters of accusation. Believing he is the object of the slur, he assumes the voice as an interpellating address. He is mistaken about its source as well as its destination. Spoken language has insinuated itself between these two men and created the encounter as such: had the words “wretched cur” not been uttered, Jim would never have turned around to see Marlow. While spoken language holds up the two men and bars narrative progress for several pages, spoken language is at the same time the *crux* of narrative progression and action. It is due to this (missed) encounter, that the remainder of the novel, a document of the relationship between the two men, is incited and propelled.

This moment of delayed decoding must be reevaluated in terms of the dual project of registering and rescue, what allows “words” to become “images” and in that transition, secures affective affinity. Registering incites the bond that restores a narrative voice to Jim, for just before the two men meet in the hallway, Jim had sat upon the witness stand to think to himself that he will never “speak out again as long as he lived”—there is no way he can articulate his story in an absolute signifying language of cause and effect for “the men who wanted facts.” Marlow, in his acute sensitivity, will transform what Jim has registered into a stable narrative of the community, rescuing it as a demonstrable tale of a larger human fragility and therefore its continuity with history. After their meeting in the courthouse, Marlow and Jim will sit together

and converse and Jim will be able to tell his otherwise inarticulable story. The misheard words “wretched cur,” then, condition the rescue of narrating voice for Jim—it is a reticence broken only by Marlow’s patient listening: the main drive of the novel is for Marlow to tell the story that Jim tells him to a group of others. A group of seamen are seated on a veranda in a spatial homology with the stalled encounter—Marlow tells the story of Jim to this anonymous collective so as to redeem Jim as what he calls “one of us.”

As one must ask, however, why must registering, the perception of an errant, acoustical sense-data, bring about this opportunity for rescue? What conditions that possibility of Jim’s rescue by Marlow’s narrative? Acoustic registry remains the origin of their bond, both in their chance encounter and again as Marlow rescues the fragments of Jim’s brute sensual experience. The narrative *loiters* in this passage-way as a place of sound; it is precisely the zone which incites the criticism that the Conrad “tale is no tale,” that it lacks action. Yet, is this passage-way not merely a delay on the way to action, but rather the support of all action? Can it not rather be heard as the *genesis* of narrative voice, the passage-way on the other side of which the neutralized voice of the author is *waiting* by means of an acoustic displacement? As Marlow explains, Jim, walking alone, gets pulled into the scene of narrative, recognizing himself as addressed by this voice from without. Progress has been thwarted by a troubling sound-signifier loosened from its signified. As there is contact between the two men, one should note the triadic level of quotations as an unnamed third person narrator quotes Marlow who is himself quoting Jim: “““Did you speak to me?” asked Jim very low, and bending forward, not so much towards me but at me, if you know what I mean. “You say you didn’t. But I heard.””” The slur meant for a dog has reached the ears of Jim as the voice of his own bad conscience. The trope “says” what a narrator has not. The dog continues to scratch unheeding; Jim has heard what was meant for a dog as though it were meant for him and he has turned around as if by instinct. Nevertheless, a hole in narrative has emerged by the phonetic force of language reaching his ears without a visual referent. As a hole in narrative, it is one in which the actants must pause not only to negotiate a false narrative, but renegotiate the terms of address as such.

Marlow now attempts to explain to Jim what had just occurred; yet, the embedding of quotations reminds one that Marlow is himself telling this story to a group of men, calling into question the means of and the possibility of his own address to them as the “us” for whom he seeks to rescue Jim. The very status of the exterior quotations marks (Marlow repeats the encounter for the men on the veranda) are in fact the stakes of the story told in such painstakingly delayed detail. The conversion of sense-data into the concept—Jim is “one of us”—remains tentative, for *can* Marlow be heard and understood, and Jim understood through him, if spoken language misfires so? Misunderstanding propels the dialogue between Marlow and Jim, a dialogue in which they cannot meet as equals—the ambiguity of spoken language has prevented its own fulfillment in and as communication. This ambiguity has perhaps seeped into writing as such, given the novel’s own technical delay, its evacuation of omniscience which bars understanding from the outset. Both the novel and Marlow refuse to synthesize the scene, there being no voice outside of the voice of Marlow that might move his narrative along. Misunderstanding clings to all levels of discourse and articulation.

Marlow had misunderstood, for as Watt notes, Jim finally repeats the words he has overheard—“wretched cur”—only after several minutes or pages of exposition. Just as Marlow, “the reader... may not understand,” Watt writes, “unless he recalls the stranger’s casual remark earlier” (*Conrad* 282). There is, then, a sensory *fringe* of reading whereby the reader must have “registered” what had appeared to be an insignificant piece of sense-data, a technique which

Faulkner will later exploit when a narrator gives the entire story of *Absalom! Absalom!* within the first chapter, yet provides no means of understanding it. It is only later that understanding emerges, but it is, as it were, too late. As it appears in Conrad, however, delayed decoding is premised upon a reader's knowledge being limited to that of a fictional consciousness, what Faulkner will expand and recast as unbearable responsibility for and implication in events for which one was not present, storytelling being a provoking facsimile. Delayed decoding in Conrad "served to put the reader in the position of being an immediate witness of each step in the process whereby the semantic gap between the sensations aroused in the individual by an object or event, and their actual cause or meaning, was slowly closed in his consciousness." Yet, as a scene of impasse, "wretched cur" is a spoken shard of language that misfires, reaching and being overheard by the wrong *destinataire*. Such words are not fully "decoded" nor is the semantic gap fully "closed," and not only because Marlow tells and retells. This first encounter between Marlow and Jim tropologically registers spoken language as it tends to open space between individuals, to rupture an otherwise neutral exchange.

This *drifting of sound*—a tendency to open that organizes not simply the diegesis but the movement from work to work, novel to novel, novel to preface, preface to letter—recalls Conrad's haunting beginning of *A Personal Record* where he meditates on the genesis of the author's voice, saying not "from where" it comes, but rather that it is to be judged by its effect: "For who is going to tell whether the accent is right or wrong till the word is shouted, and fails to be heard, perhaps, and goes down-wind, leaving the world unmoved?" Conrad echoes a Jamesian sense of authorship:

As for the origin of one's wind-blown germs themselves, who shall say, as you ask, where *they* come from? We have to go too far back, too far behind, to say. Isn't it all we can say that they come from every quarter of heaven, that they are *there* at almost any turn of the road? They accumulate, and we are always picking them over, selecting among them. They are the breath of life—by which I mean that life, in its own way, breathes them upon us.

The Conradian authorial voice, however, has no such agency of picking over and selection: is it burdened, "encumbered," by an inclusionary force that cannot reject what is breathed upon it. In other words, in the yellow dog incident, the narrative seems to retain or "accumulate," as functioning entities, what would otherwise be rejected. It is as if the narrative is unrevised and in a draft-stage, exhibiting the kind of "permanent provisionality" of the spoken voice Jameson had critiqued in Conrad. "Selection" is not an event that takes place before written composition itself but is rather dramatized by narrative progression that "includes" its own stalls and traces of revision at the level of focalization. The focalizer is distinct from the narrator, being what Bal calls a "selector." Yet, in its inclusionary impulse, the acoustics of the scene exceeds focalization. Such selection cannot be separated from the level of narrating, for in the course of Marlow's story, "sounds" insinuate themselves as a liminal and subversive counter-narrative.<sup>39</sup>

There is a sonic spectrum. One thinks of the Balzacian impulse towards setting which begins by describing the cracks on the wall of a room before the people who are occupying it—

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<sup>39</sup> One might consider the sound-design of the films of Jean-Luc Godard as they often render the conversation between individuals inaudible. In his realism and refusal of the fetishistic selectivity of point of view, Godard will not "lower" the ambient sounds of a café—marginal voices, dishes clattering, a general din—because the conditions which facilitate the encounter are, for Godard, as central as the encounter itself. This deprivileging of the *logos* causes a diffuse sonic spectrum in which speaking voice is at the same acoustic register as sound, thwarting the viewer's ideological expectations. See especially *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*.

this impulse is pushed by Conrad to the micro-level, intervening in the movements of plot itself. Conrad pushes written language towards the registry of the *overtones* of spoken discourse—not simply in the Jamesian sense of “the tone of a man” as it registers what reticence keeps safe, but what must be displaced for the audibility and neutrality of the *logos* to become possible. Such overtones necessarily force a dramatic attenuation of the flow of classical action, pausing diegetic time so that it might expand diegetic space. Conrad’s radicality in this regard is grounded in a linguistic predicament, the conditions of communication being continually negotiated at the micro-levels of narrative, narrative asking not simply how can one tell, but how can one hear what there is to tell?

Foreign voices—“the tone of a shrewish woman”—sound-out on the fringes of the meeting between Marlow and Jim, conditioning their exchange. These men are at odds because they speak; yet, it only upon that condition of impasse that they may finally converse. Is not such rupture contained and mitigated at the level of focalization and acoustic registering? In one of few critical accounts to consider the ability of sound in the yellow dog incident to create a competing and adjacent narrative, Sanjay Krishnan notes the “distracting” tones of the natives who talk, the sound of an “oriental voice” that “whines abjectly.” As Krishnan argues, “this resonance offers the first indication of a world excluded from yet operating alongside Marlow’s narrative agenda.” These are sounds he does not understand and they appear as non sequiturs, having little to do with the central action: *Marlow notes them nonetheless*. How is one to receive these sounds surrounding the scene if the stakes of the scene are precisely the possibility of Jim’s narrative rescue? “Repression neither repels, nor flees, nor excludes an exterior force; it contains an interior representation, laying out within itself a space of repression,” writes Derrida. Narrative voice begins to falter as a category, for there are spaces within the voice, durative lapses interior to enunciation. The native voice is not excluded from this scene, but is interior to its mobility. Gibberish, tone, accent—the very drifting of sound against which the success of the Word is measured—are the genesis of the (failed) encounter. The “high-pitched, shrewish tone” catches the attention of the pedestrian, causing him to fall over the dog and then call out “wretched cur,” what then forces Jim to address Marlow.

Like the “oriental voice” that “whines” a-semantically *alongside* of the scene, this voice meant for the animal exists in order to be marginally perceived, *in order to be on the border of recognition* (as I will return to in Chapter Three, Faulkner expands this dilemma of displaced hearing to temporal and historical registers). It creates the negative-acoustic space by which the central narrative action—the encounter between Jim and Marlow—may emerge. A registered sound “outlines” their contact. Jim himself, having heard the address, one meant for a dog, is one who registers brutally and cannot redeem his own story on the witness stand before the “men who wanted facts.” He floats dangerously on the border of recognition; he must be rescued by Marlow’s narrative as “one of us.” Such sounds on the border of recognition had facilitated Conrad’s critique of colonial logic in *Heart of Darkness*; yet in his linguistic predicament, there remains struggle. His writing must *mime*, in scenographic sound, its own claim to authority.

In this regard, the act of vision emerges as a central protagonist against the antagonist of the phonetic quality of voice: it is only after Marlow’s strained attempt to understand why Jim accuses him, that Marlow sees the dog and then tells Jim to look at it. Jim then turns to see the dog himself and in that moment, Jim is rescued from his own animality, his violent tendency to respond to Marlow “as if by instinct.” There are two worlds, native-animal and European-human; yet, “the separation of the two worlds is undermined in this episode,” Krishnan writes, “for the properly human engagement between Marlow and Jim is interrupted by a senseless if



insistent movement that originates from the other side.” This other side remains acoustic in nature, “going down wind,” unbinding men. By Marlow’s own narrative account—Marlow being the central narrative authority of the novel—foreign voice is represented in order to be repressed, to be “slowly closed in his consciousness,” and localized as the “cause” of rupture. The reader is delayed into the meeting of these two people—conversation being the primary location of contact between self and other for Conrad. Yet, such delay owes itself to Conrad calling attention to the atmospherics of the setting that should facilitate such an encounter.

One must have an ear—an ear behind an ear, as Nietzsche suggests—for the process by which sensory project of registry is transformed into the ethical and historical project of rescue. One must ask after the significance of a sounding-out of that transformation, objects resonating with contrasting force, being registered, but negated and committed to the act of forgetting. If Marlow “fulfills” the registering temperament as first experimented with in *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus,’* one can begin to understand the degree to which registry remains necessary for the rhetorical and poetic project of rescue. He must register, but not fully synthesize competing forces, as that which thwarts and threatens to disband. While Conrad’s call is “above all, to make you see,” noise, sounds, music, and bits of misapprehended spoken language continually sound-out from the spacio-temporal margins of the visible world and the action taking place within it, exerting pressure about the novel’s most direct *theorie*.

#### *Narcissism, Faceity, and The Blackened Voice*

As I have already noted, Achebe critiques the dehumanized howls emitted from the invisible depths of the Conradian landscapes, arguing that Conrad bars these voices the possibility of semantic clarity, making him a “bloody racist.” As North concurs, “Conrad avoids the whole problem of difference in language by depriving his characters of words altogether, describing their voices instead of transcribing their statements.” Such a proposition maintains an *a priori* distinction between sound and voice, the externality of outside from inside. To the degree that Conrad posits a “neutral” semantic speech alongside of a pure *phone* without semantic clarity, he suggests their constitutive engagement. One must account for a further intimacy between a narrative that de-semanticizes voice—turning it into a kind of “sound”—and narrative as it works towards becoming the silent, visible object signifying authorial English voice. In *Heart of Darkness*, sounds accompany diegetic voice, and ultimately, narrative voice itself. Marlow’s audiotopos is constituted by the engagement between voice and its exterior, hearing the adjacent space of action. These sounds are registered and *persist* within and between works, that space, and its extra-textual vicissitudes, constituting the *oeuvre* as such.

Nietzsche suggests that every philosophy reads as an autobiography of the philosopher—literature is perhaps no different. I have been suggesting that the phenomenon of doubling—both in space and as temporal succession—courses through Conrad’s work in a way that exceeds that of the autobiographical as a placing of oneself “in” the work. The Conradian novel promises to return the writing self back to itself, super additively, and therefore, as more precisely “present.” The work of narcissism takes the shape of doubling.<sup>40</sup> It is a work in which the ego encounters a double not as a happy self-reflection, but an uncanny aggressor. Citing Otto Rank’s classic study of doubling, John Irwin writes that “the origin of doubling [is] in narcissism, specially in that guilt which the narcissistic egos feels a ‘the distance between the ego-ideal and the attained reality’” (33). Irwin continues:

The rejected instincts and desires are cast out of the self, repressed internally only to return externally personified in the double, where they can be at once

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<sup>40</sup> See *Modernity at Sea* for a reading of doubling in Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer.”

vicariously satisfied and punished. ...The difference that the ego senses in the double is the implicit presence of the unconscious and particularly that form of unconsciousness which the narcissistic ego finds most offensive to its self esteem—death. In the myth, Narcissus sees his image reflected in the water; he recognizes the image as himself, yet sees that it is shadowed on a medium whose fluidity, whose lack of differentiation, whose anarchy continually threaten to dissolve the unity of that image at the very moment that the medium itself seems to supply the force to sustain that image. What Narcissus sees is that unified image of conscious life buoyed up from moment to moment by a medium whose very constitution, in relation to the ego, seems, paradoxically to be dissolution and death.

According to Rank, the “shadow” is the classic form that the double takes. While I will more fully address Irwin’s seminal account of Faulknerian doubling in Chapter Three, I raise a cursory reading now, not only because Faulkner seems to be duplicating Conrad in his negotiation of repetition and doubling, but because Irwin’s reading demonstrates a paradigmatic refusal to link the “shadowing” work of narcissism with the question of race.

Both as rhetorical figure and a human shape, “the Nigger” is at the center of Quentin’s suicide in *The Sound and the Fury* when like, Narcissus, he drowns himself, exacting punishment against himself after failing both to commit incest with his sister, Candace, and to avenge himself against Dalton Ames, her seducer:

The shadow of the bridge, the tiers of railing, my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so easily had I tricked it that it would not quit me. At least fifty feet it was, and if I only had something to blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned, the shadow.... Niggers say a drowned man’s shadow was watching him in the water all the time.

Irwin calls attention to the reference to blackness, for “in Quentin’s mind, blacks are the obverse reflection of whites,... they are like shadows” (36). It is significant, Irwin remarks, that the day of his suicide this Mississippi boy attending Harvard is told that he sounds like a colored man, for “Quentin’s own shadow has Negro resonances in his mind.” What Irwin seems to suggest, is that it is the force of being likened to a black man in speech gives rise to feelings of inadequacy; Irwin then immediately shifts his account to Quentin’s “determination to drown his shadow [as it] represents the substitutive punishment, upon his own person of the brother seducer (the dark self, the ego shadowed by the unconscious) by the brother avenger (the bright self, the ego controlled by the super-ego)” (37). How is one to understand this tropological *movement* between the shadow, the dark self, and the signifier of race? While I will return to the legacy of slavery as it inflects Faulkner’s American imaginary, one must ask after the peculiar and unquestioned *suitedness* of “the Nigger” in Irwin’s account as a stand-in for the shadow self, what allows that self, otherwise insubstantial, precisely to be figured, “read,” and made visible. These questions are at the center of Conrad’s linguistic predicament as it enacts itself as narrative technique.

*The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is a novel to which he always metonymically referred by “The Nigger” alone. Recent criticism chooses the latter two words as if to erase a troubling signifier; yet, “the Nigger” and “Narcissus” are in a genitive, mirroring relation. As Irwin does not ask of Quentin Compson’s experience in the water, how does race seem to sustain the function of the shadow self, its capacity to “reflect” back? The final words of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* declare that “the spring-flood of memory sets with force up the dark River of the

Nine Bends. Then on the waters of the forlorn stream drifts a ship—a shadowy ship manned by a crew of Shades.” These waters holds James Wait, “the Nigger” who dies aboard ship and is then buried at sea with the eulogizing words, “to the deep.” One hears, as a register of the “force” of memory, Conrad’s comments upon his first encounter with a black man: “A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of a blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as if manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards” (*Darkness* 344). Between narrator and writer, there is deconstituting force of memory, a violation of self-identity figured as blackness in the most literal sense: the force of memory takes shape as a black figure. Irwin suggests that repetition is inherently a “revenge against time;” yet, as one begins to consider race as if figures and thereby sustains the dynamic of doubling, there is, in the rage against time, a peculiar rage against blackness as the force of deconstitution. It is upon the Shade that revenge must be exacted, a revenge that promises, in that instance to dissolve the precarious status of an identity that can only enact itself in repetition.

What Irwin calls, after Nietzsche, a revenge against the “it was” of time is perhaps more precisely the desire for the pure infinitive of self-identity, the desire “to be.” Repetition promises the mastery of authorial voice in the super-addition of tropes. Yet, such repetition defies motivation, being a slurring of speech, its turning against itself even as it asserts itself. In one of the few accounts to take seriously Conrad’s titling the novel by means of a racial slur, North notes the descent of Wait’s voice into “gibberish” upon his death and asks what it can mean that, in the months following his completion of the novel, Conrad wrote to Cunningham Graham of his own “gibberish.” Later in the preface to *The Rescue*, Conrad writes that the completion of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, his first novel to tell the story of a journey to England, “brought to [his] troubled mind the sense of an accomplished task, and first consciousness of a certain sort of mastery.” How are we to reconcile this sense of accomplishment—on the part of an outsider, completing his first novel to make a direct appeal to an English audience—with the word “by which Conrad always metonymically designated the novel that concerns us here: *nigger*?” By using this word (yet, does it not become in that instance a trope?), North suggests, outsiders can become “linguistic insiders, a shared colloquialism being one of the best ways to make common company. And what better colloquialism, from the point of view of a European alien, that one that draws lines not in terms of culture or language but in terms of race?”

In his study of blackface minstrelsy in nineteenth-century America, Eric Lott suggests that the logic of blackface is always premised upon an erasure and a dialectic of “love and theft,” a desire and repulsion. The ethnic white blackens so as to perform whiteness—it is only in the removal of blackness, that whiteness beneath the mask is effected and recognized. The gesture, on a fundamental level, says “I am white, because I may make myself black.” In the “The Negro and Recognition,” Fanon narrates the scene of interpellation as deconstituting for the object of the gaze *qua* object—“Look! A Negro”—what Anne Cheng more recently calls “the melancholy of race.” Yet, Fanon at once suggests that for the subject of the gaze, the recognition of racial difference functions in and as ego-constitution. For he who yells “Look, A Negro!,” is it not a kind of continuation of the mirror-stage? For it is then that that pre-symbolic forces that threaten to deconstitute take external shape, and in taking shape—Conrad’s own metaphor for the novel—they have somewhere to “go.” In a way that has not been understood, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* functions as an acoustic mirror for English authorial identity only insofar as it may figure troubling forces of ego-constitution in the blackened face; it only enacts English author voice insofar as it may pronounce and excommunicate the voice such a face emits, a black noise.

The novel begins by surveying the crew aboard ship. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* takes pains to discover Singleton insofar as he is reader, concentrating the first several pages of the novel upon him as he is rapt in silent attention. "[O]ld Singleton sat unmoved in the clash of voices and cries, spelling through *Pelham* with slow labour, and lost in an absorption profound enough to resemble a trance. ...Hidden by the white moustache, his lips, stained with tobacco juice that trickled down the long beard, moved in inward whisper. His bleared eyes gazed fixedly from behind the glitter of black-rimmed glasses" (*Narcissus* 3). The narrative gazes upon Singleton, desiring not simply his incapacity and lack of need for speech, but hearing—as he reads, Singleton is like Almayer unshaken, never once turning around to locate or even recognize the presence of voices. "The noise increased. ...Voices buzzed louder. ...Voices cried.... Old Singleton, lost in the serene regions of fiction, read on unheedingly" (*Narcissus* 4-7). As "an expression of grave surprise would pass over his rugged features," he is pulled away from the scene in the vision of another world spelling itself out below his glasses. The narrative gives a face to its principle actor and in that same gesture, thematizes its written status—it narcissistically underwrites its own identity.

How is one to understand this orchestration of the surface of the face, lost in the written word, pressured by the exteriority of speaking voices as they veer into their excess? Indeed, the force of this scene, both as a gesture of beginning the novel and enfacing its ideal-ego, cannot be fully felt until the narrator shifts his attention to Belfast, heated and agitated, as he tells a story:

The noise increased. Little Belfast seemed, in the heavy heat of the forecandle, to boil with facetious fury. His eyes danced; in the crimson of his face, comical as a mask, the mouth yawned black, with strange grimaces. Facing him, a half-undressed man held his sides, and through his head back, laughed with wet eyelashes. Others stared with amazed eyes. Men sitting doubled up in the upper bunks smoked short pipes, swinging bare brown feet above the heads of those who, sprawling below on sea-chests, listened, smiling stupidly or scornfully. Over the white rims of berths stuck out heads of blinking eyes; but the bodies were lost in the gloom of those places that, resembled narrow niches for coffins in white-washed and lighted mortuary. Voices buzzed louder. Archie, with compressed lips, drew himself in, seemed to shrink into a smaller space, and stewed steadily, industrious, and dumb. Belfast shrieked like an inspired Dervish: "... So I seez to him, boys, seez I, 'Beggin' your pardon, sorr,' seez I to that second mate of the steamer. [...] You should have seed him skip boys! Drowned blind with tar, he was!"

While the narrator turns his attention to Belfast, both to watch and listen, Belfast's voice is rendered nearly incomprehensible. He is "shrieking like an inspired Dervish" through a devouring mouth which "yawns black." Voice does not bestow face, but folds upon its own origin to deface. Belfast's "mask" of a face is seen in the midst of an incomprehensible transport. It is the inverted surface of Singleton, a refractive, negative mirror. This face *conspires* with his babble, prose juxtaposing grotesque shards of images which do not compose a complete image of recognition: "His eyes danced; in the crimson of his face, comical as a mask, the mouth yawned black, with strange grimaces." Even at the level of punctuation, the narrative does not reflect the scene, but breaks it apart.

While the *Narcissus* is peopled with simultaneous spacio-temporalities of storytelling, their juxtaposition within the first several pages of the novel, by the narrator who registers them, provides an important lesson for the novel that will follow, for the preface that will later ratify

the novel in the phrase, “above all, to make you *see*.” Singleton is at odds with the mimetic, inspired, furious and dialect voice of Belfast as he performs before his fellows who “buzz” in a troubling, inhuman noise. The novel writes into existence its own conditions of reception, performing for the reader how it is to be seen, pronounced, and engaged. The reader is first positioned as an observer, puzzled by Belfast’s contorted body which, not yet with reported speech, is at once without reason, without meaning and seductive power. One sees Belfast possessed, in Dionysian contortion and ecstasy, without understanding that he is simply telling a story. As the description of him begins, the reader cannot yet hear his voice because the narrative cannot be in both spheres of sensual experience at once, being occupied with the vision before it is occupied with his speech. The story cannot be registered in any depth; the reader envisions not its signified, but rather Belfast, the storyteller, as fragments, proto-cubist angles without centralized point of view. The reader finally meets Belfast’s listeners, but they too have been defaced: “Over the white rims of berths stuck out heads of blinking eyes; but the bodies were lost in the gloom of those places that, resembled narrow niches for coffins in white-washed and lighted mortuary.”

While the description of Belfast culminates with reported speech, an ellipsis begins his story and disfigures its signified: “...So I seez to him, boys, seez I, ‘Beggin’ your pardon, sorr,’ seez I to that second mate of the steamer.” The lacuna indicates precisely what the narrator could not hear, his eye having been drawn away from the speech by the spectacle. On a theoretical level, it would seem that we are still within the limits of heteroglossia, for as the narrator finally begins to quote the story of Belfast, it crashes into the dialect speech of sailor talk: the two are set in auditory relief. One is left with the sense of a voice that must be sounded out to be understood, assumed by the reader, but only as an alien harmonic of inner voice. His is a voice that is “heard,” but not as the reader’s own, refusing the warmth of Welty’s reader-voice. It is a voice that antagonizes and cannot be interpreted by means of the narrative techniques that reproduce it. The reader hears Belfast, but more importantly, the reader hears against it the narrative that reports it *as no voice at all*—narrative voice has become, by way of the blackened voice, neutral and without tonality, accent or dialect speech; it is beyond heteroglossia, mastering through narrative the difference incited by speech. The narrator emerges outside the scene, as an eye “before all else, to make you *see*.” The narrative discourse inoculates the voice of Belfast, a voice which now limits and contains the otherness within the English language, averting difference from the site of narrative.

Narrative voice, in absorbing and commemorating the reticence of Singleton, begins itself to stand as the means of solidarity, to take his place, nearing the affective plane of the reader. As Belfast continues to tell his story, a third voice sounds-out on the scene in response. Belfast had been quarreling with a gentleman, he tells the men. “‘What do you say you--!’ seez he, comin’ at me like a mad bull...all in his white clothes; and I up with my tar-pot and capsizes it all over his blamed lovely face and his lovely jacket.... ‘Take that!’ seez I [ellipsis in the original].” Like B’rier Rabbit, Belfast turns the gentleman into a “tar-baby,” “blackening” the whiteness of his clothes. The “lovely face” of the gentleman is defaced, written upon by Belfast’s castrating noise. “Blind with tar he was!” A dissenting voice then responds: “‘Don’t ‘ee believe him! He never upset no tar; I was there!’ shouted somebody.” The face of the shouting “newcomer” then appears, one who “had been listening open-mouthed in the shadow of the midship locker:”

He looked as if he had known all the degradations and all the furies. He looked as if he had been cuffed, kicked, rolled in the mud; he looked as if he had been

scratched, spat upon, pelted with unmentionable filth... and he smiled with a sense of security at the faces around.[...] He stood repulsive and smiling in sudden silence. This clean white fore-castle was his refuge; the place where he could be lazy; where he could wallow, and lie and eat—and curse the food.

The narrative eye has been steadily withdrawing from Singleton in order to refract its furthest exterior; yet, in his profound otherness and animality, Donkin is halted upon. In a moment of what Gilles Deleuze calls “faceity,” this close-up has “the compound effect of desire and of astonishment” (*Cinema 1* 101). The close-up “tears” the image away from space and time. “even the place,” Deleuze continues, “which is still present in the background, loses its coordinates.” In its repetition of the phrase “he looked,” the narrative contains the object of repulsion *qua* object. Nevertheless, such repetition is a classic oratorical gesture. As Ross writes, “anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase the beginning of successive clauses or sentences, is especially favored in colloquial oratory, both because it permits amplification and because its repetitive pattern is easily followed by auditors” (*Voice* 199). In other words, narrative is addressing its reader politically as a listener *while* ousting certain vocalities, incanting and amplifying an image of the enemy before him. There are two voices: the reader-voice and its inimical harmonic. The enemy of whom? Of narrative voice itself, which alone wields the force of containment.

If the group of raucous men had been committed to their death by the narrative eye, they are once again resuscitated in their community by the presence of Donkin as more deeply other. Mr. Baker calls over the roster of names, ceasing upon the name Donkin as he steps forward to become a pure, horrifying mouth: “It stopped; it uncovered pale gums and long, upper teeth in a malevolent grin” (*Narcissus* 9). The reader *waits*, in suspension, to hear Donkin speak. Narrative vision isolates and attenuates the violent difference of the mouth itself as the site of an embodied blackened voice that threatens identity as such. ‘What’s your name?’—‘Donkin,’ he said, looking around with cheerful affrontary.—‘What are you?’ asked another voice. “Why, a sailor like you, old man” (*Narcissus* --). As Baker continues to call the names and muster the crowd aboard ship, a distant voice sounds out on deck. Conrad’s temporal craft is at once spatial, for in deferring action, he enlarges the space of the diegesis: the role of the cinematic voice-off is precisely to delineate the limit of immediate vision and call attention to the “more” beyond it. There is a visual, political, and epistemological *frame* to this introductory scene, voices erupting from its exterior. The narrator sonically refracts Singleton, moving out into the acoustic exterior of his silence, and now reaches its acoustical and onto-epistemological limit, one beyond even Donkin himself. Mr. Baker continues to look at his list and call names. This final name marks the limit of writing as such:

“Can’t make out that last name. It’s all a smudge.... That will do, men. Go below.”

The distinct and motionless group stirred, broke up, began to move forward.

“Wait!” cried a deep, ringing voice.

All stood still. Mr. Baker, who had turned away yawning, spun round open-mouthed. At last furious, he blurted out:—“What’s this? Who said ‘Wait’? What...”

But he saw a tall figure standing on the rail. It came down and pushed through the crowd, marching with a heavy tread towards the light on the quarter-deck. Then again the sonorous voice said with insistence:--“Wait!” The lamplight lit up the man’s body. He was tall. His head was away up in the shadows of lifeboats that stood on skids above the deck. The whites of his eyes

and his teeth gleamed distinctly, but the face was indistinguishable. [...] The boy [Archie], amazed like the rest, raised the light to the man's face. It was black. A surprised hum—a faint hum that sounded like the suppressed mutter of the word “Nigger”—ran along the deck and escaped into the night. The nigger seemed not to hear. [...] After a moment, he said calmly:—“My name is Wait—James Wait.”

The “baritone” voice of James Wait sounds out at the fringe of the visible. Baker realizes he is one man short and now uses the same terms the other men had used to address Donkin—“*what*.” There is a rhetorical joint that extends from Belfast, to Donkin, and this new hand. Baker does not ask “what’s your name,” but rather ““what’s this?”” It is a question that appears to be addressed to spoken language itself. As he attempts to understand what he hears, neither he nor the reader yet know the voice is to be unified with a written mark, For a moment, sound hangs in the air, indeterminately. The face of Wait *surfaces*, *prosopopoetically*, as if generated from out of the noise aboard ship, to bind acoustical errancy.

As Paul de Man writes in “Autobiography as Defacement,” *prosopopoeia* is “the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech.” In this conferral, de Man continues, “voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope’s name, *prosopon poein*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*). *Prosopopoeia* is that trope of autobiography, by which one’s name...is made intelligible and memorable as a face” (*Romanticism* 75-76). Such figuration, de Man argues, is at once a disfiguration or “defacement.” Where is this deconstituting “smudge” of Wait’s name to be located? Structure, writes, Irwin, is “always virtual, always *to-be-known*, or more exactly, always *to-be-inferred*...a structure is a virtual object whose shadow alone is real” (6). The emergence of Wait’s face, at the limit of blackened speech, is at once at the limit of Conrad’s personal predicament, the striving for autobiographical *intelligibility*.

In this novel that is about the conferral of mastery and identity, the reader is asked to read of readers. In that act, there is a reflexivity or auto-activity, a narcissistic self-naming of the novel. Yet, Conrad introduces the figure of reading repeatedly in his opus, as with Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* who clings to a sea-faring book, filled with marginalia presumed to be “cipher,” later inheriting Kurtz’s letters whose content is never disclosed to the reader. We are only told that Kurtz’s “manuscript” ends with a scrawl, “destroy all the brutes!,” Marlow tearing-off this conclusion before handing it over to the Company. In *Lord Jim*, a young Jim is driven by a desire to see himself enact the adventures of which he had longed read at the parish, novelistic visions which fail him as he abandons ship. The novel then comes full circle as Marlow later bequeaths a poorly written package of letters to the “privileged man.” Writing negates itself in Conrad’s sensorium, plagued by the presence of “bad writing,” a writing that withdraws, obscures, confounds and yet is transmitted with urgency. So too there is a regressive movement from Singleton’s “serene region” of novelistic reading to a negative inscription, a bare mark, a writing which blackens, that can only appear as improper to the written novel which accounts for it. Singleton, as I have already mentioned, will make his exit by “blotting” and painfully etching a cross instead of a name (becoming bound, at the level of trope, to the sanctioned appearance of the name of Wait). Writing seems to be undoing itself even as it must assert itself.

Arguing that “a particular fantasmatic relation to the blank page lies at the heart of...Conrad’s fiction generally,” Michael Fried calls attention to a letter written in French by Conrad to writer Marguerite Poradowska. He writes of progress on *Almayer’s Folly* after she has sent him some of her own writing. As Conrad begins the letter however, “forgive me for not

having written sooner, but I am in the midst of struggling to the death with Chapter XI; a struggle to the death, you know! If I let go, I am lost!” (Fried 214). He continues, “I send you the first page (which I have copied) to give you an idea of the appearance of my manuscript. This I owe you, since I have seen yours” (Fried 199). The “look” of the page, reproduced in Fried’s essay and held in the Rosenbach library in Philadelphia, is defaced, palimpsestal, scribbled over, nearly destroyed—and yet he offers it to Poradowska as an aggressive “gift” and with it, a kind of autobiographical visage that might “speak” his predicament. It is a prosopopoeia. One must recall his linguistically tortured comment to Poradowska that “l’Anglais m’est toujours une langue estragère,” an agony of English articulating itself in neither Polish nor English, but displaced into yet another harmonic. The page given to Poradowska is the visual analogue of this comment. One is not meant to *read* such a page in the precise sense, but to witness its illegibility. One sees its falling away from identity and facement into darkness, like the map upon which Marlow will gaze as a boy in *Heart of Darkness*, “a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially... resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country and its tail lost in the depths of the land” (*Darkness* 8). The snake, a curved line, is at once hidden and defaced, it courts and condemns.

As Fried writes of the figure of the blank page in Conrad’s letter to Poradowska, however:

...his assertion that inspiration comes to him ‘while gazing at the paper’ can serve to make us aware that *Almayer’s Folly*, like Conrad’s fiction generally, tends to minimize the role of the pen imagery... Moreover, Conrad’s emphasis upon gazing rather than writing evokes a state of heightened receptivity that, if inspiration were not to arrive, might easily decay into passive fantasizing and anguished conviction of failure. ...Indeed, Conrad’s account of the advent of inspiration... suggests that the continual restoration of blankness with each new sheet of paper, but also a consequence of the nonliteral, that is representational or figurative, acts of erasure was the generative—as well as the most anxious—moment of his enterprise. Finally, Conrad’s decision to send Marguerite Poradowska an actual page of his writing testifies to a fascination which the “look” of his prose as it filled up (or “blackened”) the blank sheet. (214-216)

Again, there is a theoretical elision in the account of narcissistic figuration. What is one to make of the ease and near *necessity* by which blackness *surfaces* as a figure for agony (an elision that is particularly troubling given that Fried’s essay is *about* the signifier of the face)? How is one to understand the psycho-tropological move from *blankness* to *blackness*? These tropes will pivot upon the reflective deck of the *Narcissus*: “It was black,” the narrator remarks of Wait’s face, a face which now seems to draw its *identity* from the written “smudge” that had a first announced him. There is a blackened face and a blackened page. Yet, as one must ask, is there not in this movement of prosopopoeia a *blackened voice*, an acoustical displacement that finds its disfigured “face” in the “look” of Mr. Baker’s page, figuring Conrad’s own? To merely “look” upon Conrad’s page is to fail to hear the voice sustaining it, sounding out beneath its defacement. In what struggle to the death is the face of Wait engaged?

The prosopopoetic naming of Wait is a dynamic restaging of Conrad’s maxim, there being hearing and feeling before there is seeing. There is between these sensual modes a narrative progression: Baker reads a written smudge; the voice sounds out; it is heard and offends, and vision then attempts to seal upon its meaning and attenuate its violence. Yet what is



the promise of such seeing? Wait's voice is acousmatic, sounds and voices whose visual sources have not yet been seen and thus rear a power as "*part objects* which may be fetishized and employed to 'thingify difference'" (Chion 1). *What* is this sonorous voice that sounds out and to whom does he call?

When the crewmen hear "Wait!", their impulse is to "return" the unbound sound to its visible source so as to understand its meaning. Reading, writing, seeing, and hearing collaborate in order to make the sonorous *speak*. The youngest sailor, Archie, brings the lamp light up to Wait's face. Only in that moment, does uncertainty become Difference, Wait being seized upon, but only as a mask: "it was black." A "surprised hum—a faint hum that sounded like the suppressed mutter of the word 'Nigger'"—sounds out after the face is seen, collectivizing the men who surround Wait. The *progress* of narrative in time is crucial in that regard. The trope of blackened voice is momentarily circulated to Mr. Baker. "What's this?," cries Baker as he himself waits, "yawns" "open-mouthed" in astonishment, as did the mouths of Belfast and Donkin. Race itself hangs in the scene and awaits its proper object. Narrative voice itself continues to *wait* for further determination, as Jim and Marlow, being "held up, as if in a wood." Recognition floats between the men destabilized in relation to each other, to their "order" or "muster." As the errant voice of Wait awaits prosopopoetic return to its proper site in the body, narrative voice itself hangs in suspense, unable to fasten upon its own means, its own actant. (good)

*Waiting*: an anticipatory present tense that is neither pause—to pause, writes Georges Poulet, is "to linger in the pure present"—nor action, but its conditioning support (*Human Time* 329). The terms of recognition and narrative action itself have been suspended—"Wait!"—a phenomenal voice stalls narrative progression and meaning itself as it might pass between addressor and addressee. Wait's entry is the displacement of signification as such; it is the displacement of characterization insofar as it is required for the subject of narrative to emerge, for the scene to unify and progress. None of the men aboard ship are the "subject" of narrative: it is the assumption of the English language, fraught with homonymic ambiguity—"Wait" and "wait"—the difference within spoken language becoming the scene's central actant, with its capacity to unbind meaning and men. The homonym, as trope, forces a lingering over the word *qua* word, its spacio-temporal extension within itself.<sup>41</sup>

In an earlier draft, Conrad had written "Who said wait?" only changing it later to "Who said 'Wait?'" (*Narcissus* 115). How is one to understand that revision, particularly if the departure of the ship, the progression of the novel itself, depends upon the crew's being mustered? North suggests that the revision writing resolves acoustic ambiguity; yet, one must ask towards what end, for it is as if *the voice of narrative seals around the voice of Wait*, enclosing the errant phoneme in the visible marks of direct discourse. Writing, as the agent of narrative, diverts the acoustic-realm, contains it such that its troublesome ambiguity is localized in Wait and the narrative voice bears no responsibility for the fractured collective. Narrative voice now listens, waiting in regard to its object by reporting observations in the order of experience. Yet, the *differance* driving the scene cannot be separated from Conrad's critique of omniscience, of a

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<sup>41</sup> The time of waiting in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* recalls Victor Shklovsky's sense of the artistic essence of the novelistic discourse as lying in "defamiliarization:" "A work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception. As a result of this lingering, the object is perceived not in its extension in space, but so to speak, in its continuity. Thus 'poetic language' gives satisfaction. According to Aristotle, poetic language must appear strange and wonderful; and, in fact, it is often called foreign" ("Art as Technique," *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge [London: Longmans, 1988]).

narrative that stands at remove from its object. The title of the novel refers only to the “nigger” and not yet to a proper name. For the reader, “Wait!” remains enigmatic, verbal, and imperative in tense—someone appears to be demanding and not announcing his identity.

The novel-as-autobiography, in its epithetical self-naming, will commit an act of violence against the face which holds the name. It announces an *impersonality* of displacement—errant phonemes that require a destination—reflecting back anarchic blackness rather than the personality of the face. Only at the end of a violent attenuation, threatening to undo the very means of the novel as a progression of plot, Wait resolves the enigma by explaining that he had thought his name was written on Baker’s list, that the chief-mate therefore had the means to link the acoustic signifier to written signified. “The deep, rolling tones of his voice filled the deck without effort” as Wait occupies the point of the crew’s blindness: “I saw you all aft as I came up the ladder,” Wait says, “and could see directly you were mustering the crew. Naturally I called my name. I thought you had it on your list, and would understand. You misapprehended.” The reader is left doubting Wait’s intentions, divested by narrative technique of any access to interior space. Did Wait in fact issue an indecorous command, an unwelcome interpellation of his superiors? Or was this a mistake? The reader has not the means to answer this question; the cause or intent seems no longer to be at stake.

The stakes are narrative voice as it regards its object, and how thereby, it is to be regarded by the reader. The “surfacing” of linguistic meaning from ambiguity—the moment that the reader and Baker both understand that “Wait” is in fact a name—is quite literally a surfacing at the level of plot and the bestowal of a face: as Archie lifts the lamp to the face that has issued the call, the scene drives towards *visibility*, the satisfaction of the troubling acoustic-linguistic signifier into a visage that might anchor and name. Narrative voice is now sealed-off from that which had fractured narrative time. Like Woolf who “heard a humming noise” and “listened with all my ears not entirely to what was being said, but to the murmur or current behind it,” difference is the hum behind the scene, behind narrative voice itself, behind Conrad’s most central aim:

The disdainful tones had ceased, and, breathing heavily, he stood still, surrounded by all these white men. He had his head up in the glare of the lamp—a head vigorously modeled into deep shadows and shining lights—a head powerful and misshapen, with a tormented and flattened face—a face pathetic and brutal; the tragic, the mysterious, the repulsive mask of a nigger’s soul.

Is not the mask of Wait, beneath which the disdainful tones originate, the acoustic shadow of the future anterior image, of the novel itself in its drive towards identity in the representation of a national English past? Where is one to locate the voice beneath the mask, beneath the page itself? The hum of the epithet is at once an *epigraph*, defacing the autobiographical movement of the novel itself in its auto-telic gesture.

For after the cry of his name, the next sound will signal that he is waiting for death. “He put his hand to his side and coughed twice, a cough metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud; it resounded like two explosions in a vault; the dome of the sky rang to it, and the iron plates of the ship’s bulwarks seemed to vibrate in unison.” *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* cannot function as the allegorical representation of a nineteenth-century English social-microcosm, a community of men, without being at once the story of their counter-unification in Wait, the ship’s only disclosed cargo. As Balzac would perhaps remind us—“Typhus fever is the product of the exhalations in a hospital”—the destination of a cough is its inhalation by others—when Wait speaks, “the words, spoken sonorously, with an even intonation, were heard all over the ship.”

The image of Wait moves beyond its borders, inhabiting the air that the men share and thereby binding him to the ship in a way that only Singleton himself had been previously bound. Wait is himself “part of the ship’s fittings,” becoming its unifying agent. The reader is made to understand that the “cough,” the same air that carries the voice of Wait, is a force of contagion and has its destination in the narrative itself. Just as the “babble of Eastern language” that clashes to absorb the “masterful tones of sailors” at the novel begins, Wait becomes the absolute origin of the havoc of the spoken word; he arrives to contain this sickness. And yet his sick air inhabits the same air that circulates *logos*; this errant air will not go unrespired, as if taken in by Baker in strange punctuating phrase that, as Aaron Fogel notes, continually “chimes” with Wait’s cough, “Ough. Ough.”

The space of narrative and the space of a ship are often coextensive in Conrad’s novels, narrative discourse literally becoming susceptible to the fluxes of feeling and sensation. In his thinking about trauma, however, Freud does not answer the question of *where* “bound” disruptive energy goes. It is perhaps *there*, outside of oneself and the *Innwelt*, in the *Umwelt* and the aesthetic relation to the world. It is atmospheric. Insofar as narrative is a site not simply of registry, but a strategy of containment, there is an *atmospherics of narrative*, written narrative “catching” the logic of its object.<sup>42</sup> “He became the tormentor of all our moments; he was worse than a nightmare. You couldn’t see that there was anything wrong with him: a nigger does not show” (*Narcissus* 27). One can only hear, echoically, such a comment as one upon the novel itself, hanging indeterminately within the English tradition and the fulfillment of Jamesian technique that must show. The title of the novel is to be heard as an acoustic displacement, committing to death the blackened voice that sustains the ego, the narcissistic assertion of one’s own voice, the possibility of neutral voice as such. Racial displacement and the metaphysics of presence appear in a kind of collusion that seems difficult to overestimate, or perhaps more precisely, it will remain an underestimation, moving super additively, implicating the means of estimation as such the moment it has reconciled itself as “enough.”

The narrator has heard in Wait’s place, occupying the third-person consciousness: there is the subject which names (the crewmen), the object which is named (James Wait-cum-nigger), and a third-person consciousness (the narrator) which describes the scene and therefore occupies two positions at once, split in relation to itself. The reader cannot fully recognize the narrator as among the crewmen who issue the call, as he continually vacillates between “we” and “they.” The narrator now refers to Wait not by his name, but as “the nigger,” as if to assert his status as one among “we.” The rhetoric of the statement has undone its own tenuous grammar. “The nigger seemed not to hear.” For this statement to be possible, the narrator has heard what “the nigger” or “not-I” did not. It is as if the hum circles round the deck to return precisely back towards the narrator—the hum of interpellation has not “escaped into the night,” but been absorbed by narrative itself, that absorption condition its own neutrality, one that echoes as an acoustical displacement “long after the last note has been struck.”

*Thanatology: Echo and the Trope*

In his essay on Proust, Benjamin differentiates “remembrance” (*Gedächtnis*), as an involuntary act, from “memory” (*Erinnerung*), a voluntary act:

“The function of remembrance,” Reik writes, “is the protection of impressions; memory aims at their disintegration. Remembrance is essentially conservative, memory is destructive.” Freud’s fundamental thought, on which these remarks are

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<sup>42</sup> Baker’s inexplicable noise punctuating his speech, “ough,” does not simply rhyme with “cough,” but suggests a material *circulation*.

based, is formulated by the assumption that “consciousness comes into being at the site of a memory trace.” ...Therefore, “it would be the special characteristic of consciousness that, unlike what happens in all other psychical systems, the excitatory process does not leave behind a permanent change in its elements, but expires, as it were, in the phenomenon of becoming conscious.” The basic formula of this hypothesis is that “becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system.” Rather memory fragments are “often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that entered consciousness.” Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as experience, can become a component of the *mémoire involontaire*. (*Illuminations* 84)

Conradian narrative voice is, in its acoustics, a psychical system in which becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are compatible and co-present. It is a system which confounds available narratological terminology, for the critic must at once speak voices that are “there” and voices that have been discarded as they exist and persist on the same plane of narrative utterance. It is in an act of involuntary memory that one “repeats,” Freud suggests. One does not “recall” the unconscious memory fragment in a precise sense, for it has not been sufficiently recognized; it cannot become properly past, but redoubles itself as an absent-presence. It is in that repetition that one must hear the voice of Conradian narrative, Conrad’s voice as an author, if not the individual voice as such. The reader is interpellated into a resonant process of rescue; his or her involuntary memory alone becomes the place where Conrad’s voice becomes possible, the reader shoring up acoustical fragments that linger and vibrate from work to work, from reading to reading.

I have been treating *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* as an “origin” of certain problematics that will continue to be negotiated both by Conrad’s narrative technique, his evaluation of his voice as an author, and ultimately, other works in so far as they experience Conrad as an influence. Yet, this novel is more accurately a “beginning.” It is an overdetermined site where a certain tropological relationship between the writer and other men strikes with acoustical force, becoming the ground of imagined community. What is the substance of such community? In temporarily saving one marked for death and continuing to await its inevitable occurrence, the men aboard the *Narcissus* experience an inexplicable kinship. The novel documents a series of affects, shifting in relationship to Wait as what Conrad calls “nothing; he is merely the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action.” Such non-identity at once suggests a narrative force, Wait’s own tropological status or “turn.”<sup>43</sup> What binds the men and this novel

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<sup>43</sup> As Hayden White writes in *Tropics of Discourse*, “the word *tropic* derives from *tropikos*, *tropos*, which in classical Greek meant ‘turn’ and in Koiné ‘way’ or ‘manner.’ It comes into modern Indo-European languages by way of *tropus*, which in Classical Latin meant ‘metaphor’ or ‘figure of speech’ and in Late Latin, especially as applied to music theory, ‘mood’ or ‘measure’” (2). Yet implicit in the definition, especially in that last sense of a musical measure which marks a unit of meter, is temporality or spacing across time; that tropes move, finding their significance in difference and repetition. In this way the trope *departs* from customary language and, as Judith Butler notes in *Psychic Life of Power*, “can produce a connection between terms that is not considered customary or logical” (201). Butler reminds her reader, however, of the Nietzschean sense of metaphor, which is primary, and not secondary to a process of conceptual, rational, or non-figural language; the concept for Nietzsche is a “forgetting” of its condition in metaphor, each concept only being an accumulated use of a metaphor that only after a period of time may take on the status or guise of non-figural language. I have been suggesting that the “voice” of Conrad is such a cumulative forgetting, a super-addition of tropes.

together is Wait as a structure of feeling: there is a shared shadow of death that circulates between them as they negotiate Jimmy's dying, finally gathering in a circle during his burial-at-sea in a moment of solidarity. The novel is not an "imitation of action," but rather, as Milton might say, of a "passion." Wait's death is an affective event that pushes the journey towards its conclusion, being one around which the men psychologically converge just before the ship docks in England.

That plot conclusion coincides with a conclusion at the level of narrative discourse. The narrator will not be addressed by his mates or recognized, one might say, as one of their own, until Jimmy's death. Belfast weeps on the shoulder of the narrator—who for the first time appears to us, as a figure—lamenting his loss. The narrator quietly walks away, invoking the first-person singular for the first time, thinking that "I was not anxious to stand the brunt of his inconsolable sorrow." The narrator "disengaged" himself from Belfast, taking a "last look." There is a silent watching and overhearing throughout the novel which seems to move towards a culmination in and possibility of the narrator's "I," a consciousness which pivots, in a way that has not been understood, upon Wait. In moving towards "I," the novel moves towards the possibility of direct address to his mates, only reported utterance—"So long!"—is the final valediction of the novel, turning away from his life at sea and towards the project of memory. There is a narrating activity throughout *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, yet it nonetheless narrates its own possibility, the story of how the voice of narrative came to be. The death of Wait and his dangerous sonority conditions the conclusion (and origin) of the story insofar as it is the story of narrative voice. The loss of Wait conditions the emergence of a narrative "I," marking it as an acoustic displacement, challenging our understanding of the givenness of neutral narrative voice. As Guérard famously writes, Wait is "*something the ship and the men must be rid of before they can complete their voyage.*" He is the acoustic shadow, the violence that conditions the very possibility of "I" and Conrad's coming to himself as an English author. We must question Levenson when he argues that the "I" of the narrator "'comes up,' ascending from the midst of events. ...[T]he text struggles towards self-consciousness, towards a reflecting human presence which will ensure due consideration for the unreflecting, the unconscious, the merely factual" (9). Can there be such sublation? Is not the sound of Wait a remainder of self-consciousness as such, a tension unresolved by the discursive struggle of narrative voice with itself?

It is on behalf of "the permanence of memory" that the novelist must write, Conrad asserts in his essay on James. He recalls both the logic and central figure of the 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* where he declares that "to snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task." If an introduction might be defined as a kind of continuation, a ratification, or "an attempt to explain why the book is as it is by telling where it came from" (Irwin 1), such a task makes itself felt in the conclusion to the novel itself. "A gone shipmate," the anonymous narrator concludes as he walks away from the ship, "like any other man, is gone for ever; and I never met one of them again. But at times the spring-flood of memory sets with force up the dark River of the Nine Bends. Then on the waters of the forlorn stream drifts a ship—a shadowy ship manned by a crew of Shades." The narrator shifts from past-tense to the present-tense, as if to address the reader him or herself. As the narrator of *Narcissus* looks upon the faces of these "forgetful men", the novel concludes with its own possibility as a "shape" for their memory, a eulogy that is co-extensive with the desire to narrate that must have already existed for the novel to be possible. In his last phrases, we are positioned for something to return with force, and return it will, or

return it already has. The narrator's strikes a chord in the reader's memory—what Faulkner will call “the resonant strings of remembering”—for earlier aboard ship Singleton, like Narcissus, had “peered at Jimmy in profound silence, as if desirous to add that black image to the crowd of Shades that people his old memory” (*Narcissus* 87). The beauty of Singleton is his placid surface, that he does not speak; he retains, yet he discards. He becomes a figure forgetting outside of the most overtaking effects of involuntary memory. They are effects to which the narrator will be committed as memory floods in a way that can be neither anticipated nor dammed; the spring-flood of memory is anarchic, unmasterable, and owes itself to those things which have not been precisely experienced. It is a flood which afflicts Conrad as a writer.

Singleton's memory, however, is a place of pure negation, populated by non-entities, Shades, and other voids—it absorbs and makes permanent, and in making permanent, discards. He remains the ideal-ego, Singleton, “as old as Father Time himself,” and unto himself, reifying Derrida's comments upon Platonic memory as the true site of the *logos*:

A limitless memory would in any event be not memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always there already needs signs in order to recall the non-present, which it is necessarily in relations. The movement of dialectics bears witness to this. Memory is thus contaminated by its first substitute: *hypomnesis*. But what Plato *dreams* of is a memory with no sign. That is with no supplement (*Dissemination* 109).

Conrad perhaps shares that dream. As if continuing the phrase “the crowd of Shades that people his old memory,” a continuation that opposes and yet seeks such unviolated containment, Conrad (re)writes in *A Personal Record* “for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure, sun-bathed existence demand to express itself in the shape of a novel—except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and hearts all the dwellers on this earth?” The trope forces its way out; it turns; it is bathed in light, but continues to cast a shadow. It is as if the shape of the novel is precisely that which floats on the forlorn waters of the spring-flood of memory: it retains, but recognizes its own incompleteness—the spring-flood does not set with force but once, but “at times,” as in time and again. In other words, it is only in tropes, as echo, that the novel “mimes” the infinite self-presence of unaccented voice that is its dream.] /cut bracketed section above.

Once one begins to attend to the novel acoustically, which demands a relational account of sounds and voices between and amongst each other, the narrative voice can no longer be said to move developmentally from “they” to “we” to “I,” synthesizing into its reflecting presence all that it has encountered—even in death, Wait is not discarded. There is a diachronic waiting within the heart of narrative voice, a ruptured temporality that undoes the site of a singular voice present to itself and its object of narrative. In absorbing the feelings that ambivalently circulate around Wait, concealed by the ship's “false aspect of passionless repose”—from scorn and dejection to need, profound sympathy, and ultimately, forgetting, as “the sea of life thundered in their ears ceaseless and unheeded”—the novel both documents and provokes the echoic genesis of a first-person voice, its acoustic shadowing.

It is an emergence in death by which Conrad makes a most profound statement on the nature of authorship. Not by “chance” but rather harmonics, such a statement persists in spite of and rings beyond Conrad's efforts of the 1897 preface, death not waiting for Wait alone: “La solitude me gagne: elle m'absorbe. Je ne vois rien, je ne lis rien. C'est comme une espèce de tombe, qui serait en même temps un enfer, où il faut écrire, écrire, écrire,” Conrad writes. The novel as a practice falls away from its theoretical and visionary promise, committed to death by

the necessity of its own medium that negates its own conditions, obliterating the “I” writing. Against the Jamesian act of theorization, observation, and selection, against the act as such, there is a dying into writing, one that lacks even the motivation of suicide, writing being a murderer which solicits and impels Conrad into darkness. Writing does not activate and materialize the writer’s aims, but tampers with the project, diverts it, and hunts it down from the interior.

Conrad later writes to editor Meldrum of the agonizingly slow process of composition of *Lord Jim*, “I never mean to be slow. The stuff comes out at its own rate. I am always ready to put it down; nothing would induce me to lay down my pen if I *feel* a sentence—or even a word ready to my hand. The trouble is that too often—alas!—I’ve to Wait [capitalized in the original]—for the sentence—for the word.”<sup>44</sup> Conrad waits in relationship to his own novelistic production; the trope is felt, not grasped. There is a *waiting* for the Word, when it seems that such a word has already been given. Conrad attempts to articulate this affective process behind writing, or rather in front of it, one towards which he writes out. There is an afterhearing and a beforehearing. One can only hear James Wait’s own thundering entry aboard the *Narcissus* as he calls out “Wait!” from darkness in a deep baritone voice that cedes all action, just before a coughing fit which signals his sickness and shakes the ship itself. The novel, whose *telos* is Conrad’s assumption of written mastery, turns back echoically to deconstitute both itself, as though it is not through being written, and the one who writes. The trope is remembering itself, accumulating—it is a force undermining the theoretical instance, not to be taken on as an object, but only stated once more. The trope is being effectuated within the scope of Wait’s voice as it seems to “speak” Conrad’s own written practice and the development of narrative technique itself, what cannot speak except through trope and the language of indirection, or the repetition and reversal.

There are synchronic stories of waiting which “compose” *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* as a radical experiment on the hinge of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe might call a *hetereothanatology* of Conrad: the waiting of the ship for its completed journey, the men for Jimmy’s death, the narrator for a first-person voice or the “I”, and Conrad for a writerly “I” and writing itself. As Lacoue-Labarthe writes in “The Echo of the Subject:”

...the autobiographical self cannot be written. Or can be written only specularly, but an interposed person (or figure), thus following a movement at work everywhere in one form or another, and that makes every autobiography essentially an *allobiography*, the “novel” of an another (be it double). The novel of a *dead* other, or other dead. ...the biography of the dead other, is always inscribed in an agon—a struggle to the death.... Every autobiography is in its essence the narrative of an *agony*, literally. ...[A]ll autobiography, in its monumental form, is *allothanatology*, if not *hetereothanatology* (if the figure is never just one).

“From that evening when James Wait joined the ship—late for the muster of the crew—to the moment when he left us in the open sea, shrouded in sailcloth, through the open port,” writes Conrad, “I had much to do with him.” Conrad is “waiting for the word,” for an affective event, a belief in writing elicited by writing itself that might make the identity of one who writes possible. “The moment I laid down my pen, I understood that I had quit with the sea and thenceforth had to be a writer.” He repeats himself in a 1919 letter to Brown: “After writing that last words of that book... I understood that I had done with the sea, and that henceforth I had to

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<sup>44</sup> The anonymous narrator in *Heart of Darkness* is “on the watch for the sentence or the word”—is there not a chiasm between Conrad and his narrators who listen?

be a writer. And almost without laying down the pen I wrote a preface, trying to express the spirit in which I was entering on the task of my new life.”<sup>45</sup> Conrad’s identity as a writer, an English writer, mediated by the experience of waiting and death, is affectively and acoustically bound to the fate of Wait in a way that cannot be precisely explained, only registered. Again, an echo, a turn: “nothing would induce me to lay down my pen if I *feel* a sentence—or even a word ready to my hand.” Waiting and the laying down of the pen, a novel on the other side of which writing will become possible: Again, “it brought to my troubled mind the sense of an accomplished task, and first consciousness of a certain sort of mastery.” It is by way of this repetition, that Conrad pushes towards completion; the resolution of the novel, Wait’s death, can only be at the figural level of authorial articulation, which must continually restate itself.

As Levinas suggests in “The Transcendence of Words,” the “fundamental category” of the modern work of art is “incompleteness.” His discussion then opens upon the acoustical:

There is in fact in sound—and in consciousness understood as hearing—a shattering of the always complete world of vision and art. Sound is all repercussion, outburst, scandal. While in vision a form espouses content and soothes it, sound is like the sensible quality overflowing its limits, the incapacity of form to hold its content—a true rent in the fabric of the world—that by which the world that is *here* prolongs a dimension inconvertible into vision. It is thus that the sound is symbol par excellence—a reaching beyond the given. (147)

Wait’s speaking voice devolves into a sound not to be captured by any image and perhaps being its very excess until finally he is rendered “mute” by death (diegetically, for extra-diegetically, he will be narrative voice as such). “Yer nobody! Yer no one at all!” cried Donkin in a voice that “left him vibrating like a released string.” Wait utters no last words, yet again shows a face at the limit of signification:

James Wait rallied again. He lifted his head and turned bravely at Donkin, who saw a strange face, an unknown face, a fantastic and grimacing mask of despair and fury. Its lips moved rapidly; and howling, moaning, whistling sounds filled the cabin with a vague mutter full of menace, complaint and desolation, like the far-off murmur of a rising wind.

In this moment of intimacy between Donkin and Wait, they sit alone in the cabin; yet, the narrator momentarily transcends his character status to inhabit the acoustic space created between them. He overhears semantic language receding away from itself into its condition in sound. The narrator reports the acoustic excess back into semantic language that might communicate what is otherwise inaudible and contain it. Sound is the errant signifier that escapes the body of Wait and, in filling the cabin—just as Wait had vibrated the ship upon his sonic entry—he fills the novel as such. The figure of the mask that won’t show reappears, but “its lips” move. Wait becomes precisely the visual surface lauded by the preface (*Narcissus* 93-95).

It is in Wait’s death that the novel reaches one *telos* as described by Conrad. The narrator will take on the task of remembering for his mates, finding in Jimmy what Benjamin might call its “sanction:”

Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority

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<sup>45</sup> This chronology has been disputed and Watt argues that he most likely wrote the preface six months later. Conrad exposes, however, a desire for immediacy that drives his technique as a writer.



which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story. Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death (“The Storyteller” 95).

How are we to understand that borrowing from death, by the novel and by Conrad’s voice as an English author, given Wait as he succumbs to the sickness and errancy that had marked his being aboard ship? Such agony vibrates beyond the diegesis, into the letter Conrad writes the month following his completion of the novel, “But you know I am shy of my bad English. At any rate prepare for a ‘b—y furriner’ who will talk gibberish... at the rate of 10 knots an hour.” As Lacoue-Labarthe writes, “[u]ndoubtedly, death must be “imagined” for the dialectic of recognition to be able to function. But the dialectic of recognition does not perhaps function so well, ...simply because it comes to itself only in losing itself.” He continues:

The theoretical consequence (though at the limit of the theorizable): the figure is never *one*. Not only is it the Other, but there is no unity or stability of the figural; the imago has no fixity or proper being. There is no “proper image” with which to identify totally, no essence of the imaginary. ...[I]ts only chance in “grasping itself” in introducing itself and oscillating *between* figure and figure.... (175)

“Yet he, who in the family circle and amongst my friends is familiarly referred to as the Nigger, remains very precious to me,” writes Conrad. “For the book written round him is not the sort of thing that can be attempted more than once in a life-time. It is the book by which, not as a novelist perhaps, but as an artist striving for the utmost sincerity of expression, I am willing to stand or fall...” The book is “written round” Wait; yet, this moment of Conrad’s critical self-reflection is an echoic momentum of the figure, of “last words,” being “done with the sea” and “henceforth...to be a writer.” It is Conrad’s “I” as a writer that promises to emerge from the circle, Wait’s death, as he is enclosed by the sea, “to the deep,” being precisely the site of the emergence of the writer’s voice. The intimacy between Wait and the “me” who writes of himself becomes nearly unbreakable. There is a redoubled event, one that occurs not singularly then to be repeated, but as if from an originary echo—the “last words” of the book, encasing Wait as a sarcophagus, resounding into being done with the sea and being a writer, just as the narrator, in his final meditation on shore sees the crew of the *Narcissus* drifts “out of sight,” to then speak futurally, from his position as the one who has told this story. Conrad felt an “accomplished task” and with it, his birth as a writer; yet, alongside of this trajectory, is that of the ship “*Narcissus*” itself, Wait’s death conditions both the emergence of solidarity and authorship within and outside of the text, the novel being itself, a narrative about the origins and possibility of narrative. Wait becomes a repository of all that English narrative voice, if not the figure of the Author as Conrad imagines it, cannot say and what it must negate to become itself.

The “dead other” waiting within the author’s voice, is mediated neither specularly nor semantically, but acoustically:

Jimmy kept up a distracting row; he screamed piercingly, without drawing breath, like a tortured woman; he banged with hands and feet. The agony of his fear wrung our hearts so terribly that we longed to abandon him, to get out of that place deep as a well and swaying like a tree, to get out of his hearing, back on the poop where we could wait passively for death in incomparable repose. We shouted to him to ‘shut up, for God's sake.’ He redoubled his cries.

The “incident” is happening at the level of sensory surface, yet it is an acoustic surface, asking that the reader move inside of the sound and therein discover a core of character, the core

of affective action; the author's voice itself will be there protracted and articulated through the redoubled tropological movements of Wait. One must engage in a practice of resonant reading, what suggests that the trope, as such, is acoustic in its ontology. "The beauty of surface has always a fibre of morality within it," Woolf observes of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. Woolf gestures to the figure as spatial matter. Yet, what "fiber" is being heard "beneath" this surface of sound and can the model of surface and depth account for this shift towards an acoustics, that from which sounds a death rattle, one which protracts itself not vertically, but horizontally, moving through time, resonating Jimmy's death, the journey's trajectory, Conrad's coming to his "voice" as an English author, and the narrator's coming to self-conscious narrative voice? Beneath his mask are sounds that cannot be "transmitted" to subsequent generations in any precise sense; yet, they return to haunt Conrad's sensorium. Such a sound finds itself once more in the acoustical displacements that resonate transtextually. Conrad's echoic insistence across several texts that a certain transformation is "complete", that he has quit with the sea and become a writer, undermines precisely the novel's claim to completion, suggesting a persistent aesthetic remainder, for while Wait is "prematurely shut up in a coffin," the power of the acoustic is its tropological movement (or the trope, its acoustical movement) beyond the space that contains it—in the instance of his death it is the excess of human speech, as trope, that escapes its bounds. The acoustic shadow of the figure's self-referentiality is its "unceasing cry."

These works refer themselves into re-writing: repetition continues to hold the promise of return, creating in the written word a circularity, its own turning. Distance or "absence" is the nearly ontological condition of writing—the "take me out of myself" which Conrad calls the "rescue work" of fiction—yet as Genette explains, "the narrating situation of a fictional account is *never* to be reduced to its situation of writing." To articulate the terms of this double-bind differently, writing both promises and bars Conrad's becoming self-identical with the Englishmen who narrates on his behalf. Writing is caught within an impossible transformation into the silent neutrality of the image, yet it produces a mode of writing that will refashion the genre of the novel and a new form of narrative voice that finds in echo its central force, both as repetition and the destabilizing humming noise behind the words, "another art altogether." "He was little more than a voice," Marlow will remark of Kurtz. "And I heard—him—it—this voice—other voices—all of them were so little more than voices—and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, or simply mean, without any kind of sense." Such jabber behind speech continues to resonate. As Marlow hears the echo of Kurtz, each vibration of the voice seems to move away from its originary source, from him to it, negating it and subsuming it into its exterior of other voices that are no longer semantic voices but sounds that wait and then return, from novel to novel, letter to letter, preface to preface. Jimmy must die for Conrad's written voice to become possible; yet, it is a becoming possible. With *Heart of Darkness*, neither the finality of death, the singularity of an incident, nor even the utterance itself remain the model for writerly subjectivation. Rather, as Reik writes of those bits of song which refuse to go away and hunt one down from within, "such melodies which refuse to leave us express the operation of a dominating power within the person in whom they sound and resound. They are not tunes of the hour or of the day. They are, so to speak, the life melody of the individual."

The "life melody" of Conrad's opus is paradoxically a "dying vibration." What is the echo if not an acoustic displacement of the originary voice which finds itself thrown elsewhere as in a haunting? It is *in* that *heterothanatographic* sound—the echo, the partner of Narcissus—that Conrad's peculiar voice as an author is to be heard, waiting in and as the reader's acoustic

experience, the rescue of the trope as acoustical fragments. Such voices no longer “belong” to one in any precise sense. The *logos*, Derrida writes, “does not borrow from outside of itself...any substance foreign to its own spontaneity. It is the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously, from within the self” (*Grammatology* 115). How are we to hear the voice of rescue—that to which the author commits himself in the dream of national identity—what persists as its substance, and from what stratified places and locations compose its duration *as* rescue, what is precisely as to carry on terms from without?

As the narrator articulates “I,” he arrives on the other side of an experience that is now an object of rescue work. It is a vocation which Conrad’s theory of the novel does not fully elaborate, but it is one that most opens upon the world and, insofar as it is undertaken by what Conrad calls a registering temperament, goes beyond narrative to suggest a disposition or comportment. Such a comportment is not only a recognition of the past, but of the present as it is always-already ebbing away from phenomenality. The reader can only get caught up in this repercussive reading. Acoustics begins, then, where poetics end, for it can only deconstitute the work’s claim to completion and hear it in its echoes.

Once one begins listening to these works, a developmental model of literary history becomes most trying. One cannot document a progressive movement from novel to novel; “revision,” in this way, becomes unsatisfactory as a paradigm for a written practice that is taking as its object sounds and voices. Rather, the temporality of reworking—a temporality of echo, the movement from trope to trope—structures these works such that sounds of one resonate into the sounds of another; they compose and recompose each other. These novels hold converse, yet as Charles Sainte-Beuve writes, “the history of conversation, like that of all which is essentially relative and transitory, all dependent for the most part upon passing impressions, seems to me impossible. Where could the material for such a work be sought, and how could its limits be defined?” Conradian narrative voice draws its force from an acoustical caesura, a temporal relationship to diegetic sounds and voices that are heard or registered in between major action, but not listened to or recognized: sounds “surface” so as to persist at the margins of narratability. In listening to these acoustic exteriors, one must ask how Conrad heard his own voice and how that self-hearing of the writer inscribed itself in the possibility of narrative as “rescuing” the bonds of solidarity, a self-hearing that occasioned a radical revision of discourse in the novel. There is, as Saint-Bauve suggests, the task of how to negotiate critically a narrative that represents so as to discard, that commemorates what it negates, the voice of narrator that seems to be derived from objects to which it will not fully attend—such a mode of criticism is essentially to write in two places at once, in the domain of what Poe calls “suggestion” or the tonal “undercurrent of meaning.” If, however, the main action of *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* is a temperament registering those around it—a giving over of the narrative consciousness to others and the subject finding in its capacity to attend, its “voice”—Conrad demands an absorptive mode of reading that registers along with the temperament formulating narrative discourse. A faithful reading of Conrad attempts to register the event of narrative, theorizing a writing and a sense of narrative ambivalently drawn to its acoustic exteriors, an act of writing and a form of narrative discourse that represents its origins only to refute them, longing to transform. Such longing can only gesture to the Conradian novel as what Benjamin might call a work of “translation:” “Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of

the work in the alien one” (*Illuminations* 76). The continued vibration incants a new narrative object, and with it, a way of reading and a critical practice.

## Chapter Three: Unorchestrated Voice: Faulkner, Song, and the Politics of Archival Listening

A philosophy of the event must move in what *at first glance* appears to be a paradoxical direction: towards a materialism of the incorporeal.

—Michel Foucault, “Return to History”

“No one,” Pascal once said, “dies so poor that he does not leave something behind.” Surely it is the same with memories too—although these do not always find an heir. The novelist takes the charge of this bequest, and seldom without profound melancholy.

—Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

*He never gave me a chance to say and Pap never asked me if I told him or not and so he cant even know that Pap sent him any message and so whether he got it or not cant even matter, not even to Pap....*

—William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

As we have said, the rhythm of American art-activity is dual.

(1) The disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness.

(2) The forming of a new consciousness underneath.

—D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (70)

### *Another Way of Listening, or Dual Rhythm*

“It got so when Billy told you something, you never know if it was the truth or just something he’d made up,” William Faulkner’s cousin recalls. Faulkner biographies often begin with the role of fabulation, his propensity to spin yarns as a child in Oxford, Mississippi where he was steeped in a world of storytelling voices. While by the age of ten he had spent much of his time at home reading (Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac, and Conrad), it was in his father’s office that he sat at the stove, listening to him and his friends share tales over whiskey (*Minter Life* 12). He was a voracious listener, “as he had learned to be from listening to family stories told by his grandfather, his aunts and uncles, his neighbors, stories that were themselves often more made-up than not” (Porter *Faulkner* 1). Faulkner would go to the courthouse to listen to men tell stories of the War and sat at the fireplace of cabin of Mammy Caroline Barr, a former slave who lived on Falkner property (Faulkner added the “u” to his name). “Unable to read or write, she remembered scores of stories about the old days and the old people: about slavery, the War, the Klan, and the Falkners” (*Minter Life* 13). As Faulkner himself replied when asked of his literary method, “I don’t go out with a notebook, but I like these people, that is, I like to listen to them they way they talk or the things they talk about.... I would go around [with my uncle] and sit on the front porch galleries of country stores and listen to the talk,” a location that would later be commemorated in *The Hamlet* (1940) (Blotner 233).

In “The Art of Fiction,” Henry James avows a note taking practice that is both inward and outward: “try to be one of those people one on whom nothing is lost,” he suggests to the student of writing. If James had an eye for minute gesture, Faulkner was an acoustical register, writing being a way a remembering once having heard. It was in writing that he seemed to sort through the voices that had a most powerful hold on his memory. When the writer Malcolm Cowley asked Faulkner if he “ever felt possessed by a demon in his inkwell (the way Hawthorne did),” Faulkner responded that “I listen to the voices, and when I put down what the voices say, it’s right.” “Right,” and not “true.” Faulkner was listening for something other than the *logos*. In attuning himself to dialect and regional voices in particular, Faulkner’s practice was what

Stephen A. Ross calls “another kind of listening,” a phrase which echoes Conrad’s sense of the acoustically oriented novel as being defined by “another art altogether.” Reared in an atmosphere of talk, Faulkner’s listening might be cursorily described as indirect, a listening-in on voices that will become both the narrative posture and centrifugal acoustic force in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). It is a novel that engages with the problem of the lived reality of talk, composed almost entirely of conversation defying chronology in a way that had not been exceeded since *Lord Jim*.

*Absalom, Absalom!* is driven by the question of the human voice—speech and sound—as it builds community, consciousness, and “history,” both as a lived phenomena and what Pierre Nora calls, after the German sense of *Geschichte*, “the intellectual operation that renders it intelligible” (Nora 8). That intellectual operation, for Faulkner, is itself acoustical. In each of his instantiations, Quentin Compson is a listener, a consciousness that negotiates the voices of others both in memory and in experience. In this way, the effects of the “loud world,” as he calls it in *The Sound and the Fury* define his sense of self more than the act of speech itself. If the work of the acoustical in the novel is normatively regarded as a form of “telling,” Faulkner would transform it with Quentin to become an act of listening. There is a narrative ear or an acoustical activity that renders history intelligible, an activity that reopens upon the world after reading. In other words, in reading one seems to develop a new way of listening.

Minter, among Faulkner’s most central biographers, writes that with Mammy Callie and “secure in her presence, [Faulkner] crossed from listening to speaking, and so began telling tales of his own” (*Life* 13). This remarkable experience plots Quentin’s own transformation in *Absalom, Absalom!*: he is a young man, about to leave Jefferson, Mississippi for Harvard, called one afternoon to listen to an old woman, Rosa Coldfield, talk of people who are long dead. These people already have a strong hold on his imagination; he has grown up hearing about them from both his father and grandfather. After listening to Rosa’s curious brand of narrative, however, he “crosses” from listener to position of teller. Quentin begins the novel as an overhearer in relationship to the stories of Thomas Sutpen, a character based on Faulkner’s great-grandfather’s own auspicious beginnings. Sutpen arrives in Jefferson in 1833 to build a “dynasty.” Quentin’s own grandfather had been the man’s only friend and is himself a forceful voice within Quentin’s memory and psyche, the stories of Sutpen having circulated in the Compson family for two generations, being in part a patrimony between fathers and sons. The novel begins in that way in *medias res*, after Quentin has been called by Rosa Coldfield, the sister of Sutpen’s dead wife, Ellen, to listen to her lecture uninterruptedly about the man about whom Quentin has already heard so many stories. “Maybe one day you’ll write about this,” Rosa says. To the extent that Rosa calls upon Quentin to write or “do” something with what he hears, this “day of listening” is one beginning of a transformation: he will incorporate the patrimony, which is itself neither fact nor fiction, and will retell it in ways that seem to resist the foundation upon which the father’s talk is based.

In important ways, *Absalom, Absalom!* dramatizes the transformation of Quentin as he moves from listening to the stories of Sutpen to creating his own version, in the last three chapters of the novel, in dialogue with his friend Shreve. Faulkner, in moving backwards and forwards in time in this novel, is careful to underscore the experience of listening to Rosa as an intermediary acoustical space that cannot be fully mediated by that of listening to his father and grandfather. Indeed, before he enters Rosa’s office, Quentin asks his father: “Why tell me about it? What is it to me?...What if it did destroy her family too? It’s going to turn and destroy all of us someday, whether our name happens to be Sutpen or Coldfield or not” (*Absalom* 7). It is our

certain gracious duty towards women after the War, Mr. Compson explains, “[to] listen to them being ghosts...” (*Absalom* 7). The reader can only share Quentin’s doubt; one is neither with concern nor care until Faulkner returns, midway through the novel, to the voice of Rosa in an alternative aesthetics of audition that can no longer be circumscribed by the dictates of direct discourse.

Minter suggests that one “crosses” from *listening* to *speaking*, yet how and under what conditions? We tend to think of voices in the novel as either being silent or speaking; yet in Rosa’s chapter, Faulkner seems to render a speaking voice in the midst of becoming one. Rosa’s discourse is neither indirect nor direct, but somewhere between herself and Quentin’s consciousness as he is listening. Faulkner dramatizes the effects of voices upon consciousness; yet, the substance of that drama will not simply be paradigmatically rehearsed, but *redirected*. If certain discourses are at the crux of all violence in the novel, the intellectual operation that has rendered them “intelligible,” to return to Nora’s understanding of the word “history,” will be recreated by the novel to the extent that they have ossified as the only available way of knowing. While Faulkner’s literary pursuits, like Conrad’s, can be linked to the Jamesian novel of consciousness in which the reader witnesses a central intelligence make sense of events, Faulkner does not represent, but rather *protracts* and *recreates* the event that Lyotard calls the “ephemeral temporality inhabiting the space between the ‘I have heard’ and ‘you will hear’” (22).

Such a transformation of consciousness occurs by necessity for the reader him or herself; he or she is implicated in the discourses that the novel criticizes. As Rosa will describe it in chapter five, her italicized voice wavers between her body and its reception by Quentin, incarnating a space beyond “*this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal-distallant, wroils ever upward sunward, ... as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates) all of space and time*” (*Absalom* 114). Such “wroiling” of the “prisoner soul” is leaving the cave, a coming to consciousness. At the level of *figure* its freedom “mirrors” space and time pushed to its inmost potential. Yet at the level of *articulation*, it is a thoroughly musical voice that is insisting upon transformation. Such a sentence, bordering as it does on nonsense, does not incite the eidetic vision, which I argued in Chapter One to be the basis of Iser’s theory of reading as image-building; its rather speaks to the ear, to the acoustical consciousness of the reader. One does not listen to what Foucault calls in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* “rational language;” one listens for emotional *ambiguity*. Hearing itself is ambiguous, being what Plutarch calls the most *logikos* (intelligently) and *pathetikos* (emotionally) used of the senses (Foucault *Hermeneutics* 334).<sup>46</sup>

Rosa’s poetic, metaphor-ridden voice is ambiguous at best, but it is registered by writing: it is unlistenable, perhaps, except through reading. As an instrument of critique, Nietzsche suggests, metaphor is wielded by the “liberated intellect” who pairs “the alien and strange.”<sup>47</sup> The voice of Rosa belongs to what Sara Kofman would perhaps call “an unheard of [*\*inouï*] and insolent philosophy.” As Kofman’s translator notes, *inouï* is a double entendre (itself a double hearing), corresponding to Nietzsche’s use of the term *unerhört* to “connote that which has never

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<sup>46</sup> Foucault does not explicitly mention Derrida in this lecture on Plutarch’s *De Auditu*, a text which Derrida does not address in *Of Grammatology* and complicates his evaluation of listening. Foucault seems to be implicitly arguing against Derrida, particularly as he does not fully separate listening from a practice of taking “notes” in this essay, what he argues to be intertwined practices for the Greeks.

<sup>47</sup> In a manuscript note to the unfinished “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense” he asks whether metaphor can be likened to the work of music: “Music? How can one speak of it?”

been physically heard” as a “buried metaphor” that Kofman and Nietzsche both activate (Kofman 147). In a 1956 interview with *The Paris Review*, Faulkner writes of the music of prose as it occurs in silence, rearticulating his earlier assertion that there is an “incident” towards which and away from which the narrative works, “the origin of the story [being] lost in the novel,” as John Matthews argues of Faulkner’s work (Faulkner *Fury* 373). Faulkner poses an incredibly nuanced theory of his writing, method and its relationship both to an originating “idea” or “memory:”

The writing of the story is simply a matter of working up to that moment, to explain why it happened or what it caused to follow. A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can. Obviously he must use as one of his tools the environment which he knows. I would say that music is the easiest means in which to express, since it came first in man’s experience and history. But since words are my talent, I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better. That is, music would express better and simpler, but I prefer to use words, as I prefer to read rather than listen. I prefer silence to sound, and the image produced by words occurs in silence. That is, the thunder and the music of the prose take place in silence. (*Paris* 48)

There is a tarrying with music, but a preference for words. If “pure music” means a physically sounding music, a performance, what, then, is “impure” music? Is it music registered or approximated by the written word? Music would do “better,” but in clumsy words there is a certain preferred failure, a just missing music that achieves a different kind of end. Its effect relates to Conrad’s sense of “another art altogether,” a kind of vibration or after-effect that, for reasons neither writer fully explains, can only occur in writing. For Conrad, the “silence” of the written word has a specific appeal: as it is evoked in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, it commands fellowship and communion. What I called “the incanted image” is beheld in silence and for Conrad, idealized as a form untroubled by communication. For Faulkner, however, silence seems to evoke a certain reticence or holding in reserve that elevates the experience beyond the mundane. Few voices in his world hold back; they speak with a certain verbosity that is always on the verge of losing sight of itself. The reader is the sole location of silence: he or she is quite literally made to hold the voices of others. The reader as a vibrating destination.

The voice of Rosa, however, is the location in which Faulkner most approaches his “pure music,” becoming the poet that Faulkner had longed to be. If one is to consider Faulkner’s remarks on music, writing, and silence, the musicality of the voice of Rosa is not a “supplement” to writing or words, as Nietzsche, still at most metaphysical will posit in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but their critical *contact*. As I will argue at length, there is something of the “silence” of reading of Faulkner, in its asymptotic or “just missing” approach to music, that not only retrieves the specificity of and necessity for the fictional reading experience, but his peculiar insinuation into readerly consciousness. In *Echo Chambers: Figuring Voice in Modern Narrative*, Patrick O’Donnell suggestively argues that voice of Rosa, a musical voice, is the “repressed material” of the story, drawing from Kristeva’s account of the semiotic *chora* in *The Revolution of Poetic Language*. The *chora* is the pre-symbolic, pre-oedipal vocality of speech. Conrad had engaged with such material, drawn to shouts, howls, shrieks, and cries that do not speak directly, yet insinuate themselves into narrative as what I called their “acoustic displacement.”

Rather than reading Rosa as a “figure” for “repression,” however, Rosa must be approached in her effects upon consciousness. That motile space of the *chora* insinuates itself



into the reader, clearing a space with a curious force. Indeed, Quentin “has” to listen to Rosa and her rush of speech is most difficult to ignore; she also provides central information, so one *must* listen to Rosa if one is to carry on in the project of reading the novel. She is a caesura, a kind of hurdle for both Quentin and the reader. The voice makes contact with the novelistic page and calls out for a mode of hearing that is, quite literally, not possible in any other domain. One might argue for the relationship between the clinical scene of transference and the conversation between Quentin and Shreve; yet, Lacan himself draws from literature (as did Freud) in order to understand psychoanalytic listening. Lacan writes, in a way that will have consequences for a consideration of Faulkner’s critical use of Conradian narrative incantation, that the role of the analyst is “to suspend the subject’s certitudes until their last mirages have been consumed. And it is in the discourse that, like verse, their resolution must be scanned” (13). Patient speech is likened to “verse” and “an apologue addressed to him that hath ears to hear, a long prosopopoeia for a direct interjection,” the analyst listening to “even the sigh of a momentary silence for the whole lyrical development it makes up for” (13). It is as if, one might say, such a listener has been instructed by literature, learned to listen through reading. These kinds of “sighs” or pauses happen rarely in *Absalom, Absalom!* and they belong more to the realm of Marlow’s speech, as he pauses in darkness to reflect upon his own voice, to return “here” and “now,” after having been transported elsewhere. Yet, important for a consideration of Faulkner, is the sense that listening is not given; it is not a ready-made faculty. One might hear, rehear, and hear more than might have been heard before.

Lacan goes on to invoke the novel and what I have argued to be its origins not simply in epic, but tragedy. In recounting an event, or what Lacan calls “hypnotic remembrance,” the analysand has made [the past event] pass into the *verbe* [or *la parole* or *logos*] and or more precisely into the *epos* [“tale” or “song”] by which he brings back into present time the origins of his own person.... Thus it happens that the recitation of the *epos* may include some discourse of olden days in its archaic or even foreign tongue...; but it is like an indirect discourse, isolated inside quotation marks within the thread of the narration.... (17)

These remarks are at the intersection of the literary and the therapeutic. Kaja Silverman writes of the passage in a way that has consequences for a consideration of discourse in the Faulknerian novel: “[the analysand] does not assume his history, and then speak in ‘quotation marks.’ Rather, his words return in that form from the place of the Other” (*Spectators* 70). Faulkner attempts to document voices as they bear traces of their material condition of having listened to others. At times a chorus of others is hauntingly present in the moment of direct discourse; there are traces of voices that spoke long before one arrived. Yet, in what he calls “the marriage of speaking and hearing,” direct discourse is not contained by the speaker but seems to be routed through the other’s hearing. Faulkner radicalizes discourse in the novel by registering the *return* of voice back to oneself through the other’s listening. I do not simply mean that direct discourse is never more than a quotation of another discourse, as Bakhtin argues of all language; but rather, direct discourse and conversation is recuperative and incantatory of memories that may or may not be properly “owned.” As Lacan describes them, the memories that “come back” to one in song, “the origins of his own person,” can be in a “foreign tongue.” Does one speak always in one’s own name or rather, might one speak and remember on another’s behalf?

Such expropriation is perhaps where a consideration of Faulkner must part ways with Lacanian *epos*. In this chapter, I converge with Lacan in my evaluation of Faulkner’s relationship to Bergson in the sense that “the completeness of the cure, has nothing to do with the

Bergsonian myth of a restoration of duration in which the authenticity of each instant would be destroyed if it did not sum up the modulation of the preceding ones” (18). What Lacan calls “full speech” is rather “a question of remembrance, that is, of history—balancing the scales in which conjectures about the past cause a fluctuation of the promises of the future upon a single fulcrum: that of chronological certitude” (18). “[I]n the internal unity of this temporalization,” Lacan writes, “the existent marks the convergence of the having-beens” (17). While *Absalom, Absalom!* is everywhere concerned for “conjectures about the past” as a “balancing of scales” that “cause a fluctuation of the promise of the future,” there is no cure, but rather a form of instruction in habits of critical listening. The novel is concerned with a sphere of politics as it must continually augment its fulcrum; it pivots upon points in time that forcefully emerge in the singular only to evade the understanding and recede, forcing one to speak and speak again. “Chronological certitude,” as it is organized by storytelling, is recognized as provisional and it is *in* that provisionality that Faulkner locates the critical valence of the literary.

This chapter returns to Faulkner’s, like Conrad’s, practice of rewriting and reworking—impossible fully to organize chronologically—as it everywhere suggests that the final published form of a novel is simply one version. *Absalom, Absalom!* becomes, at the level of its own history, a dramatic statement of the motility of the fulcrum. In the way that characters seem to hear and rehear history, Faulkner hears and rehearses works and portions of works, at times a single sound. The stakes are higher than those of simple revision. If one follows, as I had the trope in Conrad, the echoic course of Faulkner’s revision of stories, there are primal scenes, locations, and experiences that are exchanged between characters across gender and race. Both writers continually re-trope certain acoustic material such that the substantive intersections between works and individuals compose a most compelling critique of the logic of identity: sounds literally move through the works and bodies. There are few memories which, at the level of *œuvre* and *Absalom, Absalom!* itself, belong to one person and are not subject to being lived differently.

To return to Lacan’s turn to *epos*, one might recall my assertion in the introduction to this project that the acoustics of the modernist novel fulfills Benjamin’s latent suggestion in the “The Storyteller” about the future of the novel. One must recall that he argues that epic memory was divided into two “principles,” remembrance and reminiscence. “Reminiscence” is the mode of memory that was forgotten by the novel (insofar as its “birthplace is the solitary individual”). The novel actively developed the principle dedicated to one hero and one journey, and is, Benjamin argues, “historiographical.” Bakhtin corroborates this view, as I showed in Chapter Two, writing that “the epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present.” As Benjamin argues, the forgotten dimension of epic as *reminiscence*, however, is told in the modality of what he calls “counsel” (*Rat*). It does not conclude upon listening, but is suggestive of a “continuation” (*Fortsetzung*). Counsel, he writes, “is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation [*die Fortsetzung*] of a story which is just unfolding.” The Conradian novel, as the “continued vibration,” places a certain burden of unfolding on the reader, providing more questions than answers.

*Absalom, Absalom!*, an ambiguous, challenging, and purposely unclear story, continues that possibility of the novel—itsself a retrieval of the novel’s forgotten dimension of memory—in order to counsel the reader into questioning. The reader is not educated or edified into morality, but is drawn into critical listening. In that way, one must consider the collaboration between *voice* and *time* in *Absalom, Absalom!* In its voices, there is an augmentation in the acoustic

capacity of readerly consciousness. Rosa's chapter the invocation of a new order of hearing; indeed, the italics which register her voice suggest that the chapter is not a literal transcription. There is something of the voice of Rosa, as it is brought to the order of writing and steeped in metaphor, that does not offer itself to the ear as it has been hollowed out by *logos*. The ear to which she speaks contrasts that ear in which names, beliefs, sedimented "old-virtues" and what Quentin calls "old iron traditions" have settled. This voice insists upon a sonic materiality that clears a space in the consciousness of the reader, a hearing otherwise. It resists the logical ground of identity that is at the origin of violence in the world of this novel. The complicated time of this novel, then, registers the acoustic transformation. D.H. Lawrence suggests that classic American literature, in its emphasis (from Emerson onward) upon breaking from European influence (to formulate a unique national consciousness), is with the "dual rhythm," "sloughing" the old consciousness while a "new one forms underneath." The dual rhythm in Faulkner does not lend itself to the metaphor of surface and depth, a sloughing under which a newness takes refuge before it may emerge. In Faulkner's commitment to the acoustical—learning a great deal from Conrad's sense of incantation—there is rather an overtone reality, voices within voices from the past. The present moment is pulled upon by voices of the past and future.

Many of these voices have never spoken as such. The second consciousness in Faulkner is attuned to what the apparent order has had to reject to become itself, to what the Frankfurt School of critical theory understands to be negated potential of objects despite their apparent finite quality.<sup>48</sup> Just before his death in 1940, Benjamin wrote to Adorno asking if he had read Faulkner, expressing interest in *Light in August* (1932), a novel which he perhaps found sympathetic to the dialectical image as he was further articulating it in *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940). The present is not a culmination of the past as successive, Benjamin suggests, but reaches out to "rescue" the past in its unfulfilled dimension. In an explicitly political rather than theological vein, Herbert Marcuse represents this point in 1968 in *Reason and Revolution*:

nothing that exists is true in its given form. Every single thing has to evolve new conditions and forms if it is to fulfill its potentialities. The existence of things is, then, basically negative; all exist apart from and in want of their truth, and their actual movement, guided by their latent potentialities, is their progress towards this truth. The course of progress, however, is not direct and unswerving. The negation that every thing contains determines its very being. The material part of a thing's reality is made up of what that thing is *not*, of what it excludes and repels as its opposite.

While Marcuse adopts the language of psychoanalysis ("conscious" and "unconscious," "latent" and "manifest"), the excluded reality is not a trace, the unrepresented that lives a covert life in the symptom. Adorno rather calls such exclusion "non-identity." Throughout his career, Adorno turned to the musical as the privileged location of the critique of the positivism, writing in *Negative Dialectics*, that "music is the critique of phenomenality, of the appearance that the substance is present here and now." As if suggesting an alternative modality of hearing—a third ear, as Nietzsche would perhaps say—Adorno writes of an "immanent method" in *The Philosophy of Modern Music* as "it reveals the implications of procedures and works in terms of the factors within the works" (27). It is to "pursue" these works until "the inherent consequence of the objects is transformed into their own criticism" (27).

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<sup>48</sup> While Adorno uses the phrase "second life" to denote art as semblance in *Aesthetic Theory*, my use of the phrase "second consciousness" is unrelated.

*Absalom, Absalom!* seems to undertake such a pursuit, performing through the literary an immanent critique of one mode of listening and the order of identity implied by it. There are voices within voices: one voice, that of Thomas Sutpen, is imitated, parodied, and reheard, such that it is proven to contain its own negation or critique. There are sounds and voices, however, that given the space to resound, perform a most critical function. Marginalized voices, such as that of Rosa, are allowed to speak in their unfulfilled potential; there is proven to be an unfulfilled voice within Sutpen himself. To critique the object, insofar as it has been realized, is not to argue that it should become an other object, but rather to critique the object from within the realm of its as-yet unrealized potencies. In the introduction to this project, I began to argue for “durative voice,” lapses within a voice that are not reducible to silence as the pure inverse of articulation. Faulkner’s immanent critique is suggestive of *another way of hearing* silence than as absence and the acoustical as presence.

Such hearing has consequences for a consideration of Faulkner’s return to storytelling that must be understood in its critical rather than nostalgic valence. At base in both objecthood and consciousness for critical theory is an excluded potentiality. In his turn to regional voice and storytelling, particularly in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner critiques ossified racial consciousness and the logic of identity that culminated in the Civil War from within its own memory of itself. Voices articulate alternative potentials so that an another consciousness might become possible. Beginning with *The Sound and the Fury*, many of Faulkner’s novels are experiments in representing consciousness in its relationship to time, the narrative being “inside” of characters as they perceive, process, and experience psychological forces often unknown to themselves. The resulting language is frequently understood as a “stream of consciousness,” linking him to other high-modernists such as Joyce (whom he greatly admired) and Woolf. What I am concerned for in this chapter, however, is how Faulkner adapts memories of regional voice to prose. In his concern for a South that is intimately tied to the legacy of slavery and the Civil War, Faulkner registers the mode of forgetting that supports national consciousness.

Bringing Conradian acoustics to bear upon the politics of memory, Faulkner’s world is haunted by dead sounds and lost voices that were repelled, excluded, and never articulated as such. In Conrad’s work with acoustic displacement in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow registers the sounds of the jungle, the unreason of colonial reason adapting itself to and transforming the hearing-sense of the reader. The Faulknerian novel as a “consciousness,” then, comes to include the reader him or herself, that inclusion—or implication—being the location in which critique *enacts* itself. As I argued in Chapter One, reader-response theory, in its ocularcentrism, understands reading as ideational, the reader’s positive “image-building.” Faulkner rather exploits what Poulet argues to be the vocalic phenomenology of reading, that my consciousness is “on-loan” to another, inhabited by what he calls the “alien principle” that uses my “I” to articulate itself. Conrad had already begun to experiment with separating in narrative voice a lived history (registry) from history as the “intellectual operation that renders it intelligible” (rescue), and a third moment that occurs belatedly after the event of reading in the “continued vibration.” It is central that Marlow is, above all, one who remembers, for in his rendering of storytelling about the past, Faulkner forces the reader to become a fourth conversant. I do not say third, because narrative voice is *itself* this third conversant moved in relationship to the object, speaking from within its negated registers. Narrative voice, the subject of the verb’s mode of action, ceases to support the action as it has occurred, and is altered in relationship to the action as it is remembered.

Minter and others have described *Absalom, Absalom!* as possessing a “conversational form” (*Questioning* 13). Yet, we are far from something like a transcription of dialogue as the singular plane of the said. Discourse in *Absalom, Absalom!* exceeds the direct, indirect, and free indirect, there being voices that speak from a location in the past that did not happen as such, that is unfulfilled. Such a “transcription” of the temporality of what one might call “negative voice” again lends the novel its peculiar rhythmic challenge, both in the interjections made by an anonymous narrative consciousness (one that seems to transform in relationship to what it overhears) and the novel’s disregard for the (empirical) reality of chronology as it struggles to access its registers. If “reason is the negation of the negative,” as Marcuse argues, then the acoustically driven novel is, as Adorno would perhaps say, “a negation of the negation.”

The novel adopts not the “form” of conversation, but rather its phenomenal reality as a lived transformation (“the space between the ‘I have heard’ and ‘you will hear’”) and its negative reality as unfulfilled discourse. “A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “that I *was* not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself followed in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me.” The novel follows such a route which is contrary to reflexivity, an intentionality of speech that is then verified by the listening other in a redoubling. There is a “fundamental seamlessness...of time as we experience it in [Faulkner’s] fiction,” Minter writes, “where history always includes present and future as well as past” (*Questioning* 13). Perhaps more precisely, the other echoes back a non-identity between the speaking subject and the subject of speech. *Absalom, Absalom!* is an acoustical event for the reader who is necessarily altered in relationship to phenomenal hearing. Such a space of continuation, as Conrad had described it, is sometime after the event of reading itself, transforming the hearing capacity of the reader in its third or negative dimension, hearing not was or what is, but what Rosa calls “the might-have-been which is more than truth.”

Concerning itself with the destruction of a family in the period leading up to the Civil War, *Absalom, Absalom!* takes on the voice of ossified ways of knowing, speaking from within them to articulate their dual rhythms and negated potencies. Like Faulkner, the novel’s central protagonist, Quentin, feels that “his body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names” and “old tales and talking.” The last three chapters of the novel document the moment in which Quentin is transformed into a teller in a conversation with his close friends Shreve. It is a reconciliation between subject and object or acoustical rescue of phenomena described by the narrator as an “overpass to love.” In the world to which the novel refers, beginning in the midst of its “coming to an end,” as Benjamin might say, telling had previously been based upon an order of listening premised not upon love—the overarching refrain of Rosa’s lecture—but authority and domination.

It is in negotiating that *remnance* of past voices within the subject, their actual and potential overtones, that Faulkner will make his most important intervention in the genre of the novel and the theory of listening. In this chapter, I attempt to hear this pivotal novel as an irruptive event within the trajectory of American literature and a continuation of Conradian modernism. I hear the event of this novel within Faulkner’s own trajectory as a writer, attending to his turn to short story writing in late 1926 in the period leading up to *The Sound and the Fury*, asking how these experiments return with new force in *Absalom, Absalom!* Such an attention to stories, fragments and manuscripts does not simply pose a means of considering Faulkner’s technical development. The way in which Faulkner moves in his written attempts *themselves* composes a historicity that cannot be reduced to “revision” or “writing-over” mistakes: there is

in the acoustical interstices between versions a negative work of critique or “rescue.” There is an acoustical economy of deferral or *differánce* whereby, primarily in the interstices or the relations between disparate moments connected at the level of sound and voice, a critique is made. What follows is an argument for and heuristic performance of an acoustics of reading—an immanent critique of voice—that for which Faulkner’s works and compositional practice itself performs.

*Towards a Sonic Materialism*

Discourse, Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is a “phenomena of recurrence” (124). Foucault articulates a most contradictory thesis, particularly given our propensity to understand an utterance having simply been *made*. While the analysis of discursive formations is not to retrieve their interior (a nucleus whereby the “initiating subjectivity” can be represented) there is an anteriority of contemporary discourse: “this enunciative domain refers neither to an individual subject, nor to some kind of collective consciousness, nor to a transcendental subjectivity; but that it is described as an anonymous field whose configurations defines the possible position of speaking subject” (122). What voices might take shape and how, their possibility, is conditioned by this anonymous field, beyond what is called “expression” or even speaking as oneself in the way expression demands. Discourse analysis is related to forms of accumulation “that can be identified neither with an interiorization in the form of memory nor with an indiscriminating totalization of documents.” They do not survive by either “chance” or “care” nor do they “slumber in a sleep towards which they have never ceased to glide since the day they were pronounced, since they were forgotten and their visible effect lost in time....” Normative historical analysis, Foucault argues, seeks the initiating subjectivity. What he calls “enunciative analysis,” however follows texts “through their sleep” and “oblivion.” Statements, like texts, “are reactivated, and used, ... forgotten, and possibly even destroyed....” Such analysis considers statements “in the *remnants* that is proper to them, and which is not that of an ever-realizable reference back to the past event of the formulation.” Statements “are residual,” what “is not to say that they remain in the field of memory, or that it is possible to rediscover what they meant; but it means that they are preserved by virtue of a number of supports and material techniques...” (123) In a way that most radically contradicts the normative conception of the speaking voice as ephemeral or, if preserved, complete unto itself, “This survival in time,” Foucault concludes, “is of the nature of the statement,” even insofar as it “excludes what cannot be compatible with it” (124). One might argue that the statement, then, can exclude its own potentialities. There is a material “survival” of discourse in its dejection, silence, and disarticulation. What Foucault calls “remnance” is provocatively neither presence nor absence and seems to refer to an immanent object, its yet-unrealized potential. By what techniques does the novelist preserve these statements, particularly if, as Benjamin asserts, the novelist “takes charge” of memories that “do not always find an heir?”

At this stage, I have argued that Faulkner, as a writer, was a historical listener in two important ways. First, he was committed to preserving the voices from his youth, and second, he was committed to writing as a medium for communicating what in those voices was so powerful and worth remembering. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, his project seems to be not just one of documentation, but isolating the moment—if it can even be said to be singular—that one crosses over from being a listener to a speaker: Quentin gains something like a historical consciousness in the novel, the sense that his voice comes from somewhere and that he is responsible for articulating old, missing, and forgotten statements anew. It is important to address how that becomes possible and with what kind of urgency.

At one point, Mr. Compson pauses his narrative to reflect, positing a theory of cause and effect that has consequences for the novel's material techniques of enunciating a field of memory. Discussing the murder of the mixed race character Charles Bon forty years ago, a central event at the heart of suffering in this novel, Mr. Compson gestures to the problem of American self-recognition in the face of the fratricide that was the Civil War:

“So that was all. It should have been all; that afternoon four years later should have happened the next day, the four years, the interval, mere anti-climax: an attenuation and prolongation of a conclusion already ripe to happen, by the War, but a stupid and blood aberration in the high (and impossible) destiny of the United States, maybe instigated by that family fatality which possessed, along with all circumstances, that curious lack of economy between cause and effect.”  
(*Absalom* 94)

There are potentials that are not merely, as Mr. Compson calls it, “fate,” but rather *impossible* occurrences under material and ideological circumstances, a “lack of economy between cause and effect” that must remain such for contemporary reality to be recognized in its identity and verisimilitude. As I will return to, Rosa calls such “attenuation”—itself a prominent refrain of her chapter—or “the might-have-been which is more than truth.” Faulkner crafts a narrative that might speak from within such registers. The narrative, in this way, does “realize” the “unrealized”—but takes on the voice of “following” voices, as Foucault argues of discourse analysis, “through their sleep.”

There is, by necessity, a missed encounter or *expropriation* of the *episteme* by the culture that produces it—Faulkner seems to suggest that do not hear ourselves. There is a delay between the utterance and the ear that might hear it, what is not listening in the proper sense, an act present to the event of utterance, but a faculty of excavation. It is as if the *episteme* must be dormant, subject to mishandling and forgetting in order to become itself. Discourse is material, yet an expropriated material that is non-coincidental with the moment of production, a moment that is, in that way, no longer conceivable as production but rigorously calls out for something like “archeology.”

Jefferson seems to be filled with sounds and voices that are “heard” long after their inception—like the very shot that kills Bon—and are heard more concretely in echoic memory. Faulkner crafts a narrative technique that might, as Conrad says, “rescue” fragments, a novel that is aligned with archeology. Yet, if discourses exclude what is incompatible with them and there is a hearing that can only arrive later, where is this negative acoustical archive to be located? In dramatizing Quentin's transformation, Faulkner suggests that human consciousness is itself the accumulative intersection of the said, “preserved by virtues of supports and material techniques,” and the never-been-fully-said, the unfulfillment or exclusion that clings to utterance. Bakhtin has said that “the human being in the novel is first and foremost a speaking human being;” yet, as I began to ask in Chapter Two, how is one to approach discourse in the novel insofar as it is not circumscribable by quotation, in its acoustical displacement, the stratified locations in which sounds carry the burden of what is not said?

*Negative discourse* cannot be paraphrased nor is it an inner voice that might be exteriorized: it is the unfulfilled register—a material overtone—of past speech. Faulkner asks if phenomenal voice is not a repository for what has been heard, yet not fully understood; it is at once an inexplicable responsibility for “the defeated” sonorities that perhaps never spoke a such, problematizing the very notion of one's “own” voice.” In *Absalom, Absalom!*, he pushes

discourse in the novel to its limits so that a new listening consciousness might become possible. What, then, does he want us to hear and how?

### *Historical Listening*

*Absalom, Absalom!* takes place in and as an acoustical transformation and it is one that is concrete dialogue with, or rather, directs itself towards, the historical determinations of American consciousness. Though Faulkner insists his project is not what he calls “sociology,” the regional concern for the sounds and voices of Mississippi opens upon the national or what Mr. Compson calls “the high and (impossible) destiny of the United States.” *Absalom, Absalom!* is not a “center of consciousness,” but a hearing-consciousness, registering what is displaced from the national consciousness. Before one can address what Faulkner wants his reader to hear, differently, one must address the mode of hearing he incites. *How* we are asked to hear is as important as *what* and, in fact, the way we hear shifts the object as it makes itself available to consciousness. On the technical level, the way Marlow seems to allow voices to pass through him—he speaks “through the lips of the past”—is taken up by Faulkner in its historical-philosophical possibilities. Faulkner rewrites the scene at the veranda in *Lord Jim*:

It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father's cigar as they sat on the front gallery after supper until it would be time for Quentin to start, while in the deep shaggy lawn below the veranda the fireflies blew and drifted in soft random—the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr. Compson's letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin's sitting room at Harvard. It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells run on that Sunday morning in 1833 (and, on Sundays, heard even one of the original three bells in the same steeple where descendents of the same pigeons strutted and crooned or wheeled in short courses resembling soft fluid paint smears on the soft summer sky);—a Sunday morning in June with the bells ringing peaceful and peremptory and a little cacophonous—the denominations in concord though not in tune.... (*Absalom* 23)

There is an aural relation or chord between two times and places; there is a resonance. The force of air is to establish an uncanny continuity between past and present, indeed, the narrator will carry the same scent of wistaria to Quentin's room at Harvard as he opens a letter from his father, the same air itself moved by the bells as they rang out in 1833.

With such a chord, the following question must be raised with new urgency for the study of modernist hearing: is there an acoustical equivalent of the Benjaminian dialectical image and constellation? Would they be mere equivalents? If, as I have been insisting throughout this project, hearing and seeing are not to be confounded, though they often collaborate, would the acoustical register perform an alternative work? The constellation, as elaborated in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” must appear visually if it is to do its metaphoric work: it “appears,” yet it is an optical illusion, two trajectories of light from different points in space appearing together, in the same moment, as the present reaches out to an unfulfilled dimension of the past. For Benjamin, the past as the was-not can only appear in light of the present. As Buck-Morss writes, “the truth which the dialectical image illuminates is historically fleeting.” There is a momentary stasis, however, “within a non-reconciled and transitory field of opposition that can perhaps best be pictured in terms of coordinates of contradictory terms, the ‘synthesis’ of which is not a movement towards resolution, but that point



at which their axes intersect” (“Culture” 314). This “dialectical optics” is the cognitive experience of montage, collage, and commodities, and “it is the forceful confrontation of the fore- and after-life of the object that makes it ‘actual’ in the political sense—as presence of mind (*Geistesgegenwart*)—and it is not process but ‘actualization’” (312). There is a “shock” of recognition.

The “continued vibration,” delayed and slow-moving, is a historical materiality that functions on an alternative register, bringing not shock but a sense of irrefutable responsibility. The force of air is not simply to establish uncanny continuity between past and present, but the condition of that air in the suspirations of others. Indeed, the novel will carry the same scent of wistaria to Quentin’s room at Harvard as he opens a letter from his father, the same air itself moved by the bells as they rang out in 1833. On the other side of listening to “the talking, the telling,” there seem to be a shift in the capacity for thinking and hearing. Only a reposeful listening to the novel—as it itself seems to listen to the history of literature and the history of its own composition—a writing within the time of waiting, can unfold as a theory of Faulknerian responsibility. There is no flashing image, only repose.

In a sensitivity that exceeds that of its characters, narrative precisely being moved where it should simply move according to Bakhtin, narrative retains what is heard. Conrad’s theory of the novel had already begun to gesture to a practice of acoustic archivalism. In the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, Conrad affords narrative a consciousness, not in its power of converting the air into “revelations,” but to “hold up” where men will not. Such holding up recalls Benjamin’s sense of the melancholy of the novelist as a prosthetic “heir.” The registering temperament is a voice that might “speak” the communal ground of the present; yet, on a narratological level, it is conditioned by displacement, voices and sounds that cannot be circumscribed by the bounds of the community—such sounds never really leave Conradian discourse, but circulate within it, sounding out as what Benjamin calls in his essay on Baudelaire, a “murmur of the past.”

Benjamin is often regarded a visual thinker and Adorno, an acoustic thinker, their correspondence breaking down precisely along these lines. Yet, invoking what is Plato’s overwhelming emphasis upon knowledge as a form of mental vision, Hannah Arendt writes that “Benjamin regarded truth as an exclusively acoustical phenomenon. ‘Not Plato but Adam,’ who gave things their names, was to him the ‘father of philosophy’ . . . Hence tradition was the form in which these name-giving words were transmitted; it too was an essentially acoustical phenomenon.” Benjamin turns to the echo in a central moment of his essay on translation:

Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. (*Illuminations* 76).

While Benjamin here distinguishes between the work of translation and the work of literature, I argued in Chapter Two that in its negotiation of the alienation of individual voice, the Conradian work is best understood as a work of translation. In translation, Benjamin suggests, there is a resonance in the temporal distance between works, between the act of writing and the act of reading as re-writing. If the Conradian novel calls out for reading as “continued vibration,” the reader is quite literally this “single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.” In Benjamin’s philosophy of history, the echo is as suggestive as the dialectical image, yet it has been less attended by critics in an effect to think through modernism, particularly with Benjamin’s own attentiveness to Surrealist collage and

cinematic montage. The dialectical image is an axis of the present and unfulfilled past. “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it the way it really was,” Benjamin writes in “Thesis on the Philosophy of History.” “It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” There is a certain motility to what has been evaded, what renders any historical account provisional and unsustainable, a fixed history endangered, without warning, by an image that evades it.

In the essay on Baudelaire, however, such “seizure” shifts in the acoustic register to a play of mood and distance, an aesthetic experience of being overtaken by the affect of recollection and with it, losing perceptual coordinates. The dialectical image, one might say, is seized by the cognition (he will call it a critical “presence of mind”); that which Benjamin calls a “murmur of the past,” registered by the affect. Baudelaire’s “Correspondences” documents as synaesthetic experience of sound, sight, and smell; yet, as Benjamin himself alludes, the correspondences begin with a sound from out of the past, one that cannot be located in time memorial: “As long-resounding echoes from afar/Are mingling in a deep, dark unity,/Vast as the night or as the orb of day,/Perfumes, colors, and sounds commingle.” There is a hearing that infects the order visible, infects its present aspect with that which is heard “from afar.” “The *correspondances* are the data of remembrance—not historical data,” writes Benjamin, “but the data of prehistory.” The visual register for Benjamin is within the historical register, while the acoustical belongs to the pre-historical. The constellation of negated past time *appears* in the present. The historicity which he affords vision is perhaps one basis of his critique of Nietzsche’s emphasis upon the chorus, claimed to be an evacuation of the historical-philosophical. Nevertheless, Benjamin continues to articulate the theory of correspondences in a way that registers the temporality of the constellation: “What makes festive days great and significant is the encounter with an earlier life. Baudelaire recorded this.... *There are no simultaneous correspondences*... The murmur of the past may be heard in the correspondences, and that canonical experience of them has its place in a previous life [emphasis added]” (*Illuminations* 182). In this passing moment, hearing a voice that does not speak clearly allows Benjamin to invoke what cannot otherwise be invoked, the non-simultaneous co-presence of present and past. Such apprehension is quasi-mystical. Indeed, in “The Storyteller,” a continuous tissue of the voice—the first voice being a kind of transcendental origin—is the bond of the community; it is grounded in the voice of the storyteller insofar as he can channel the past into a present event.

Yet, if one is to pursue the non-coincidental mode of hearing suggested by the correspondences, it bodes a thoroughly modern and historical modality of the acoustical register not fully considered by Benjamin. It is from within the space and time of the correspondences that Marlow is first heard in *Lord Jim*:

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow’s body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past.

There is a time of repose or waiting that facilitates a receptiveness for the redemption of Jim, lost to the community, as “one of us.” As Blanchot writes of the murmur, “We hear in the narrative

form, and always as though it were extra, something indeterminate speaking.” Blanchot argues that “the distant epic narrator recounts exploits that happened and that he seems to be reproducing, whether or not he witnessed them” (*Infinite* 380). That is most curious notion of historical speech, one that suggests that one might articulate as “experience” that which was never witnessed. That possibility is central for Faulkner in that Quentin is called to “remember” things that he never experienced; there is a memory that seems to exceed his own personal life. The narrator of epic, Blanchot argues, is therefore not a “historian” in the traditional sense. “His song is the expanse where, in the presence of remembrance, there comes to speech the event *that takes place there* [emphasis added]” (*Infinite* 381). In remembrance, there is at once the cathartic reenactment of the past in the act of hearing such that a new event emerges in speech itself. Benjamin represents this point similarly: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it the way it really was.” The act of *incanting* the displaced is at the center of Marlow’s care for Jim (and what we will find to be Quentin’s care for both Rosa and Sutpen), redeeming him in his possibility.

Such reenactment or “rescue,” insofar as the event takes place in the readerly consciousness, will drive Faulkner’s experiments in *Absalom, Absalom!*. In a way that has not been sufficiently addressed in its consequences of a theory of modernism, Faulkner brings the Conradian voice to bear upon a politics of memory. Offering what is among the few considerations of the relationship between these two writers, Ross writes:

[B]oth writers dramatize the effects a story has on an observer by embodying impressions in an action—usually in the actions of talking and listening. That is, the reader overhears one character relating events to another character in the novel, not directly to the reader. The impact of hearing about Jim or Kurtz, or about Sutpen, is manifested in dramatic form in the story, since the expression of and response to events remain within the boundaries of the fictional world. Story-telling scenes or letters become more than structural devices; they become essential dramatic moments affecting the novel’s final meaning. (“Influence” 204)

Incorporated into the fictional world, responsiveness “[forces] the reader to experience responses to events as part of that world he must, in turn, respond himself.” Indeed, Richard Adams writes that Conrad’s influence is “in the whole of Faulkner’s work...the strongest and the most pervasive...coming from any writer of prose fiction” (Ross “Influence” 199). As Faulkner writes of his creation of the Yoknapatawpha County in which the fictional Jefferson, Mississippi is located, these novels “originated in a desire ‘to bind into a whole [a] world which for some reason I believe should not pass utterly out of the memory of man.’” Faulkner turns towards the voices that had typified the region of his youth. “For most readers,” Ross writes, “the dominant impression...is of a valued world recaptured” (*Voice* 2).

In “Between Memory and History,” Nora suggests that modernity represents an “acceleration of history,” an acceleration which perhaps concerned Faulkner, as it had Conrad, in his gesture to a “world” that might pass out of the memory of man. Indeed, the Compson family is one among several of the aristocratic families Faulkner will create that feels itself to be both “prominent” and yet, “endangered” (Minter *Questioning* 73). Under this acceleration, Nora argues, “we speak so much of memory, because there is so little left.” There are not longer “*milieux de mémoire*” or “real spaces of environments of memory”—what is perhaps akin to Faulkner’s listening in the Oxford of his youth—but only “*lieux de mémoire*” or “sites of memory,” a site “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself...bound up with the sense that memory has been torn.” In 1957, in answer to the question to what extent he was “trying to

picture the South and Southern civilization as a whole, rather than just Mississippi,” Faulkner responded: “Not at all. I was trying to talk about people, using the only tool I knew which is the country that I knew....Just the human heart, it’s not ideas. I don’t know anything about ideas, don’t have much confidence in them” (*University* 9-10).

Faulkner’s project, in emphasizing the novel as a memory that “binds” itself to the substance of the “heart,” is a continuation of Conrad’s “rescued fragment.” Conrad writes:

To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task.... In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one... shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.

Conrad in this way defines the novel as a form of archivalism that is ethical in aim, solidifying the bonds of the community in their continued relationship to the past. As I began to argue in Chapter One, it is project that is perhaps sympathetic to the Benjamin’s visual sense of historical materialism, one that expressed itself in the written practice of montage as a “careful inventory of the fragmentary parts” of texts (“I have nothing to say,” writes Benjamin, “only to show”) (Buck-Morss “Culture” 313-314). As Benjamin enumerates in “Theses on the Philosophy of History:” “(1) The historical object is that for that for which the act of knowledge is carried out as ‘rescue.’ (2) History decomposes into images, not into narratives.”<sup>49</sup> Conradian visual impressionism can be theoretically linked to such rescue; yet, his project of binding men to the “visible world” was overdetermined by the English language as a cathected object. This “vision” of the novel—narrative erasing itself to become startlingly present, accessing what I called a “formerly inaccessible mode of sight”—owes to the work of acoustical displacement, that which the image has to reject to become itself persisting at the margins of narratability, insinuating itself in the flow of action as a kind of hold-up where means of kinship are thrown into confusion before sutured by sight.

While “rescue” for Conrad is described as a visual project, an alternative mode is at once suggested by the voice of Marlow. He is one who, in storytelling, occasions redemption of the marginal figure of the community and, receding into darkness, calls for a dreamy repose of listening that incites a drama by which the acoustical and the visual are held in provocative suspense. There is what I called a “tertiary space” between teller and listener, a space that seems to draw its life from two subject positions. In such “image-making,” the object of vision is not an image *per se*. It is an unfolding drama incanted by the voice, as with Nietzsche’s notion of an originary form of tragedy.

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<sup>49</sup> In the essay on Schubert, Adorno seems to share this theory. Adorno writes that “the image-maker lays bare the image....The history of the image is its decay, that is, the decay of how truth appears in detail, which the image does no more than express....; it means the truth content which comes to the fore only in its decay.” The “lyrical work of art” (music) decays along the axis of its “subjective content,” which is at once its “material content.” Its material content is not “deep human feelings,” he writes, but rather “those objective characters that are driven by fleeting feelings at the time that the work of art first arises,” the lyrical work meeting “the same fate as those larger, materially determined forms eroded by time” (8). This theory of feeling perhaps suggests that music (either as composition or recording) does not “retain” the feeling of its maker; it is anti-expressive theory of musical emotion, that is, it is against the belief that the listener feels the feeling of the composer; the listener perhaps feels feelings of the work itself (as Eliot argued of impersonality in poetry) whose objective characters (perhaps melody or intervals) decay like those of sculpture or painting. This historicity of musical response seems to suggest that is the case if one considers what it is to listen to the work from an other era in a present-day performance.

As I have discussed at length, the temporality of “repose” and waiting is central to the work of incantation, storytelling happening when men wait for the turn of the tide. In Benjamin’s modernist, political aesthetic of the dialectical image, however, there is a shock to “jolt the dreaming collective” as it turns upon the axis of “presense of mind” (*Geistesgegenwart*) and “political awakening” (Buck-Morss “Culture” 312). In Benjamin’s theory of *Trauerspiel*, however, the temporality of waiting lends the drama its relationship to history: classical tragedy, he argues, reaches a terminus in death, “where the baroque knows no eschatology; and for that reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered together and exalted before consigned to their end” (*Tragic* 66). There is a paralysis of action; yet in this paralysis, drama reveals itself in its visual element, particularly as setting and the “panoramic,” i.e. “chronological movement...grasped and analysed in a spatial image” (92). Time is spatialized. Benjamin critiques the Nietzschean “aesthetic listener” and the “interplay of Apollonian and Dionysian energy [that] remains equally contained to the aesthetic sphere” (102). Metaphysics “vitiates” his work, Benjamin argues, as a “renunciation of any understanding of the myth in historical-philosophical terms” (103). His critique, as I noted in Chapter Two, emphasizes the acoustical and incantational dimension of Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy as the evacuation of the historical-philosophical and its political implications.

The time of waiting in Conrad is a time of listening and with it, critical remembrance. It is by means of listening to Marlow that the anonymous listener in *Heart of Darkness* experiences at the end of the novel a new modality of thinking, now attuned to the unreason of colonialism, looking out at the horizon and recognizing that the *Nellie* now moves towards “an immense heart of darkness” that is England itself. There was a slow attunement, one that perhaps explains why William James will argue that “one should listen passively to lectures as one would a song.” There is not a “presence of mind,” but an affective shift on the other side of which normative ways of thinking and feeling have become untenable.

#### *The Atmospheric of Narrative*

Near the end of *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad performs a subtle implication of the reader. As Marlow watches the death of Kurtz, he is, like the narrator “waiting” for a word:

He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath:

“The horror! The horror!”

I blew the candle out and left the cabin.

The colon, placed before Marlow cites the last words of Kurtz, oratorically indicates a pause, the moment of an inhalation. “The horror! The horror!” is uttered in an exhalation, just before Marlow tells us of another breath, that which blew out the candle shining light upon the scene. The scene becomes as pitch dark as the *Nellie* itself is heavy with “night air.” As with Kurtz’s death, the narrator of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* insinuates himself between the very breath of Wait and Donkin, the airy intimacy which carries the death rattle. The rattle “shaped itself.”

It is as if narrative voice, impersonal and reflexive, there discovers itself *in and as* that shape, a shape that has originated in difference and death. There is an architecture of the voice of Wait; the novel as it builds a space to inhabit as “that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and hearts all the dwellers on this earth?” Audible relics of what must be rejected and disavowed by the image are once again “set-up” and ambivalently maintained within the interior of writing and narrative voice. Written narrative is sustained by noise, howls, bits and pieces of misapprehended language, and all that cannot be properly “seen.”

Listening subjects for Faulkner do not receive voices in an air that has not already been breathed in and out by multiple people at multiply different moments. Once that lack of originality is admitted into the novel, the task becomes how to represent that repetitive life. It is a peculiarly modernist challenge, as I argued in Chapter Two, given that the speaking voice begins to take on a deauthorized status, one that did not trouble it in the Victorian novel. There is a challenge for the novelist to render time and place in its correspondences, its moody relation to that which, to all visible appearances, is no longer empirically there. Narrative voice in *Absalom, Absalom* is archeological, negotiating the multi-dimensionality of time as the diegesis establishes its “locatedness” in place that is not immediately present, that is anterior or behind the space of action. Just as in Bergson’s critique of empiricism—consciousness had been theorized through the continuity of a series of rooms—voices continue to sound out and move in the air to be inspired and suspired in present day speech. Faulkner had read Bergson, yet as Porter notes, he “used Bergson—as he confessed to using other authors—not as a source for ideas, but as a resource for narrative tools” (*Seeing* 258). Porter speculates that “Bergson may have suggested to Faulkner the value of hearing as a register for motion,” in that Bergson writes that “we have less difficulty in perceiving movement and change as independent realities if we appeal to the sense of hearing” (258).

Such a movement afflicts the organization of the Faulknerian novel’s plot. In *Light in August*, each new character had brought with him or her an anteriority that forces the forward motion of the plot backward to account for what is behind the present; this experiment becomes more radical in *Absalom, Absalom!* Here, Faulkner poses a theory of memory and subjectivity that now includes the problem of responsibility. At the technical level, it is a forceful departure from Bergson. In chapters one and two of *Absalom, Absalom!*, two moments in 1909 position themselves as the most contemporary moment of the diegesis, vying to be established as the present. In chapter one, Quentin listens to Rosa in what she likes to call her “office,” reinhabiting the position he had earlier assumed (even though it is for Quentin and the reader a later moment at the beginning of chapter two) when listening to Mr. Compson on the porch gallery. Both moments are spaces of memory, but with a telling difference. In chapter one, Rosa remembers and retells the story of Sutpen, a story Quentin “already knew,” having listened to it all his life. Her focus, then is primarily on the past, concerning events that Quentin is not learning about in the present, but having tiresomely to hear again. In chapter two, and into chapter three, he again has to listen, now to his father’s efforts to explain, to fill in the blanks. But here, although the past remains center stage, the future as well appears in the second sentence of chapter two:

It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father’s cigar as they sat on the front gallery after supper until it would be time for Quentin to start, while in the deep shaggy lawn below the veranda the fireflies blew and drifted in soft random—the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr. Compson’s letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin’s sitting room at Harvard.

Faulkner perhaps learns from James what Jameson calls the “art sentence.” Such sentences are “precious objects fashioned one by one,” in which James inverts the order of clauses such that understanding is delayed and calls out for a second reading. Porter argues that “Faulkner’s strategy works against not the inherent temporality of narrative, but the inherent spatiality of the book—that spatiality which endows the reader with the freedom to ‘re-read, tedious and intent, poring’ over pages which he can turn backward as well as forward” (*Seeing* 260). Against such

“reification” of the reader, Faulkner undermines “this material spatiality” of the book “in order to make the reader...a participant in the story he reads” (260).

In undermining both the Jamesian claim to “form” and the not unrelated dangers of detachment, Faulkner insinuates, by way of acoustics, an alternative materiality, which Conrad, in his discovery of matter as waves, had called a “continued vibration.” As chapter two begins, the summer of wistaria now directs us to a moment in 1909 just before that with which chapter one began; Quentin is just about to start for Rosa’s house. In a Conradian atmospherics of narrative, the sentence begins in the presentness of odor, which, by the end of the sentence is discovered to be a *recurrence*; it had already “returned” insofar as the novel is a *recit* and will return *again*. Porter argues that in *Light in August*, “consciousness as memory must serve as the register of life’s ceaseless motion” and that it is only with *Absalom, Absalom!*, his turn to “the sound of human voices,” that a “stream of events [is] grounded in history” (259).

That insinuation of history into the stream of event by way of the archeological nature of discourse asserted by Foucault, however, renders the positivity of the stream fundamentally violated by the negative. Discourse, Foucault suggests, is a “phenomena of recurrence,” not continual presence. To return to the interruption of the diegesis between chapter one and chapter two, the interval “five months later,” as the most contemporary moment of the diegesis, will be delayed until chapter six; the “present,” in other words, will not be allowed to happen for quite some time (and, as I will discuss at length, that happening will itself be premised upon a psychological and cognitive lapse). In chapter five, Rosa’s chapter, it is as if Faulkner rewrites Bergson’s meditation on the room. Bergson writes, “Beyond the walls of your room, which you perceive at this moment, there are the adjoining rooms, then the rest of the house, finally the street and the town in which you live....” Bergson seem to rewrites the Cartesian scene of mediation in which the *cogito* overcomes extension, asserting the presence of subjectivity to itself in the moment of self-reflection.

Faulkner redirects Bergson’s critique towards a substance that is not purely psychological, but historical. Rosa remarks:

“Once there was—Do you mark how the wistaria, sun-impacted on this wall here, distills and penetrates this room as though (light-unimpeded) by secretive and attritive progress from mote to mote of obscurity’s myriad components? That is the substance of remembering—sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel—not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name dream.” (*Absalom* 115)

Rosa begins in the modality of Benjamin’s storyteller only to be pulled away from time as tradition to time as substantive *attrition*. Rosa’s theory of the memory is at once a rewriting of Conrad’s simple future declaration of the novel’s purpose, “to make you hear, to make you feel, ...above all, to make you *see*.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, Rosa insinuates into the accumulative move towards futurity the periodicity of the *anacoluthon*; it is a “foreign element that disrupts.”<sup>51</sup> There is a

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<sup>50</sup> In Chapter One, however, I argued that Conrad’s maxim is a future anterior. In the moment of reading, Conrad will become sutured to the visible world inhabited by the reader; he will become he who is with authority to have written the novel that asserts solidarity.

<sup>51</sup> In *Allegories of Reading*, de Man writes: “Classical rhetoric mentions anacoluthon especially with regard to the structure of periodical sentences, when a shift, syntactical or other, occurs between the first part of the period (protasis) and the second part (apodosis)...It designates any grammatical or syntactical discontinuity in which a construction interrupts another before it is completed” (289).

*negative substance*, an “attritive progress” that places the body at odds with the mind in a way not circumscribed by dualism. The body does the perceiving, yet the mind, Rosa emphasizes, retains something after and can never reconcile itself to not being able to touch its object once more. Between feeling and remembering, there is a syncopation or *lapse*, just as the reader, under incredible pressure, is not allowed to “return,” by way of the fluidity of stream, to “five months later.” Time is not “a thread holding together the beads of a necklace,” as Bergson describes, for something is missing, the interval of the anacoluthon. Rosa will insist upon that lapse in her chapter, the gun shot which she heard and re-hears in memory, the shot that did not produce a visible dead body, concealed as it was by a closed door.

It is that same door which Quentin himself will not be able to “pass” when he listens to Rosa and is pulled into groping, afflicted by the same audio-visual “memory.” As I have already begun to discuss, *Absalom, Absalom!* is concerned for an epic atmospheric of memory (in the sense which Benjamin posits is forgotten by the novel) in which memories move between bodies. Quentin’s “memory”—what is one to call it if Quentin was not present for the event’s occurrence?—is at the limit of the psychological and personal, suggesting an historical consciousness. He was not “there;” at stake in this novel is the *expropriated* status of memory, memories of others’ insofar as they condition the possibility of one’s own consciousness. What is not properly his own—an historical *substance*—takes on the status of memory (“But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass—that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot” [*Absalom* 139]). In the incantation, it is as if he was there and he will take on the very burden of having been there. As she tells the story to Quentin, Rosa insists not upon stream, but severance: “*That sound was merely the sharp final clap-to of a door between us and all that was, all that might have been—a retroactive severance of the stream of event: a forever crystallised instant in an imponderable time accomplished... which, preceding the accomplished fact which we declined, refused,... left the murderer of a victim for his very bullet*” (*Absalom* 127). Indeed, Faulkner insists on the level of voices moving that a responsibility inheres to listening, that one must continue what was severed for another.

The feeling of duration is “a continual winding,” Bergson writes, “like that of a thread into a ball, for out past follows us, becoming larger and larger with the present it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory.” As I began to suggest in the introduction, however, Bergsonian duration is a pure positivity of accumulation; negativity only occurs in inattention, that interlude, however brief, that allows the present to become past. In chapter one, Faulkner steeps his reader in two orders of negativity. The first is at the level of cognition, for the reader has no means of understanding the story as Rosa tells it in *medias res*, the reader forced to “register” what will only become “understood” later. The second is at the level of time itself, Rosa sitting in an “impotent and static rage” that cannot reach “the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration” (*Absalom* 3). Something of that unfulfillment clings to the order of plot, to the novel itself. If we are to take seriously Conrad’s experiments in what I had called “contagious” air, then the novel is drawing its own substance from that which it supposedly tells, the talk which it overhears: narrative is an ear. The Jefferson porch, like the veranda in Conrad, is itself structured like an ear, what Greaney calls “limit and passage.”

Such mimesis has consequences for an understanding of Anglo-American modernism insofar as it is traditionally understood as originating with James. As with Conrad, there is in *Absalom, Absalom!* a personal-impersonality, an anonymity that also is affected by the mode of action. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the narrator “hears” the music of Madame Merle as she plays at



the piano and hears Isabel hearing it, the music floating through the halls of Gardencourt.<sup>52</sup> Yet, James' sense of narrative is a force which predates and outlasts that object. Narrative hears, but it is not itself affected, unchallenged by the transitivity it transcribes between the two women. Jamesian narrative voice is not produced in the atmosphere of listening; it is not mimetically bound to its object. As I argued in Chapter Two, Conrad demands a consideration of the *constitutive* relationship between the diegesis and the narrative discourse which articulates it and, as it were, boards it in what James calls "the house of fiction." From his earliest novels, Conrad was driving towards a form of narration which, despite being a *recit*, is not given in advance and seems to develop in time, meeting, responding, and adapting to the demands of its object—it registers, an activity that is intimately associated with the act of hearing.

#### *The Hum Behind the Words*

As chapter two of *Absalom, Absalom!* begins, the novel establishes the scene of dialogue between Quentin and his father; yet, the ear of an anonymous third person pushes out from Quentin's consciousness to hear what Woolf might call "the hum behind the words," the anonymous, substantive excess of Quentin as both a character and a "center of consciousness." As it remembers the moment on the gallery with Mr. Compson, the narrative is not focalized through Quentin, but rather a third historical consciousness. The novel inhabits the same air and, at the level of grammar pushed to its limit, Faulkner critiques the supposed singularity and self-coincidence of the verb's mode of action:

...the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells run on that Sunday morning in 1833 (...on Sundays, *heard even* [emphasis added] one of the original three bells in the same steeple where descendents of the same pigeons strutted and crooned or wheeled in short courses resembling soft fluid paint smears on the soft summer sky);—a Sunday morning in June with the bells ringing peaceful and peremptory and a little cacophonous—the denominations in concord though not in tune....(*Absalom* 23)

In what is the most frustrating grammatical style of the novel, an excessive parenthetical indication (which, in its difficulty perhaps exceeds all of Faulkner's works), the subject of the sentence moves into an anonymous space held by the parenthesis where the subject of the verb's mode of action *takes leave*. Who heard? It is not *no one*, the acoustical equivalent of what Woolf calls "the world seen without a self;" nor is it precisely the unconscious. An atmosphere of the past begins to return in the materiality of the written word.

There is a hearing that exceeds the capacity of audition understood as being contemporaneous with itself, a hearing here and now as the supposed ground of phonocentrism.

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<sup>52</sup> "Isabel was on the point of ringing to send a question to her room, when this purpose quickly yielded to an unexpected sound—the sound of low music much proceeded apparently from the saloon....The drawing-room at Gardencourt was an apartment of great distances, and, as the piano was placed as the end of it furthest removed from the door at which she entered, her arrival was not noticed by the person seated before the instrument. This person was neither Ralph nor his mother; it was a lady whom Isabel immediately saw to be a stranger to herself, though her back was presented to the door.... The advent of a guest was in itself far from disconcerting; she had not yet divested herself of a young faith that each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence on her life. By the time she had made these reflexions she became aware that the lady at the piano played remarkably well. She was playing something of Schubert's—Isabel know not what, but recognised Schubert—and she touched the piano with a discretion of her own. It showed skill, it showed feeling; Isabel sat down noiselessly on the nearest chair and waited till the end of the piece" (James *Portrait* 150-151).

This non-coincidental object of sound moves the prose forward, for the past tense “heard” moves to the present progressive “ringing.” On the other side of the hyphen after which “that Sunday morning in 1833” is invoked, the reader is now partly *there*, in a *divided* location, as if by the force of this vibratory air itself. The narrator hardly prepares the reader for this leap in time—he is subject to it—narrative ringing out, in what Conrad calls the continued vibration, into the June day in 1833 as it grounds that in 1909. If my own critical tactic has been to *seize* the movement of this vibration, to “re-read, tedious and intent” in an effort to discover the effects of Faulkner’s prose, it is perhaps to claim the work resists neither analytic reading nor the “inherent spatiality” of the book. It is to inhabit its critical consciousness, the fulcrum of which can only be ushered away by its own subsequent refusal, just as the hearing-sense of the narrative continually seems to change in relationship to that which it hears.

The reader begins to learn what Quentin already knows: “Jefferson was a village then” and one day the residents encountered a “face and horse that none of them had ever seen before, name that none of them had ever heard, and origin and purpose which some of them were never to learn....[T]he stranger’s name went back and forth among the places of business and idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen*” (*Absalom* 24). This name, as it persists in both the novel and the town, is “keeping time, time, time.” *Absalom, Absalom!* is thereby conscious of itself as being in the midst of already speaking voices that cannot be fully orchestrated. Before any description of the man, the reader is given the principle force as an *acoustical* and a-conceptual phenomenon, the “ring” of the name, what is both arbitrary (as a signifier) yet embedded in an already existent discourse that precedes the possibility of Quentin’s utterance. Sutpen is not yet described, but the name is pushed out of the air as a trope, for as Henry James remarks of Kurtz, “we never really get a hold of him after all that talk.”

Sutpen materializes but twice before Quentin as an ungraspable incanted image. As Rosa speaks, “the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked” (*Absalom* 3). In this hearing-becoming-seeing, “there comes to speech the event that takes place there,” as Blanchot writes of epic. Quentin listens “as though in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of the man whom she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence.” The ghost, visualized before Quentin in the incantation, “was still irrevocably outside the scope of her hurt or harm,” material and yet immaterial, as if haunting the lapse between physical experience and cognitive recollection, remembering premised upon the “*the brain [as it] recalls just what the muscles grope for.*”

Faulkner does not establish an opposition between hearing and seeing, but rather, as Conrad had, an opposition between an incantatory (auditory) vision and a *theoretical* vision that claims to elevate flux as form. As Porter writes of this moment, an opposition between “light and the vision it supports” and “talking and the hearing it sustains...is grounded in that between transcendence of, and immersion in, the stream of event” (*Seeing* 263). If one returns to his steeping in the Conradian, itself a steeping in the Nietzschean phenomenology of tragedy, Faulkner establishes an opposition between an incantatory vision (audience) and a vision that is not endangered by its objects (spectator). The ghost, Quentin, remarks, can do no “harm;” yet, it insinuates itself into presence and the claim to the self-identity of the perceiver. The reader knows it has done something, since Quentin’s very being is “an empty hall resounding with sonorous defeated names.” Those resonances ostensibly “belong” to the image of the man who rises before him: Quentin’s body is, however, the only available site of union, his body being on-

loan as Rosa exacts her revenge, as Poulet suggests of reading itself. There is not an opposition, but “an inverse ratio” at the fulcrum of vanishing voice—Quentin himself—the synaesthetic location which can no longer say if it belongs to the order of hearing or seeing, and, as Benjamin asserts of the correspondences, the order of present or past.

#### *Audio-Visual Suspension*

As I argued in chapter Two, *diatyposis* is a dialectical suspension between the acoustical and the optical; it is a location in which the aesthetic might become political, for the empirical world is destabilized by a drama that, without “permanence,” overtakes its domain. The voice remains an intransitive, reflexive force “as Miss Coldfield’s voice went on, resolved out of itself before Quentin’s eyes” the figures of the Sutpen family. Dramatic vision yields to another order of vision, the pictorial, as the family is “seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself would have been seen enlarged and hung on the wall behind and above the voice and of whose presence there the voice’s owner was not even aware...—picture, a group which even to Quentin had a quality strange, contradictory and bizarre.” The reader is not yet in the position to understand that at stake in this incantation, as it will be redirected by Quentin and Shreve, is precisely that more emblematic presence “behind and above” Rosa that will be ungrounded by talk. Quentin is in a position to recognize the icon “behind and above” the vanishing voice, recognize in a way that the “owner” itself cannot precisely because of the delay within the *episteme* whose rescue Foucault names “archeology.”

Rosa’s office, where the novel begins, is burdened by air “as if there prisoned in it like in a tomb all the suspiration of slow heat-laden time which had recurred during the forty-three years” (*Absalom* 6). Quentin has been hailed not by Rosa, but this force behind and above her; yet, these images are the unwelcome product of a voice to which he does not listen freely, “whatever her reason for choosing him” (*Absalom* 8). It is a reason that the reader cannot yet understand and he or she is, in that way, equally divested of the freedom to listen, unable to fasten upon and thereby reject, a motive. It is from within this acoustical force that the world of this novel will be constructed to include the space and time of the act of the reading consciousness.

Before the readers can recognize that the room is not “there,” but rather the space of memory, the image of Sutpen rises before Quentin in the narrative incantation. Quentin in this moment becomes *two* listeners and in a way not circumscribed by the positivity of the Bakhtinian double-voiced. He is both the Quentin “preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, *having to listen*, to one of the ghosts” and the Quentin “who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless *having to be one* for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was [emphases added]” (*Absalom* 4). There is that which has supposedly been “dead” since the end of the Civil War (1865 being both the end of the war and a certain conclusion to the Sutpen story), but is rather undead, as W.E.B. Du Bois had also suggested of the color-line in 1903. It lives on as the substance of consciousness, composed of voices, one of which one is “having to listen.” It is what Du Bois calls double consciousness:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others.... One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts.... (10-11)

As Faulkner dramatizes it, double consciousness afflicts anyone who might try to listen in Jefferson insofar as it is a microcosm of the nation itself. “History,” as it is incanted before Quentin from within consciousness as it receives Rosa’s voice, is not a narratable object that is grasped, but implicative of his personal consciousness. As Quentin sits at the intersection of two temporalities which determine him equally, the one refuting the other, consciousness is the substance of their struggle. There is an exigency by which Quentin can no longer be disinterested. There is no “deserving” to be a ghost and in order to register the responsibility in excess of such “deserving,” Faulkner must turn to the acoustical as it is itself the excess of what Blanchot calls “the distance that belongs to the gaze” (*Infinite* 384). There is something of the order of historicity for which Faulkner is concerned that can only be registered in the way that two disparate bells sound out in cacophonous concord, forcing Faulkner to revise the possibilities of the diegesis so that readerly consciousness might register the conditions of “here” and “now,” as well as “then” and “there.”

### *The Resonant Strings of Remembering*

Faulkner politicizes the Conradian experiments in acoustics. There is an inconclusiveness at the heart of Kurtz’s story—what cannot be seen as he cries out in anguish “at some image” in a refrain that will be heard un-hermeneutically by Marlow and heard again. It is that inconclusiveness that gives Conradian storytelling its generative effect. Indeed, Marlow lies awake overhearing two men gossip about Kurtz’s inexplicable decision to turn away from home and return to the jungle, finding in that moment of overhearing the curious force of his own will to follow him, being at a loss for “the motive.” As I argued in Chapter One, Conrad continually falls in to the written world he creates, susceptible, in the course of writing, to visions that are never determined in advance; that world for him is never silent nor without a certain *call*. Conrad writes of his compulsion towards “the world” of Almayer’s story in *A Personal Record*:

He stepped upon the jetty. He was clad simply in flapping pajamas.... His arms, bare to the elbow were crossed to his chest. His black hair looked as if it had not been cut for a very long time and a curly wisp of it strayed across his forehead. I had heard of him at Singapore; I had heard of him on board; I had heard of him early in the morning and late at night; I heard of him at Tiffin and at dinner; I had heard of him in a place called Pulo Laut from a half-caste gentleman there.... I had heard of him in a place called Dongola.... At least I heard his name distinctly pronounced several times in a lot of talk in Malay language. Oh yes, I heard it quite distinctly—Almayer, Almayer.... And I overheard more of Almayer’s name amongst our deck passengers.... Upon my word, I heard the mutter of Almayer’s name faintly at midnight.... (*Record* 75-76).

The visual encounter with Almayer, an image which is the avowed impetus for the novel, is narrated as what Watt calls “a momentary but suggestive glimpse.” Nevertheless, Conrad’s retelling of the encounter begins as a visual impression only to take a radical detour into an acoustic pre-history or what Greaney calls a “polyphony of gossiping voices” (21). As Conrad writes of the experience of beginning to write *Almayer’s Folly*, an experience which can only be understood as responding to suggestive voices, “there was no vision of printed book before me as I sat writing at that table, situated in a decayed part of Belgravia.” Conrad begins to narrate to himself the highly perceptive image of this man surveyed from head to foot, Almayer moving from out of an opaline mist into clear view; yet, the image of Almayer is haunted by voices, voices which seem, precisely, to undo the completion of the work and propel into rewriting. Indeed, the latter half of the passage might be condensed as “I had heard... I had heard... I had

heard... I heard... I heard... I overheard... I heard" (Greaney 22). This is where the passage is no longer simply pre-occupied with narrating physical-visual space, but moves into *time*.

The visual sense offers a detailed picture; the eye moves over its composite parts to form the complete image of an instant; yet, the sense of hearing effects an alternative temporality of the repetition compulsion. There is a protraction across time; something continually makes itself felt; there is starting and stopping only to start again with the rhythm of *fort-da*, an exasperated time of desire that moves as a force of a continuation, a compulsion to carry on the momentum of what came before it. It is within that force that Conrad must write the novel all over again, offering what I described in Chapter One as a rival version: Conrad searches for a justification for the novel as its *raison d'être*; yet, a catacoustic phenomenon literally lines and attacks the interior of the writer's consciousness, beginning to over-take that aim. In this moment, to narrate its origins *is* to tell the work once more, the fiction repeating fiction. Conrad cannot find the distance or vantage point which the composite scene requires to become properly and concretely the "past." For, with the haunting voices—do they give rise to the image?—something *is happening* again.

Indeed, in *The Sound and the Fury*, the sound of the word "caddie" is registered by the autistic narrating consciousness of Benjy as "Caddy," the name of his dead sister. This name, rich in associative hearing, is a *portal* that opens onto the past, a surge that the reader has no means of organizing. It is then that Benjy begins to bellow, the acoustical exterior of experience and consciousness. As Conrad hears the name "Almayer," something that never fully happened, that which was never fully completed or satisfied by the view, pulls the work into rewriting. In a way that is crucial for the strophe and antistrophe that pulls *Absalom, Absalom!* forward, the obsession with Almayer only begins to make itself felt in the moment the account turns on itself, its own explanatory aim, to become preoccupied with the sense of hearing. Watt summarizes the moment of seeing Almayer as "an initial visual impetus" of the novel; yet to negate the acoustics of this moment is to negate its obsessive drive, to negate the way in which both narrative and the desire for Almayer begin to work upon Conrad once again, drawing him back into something that has not been fully effectuated, a novel that is not, therefore, through being written. The acoustic incessantly repeats with the force of a what Dolar calls a "nonsignifying remainder" that is material, heterogeneous to narrative and the onto-epistemological; the critic is deaf, quite literally, to desire.<sup>53</sup>

Reading Conrad and Faulkner, as my own reading dramatizes, is an incitement to discourse. Such incitement drives *Absalom, Absalom!* and the teller's own interest in the enigma that is the story of Thomas Sutpen. Everyone and no one utters the strophe and antistrophe, *Sutpen, Sutpen, Sutpen*, a certain din conditioning all speech in the novel. Any bell, any voice, any movement of "the suspiration of slow heat-laden air," articulates this murmur that exceeds both listener and the man himself.

Faulkner is attuned to a long-resounding voice, a nameless murmur; yet, he is concerned for the eruptive event of discourse that cannot seek refuge in a transcendental origin, a speaking

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<sup>53</sup> Watt polices "a boundary that does not exist in any comfortably visible or material form," Geoffrey Harpham suggests, "by raising possibilities and then trying to contain them," nowhere conceding "the possibility of a fugitive current of libidinal energy between the two men." Yet is the acoustical desire simply a matter of the critic's concession? Does this fugitive current *cease* with the novel, if, the very drive of Conrad's narrative discourse is to continue, to repeat? What does criticism that now "outs" the text undo, particularly if Conrad's narratives, if not modernism as a project, organize themselves against what Conrad calls the "men who wanted facts?" Both modalities of criticism refuse to be implicated by the act of reading as it becomes with Conrad an incitement to discourse.

voice that is at once burdened with the task of *beginning*. Quentin, as two listeners, will be curiously posed at the point of listening to what he has already heard many times before and what he will have to tell himself in his conversation with Shreve. Listening, as Faulkner will enact it, is at once backward moving, yet an interruptive event, the chiasm of which being the substance of the political. Conrad had heard and reheard his composition in a highly inward act. It is as if Faulkner, in thematizing such rehearing at the level of his novel's world, asks how all supposedly finite objects are established through patterns of repetition. They can be followed in their vicissitudes, but not fully unraveled or undone.

As Faulkner moves from his concern for the family, in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, to the town as it registers the question of American consciousness, he becomes more deeply invested in hearing, an investment in the lives and stories of others and with it, a re-authoring of stories as they might be made available to the future. Just as the listeners to the story of Jim as told by Marlow become emotionally invested in and responsible for the status of Jim, at the center of Faulkner's project is acoustical rescue. Who or what is rescued? Listening must be a part of any method that might address such a question, or rather, take part in it. As Porter argues of "the participant-observer" in American literature, Faulkner crafted a novel which the reader can no longer simply observe. Yet, it is rather by means of the "hearing-sense," as the narrator will call it, that such an image will arise, the reader necessarily participating in a Nietzschean drama, events which are "there," as Blanchot suggests of epic, the audience and consciousness as such being implicated. Truth, Faulkner writes, only comes "through great effort and involvement" (Ross "Influence" 200). Narrative in both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Lord Jim* is no longer there to witness events as objectivities, but rather to overhear their reconstruction from a distance that is at once proximate.

On the technical level of prose, Faulkner works with the materiality of the sonic register, the reader "overhearing" voices speak of things which he or she has no means of fully organizing, thereby becoming, without consent, drawn into an affective dilemma of knowing-without-understanding. By the time the reader understands what had happened to Sutpen, he or she is *remembering* what has already been heard before in murmurous, inchoate passing cadences—*Sutpen, Sutpen, Sutpen*. Reading, like listening, "strikes the resonant strings of remembering," as the narrator remarks of Quentin's own position in relationship to the history of Jefferson.<sup>54</sup>

#### *American Forgetting*

Americans are plagued by "ignorance, oblivion, and a failure to remember," argues Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution*. In *Requiem for a Nun*, however, Faulkner writes that "the past is never past." Arguing for the central role of speech in politics, Arendt contends in a brief footnote that the work of Faulkner represents the shape that an American memory might take:

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<sup>54</sup> As Porter seminally represents this point in *Seeing and Being*, "From the beginning, Faulkner has been immersing us in the stream of event which his sustained voice embodies. His strategy in this respect consists in telling us things before we can understand him, possessing us of information before we have learned where it fits in the story, while at the same time pulling us forward by withholding the crucial information about Bon's past, as well as the crucial scene in which we expect to have this information verified" (271). From a different perspective, Faulkner's debt to Conrad, in the mode of listening created by release and withholding, cannot be overestimated. Faulkner rewrites the incantatory *Lord Jim*, redirecting it within the context of an American literary trajectory, echoing Conrad in order to intervene in what is a classic American literary claim to "start anew." Like Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, Faulkner attacks a *sui generis* subjectivity that exists in spontaneous relationship to the world, hearing the voice of one as a response to the voice of other and its conditioning field of discourse insofar as that field is recursive.

How such guideposts for future reference and remembrance arise out of this incessant talking, not, to be sure, in the form of concepts but as single brief sentences and condensed aphorisms, may best be seen in the novels of William Faulkner. Faulkner's literary procedure, rather than the content of his work, is highly "political," and, in spite of many limitations, he has remained, as far as I can see, the only author to use it. (307)

We have already noticed how in the auditory register of writing, Conrad had returned to phrases as "guideposts." He heard past pieces of writing, phrases, words, and sounds with charged, recurring, and multiplying significances. In Faulkner, however, such return is thematized at the level of the diegesis, characters seeming to have trouble letting go of certain subjects of talk. Against Jameson's reading that the aurally driven novel is pre-modern—there is a rambling or apostrophizing that is meant merely to imitate living speech—Arendt seems to fasten upon incessant talk as *the* modern gesture in Faulkner, and more than that, a modern *political* gesture. Arendt emphasizes Faulkner's technique, a way of handing voices, which, as I have begun to argue, is a dynamic exchange. Such an exchange is sympathetic to Arendt's rescue of Aristotle's assessment of politics as grounded in a realm of speech in *The Human Condition*.<sup>55</sup> While Arendt speaks of the domain of politic action, her gesture to a novelist as the most promising figure of radical remembering has implications for a study of literature conceived as event.

Such remembering, however, is not simply registered by Faulkner the level of talk, but more broadly by the sense of hearing. Consider, for example, one of the most important sections of *As I Lay Dying*. Darl meditates on the possibility of transformative action; he meditates, in effect, on the possibility of self-enactment that recalls Conrad's earliest experiments in *Almayer's Folly*. There is a time as "instant" that is suspended, yet in its suspension, it is imbued with an anonymous history of ruin from which it cannot be severed, nature appearing uncanny and irreconcilable to consciousness. The Bundren family aims to cross the river with a coffin holding the body of the mother, Addie, the bridge having been washed out. As it is observed by Darl, the river moves in an a-transcendental temporality, bound to a duration that exceeds the individual consciousness. Darl casts his senses, as the "last angel of history," upon a wreckage that at once becomes audible:

Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls traveling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of an into light slumber again.

It clucks and murmurs among the spokes and about the mules' knees, yellow, skummed [sic] with flotsam and with thick soiled gouts of foam as though it had sweat, lathering, like a driven horse. Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound; in it the unwinded cane and saplings lean as before a little gale, swaying without reflections as though suspended on invisible wires from the branches overhead. Above the ceaseless surface they stand—trees, cane, vines—rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense

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<sup>55</sup> "What Arendt calls 'political' is a space that is materially shared," writes Cavarero, "whereupon those present show to others in words and deeds their uniqueness and their capacity to bring new things." Action and speech are co-functions. As Minter writes of Arendt's reception of Faulkner, "no people fully exists without a history, but no people truly possessed its history except in memories raised to the active pitch by an ongoing process of articulation" (*Questioning* 75).

yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the wave and the mournful water. (*Dying* 141-42)

Audibility is not a figure or metaphor, as in a sound signifying something else, but rather seems to erupt into Darl's consideration as a force. As if in sympathy, or rather, as if similarly afflicted, writing becomes audible at the level of prose, pushed to a musical substantiveness. Writing registers, in cadence, what is the inverse of the speculative moment of Narcissus: This is not an image of eternity in the instant. The image sounds out. This spectral scene is a dialectical image in the midst of appearing as such. The image "waked for a moment... out of inertness," as if nature makes contact with what is there, what is no longer there, and what might be there. History pulses beneath the surface of things; yet, Darl is unable and unwilling, in his suffering, to synthesize that which he sees and hears into a narrative that might redeem the what "was" as what "is" in a principle of identity or eternity. Rootless, the trees are not unattached from history—there is scum as extraneous matter, soiled gouts; the trees appear only in thought to Darl as he fails to recognize their concreteness, things in the phenomenal world they shared. Yet, the intentional object is equally unstable and resists thought.

Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics* of suffering in a way that seems to speak directly to what Faulkner is attempting to achieve in the above passage. Narcissus is undone:

The power of the status quo puts up the facades into which our consciousness crashes. It must seek to crash through them. This alone would free the postulate depth from ideology. Surviving in such resistance is the speculative moment: what which have its law prescribed for it by given facts transcends them even in the closest contact with the objects, and in repudiating sacrosanct transcendence. Where the thought transcends the bonds it tied in resistance—there is its freedom. Freedom follows from the subject's urge to express itself. (17-18)

"Suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject" (18). It is in this context that Adorno will argue that "the need to lend a voice to suffering is the condition of all truth." At the level of prose, Faulkner registers such suffering. "Lending a voice" will in fact pose a significant insight into understanding the function of free indirect discourse in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the consciousness of Quentin as it suffers under experiences that do not "belong" to him. When talking to Rosa, he experiences an auditory hallucination of what happened to her in the most traumatic moment of running of the stairs to attempt to see the dead body of Bon. At the level of hearing, it is as if he "remembers" what he has never experience. As Adorno allows one to understand, the negative insinuates itself into a principle of identity. The negative is "the object's nonidentity with itself, ...its nonidentity with the knowing subject, the mind, and its logical processes" (Buck-Morss *Origin* 77). It is here that the object, not Darl himself, begins to sound out: "it talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad...It clucks and murmurs among the spokes....Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound."

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner will rearticulate this moment as a philosophy of history, the acoustical negative of Narcissus in Echo. Narcissus, one must recall, is rapt in his own image, yet Echo calls out to him to meet, drawing him away from self-reflection. Sound and image are not opposed, but the hearing seems to remind Narcissus of the world from which he has turned away. She is substantiated by that which he neglects. Quentin listens to Shreve talk and thinks to himself that he is just hearing everything all over again; he rewrites to himself the myth of Narcissus:

*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on,*



*spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple space, to the old ineradicable rhythm thinking Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (Absalom 210)*

Quentin discerns an instant making material contact with past-becoming-present. The ripples seem to move out, and yet, most paradoxically, in a repressed direction; in other words, it is not a “forward” movement. That paradox allows Quentin to access how voices are moving into voices; it seems no longer to matter who did what or why, for the act seems to have been done by all agents feeding into each other. Quentin posits a self that is non-identical and, as we will find, it is precisely that theory of self that will allow him, with Shreve, to redeem Sutpen’s narrative. He will “lend a voice” to Sutpen’s suffering, speaking as if he is Sutpen in a most visceral way.

#### *The Second-Order Diegesis*

Before turning to how Quentin’s narrative unfolds, it is important to note how Faulkner had already been experimenting with a form of hearing in which one seems not to hear the present, but an object from the past. The sense of hearing gets overtaken in an act of near possession. Quentin’s “lending a voice to suffering” does not appear to be a fully voluntary act; it is an ethical posture, but one that he senses he cannot fully choose.

In late 1926, the period before beginning *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner turns to composing a series of short stories that will later form the substance of *Absalom, Absalom!*, in particular the conversation between Quentin and Shreve. These stories are rich with regional sounds and voices. Karl Zender, who has written the most extensive account of sound in the world of Faulkner, writes that “In contrast to the attenuated imagery of the early prose and poetry, Faulkner’s great fiction have their origin in the concrete and highly distinctive voices and sounds of his own region...[W]e see Faulkner using images of sound to evoke the life of his region in all its destiny and particularity” (91). There is, however, a technical work with sonic materiality, i.e. Faulkner attempts to craft a method that might register sounds and voices as concrete things. On the one hand, that concreteness begins to establish exactly how Faulkner will attempt to implicate his reader in *Absalom, Absalom!*. On the other hand, one begins to hear how Faulkner heard the act of composition. It is as if he heard in advance certain sections of novels and certain ways of narrating them. In the short-stories from the pre-*The Sound and the Fury* period, he is working out a way of hearing that is both within the world of the story and the process of composing.

The Compsons will not appear in “Mistral,” one short story from this period, and it does not take place in America; yet it is a work in which Faulkner, as Porter notes, begins to experiment both with the problem of hearing and the form of conversation that will shape the last several chapters of *Absalom, Absalom!*. In the chapters, there is an incantatory space of conversation as Quentin and Shreve struggle to understand the enigma of Sutpen and more implicitly, its grip upon Quentin’s psyche. In “Mistral,” Don, a twenty-three year old reporter, and the unnamed narrator or “I”—preparations for Shreve and Quentin—travel together on foot in Italy and, seeking a place to rest, meet a woman who suggests they seek shelter with the town priest. The priest can be found, she explains, at the funeral of the man who was to marry his

young ward. Faulkner in this way rehearses the curiosity that gathers around a town enigma. The more crucial technical work achieved in this story, however, is a rhythmic punctuation, an acoustical excess of narrative unfolding that does not advance plot but rather undermines it from within its own location. A bell repeatedly tolls: “We could hear it outside, rippling the slow strokes of the bell half-born out of the belfry, so that by the time we heard them, they seemed to have come back as echoes from a far distance.”

In the world of Faulkner, no individual seems to have been the first upon any scene, a peculiar already-worldedness of the diegesis signaled by sounds already long vibrating, as with the bells of Jefferson in *Absalom, Absalom!*. As the two characters continue to walk, they approach the presbytery where a peasant woman opens a shutter and looks out at them. They explain they are travelers looking for supper and a bed. What is happening in this story (indeed little occurs) is less central than its atmospherics. Though they have left the hollow where the wind had blown, the narrator continues to hear it: “When we followed her down the hall we carried with us in our ears the long ruse of the recent wind, like in a sea shell.” They speak to her, yet an acoustical phenomena begins to surround the possibility of communication. “My ears were still full of wind.” The investigation itself is overwhelmed by the atmosphere, an affect that seizes upon knowing; signifiers are floating, the reader guided by impressions he or she has no means to understand. In a passage that prepares the conversation between Quentin and Shreve, Faulkner calls attention to the gap between *hearing*, as a physiological phenomena, and *listening*, as what Barthes calls a “psychological fact.” Nevertheless, the atmospherics of a concrete sound enters the historical, psychological, and physiological simultaneously:

After a while Don quit looking at me. “I don’t know.” “No. You don’t know. And I don’t know. We don’t want to know. Do we?”

“No. No spika.”

“I mean, sure enough.”

“That’s what I mean,” Don said. The whisper in our ears seemed to fill the room with wind. Then we realized that it was the wind that we heard, the wind itself we heard, even though the single window was shuttered tight. It was as though the quiet room were isolated on the ultimate peak of space, *hollowed* [emphasis added] murmurous out of chaos and the long dark fury of time. It seemed strange that the candle flame should stand so steady above the wick. (*Collected* 862)

They are in the acoustical hollow of history, sounds that seem not to originate in personal memory. There is a fury of sound that extends a space and time beyond the locatedness of “scene” as such: the ontology of sound in Faulkner’s sensorium continually signals a deindividuation. It is as if the sound has been there long before and will be there long after. There is a radical divide between affective reality and objective reality: objects, the candle, will not register what is *there*, because it is not there in any empirical sense.

In the moment of the narrator’s listening to the wind, one can hear Faulkner’s growing interest in the historicity of the listener and the act of listening itself, that listening is never here and now, but duratively thrown backward, as it were, behind the sound into origins, often unlocatable and beyond one’s own lived life. The story appears to take place in no properly diegetic realm, suggesting in sound, as Conrad had, its excess. This second-order diegesis is not available to the immediate perception. In that way, Adorno writes of musical space and musical time as “the negation of the empirical against which it establishes its boundaries” (*Music* 143). As this story inhabits such space and time, one can hear, in its incongruity with the empirical, a romanticism and symbolism outgrown itself, nature ceasing to “sound out” the core of the

heart.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the wind begins as part of the *Umwelt*, as two characters empirically heard the wind before entering the house; the wind is then *carried* or retained by the ear or *Innwelt*, and then once again pushes *out* from the ear to fill the room. The empirical sense struggles to locate the source of the sound. Simultaneously, however, the phrase “no spika” punctuates the experience: *language points to its own fiction* as it must repeat in order to drive home the logic of referentiality—“Then we realized that it was the wind that we heard, the wind itself we heard” (what is possibly an allusion to Stevens’ poem “The Snow Man”). In this instance, grammar and rhetoric are at once at odds and seem to collaborate. “Sure enough.”

In “Mistral” Faulkner is working out patterns or ways of hearing that will guide *Absalom, Absalom!*. In this period, Faulkner is establishing an acoustical imaginary and seems to be hearing in advance the way certain sections of that novel will be developed. In other words, it is simply characters or plot points that he is developing, but pivotal sounds that, when attended to, reveal alternative dimensions within the plot. The unpublished ghost story “Evangeline,” works with the form of interlocation used in “Mistral,” yet it also establishes the love story between Judith Sutpen and Charles Bon, one story that will preoccupy *Absalom, Absalom!*. It unfolds as a conversation between Don, who is in some stories a reporter, but here imagined by Faulkner as an architect and painter and one basis for Shreve, and the young man who is presumably the unnamed narrator of “Mistral,” who is widely acknowledged to be a version of Quentin.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, over the course of four chapters, Shreve rehearses with Quentin the story of Sutpen’s origins and of Bon’s eventual murder by Henry Sutpen, Judith’s brother. In “Evangeline,” however, Don tells some of the details of the story, the rest, he explains, the narrator will have to hear for himself from those who still live in the “dark house.” The dark house—the original title of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the first vision of what will become Sutpen’s Hundred—was raised up from nothing in Mississippi before the war on land ill-got by Sutpen. *Absalom, Absalom!* will tell his story once again, several voices detailing his arrival in Jefferson, apparently from nowhere. Perhaps more precisely, at the level of discourse, the novel will tell the story of the Compson family’s investment in that narrative as part of a tradition of incessant talk between fathers and sons.

In “Evangeline,” Don comes to the narrator with the story of Bon’s murder, but he will not disclose the name of the “flesh-and-blood ghost” that now haunts the house at the threshold of which the murder took place. The narrator will himself go to the dark house to encounter Judith, still living. “Her voice came out of the unbreathing stillness” to reveal one motive for the murder of Bon by Henry, that Bon already had had a wife. This story is, in part, the same version of the motive for murder in *Absalom, Absalom!* In the novel it is only in the conversation between Quentin and Shreve that the central enigma of the story—why Henry murdered Bon—is articulated aloud. In “Evangeline,” an extended knowledge of Henry’s motive comes to the narrator in the form of a visual epiphany. As the story and the narrator’s encounter with the ghost concludes, the narrator, who is inexplicably drawn to the story and house, looks at a photo of Judith and sees what is reminiscent of the “tragic mask” of James Wait:

Then I came awake, alive. I looked quietly at the face: the smooth, oval, unblemished face, the mouth rich, full, a little loose, the hot slumberous, secretive eyes, the inklike hair with its faint but unmistakable wiriness—all the ineradicable

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<sup>56</sup> In Yeats’ 1893 “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” hearing is the sense that connects empirical space and time to the ideal, the symbol being their intersection: “I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore; / While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray, / I hear it in the deep heart’s core.”

and tragic stamp of negro blood. ...I knew now...what to a Henry Sutpen born, created by a long time, with what he was and what he believed he thought, would be worse than the marriage and which compounded the bigamy to where the pistol was not only justified, but inescapable. (*Uncollected* 608-609)

The knowledge that so vivifies him remains unarticulated; it is cloaked in the silence of epiphanous vision in which meaning is sealed, yet undisclosed for the reader who is inescapably courted into a process of inference. Such inference alone “fulfills” the meaning of the story; yet, it at once seals the story as such—the mystery has been revealed, meaning is not destroyed, only delayed. The hand of the dark house’s negro guardian—one beginning of Clytie—closes around the photograph: “That’s all there is in it” (609). In *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, the inferential implication of the reader will be protracted to excruciating lengths; it is dislocated from the sphere of a flashing vision to unfold, as I will discuss at length, as a musicality between voices.

The literary historical point is not without interest. How is one to account for this shift, given the acoustical uncanny with which Faulkner is working in this period, developing an atmospherics of American memory? In moving the disclosure of the mystery to the realm of acoustics—conversation, *poesis*, and the “true enough” as it makes “good talk”—Faulkner undoes the logic of identity that the photograph, as it is beheld by the narrator, claims to seal. The photograph *shows* indelibly, ineradicably, unmistakably, and inescapably, the race of its subject; it thereby points to the equally ineradicable nature of a “Henry Sutpen born, created by a long time,” he who appears to himself as the self-same or “what” he is. His own belief in what he is—white—“repels,” as Marcuse might say, that which the picture claims to disclose. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, this burden of race will be shifted from Judith and Henry, to Bon—Quentin and Shreve discover in the course of their conversation that Bon was not only of mixed descent, but himself Sutpen’s son and thus Judith’s half-brother. Race, in other words, is specter that moves between bodies.

#### *Literary History as Enharmonics*

Quentin’s siblings, Caddy, Jason, and Benjy, will take leave of *Absalom, Absalom!*, yet Benjy, whose mentally retarded consciousness is accessed only through his “bellow,” continually sounds out in the Quentin works at the limit of storytelling, the limit of chronology, and the displaced substance of the logic of identity. Though his character leaves, his sound—like that of James Wait—does not fully depart nor remain within its shape; it rather changes in tone and moves from body to body. It is itself already echoic of more primary sounds with Faulkner’s acoustic imaginary, sounds that are not, however, more originary, but rather accompaniments within a strange, enharmonic relationship that escapes the dictates and bounds of characterization.

In a cold dormitory room in 1909, Quentin and Shreve develop the previously untold version of the story of Sutpen that had already circulated in the novel multiple times by different tellers, among them the Compson men and Rosa, the sister of Sutpen’s dead wife, Ellen. None of these prior tellers fasten upon the central enigma—that Bon is the child of Sutpen and his former wife in Haiti. At certain earlier points in the novel, Mr. Compson seems to “slip,” suggesting knowledge of Bon’s identity; but it is hard to know whether it is because he knows more than he is telling, or because he is imagining possible stories that he cannot prove. That slippage or uncertainty, on the part of characters and the reader alike, is central to the novel’s push towards a critique of racial identity, the very object of knowledge that is so uncertain. The form of racial identity isolated by the narrator’s vision of the photograph in “Evangeline” will be protracted at length such that it no longer takes the form of a revelation or epiphany, but is slowly

incorporated into the flow of discourse until it takes on, without one's knowing, not only the status of fact, but a certain affective veracity. One learns in this novel not through being told in any explicit sense, but through overhearing conversations the reader has no means to fully understand, not being privileged in relationship to referentially—words do not speak to the understanding, but in what Conrad calls “another art altogether.”

Each narrator must rely upon hearsay and the Compson family's oral tradition as it includes Colonel Compson's own conversations with Sutpen himself. Because the voices do not move in a chronological order of descent, tracing the words back from the youngest speaker to their origin in the oldest, it is difficult to determine from whom Quentin learns that Bon is Sutpen's son. They are facts one only learns if one “accepts the reliability of General Compson's account” (Forrer 29). As if in response to Lubbock's inaugural plaint of formalism—the critic must “keep a book steady and motionless before us, so that we may have time to examine its shape and design”—Foucault writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that “the book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.” It would seem that raising the question of the unity of the work it is enough to dissolve it—just as Sutpen's dynasty and “design” itself. It is on the basis of a “complex field of discourse”—the circulation of voices—that Faulkner, in the world of his stories composed as they are of talk already in the midst of itself, continually raises the *question* concerning unity, identity, and the logic of filiation. “Problems raised by the *œuvre* are even more difficult,” Foucault writes, for how is one to designate the proper field or the “proper name” of a collection of texts—letters, manuscripts, scraps, complete works—and demarcate its limit, its beginning and end. Indeed, the proper name is precisely what Sutpen, in his implacable desire for the purity of design, will deny Bon. The single written work is neither atomistic nor contained, and, insofar as Faulkner was “working” through a series of dilemmas across works, he was critiquing, at the level of *form*—open, repetitive, recapitulating—the claims to self-identical coherence that is at the origin of violence within the world of his works and the south itself. Donald Kartiganer importantly notes that repetition “seems to lie at the very center of Faulkner's fiction, as its art, its meaning, and the process of its formation” (21).<sup>57</sup> Faulkner's “craft,” then, is partially locatable in what his characters share, a compositional and diegetic repetition.

Faulkner, as with “Evangeline” and “That Evening Sun,” rewrote stories and at times entire novels. *The Sound and the Fury* had essentially unfolded within this practice, beginning with the consciousness of Benjy as it accesses a world the reader has no means of understanding. The novel retells, three times over, what is already essentially provided by the first chapter. The events are retold as they reside in Quentin's consciousness, then Jason's, and finally in an omniscient narrative that seems to incorporate and resolve them all. *Absalom, Absalom!* is similarly structured, all of the events being given in the first chapter before the reader has any means to understand them, a story that is then rehearsed and augmented in various ways by different speakers until the novel culminates in the conversation between Quentin and Shreve. Their dialogue proposes to answer the lingering question of the other sections, why Henry would

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<sup>57</sup> Kartiganer writes, “In a word, Faulkner's craft of fiction is to tell stories and then tell them again. This is the strategy that animates each of the novels, and is implicit to the stories; moreover, it describes the dynamic space between the texts, the relations from one text to another. Repetition may also describe the strategy of the lore—of what it means to be Faulkner the eldest son of the fourth generation leading away from and back to his formidable great grandfather [who is one basis of Sutpen]—as well as the strategy of the writer's historical position, of what it means to be Faulkner the American postwar modernist leading away from and back to Joyce, Conrad, and James, Melville and Hawthorne” (21).

not allow Bon to marry Judith. There is a parallel, then, between the way characters tell and retell and the way Faulkner writes and writes, and, we will find, hears and rears.

In “The Philosophy of Composition,” an essay that claims to retrace the composition of “the Raven,” Poe ironically begins with a grammar that erases cause under the force of effect, “Charles Dickens, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of ‘Barnaby Rudge,’ says—‘By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his “Caleb Williams” backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done.’” *Absalom, Absalom!* ends with the refrain from “The Raven,” “nevermore,” which gestures to the impossibility at the heart of repetition, or what Irwin calls in Faulkner the “incompatibility” of time and revenge. As Faulkner writes of his narrative technique, “there’s always a moment in experience—a thought—an incident—that’s there. Then all I do is work up to that moment. I figure what must have happened before to lead people to that particular moment, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after the moment” (*Sound* 373). Yet, such work is neither linear<sup>58</sup> nor can the incidents “there” be circumscribed by Jamesian geometry. What Conrad and Faulkner both name the “incident” is an echoic and multi-dimensional space of eventuality. Indeed, in Faulkner’s statement there is both an “incident” and a “moment”—the latter seems to lend itself to repetition. The “incident” is perhaps *there* as a *fabula*, but the different versions of the leading up to and the leading away from, as in Faulkner’s acts of revision, are motile and shifting. The incident, for both Faulkner and his characters, seems to recede beneath this pressure of revision, retelling, and rethinking. In approaching Faulknerian repetition, one must inhabit the critical valence of the fulcrum, i.e. the pivot place or hinge at which the past can be renarrated in a way that can both serve and establish a future. There is an epicenter in what Quentin calls the “pool of happen” and with it, after-shocks that are themselves no longer fully bound to the moment away from which they ostensibly “work” or intransitively effectuate themselves. Wash Jones will say, “Something happened.” Two chapters end at the same point, with him about to tell Rosa what has happened to Bon at the threshold of Sutpen’s Hundred; that climax is withheld. The following chapter then dovetails away from providing that information. Conrad, one must recall, had also experimented with such a lacuna, an omniscient narrator asking, “What had happened?” in *Lord Jim* as the ship threatens to sink. We only learn later that Jim had jumped. The narrator’s question reveals not only a lapse in omniscience, but a break between the Victorian and modernist novel.

After Mr. Compson’s exhausting monologue addressed to Quentin in chapter four, the bells between two the Jefferson’s spanned by forty-three years ringing out, there is suddenly a *break*, designating perhaps a pause, a change in tone in which he now addresses Quentin as a “you:”

“—Have you ever noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues? The thief who steals not for greed but for love, the murderer who kills not out of lust but pity?” (*Absalom* 96)

Mr. Compson must confess that sometimes knowing, without access to cause as “motivation,” can only reinstitute the *effect* of long-repeated beliefs that are themselves without verified origin.

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<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Faulkner repeated and rearticulated this theory in the 1957 interview with *The Paris Review*, changing it slightly, just as Conrad insisted in a number of ways at different times that in finishing *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* he had become a writer.

Kartiganer writes that “At issue here is the whole question of what it means that these fictions should come to dwell in repetition—that they should describe the essential human act, and the essential narrative act, as the compulsion and craft of duplication: the return to lives already lived, acts already performed, tales already told” (23). Again, there is the *incident* and the *moment*, an action and the time and place at which one makes it subject to retelling. For Kartiganer, this dwelling in repetition “comprises a kind of double perception” by which an object can join a surrounding *cosmos*. “The past verifies the present, provides the doubling context that rescues it from singleness which, knowing only itself, knows nothing” (24). Doubling is argued to be a Kierkegaardian “repetition-forward” that draws towards organization and satisfaction. As I have been insisting, however, “rescue” in its Conradian inflection cannot be reduced to the verification of a more primary “whole” to which the single fragment, in repetition and recollection, is joined. Acoustical rescue is a rescue of a moment, a particular moment only, understood afterwards—not during the incident itself—such that the incident is not resolved, but becomes subject to questioning. It is heard differently and hearing after will be different. There is a ghosting of the incident, but not a verification. Mr. Compson himself seems to despartely turn to “the old virtues.” What are the “old virtues” if not that which sutures incidents because no other account is available? Quentin, we will find, becomes interested in another way of hearing that does not make recourse to those virtues.

If Quentin had previous been a listener, he and Shreve will tell the story of Sutpen again in 1909 in order to exorcise its burden upon Quentin, the burden that is the concomitant illness associated with “breathing the same air” as people long dead. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin drowns himself in 1910, suggesting that such exorcism is not, in the end, possible. He might take leave of his father’s sense of things, but he cannot take leave of being “born and bred” in the south. There is a kind of repetition that is more exacting in its force, its pressure upon those who live under it. History is, as Joyce might say, a “nightmare” from which these characters are trying to awaken. There is rescue, a kind of ethical and aesthetic gesture, and there is a burden that cannot be refuted. Faulkner crafts a narrative in which the two work together in complicated ways, in particular, at the level of hearing. As Faulkner had already begun to develop in his work with acoustical uncanny in “Mistral,” the wind being both in the narrator’s ear and from sometime long ago, the question of “history” ceases to belong in *Absalom, Absalom!* to the domain of the individual psyche or family alone. The problem of nation comes to the acoustical fore.

Sunquist writes that *Absalom, Absalom!* “brings to culmination...the several fratricidal dimensions of American’s national sin” (100). Attempting to discover how *Absalom, Absalom!* poses the back-drop to the events of *The Sound and the Fury*, taking place a year before, Sunquist argues that by ending not in Mississippi, but “an old abolitionist stronghold” in the New England room where Quentin reads a letter from his father (the letter that carries with it the very scent of wistaria air), Faulkner “precariously reunited [*Absalom, Absalom!*] to the unfulfilled vision of *The Sound and the Fury* by leading Quentin Compson through an agonizing rehearsal of Thomas Sutpen’s flawed design...and bringing him to the threshold of his suicide” (100). Quentin is, like Marlow, a character who haunts the Faulknerian world, for in at least one instance, he outlasts his death at twenty in *The Sound and the Fury*, “That Evening Sun” having him survive until the age twenty-four. In the manuscript version of Chapter Two of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner originally has his conversation with Mr. Compson in the summer of 1910—what would again have Quentin outliving his death—changing it in the course of revision to 1909. This change perhaps gestures not to Faulkner’s oversight, as Gerald Langford has it in his

manuscript annotations, but rather it is the effect of a careful insistence: there is an acoustical relation between the two works, the characters, their deaths, and experiences.

It is a relation that sounds out the radical thesis on history and identity that is *Absalom, Absalom!*. As we will find, some repetitions transgress the autonomy of individual bodies, linking fates that would not otherwise be linked. To work through the relationships between works, both published and unpublished, is to begin to work through Faulkner's theory of memory and identity. To argue for a certain form of "relation" between works in which the Compsons appear (this term "relation" should, for a moment, hang in provocative suspense, for Faulkner's work in its acoustics redefines the very *substance* of relatedness, filial, genealogical, and otherwise) is not, however, to argue for a retroactive reorganization by which stories that take place chronologically more prior can be made to explain what May Cameron Brown calls, in her account of "That Evening Sun," "the sense of doom which surrounds the Compsons in the rest of the cycle of stories which concern them" (Kuyk, Kuyk, Miller 35). When asked of Nancy's reappearance in *Requiem for a Nun*, the novel in which "the past is never past," Faulkner replied "These people belong to me and I have the right to move them about in time when I need them." It is his avowed resistance to facts that subverts "mere assumptions that Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha works must have created a coherent 'history'" (Kuyk, Kuyk, Miller 36). *Absalom, Absalom!* does not tell the "story" of the haunted, affective consciousness of Quentin that determines his death. It is not the story of a "doom" pre-determined ("everything," writes Jean-Paul Sartre of *The Sound and the Fury*, "has already happened" [*Sound* 267]). *Absalom, Absalom!* is rather of the divestiture of the violence of autonomy, the claim to *wholeness* grounding racial identity.

Again, Faulkner's way of writing as rehearing, and the character's ways of repeating the "moment" that does not "resolve" the incident, seem to converge. To augment Foucault's notion of discursive field, *Absalom, Absalom!* opens up as the acoustical field—neither motive nor "initiating subjectivity"—behind and around *The Sound and the Fury*, re-registering family voices that now sound out from within the nation. As I argued in Chapter Two, the acoustics of the novel and the echoic nature of the trope forces one into an alternative relationship between works, the *œuvre* functioning as haunting continuation. *The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!*, "Evangeline," Mistral," "That Evening Sun," and other stories are not "versions" of each other, but rather overtones or *registers* of what Rosa will call "the-might-have-been which is more than truth." It is a temporality of correspondences which registers past, present, and future without collapsing them into a simultaneity, or what Adorno calls music's "constellation of all its moments" (*Music* 141).

In this way, the musical and the acoustical intersect at the level of sonorous substance: each story is generated in a sonorous time of reverberation just as the fundamental tone sounds out in the overtone series that which make it possible, tones which ring out after the fundamental has sounded. Adorno writes of a passing series of sounds (he does not here employ the terms "melody," seeming to be interested in the substantive base of the melodious) at the beginning of Beethoven's sonata *Les Adieux*, or "The Goodbye," "that this most transient of things, the ineffable sound of disappearance, holds more hope of return than could ever be disclosed to an reflection on the origin and essence of the form-seeking sound" (*Music* 141). In this way, Adorno suggests, philosophy must become "micrological" in order to "come close to touching music's enigmatic character, without being to flatter itself that it had resolved it" (141). Literary history might come close to touching that same character insofar as the musical and the acoustical intersect at the level of substance: the stories that echo within and are regenerated by



*Absalom, Absalom!* must be approached micrologically, in what Conrad calls “the magic suggestiveness of music,” “a sinister resonance,” or “a continued vibration that hangs in the air and dwells on the ear long after the last night has been struck.” Indeed, Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics* that in music “the impulse animating the first bar will not be fulfilled at once, but only in further articulation.” “To this extent, . . . music is a critique of phenomenality, of the appearance that the substance is present here and now” (*Negative* 16).

In Nietzsche, however, this acoustical time of further articulation opens upon a theory of history at micrological level of causality. To engage in history as acoustical constellation is to cease to work backwards towards causes. Nietzsche writes in *The Twilight of the Idols* of a “shot” that speaks to the ways in which characters hear the fulcrumatic sound of the last shot of the war in *Absalom, Absalom!*:

To start from the dream: on to a certain sensation, the result for example of a distant cannon-shot, a cause which is subsequently foisted (often a whole little novel in which precisely the dreamer is the chief character). The sensation, meanwhile, continues to persist, as a kind of resonance: it waits, as it were, until the cause-creating drive permits it to step into the foreground—now longer as a chance occurrence but as a “meaning.” (*Twilight* 61)

The “error” of cause and effect *sound outs* in Faulkner’s intervention in the temporality of novelistic discourse and more precisely, his critique of what Foucault calls “historical analysis,” the movement backwards towards the “initiating subjectivity” as the hermeneutic origin of the event. In “Evangeline,” upon seeing the dead body of Bon, Judith poses to Henry a single word of assent, one that will become the refrain of *Absalom, Absalom!* and only parodically subscribes to a world organized cause and effect: “Yes. Yes. Of course. There must have been a last . . . last shot . . . so it could end.” Bon has been killed “by the last shot of the war” (*Collected* 591). Individual and national history coincide; that which ends Judith’s engagement, ends Bon’s life and the war itself.

As James had already criticized in the “The Art of Fiction,” the “incident” in the novel demands a beginning and an end, a *punctuation*; yet, as that moment is revised in *Absalom! Absalom!*, the shot will now *ring out*: “*That was all. Or rather, not all, since there is no all, no finish; it not the blow we suffer from the tedious repercussive anti-climax of it, the rubbishy aftermath to clear away from off the very threshold of despair. You see, I never saw him. I never seven saw him dead. I heard an echo, but not the shot*” (*Absalom* 121-123). Rosa will never see the body of Bon as “climax” or epiphany; yet, the shot that rings out for forty-three years as if itself the pull towards retelling, the desire to re-bind sound and source.

Faulkner invokes a critical hearing: “Eternal idols,” writes Nietzsche of his method of critique, “which are here touched with a hammer as with a tuning fork: there are no idols that are older, more assured, more puffed-up—and none more hollow.” Faulkner is taking such a hammer to racial identity, its vibrations destroying it from within.

#### *Lending a Voice to Suffering*

In both “Evangeline” and *Absalom, Absalom!*, Henry returns to the dark house to die, the house burning down in a fire set by Clytie. In “Evangeline,” however, the narrator is *there* to witness this event principally through hearing:

The negroes came up, the three generations of them, their eyeballs white, their open mouths pinkly cavernous . . . I could hear the negroes. They were making a long, concerted, wild, measured wailing, in harmonic pitch from the treble of the children to the soprano of the oldest woman, the daughter of the woman in the

burning house; they might have rehearsed it for years, waiting for this irrevocable moment out of all time....

I think I said that the sound had now passed beyond the outraged and surfeited ear. (*Uncollected* 607)

This surfeited ear, what Nietzsche might call the “evil ear” that “sounds out idols,” is attuned to and overwhelmed by excess. Wail and song collide, for the sound is with “harmonic pitch,” “treble,” and “soprano.” Zender understands Negro melody in Faulkner as sounding out from within a lost world which the white listener cannot join, a pastoral longing for reconciliation. In “Evangeline,” however, the ear of the narrator attunes itself to a violence that inheres to family; is not diminished in generation, but only chorally compounded, just as in *Light in August*, Hightower hears “the treble shouts of the generations.” There, the mixed race Joe Christmas has been lynched and the siren signaling his death will rise in “unbelievable crescendo, passing out of the realm of hearing” (465). The *outraged* ear, however, is within such a realm. It is the ear with which Quentin can hear no more as he rushes away from the scene of dialogue at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, shouting that he does not “hate the South.”

This act of hearing in “Evangeline” will be re-written to recur after Quentin fulfills Rosa’s wish that he take her to Sutpen’s Hundred where Henry, presumed dead, is still living. In its rewriting, Quentin is no longer there; he does not witness the house as it is burned down by Clytie, she too having inhumanly outliving a natural age, but he can suddenly “see” the event at he reads the letter from his father notifying him of Rosa’s death in New England. Though he sits at his desk with a book before him, such “seeing” is opposed to Hightower’s near hallucination of his lineage as he gaze from his window onto the town in *Light in August*, a secure vantage of observation: “Now in the final copper light of afternoon fades; now the street beyond the low maples and the low signboard is prepared and empty, framed by the study window like a stage” (466).<sup>59</sup> As Quentin reads the letter, the narrator repeats “He could see it” several times, as if allegorizing the reader’s own relationship to the work. In reading, Quentin is pulled into an audio-visual work of incantation: it is the synaesthetic zone of transformation in which I have been attempting, throughout this project, to locate the political moment of the aesthetic. There is no epiphany or idea, but a struggle within the senses themselves. While Hightower too had heard hallucinatory sounds, this scene, particularly its enharmonic relationship to rewriting, is an acoustical critique of the logic of the cause and effect, the micrological force of generation. The scene, as it appeared in “Evangeline” is rewritten and redirected away from the family to an alternative register. Jim Bond, Bon’s grandson and the product of V. Charles’ Bon vengeful marriage, cries out. As Quentin imagines it, the scene:

filled with roaring beyond which somewhere something lurked which bellowed, something human since the bellowing was human speech, even though the reason for it would not have seemed to be. ...and he, Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race, seeing it to now and howling with human reason now since now even he could have known what he was howling about. ...they could not even locate the direction of the howling anymore. They...held Miss Coldfield as she struggled: he (Quentin) could see her, them: he had not been there but he could see her, struggling, making no sound, foaming a little at the mouth, her face even in the sunlight lit by one last wild crimson reflection as the house collapsed and roared away, and there was only the sound of the idiot negro left. (*Absalom* 300-301)

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<sup>59</sup> This passage is perhaps one that interested Benjamin in being a dialectical image, past and present converging in a “moment of danger.”

Nancy's wail in "That Evening Sun," a story likely began just before *The Sound and the Fury* and thus part of the cluster of stories that contribute to its acoustical imaginary, sounded out "Like nobody had made it, like it came from nowhere and went nowhere, until it was like Nancy was not there at all." There is an absent listener, a lack of geographical location. The sound is "there," yet who hears it and where does it go? This problem seems to return us to the question of acoustical rescue, a burden now placed on the reader. Yet, the sound seems to repeat several times in different works. Is not the wail of Jim Bond the "same" sound, but this time the logic of filiation and generation being pushed to its undoing?

Such a wail is registered by "Evangeline." In this story, the sound of nature "sighs...into and out of" human speech, sighing and incanting, as from out of its own substance, Faulkner's first version of Henry's final dialogue with Quentin. The dialogue here collaborates and colludes with the so-called natural:

It was quite still. There was a faint constant sighing high in the cedars, and I could hear the insects and the mockingbird. Soon there were two of them, answering one another, brief, quiring, rising inflected. Soon the sighing cedars, the insects and the birds became one peaceful sound bowled inside the skull in monotonous miniature,...into and out of which shapes, fading, emerged fading and faded emerging:

"And you were killed by the last shot fired in the war?"

"I was so killed. Yes."...

"You depended on the war, and the war betrayed you too; was that it?"...

"What was wrong with that woman Henry? There was something the matter that was worse to you than the marriage. Was it the child?..." (*Uncollected* 605-606)

"Humanized," writes Zender of natural sound in early Faulkner, "it suggests the possibility that it is congruent which the hearer and responsive to his or her needs" (91). In this moment, the sounds of nature begin to hold a form of primary conversation that, while it will emerge from out of such sound, is no longer possible in the realm of human speech.<sup>60</sup> A biological discourse—the identity of the child, Bon—takes place in the accompaniment of natural sound. Yet the words that emerge from out of this soundscape are themselves a discourse of blood and natural right: natural antiphony, however, *will not sound in concert* with Henry's reasoning; the shapes of human discourse draw from nature their logic, yet are in imperfect correspondence with it; there is a voice of nature that will not "speak" the political as its ground—it is human made. With the howl of Jim Bond, however, the conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!* forces the reader to register the enharmony of the logic of biological race and chronology. As we will find, the way times moves in the novel is not separated from Faulkner's critique of race.

#### *Against Generation, or the Flash-Back Undone*

One must pursue the lines of filiation, Jim Bond's "origins," insofar as language accumulates around them. At the end of the novel, it is as if the family, the genealogical lines that sustain it, collapses into raw sound. The characters themselves struggle to create a coherent narrative of the Sutpen family and the conclusion of the novel is not only one of the family, but

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<sup>60</sup> As Faulkner revises his relationship to natural sound in the introductory section of *Absalom, Absalom!*, he recalls the anguished relation to sound in Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." For Whitman's speaker, however, "the song of my dusky demon brother" is fused with "the thousand responsive songs" that is poetry. "Singing all time, minding not time,/ While we two keep together." The ear of the boy is "translating the notes" of birdsong into human speech (which articulates the voice of God in response to Moses): "Here I am! Here!/ With this just sustain'd note I announce myself to you." In *Absalom, Absalom!*, human speech is fractured from romantic relatedness.

the enterprise of narrative *coherence* itself, what continually forces the novel into near illegibility at the level of language and the representation of time.

Jim Bond's father, Charles V. Bon, is the son of an octoroon and Charles Bon, himself the unrecognized son of Sutpen. As a child, after his father's death, V. Bon had been retrieved in New Orleans by Clytie, who brings the child to live at Sutpen's Hundred after Sutpen's death. In his conversation with Shreve at Harvard in 1909, Quentin will recall an earlier talk with his father in which he learns of V. Bon at the Sutpen cemetery ("Yes, I have had to listen too long," Quentin will continually think to himself, the story of V. Bon origins, as it is told through a multiplying chronotopes, registering what it is at once the problem of generation in the Compson family). As Mr. Compson's version of the story of V. Bon is recited by Quentin, the reader is thrown backward from the space and time of the dialogue with Shreve in New England to Jefferson; events are never witnessed, but only incanted, made to hinge upon the time and space of contemporary utterance in excess of what Forrer calls the novels "flashbacks."

Unlike a flashback, which in both literature and (classic narrative) cinema often claims to "return" to the time and place of the *fabula*, the reader is never allowed to lose the sensation (driven by the misunderstanding) that he or she is not fully "there," but rather in a present-becoming-past.<sup>61</sup> Narrative has not yet ceded its authority in the face of what it calls the "probably true enough;" yet the drama of Quentin's incantation before Shreve pulls backward for the reader as he recalls the voice of his own father who told him portions of the story he now relays to Shreve. From within that past, Quentin pulls back a second time in the face of his father's own storytelling, now seeing the ragged troops returning from the Civil War. "It seemed to Quentin he could actually see them... Then he thought *No. If I had been there I couldn't have seen it this plain*" (*Absalom* 155). Such "seeing" only emerges in storytelling, a troubling acoustical fringe surrounding the memory's claim to scenographic presence.

Faulkner's technique, flouting the presence of diegesis and the logic of narrative chronology, is, however, not exterior to the problem of race. As Mr. Compson speaks, he upholds the Emersonian dream of poetry to "repair the decay of things;" indeed, he references Beardsley and "the Irish poet, Wilde," his aesthetic sensibility tending towards the decadent self-generation. The three sons collide, Mr. Compson invoking both his own having-heard from his father ("your grandfather never knew") and Quentin's own hearing ("Quentin thought, thinking *Yes, I have had to listen to long*"). As Mr. Compson tells the story of V. Bon to Quentin, it is not clear if Quentin himself recites it to Shreve or if it is a purely interior voice of memory, what is a central confusion. Faulkner is forcing a time and subjectivity that cannot be organized insofar as such organization *depends* upon the logic of filiation, and therefore, race. The end of history is imagined by Mr. Compson to have been promised by V. Bon's face, a dream of escaping descent. He says:

"...this child with a face not old but without age, as if he had no childhood, but as if he had not been human born but instead created without agency of man or agony of woman and orphaned by no human being (your grandfather said you did not wonder what had become of the mother: ...who would not grow from one

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<sup>61</sup> French filmmaker and novelist Marguerite Duras is a most suggestive critic of the flash-back, particularly in *India Song*. Her screen-play, *Hiroshima mon amour*, and its realization by Alain Renais disrupt this logic of a verifiable return to the past and principally through sound. Sounds of the present scene of storytelling (dishes clanging in a café, voices murmuring) haunt the image of the past as it returns to the screen. It is interesting to note that both Godard and Resnais were reading Faulkner who was experiencing a huge swell in popularity in France in the 1950s and that Faulkner himself was writing screen-plays.

metamorphosis...to the next carrying along all the old accumulated rubbish-years which we call memory, the recognizable *I*, but changing from phase to phase as the butterfly changes once the cocoon is cleared, carrying nothing of what was into the what is, leaving nothing of what is behind, but eliding complete and intake and unresisting into the next avatar as the overblown rose or magnolia elides from one rich June to the next, leaving no bones, no substance, no dust of whatever dead pristine soulless rich surrender anywhere between sun and earth) but produced complete and subject to microbe.... (*Absalom* 159)

The romantic dream of self-regeneration—the end of history and memory. The face of V. Bon is idealized as the end of the “I” as such. Yet how does this projection become possible? It is possible only insofar as the child speaks no English and is with a “smooth ivory face.” And yet, he refuses this end of memory: he is in his “delicate clothes,” “the tragic burlesque of sons of Ham,” Clytie “sometimes scrubbing at him with repressed fury as if she were trying to wash the smooth faint olive tinge from his skin as you might watch a child scrubbing at a wall long after the epithet, the chalked insult has been obliterated” (*Absalom* 159-161). He is not allowed to sleep in the bed with Judith, but rather in the trundle, just above the servant pallet next to Clytie, Judith’s Negro sister (it is never made clear in the novel whether they know this of each other, an open secret of Sutpen’s slave concubinage).

As V. Bon sleeps between them in a *series* organized by skin, the child is imagined to hear to himself in “his despair louder than speech” Judith and Clytie’s thoughts, his consciousness being at their intersection, which, at the level of grammar, is the agonistic substance of both time and race: “*You are not up here in this bed with me, where through no fault nor willing of your own you should be, and you are not there on this pallet floor with me, where through no fault nor willing of your own you must and will be, not through any fault or willing of your own who would not what we cannot just as we will and wait for what must be*” (*Absalom* 161). He is placeless; he literally “fits” nowhere in the series. Yet he has acute grasp of the way time seems to support that displacement. There is no fault, there is no willing; yet there is nonetheless an “incident,” to return to Faulkner’s provocative theory of the novel. The problem of time in this novel, organized through movements backwards towards “fault” and forwards towards the “must and will be,” is at once the problem of race. That temporal slippage is the substance of the tragic.

Indeed, Ellison will later incant this same temporality when in the prologue to *Invisible Man*, listening to Louis Armstrong’s “What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue,” he will descend, “in the breaks” of the music, into the domain of slave ancestors to engage in a phantasmatic conversation: “I dearly loved my master, son.’... ‘He gave me many sons.’” ““You should have hated him,” the narrator replies. As if seeking the “fault” that might causally organize race (what did I do?), the narrator then says “A mistake was made somewhere.” The ancestor, as close as she is to the origin, cannot answer: “I done forgot son. It’s all mixed up” (*Invisible* 10-11). There is, as Mr. Compson insists in hearing V. Bon’s inner dialogue, no “doer” behind the “deed” of race; there is no fault, and yet there is punishment (such *hearing*, repeating the inner monologues of lost others, is itself, at the level of technique, an argument for the expropriatedness of the individual). “And your grandfather did not know either just which of them it was how told him that he was, must be, a negro, who could neither have hear yet nor recognised the term ‘nigger’, ...who had been born and grown up in a padded silken vacuum cell” (*Absalom* 161). His telling of the story of V. Bon’s retrieval by Judith is continually punctuated by “your grandfather did not know.” It is only in talking to Shreve that Quentin will

fasten upon Bon as having been Sutpen's own son. The son's knowledge, then, continually moves in excess of the father's own, foreclosing the former as "knowledge" by supplanting it in the movement of generations (until this logic, as I will return to, will be demystified by Quentin and Shreve's collaborative story of Sutpen's origins, reenacted from within the consciousness of Sutpen).

Jefferson came to know "what" V. Bon was when he found one day at a negro ball in a cabin, threatening to kill a group of men. Mr. Compson tells the story of Colonel Compson's arriving at the court to hear the justice, Jim Hamblett, already making his speech of indictment against V. Bon. Hamblett is invoking the specter of war and "The very future of the South" as it depends upon in the "pride and integrity" of each race. "you, I say, a white man, a white—" (*Absalom* 165). Hamblett's oration then ceases as he looks at V. Bon; he was "looking at the prisoner now but saying 'white' again even while his voice died away as if the order to stop the voice had been shocked into short circuit, 'What are you? Who and where did you come from?'"

As Peter Brooks writes of this break, "V. Bon in fact presents a problem of categorization: Hamblett, following the vocation, 'you, a white man,' turns back on his words to find the sign he has used subverted in its referent" (*Plot* 298). Yet, the problem, as articulated by Hamblett, an agent of the law, is one of *filiation*—"who and where did you come from." The novel is actively unraveling chronology insofar as it grounded in the same *logic* that organizes race. Yet, such an unraveling will reach its limit in Mr. Compson's dream of the end of history, that which cannot be unraveled. As V. Bon fights, he describes, there was "—no cause, no reason for it; none to ever know exactly what had happened what curses and ejaculations which might have indicated what it was that drove him and only your grandfather to fumble, grope, grasp the presence of that furious protest, that indictment of heaven's ordering" (*Absalom* 164). The indictment of ordering is both at the level of discourse and the level of story, their shared logical ground. Colonel Compson helps V. Bon leave Jefferson: "you can be whatever you will' ...then he thought *I don't even know whether he wants to hide it*" (*Absalom* 165).

The technique of representing interior voice itself subverts the logic of filiation, for no speech in this novel is fully inward, Faulkner calling upon italics as if to make visible, at the level of writing, the *collusion* between what is called "inward" and its conditioning exterior. What is called "consciousness," is peopled and lined by force and anterior logic. After leaving Jefferson, V. Bon will later return with his wife in vengeance, "flouting" her blackness in honky-tonks where he is taken to be a white man. As it is described by Mr. Compson, his fury is against *seriality* itself and emerges as a description of Faulkner's temporal techniques, the novel unfolding in and as the reader's (mis)understanding—V. Bon's "furious and incomprehensible and apparently reasonless moving, progression, ... dragging her behind him, toward what and from what, driven by what fury which would not let him rest, she did not know" (*Absalom* 167). The two will bear their idiot son Jim Bond, who, with sound and fury, will give testimony to the burning edifice of Sutpen's Hundred at the end of the novel.

The sound of Jim Bond—insofar as the conclusion of the novel coincides with a certain logic pushed to its own undoing—gives testimony to the "flaw" of Sutpen's design. His "flaw," a marriage with a Negro woman in Haiti that produces Bon, forecloses "fine grandsons and great-grandsons springing as far as the eye could reach." As Quentin and Shreve imagine it in their recreation of the dilemma, any recognition of Bon would be, [Quentin] says in the voice of Sutpen, "[to] destroy my design with my own hand." By the end of the novel, no structure exists to authorize the existence of Jim Bond, leaving the sound to itself with no where to go.

*Lawless Sound*

There is, Sunquist suggests in his seminal work *The House Divided*, a suggestive analogy between Sutpen and Lincoln who, in his 1858 House Divided speech, asserts that “‘a house divided against itself will not stand.’ I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.” Abolition brings what Sunquist calls “a crisis of amalgamation,” a fear of miscegenation to which Sutpen’s “flaw” is already one testament (Sunquist 104-5). Just after Quentin’s vision of Jim Bond’s howl, Shreve will interject: “‘The South,’ Shreve said. ‘The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves by years and years and years.’” As Sunquist argues, however, “because not only the South but an entire nation may be said to have lost its innocence in the Civil War, its most fratricidal conflict, that flaw is larger than Sutpen himself can reveal” (102). The *house*, Faulkner seems to suggest, is already divided at its origin, founded on a *sui generis* self-circularity that exceeds all logic and yet is its ground.

In 1857, the circularity of the law had foreclosed the claim of Dred Scott against the State of Missouri: he could not stand before the law to argue for his freedom since, un-free, he was not a citizen and therefore without claim on the federal court to argue for freedom. His was a *logos* that was, as Austin might say, a “nonsense” speech-act in relationship to the *nomos*, without a “proper” space of hearing in the house of the law. As Lincoln said of the decision, “Judge Douglas is delighted to have them decided to be slaves, and *not human enough to have a hearing*, even if they were free, and thus left subject to the forced concubinage of their masters,” what Lincoln called “the very state of case that produces nine-tenths of all the mulattoes—all the mixing of blood in the nation” (Sunquist 103). As Bon says in his love letter to Judith, written from the front of the Civil War—a letter that is, as I will return to, a fragmentary interruption in the *logos* as it moves between fathers and sons—there is a fusillade that rings out because “no other space under heaven will receive it” (*Absalom* 102). “The house of fiction is with innumerable windows,” writes James, yet in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the house of fiction is an acoustical archive of the dejected sonorous material of the *logos* itself insofar as the Greek *legein* is at once to “shelter.” Recalling Benjamin’s notion of the novel as heir, there are sounds and voices which will not be received, the novel invoking the literary as their only available *rescue* (as with Douglass’ experience of writing of slave song), an enterprise that must pull itself into repetition if it is to continue to house that which is without hearing before the law.

In that way, “consent” is precisely that which Sutpen disallows Rosa, he leaving her “no interval” for reply in the moment he proposes that they couple so as to produce a white son. It was no proposal but rather a:

*decree, a serene and florid boast like a sentence (ay, and delivered in the same attitude) not to be spoken and heard but to be read carved in the bland stone which pediments a forgotten and nameless effigy. I do not excuse it. I claim no brief, no pity; who did not answer ‘I will’ no because I was not asked, because there was no place, no niche, no interval for me to reply. Because I could have made one. I could have forced that niche myself if I had willed to—a niche not shaped to fit mild ‘Yes’ but some blind desperate female weapon’s frenzied slash whose very gaping wound had cried ‘No! No!’ and ‘Help!’ and ‘Save me!’ No, no brief, no pity who did not even move, who sat beneath that hard oblivious childhood ogre’s hand ... (Absalom 132)*

Sutpen’s truncation of the interval between speaking and listening is grounded in an injury that will only be revealed by Quentin’s version of the story later in the novel. He must, for reasons

that are not yet disclosed, erect a voice of pure decree as if exacting revenge upon a substitute: he himself was at one time refused direct address. Nevertheless, while Rosa here refutes saying “yes,” an alternative overtone of “yes” will become the refrain of her speech to Quentin: “Yes,” she will repeat, in a pulsating rhythm whose primary force is to carve a space that is “not shaped to fit a mild ‘Yes’” (“a shape to fill a lack,” as Addie Bundren will call the *logos* in *As I Lay Dying*). It is an interval that cannot be circumscribed by the circularity of the law. Molly Bloom’s soliloquy ends *Ulysses* with the refrain “Yes, I said, yes, yes,” Joyce noting in a letter to Frank Budgen that “The last word (human, all too human) is left to Penelope.” He describes it as “the female word,” a word of “acquiescence and the end of all resistance.” Yet, the voice of chapter five—Rosa’s chapter—particularly as it evades understanding, is precisely the intervallic voice that stretches, prolongs, and carves out a space and time of answerability and audibility through *poesis*. In Rosa’s telling of the story, identity is dissolved. “*I lived out not as a woman, a girl, but rather at the man which I perhaps should have been*” (*Absalom* 116). She, Judith, and Clytie become fused within her imaginary and at the level of trope.

Rosa’s story is precisely the a-filial amalgamation that Sutpen’s design cannot stand—“Yes,” a yes that invokes the enharmonic spaces of “the might-have-been which is more than truth.” Indeed, in “Evangeline,” Clytie “is” or rather *registers* Rosa, just as Benjy is Jim Bond; it is an acoustical amalgamation, sounds moving from body to body with a certain lawlessness. Adorno writes, in critique of transcendence, that “the need to lend a voice to suffering is the condition of all truth.” In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner composes a narrative that can only be described as lending a voice to suffering; voices speak not in-themselves (they speak out against such logic of autonomy), but rather “on-loan.” Indeed, Rosa’s voice is described as being occupied by Sutpen, she speaking “as if it were the voice which he haunted where a more fortunate one would have had a house” (*Absalom* 4). It is that “lending a voice” that gives to *Absalom, Absalom!* its collapsing temporality, bringing the genre of the novel to its limit.

When retelling the story of Sutpen as he once heard it in “Evangeline,” Don enters a mantic state, as will Quentin when he listens to Rosa’s haunted voice and will again when he tells the story to Shreve. It is a state which, recalling Marlow voices as it “moves through his lips from the past,” seems to incant the excessive registers of “happen,” that which a narrative cannot tell if it is to remain self-identical or logically whole and undiverted in time. As I will return to in the conclusion, it is precisely that illogical divergence, the enharmonic registers of eventuality, that make Rosa’s voice among the most challenging of Faulkner’s oeuvre, approaching, as it does, the phenomenology of music.

As Don speaks in “Evangeline” nearly every phrase begins with “she told me how.” His refrain, as refrain, resides precisely at the line between fiction and reality, past and present, insisting upon that division because it is now only sustainable at the grammatical level. Don tells as story that is not precisely a “story,” but a loosened acoustical fragment. There is nothing for the reader to understand, only to hear. He says:

“And she told me about the slow, scuffling feet coming down the stairs (she was hidden then, in a closet beneath the staircase) hearing the slow feet move across overhead, and pass out of the door and cease. But she didn’t come out, even then. It was late afternoon when she came out and found herself locked in the empty house. And while she was trying to get out she heard the sound from upstairs and she began to scream and run.... ‘You dreamed it,’ the mother said. ‘what is in that house belongs to that house. You dreamed it, you hear, nigger?’”  
(*Uncollected* 597)



Whose memory is this? Indeed, as “Evangeline” unfolds, certain incidents are narrated as memories by the narrator—a black woman laid in the dark and was heard screaming—yet there are also impossible memories to some degree. They are floating, like the sounds themselves, belonging to no one. Yet, insofar as this scene will repeat again in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the acoustical memory now located in Rosa, a white woman, Faulkner’s experiments in the temporality of acoustics cannot be separated from his critique of the logic of identity. Such a temporality pertains both to how acoustical fragments get loosened from a coherent narrative and then loosened from the work itself. It is in hearing how the sounds move between works and characters that Faulkner’s critique makes itself felt. In listening to *Absalom, Absalom!*, one hears voices that are lent, yet is not precisely anyone’s to lend, expropriated at its origin.

“Evangeline” was unpublished and reads as an effort to keep writing, composed as it was in the agonizing period just before the swell that is *The Sound and the Fury*; yet it is evident that an expropriation is taking place at the level of the writer’s acoustical imaginary. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the primal scene of overhearing in “Evangeline” will now “belong” to Rosa, as she runs up the stairs to see the dead body to which the ringing shot must be attached:

*That was all. Or rather, not all, since there is not all, no finish; it not the blow we suffer from but the tedious repercussive anti-climax of it, the rubbishy aftermath to clear away from off the very threshold of despair. You see, I never saw him. I never even saw him dead. I heard an echo, but not the shot; I saw a closed door, but did not enter it....(Absalom 121)*

The trope of unseen-sound moves from Clytie in “Evangeline” to Rosa “in that barren hall with its naked stairs... where an echo spoke which was not mine but rather that of the lost irrecoverable might-have-been which haunts all houses” (*Absalom* 109). The echo, what I have called after Benjamin, the murmur of the past, belongs to no one who might be seen or even identified; yet, is not without a certain force of calling Rosa. Towards what is she called? Clytie, re-trope by *Absalom, Absalom!*, will block Rosa’s way as she attempts to see Bon’s dead body—“take your hand off me, nigger!,” Rosa shouts, asserting the place where one body stops and another begins:

*Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead....I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, which a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman’s flesh. Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both:--touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am’s private own.... I crying not to her, to it; speaking to it through the negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage...because we both knew it was not to her I spoke: ‘Take your hand off me nigger!’ (Absalom 111-112)*

This scene repeats twice in the novel, in 1865 and again in 1909 when Rosa and Quentin return to Sutpen’s Hundred to confront Clytie who has been hiding Henry as he waits for death. It is there that Quentin presumably learns the truth about Bon’s parentage, not from Henry, but from Clytie who, as Shreve says, “didn’t tell you in so many words because she was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father too.” In both instances, the acoustical registers what words do not, words being organized by that very “citadel” and “decorous ordering” refuted at the level of sound.

*Suggestiveness, Interstices, and Incitement*

Sunquist argues that the antagonism between Rosa and Clytie must be considered in terms of Rosa's "failed courtships, one in imagination and one in fact," one with Bon and the second with Sutpen (114). Rosa articulates a desire for both in the "re-created courtship" that is her passionate account to Quentin; yet, Sunquist insists upon the problem of miscegenation:

it is assumed [by critics] that Rosa suspects nothing of Bon's mixed parentage. Because is it the strategy of *Absalom, Absalom!* to intimate but then suppress its critical information until the very end, and even then to reveal it only in the dramatic, self-reflexive mask of tacit recognition, however, the true torment of Rosa's courtship by Sutpen may only be explicable if we assume—as the scene [at the stairs] suggests—that Rosa herself, perhaps vicariously, understands the full dimensions of Bon's tragedy as well as Sutpen's. The "debacle" represented by Clytie's "pigmentation"...is the debacle of the slavery and the war itself...; but it is also the debacle of miscegenation, which the novel so continually engages as the curse and sin that brings Sutpen's design...to collapse. (114)

One must note the force of the novel's *suggestiveness* as it powerfully mobilizes Sunquist's account and reorganization of the significance of the event at the stairs. What Rosa confronts at the stairs the "sexual crimes" of slavery, that which makes Clytie, as an unrecognized daughter of Sutpen, "neither slave nor free (neither before nor after the war) and makes Charles Bon neither slave nor son and brother" (Sunquist 114-115). Sunquist makes the central point that such (un)recognition organizes the novel itself:

the psychological tragedy Rosa's failed dream represents must be seen to exist in the *interstices of the novel's action* and its assumptions about the crisis of consanguinity; for it seems to gather together and swallow up the grief Ellen and Judith never express, and therefore to *transfer into the atmosphere* of volatile fantasy the one passion in actuality Faulkner seems *unable or unwilling to articulate* [emphasis added]. (114)

It is the "burgeoning moment of passion held forever on the brink of fulfillment" between Judith and Bon that perhaps never occurred in actuality (Sunquist 114). Such interstices of the novel's action are its acoustical substance, the excess of "tacit recognition" and "not saying in so many words," insofar as the reader only gains an understanding of Bon's plight in particular by the novel striking "the resonant strings of remembering" or what Conrad calls "the magical suggestiveness of music." Narrative continually operates on the plane of suggestion or what Rosa calls "the over-reach of despair itself." Such "over-reach" is that what direct discourse cannot say alone. There is an over and under-reach of the semantic.

"Suggestion" is a confusion between two psyches and agents at the level of language, an action or articulation by one that originates in a soft compulsion from without. The impulse to act or speak begins in the voice or gesture of one only to be fulfilled by another, suggestion being, as Freud writes in *The Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, an "attitude of *rapport*." The acoustics of such *rapport* relates to how knowledge is circulated both in the novel and for the reader. For example, Mr. Compson at times borders on recognition of Bon's identity. He seems, to know of Bon, to not know, or only know later through Quentin; it is unclear. Yet, at issue is how Faulkner *suspends* such knowing by articulating the plot through suggestion, what is somewhere between knowing and not-knowing, direct thesis and its excess in and as readerly intuition. As Rosa cries at the stairs, the referent is continually seized from understanding and disarticulated. She cries "*perhaps not aloud, not with words (and not to Judith, mind: perhaps I*

knew already, on the instant I entered the house and saw the face which was at once both more and less than Sutpen, perhaps I knew even then what I could not, would not must not believe)—and I cried “And you too? And you too, sister, sister?” (*Absalom* 112). As Sunquist writes, this moment “intimates the secret of Bon’s blood” and “charged with ambiguous power...suggests not only that Clytie, like Rosa, may be vicariously in love with Bon, but also that those possibilities reveal two further ones that constitute...what the novel holds in passionate suspense: that Bon is Clytie’s ‘brother’ and that Bon is ‘black’” (113). Does not Sunquist as a reader struggle to attach the trope ‘sister’ both to its referent and to the proper body? Again, there is an epiphany in the visage as it bears traces of race as had the photograph in “Evangeline.” Yet, Faulkner’s use of parenthetical voices, which sometimes extend into near grammatical nonsense, deliberately sunders direct objects from their agents, and verbs from the subject of action in order to cast in the reader an acoustical atmosphere of cognitive ambiguity, one which undermines referentiality and the logic that it ossifies. Conrad had experimented with such suspense with “Wait!” in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, sealing the errancy of the trope in the moment Archie seals upon the face of Wait as black. Yet, Faulkner, in refusing to allow the trope to be appropriated by referential discourse, collapses the recognized order of biological race. The proper designation, “brother” and “black,” missing referents, are not uttered aloud, but the reader is forced to hear, at every *turn* in the novel, both these missing referents and the desire that sustains them in their negated potential.

Such secrets are continually registered and redirected by the novel’s negotiation of the acoustical, *moving* by suggestion, not semantic assertion. In both 1865 and 1909, Rosa strikes away the hand of Clytie; yet, there is a curious resonance with the scene at the stairs as it occurs in “Evangeline.” Rosa confronts some force in what Sunquist calls the “form of Clytie;” yet, at the level of acoustics, form and the racialized body it secures is penetrated, mobile. There is continually an antagonism between two modalities of novelistic recognition. The scene at the stairs speaks in two registers at once, dramatized in the reader’s acoustic consciousness by the conflict between what is not quite speech to Quentin (critics have identified Rosa’s chapter as free indirect discourse insofar as it is Quentin’s consciousness negotiating the speech of Rosa) and Rosa’s direct speech to Clytie: “*I crying not to her, to it; speaking to it through the negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage...because we both knew it was not to her I spoke: ‘Take your hand off me nigger!’*” It is as if the reader must develop two alternative voices, punctuated by the exclamation. All that is uttered before the colon is precisely that which cannot be recognized by the “decorous ordering” upon which a diegesis depends; it cannot be recognized by the world organized by race as they each articulate and insist themselves in the phrase, “Take your hand off me nigger.” The reader must develop the registers of the inner reader-voice for a single character. Such a voice returns to my argument for a specificity of the reading experience, literature inciting what phenomenal listening perhaps cannot. The logocentric order of *direct discourse* is an order of hearing that is most readily available to one in the circuit of the auto-affectation: Rosa denies all relationality, denies the affectivity of the “touch” that is surrounding her shout as its displacement.

The voice of Rosa is a “lyric” voice that exceeds what Dorothy Hale calls the “unsayable” in *As I Lay Dying* (12). Her voice is not simply marked by a division between the “private” and the normative values of the “public;” at stake is the issue of what is being incited for the reader as Faulkner brings two modalities of discourse into conflict, all that is “said” before Rose recites in direct discourse the injunction against Clytie’s touch. Rosa’s glossic shout to Clytie negates the affectivity of a touch that cannot be recognized by the order of discourse insofar as it secures,

repeats, and entrenches identity. Her shout is the only available mode of speech in the diegesis as it is has been organized by identity. In a way that direct discourse cannot communicate, for it is premised upon the logic of distinction, the two meet “*as though we spoke to one another free of the limitations of speech and hearing*” (*Absalom* 111). Conrad had carved out the excess of colonial speech in sounds of the jungle as they sounded out alongside of direct discourse. There was what I called an “accompaniment” to speech that sounds out its displaced and negated registers, the unreason of its reason. In his study of the voice of Rosa, Patrick O’Donnell understands the meeting at the stairs as occurring in the real outside of the symbolic. “This enmeshing of identity in the real gives to twinned urgencies: the desire for a separate, fully ‘integrated’ identity and the concomitant desire to transcend history through the merging of bodies//identities in a continuous process of disarticulation and rearticulation” (94). The very body of Clytie signifies “the irrevocable American past of slavery that separated white bodies from black bodies,” her presence being “the sign of perversity” (95). One might argue that Rosa’s shout is one which occurs in the symbolic, claiming to foreclose the amalgamation between one “central I-Am’s private own” and another. In the face of amalgamation, Rosa must invoke race as the available taxonomy of division.

The voice of Rosa, modulated by Quentin’s consciousness, registers that which exceeds Clytie as an addressee: Rosa speaks to some other force that is “with no-hand on no-strings,” as Darl describes in *As I Lay Dying*, organizing the encounter and thereby determining it, before the two have even entered the scene, as the inimical encounter between autonomy and its enemy. She sounds out just as Benjy in a passage that could have come from his consciousness: “*I was crying not to someone, something, but (trying to cry) though something, through that force, that furious yet absolutely rocklike and immobile antagonism that had stopped me*” (AA 110). The cry is heard by the reader, the cry forcing itself into the prose that encounters the limits of grammar. That force behind action—what Quentin calls “the old iron traditions”—is only registered enharmonically.

#### *A Minor Literature: The Song of Rosa*

The reader learns that Rosa calls Quentin to her office in order to ask him to accompany her to Sutpen’s Hundred to confront the “something” that has been living in that house. Yet, Faulkner renders that “day of listening” twice, first in chapter one and again in chapter five. In the second version, the reader will not only be told what had been missing from its first rendition, but he or she will be confronted with a voice that does not appear to speak directly to Quentin nor does it appear to inhabit a time proper to direct discourse.

Such a temporality of storytelling was one towards which Conrad was working in *Lord Jim*. At the time of the novel’s publication, critics remarked that Marlow’s monologue on the veranda surpassed the limits of human hearing and speech, Marlow not pausing “for a sip of water.” While reviewers critiqued Conrad for lack of verisimilitude, it is clear from his Author’s Note that he was aware of his radical gesture, though he jocosely remarks that the monologue could have been read aloud in four hours. Conrad was writing this novel between 1896 and 1900: there was no other available model for comparison, his novel of storytelling being a thoroughly modernist gesture that exceeded Victorian realism and a mimetic representation of the speaking voice. If Dickens stories had been read aloud in public hearings, Marlow’s voice quite literally exceeded performance and “real” enunciation. Conrad could have continued working with the third-person narrative style as he had begun writing it in the first manuscript, “Tuan-Jim: A Sketch.” The novel begins in that mode only to radically break. As I argued in Chapter Two, by retaining both narrative modes, Conrad insists upon the reader receiving Marlow as a voice in

relief, his spoken narrative emerging as an interruption of omniscience. The novel as genre breaks, moving inexplicably in another direction.

This differential between two ways of writing and thinking is evoked by the movement away from mode of narration to another. Conrad moves away from a value system implied and sustained by the omniscient mode of narration, the “facts” desired by the court as Jim is on the witness stand. In shifting to the incantational voice of Marlow on the veranda, there is a contact between voice and writing, a vocal-writing or writing-voice, that addresses itself to an alternative hearing capacity of the reader. Jim is one for whom “there are no words for the kinds of things I would like to say;” that which he cannot articulate to “the men who wanted facts” in the absolute language of cause and effect might find a hearing in the voice of Marlow *in* its contact with writing. The readers are asked by Conrad to “rescue” the subject of Marlow’s story—Jim himself—and receive him into their fellowship as “one of us.” As a Pouletian phenomenology of reading (a consciousness being “on-loan”), suggests, the writing-voice works upon the reader, claiming a space where the form of belonging Conrad was driving towards might be possible.

I have posed the question of what it means for Conrad’s extra-territorial techniques to become one beginning of a modernist trajectory. As I have been insisting, *Absalom, Absalom!* would not be possible without Marlow, and that is nowhere more evident than in the voice of Rosa. In its contact with writing, Conrad’s predicament produced what Deleuze might call “a minor literature.” It is a literature “that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (*Kafka* 17). A minor literature “calls out in [its] solitude to *another science*.” (*Kafka* 17) In that way, the voice of Marlow, as Rosa, is the voice of another consciousness, another *sensibility*.

As Deleuze writes of Kafka, what interests the writer is “a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to its own abolition—a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words—a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying.” As Rosa describes herself as “crying out,” the voice of Rosa must be heard as a deterritorialized sound; it must be understood from within its effects upon the consciousness of the reader. Working within a psychoanalytic model, O’Donnell calls her voice “the repressed material” of Sutpen’s dynasty. Rosa’s voice, as it speaks within the semiotic *chora*, defies phallogocentrism and moves in the spaces between both reason and logic, fulfilling an otherwise unfilled desire. Writing of Rosa, O’Donnell argues that “while voice expresses the desire for the merging of bodies, the body serves as a text that demarcates the consequences and failures of desiring,” such that “a history of desire...becomes material, ‘real’ history” (95). Such material history “returns” at the level of voice, O’Donnell suggests, and is registered by their figurations of the body as a motile, fluid and changing substance. “[A]ll bodily functions...give the lie to the hegemonic unity of the ‘individual’ and signify ‘the fragile limits of the speaking subject, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless ‘primacy’ constituted by primal repression’” (97).

How is one to hear the cry as itself a bodily function? It insinuates itself into the written work and, given Faulkner’s resistance to describing it, resists figuration. The cry thereby materially calls upon the hearing of the reader as the domain of its articulation. In *The Sound and the Fury*, no omniscient narrative arrives to describe the sound of Benjy’s bellow: the reader knows he cries, as I have suggested, because its presence is remarked upon by the other characters who tell him to “hush up.” Benjy feels it erupt from within himself and the reader is

forced to hear this gap in narrative. As Derrida writes of the cry as heard by the one crying, it violates the auto-affection or “hearing-(understanding)-oneself-speak,” for such a “system requires that it be heard and understood immediately by whoever emits it.” To hear oneself speak is not to hear oneself cry, Derrida suggests:

[To speak] produces as signifier which seems not to fall into the world, outside the ideality of the signified, but to remain there sheltered—even in the moment that it attains the audiophonic system of the other—within the pure interiority of auto-affection. It does not fall into the exteriority of space, into what one calls the world, which is nothing but the outside of speech. Within so-called “living” speech, the spatial exteriority of the signifier seems absolutely reduced. It is in the context of this possibility that one must pose the problem of the cry—of that which one has always excluded, pushing it into the area of animality or of madness, like the myth of the inarticulate cry—and the problem of speech (voice) within the history of life. (*Grammatology* 166)

One cries out in pain and in pleasure and it can both curiously be addressed to someone and to no one, a sounding out in a contact between spirit and matter. The cry is at the center of Benjy’s experience and yet it cannot be understood by him even as he emits it. It is continually negotiated as a strange sound both from himself and from elsewhere.

Faulkner explains that *The Sound and the Fury* had begun in 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.” An unpublished manuscript, “Twilight,” dated April 1927, is the story to which Faulkner refers. It begins within the narrating consciousness of Benjy and with it, a world of referents to which the reader has no access. He is told “to hush up that moaning.” As Faulkner writes of the beginnings of the story, “then the idea struck me to see how much more I could have got out of the idea of the blind, selfcenteredness of innocence, typified by children, if one of those children had been truly innocent, that is, an idiot. So the idiot was born.” While this story is likely one origin of the novel, an unpublished Quentin-narrated manuscript, “Never Done No Weeping When You Wanted To Laugh,” later revised and published as “When That Evening Sun Go Down,” and then “That Evening Sun” (1931) perhaps led Faulkner to *The Sound and the Fury*’s second narrator, Quentin (Morrison). After beginning in the consciousness of Quentin as an adult, the narrative of “That Evening Sun” radically breaks or “regresses” to the space and time of recollection, to Quentin at nine-years old. The story is now suddenly narrated from within the child consciousness; the reader is only able to infer the events of the story through the child’s overhearing the talk of adults. Nancy, the reader is able to gather, is a cook living in a Negro cabin on the Compson property. She believes that her husband Jesus, though he cannot be found anywhere, is waiting to kill her and emits her sound in fear. At the end of the story, Mr. Compson indifferently searches in the bush for Jesus and tries to convince her that she need not be afraid; no one is there. The story ends with no conclusion and does not return to the original scene of adult narration that might suture the events. Faulkner leaves the reader in the cabin where Nancy believes she is waiting for death, the sounds she makes never being fully explained.<sup>62</sup> The story is a radical experiment in narrating from within a consciousness.

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<sup>62</sup> For the reader of Faulkner’s opus, one has every reason to believe that Jesus is not there to kill Nancy, since she is recurs in *Requiem of a Nun* (1951), alive in the 1930s. In Faulkner’s lectures delivered at the University of Virginia, when asked about her “disconcerting resurrection,” he states that the two are, indeed, the same character. As Kuyk,

No conclusive evidence exists that might decisively date which manuscript was written first or to verify that “Never Done No Weeping When You Wanted to Laugh” was begun after *The Sound and the Fury*’s publication. The central force of this story is the uncanny crying of the Negro cook, Nancy, heard by Quentin as a child: “One night we waked up hearing it sound...It was like singing and it wasn’t like singing, like the sounds that Negroes make.” In a 1957 interview, Faulkner writes of “an image or some memory” as it provides the impetus for his works. While he would avow the origin for *The Sound and the Fury* being the image of a little girl climbing up a pear-tree to look into the window of her grandmother’s funeral, in both “Twilight” and the published novel, it is the associative hearing-sense of Benjy—hearing the word “caddie” as the name of his dead sister, “Caddy”—and the sound of his suffering, moaning under some force or memories that the reader has no means of accessing, that are most continuous substance between of the first paragraphs of “Twilight” and those of the completed novel. A crucial literary-historical point is to be made at the site of the acoustic exterior of narrative. As one reads the stories Faulkner was working on before he began *The Sound and the Fury*, in particular “A Justice,” “That Evening Sun,” and “Twilight,” the last of which effectively begins the novel, one confronts an overdetermined acoustical material, to be followed in its registers and not in its chronology. It is, we have already begun to find, a suggestive means of negotiating the materiality of the voice of Rosa.

As Faulkner described of this period after the first version of *Flags in the Dust* was rejected for publication, “I believed then that I would never be published again. I had stopped thinking of myself in publishing terms” (Blotner *Faulkner* 220). Indeed, there is something of these short stories—a minor literature—that resists reading in the strict sense, as would *The Sound and the Fury* itself. “If *Flags in the Dust* marked a Balzacian moment,” writes Porter, “opening up an infinite social and historical array of narrative possibilities, *The Sound and the Fury* marks a Flaubertian moment, revealing a Faulkner who was finding the means for controlling the virtually unlimited resources of language” (*Faulkner* 38). It is a novel in which Faulkner “mounts to cope with the flood of imaginative energy released by his turn back into his move private and painful memories” and a “treacherous psychological regression” (2005, 38-39). “His imagination now required a new form of narrative” (2005, 38).

While this new form owes to his negotiation of time and narrating consciousness, there is a central work of sonic material that takes place between 1926 and 1929, particularly if “Never Done No Crying When You Wanted To Laugh” was composed around the time of “Twilight” and if it opened up the possibility of Quentin as a narrator (Faulkner realized at some point that he should like to tell the same story of *The Sound and the Fury* from three different perspectives). At issue in “That Evening Sun” is how Quentin attempts to describe and organize the sonorous object he hears by means of available categories, singing, speech, and sound. Nancy’s sound evades these categories, sounding out in their interstices: within them, Faulkner attempts to register an affective space of memory that is not reducible to the domains of word and event. Such a space is evoked in and as the acoustic sensibility of the reader listening to the sound, drawing from the resources of his or her sonorous concrete memory. The reader is doubly

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Kuyk, and Miller note, this return has lead many Faulkner critics to conclude that Nancy’s fears in “That Evening Sun” are foolish, that Faulkner provides the conclusion to the story in *Requiem* by writing of her once again—she is alive; Jesus never arrived. Yet, it is a novel in which Faulkner will make one of his most pressing claims, that “the past in never gone, in fact, it’s not even past.” *The Sound and the Fury* has Quentin already dead in 1914, the year in which “That Evening Sun” begins, Quentin having committed suicide in the earlier work in 1910. This death and return of characters suggests that Faulkner was aiming to represent something that exceeds the bounds and dictates of characterization and the individual life.

removed by the narrative voice itself, struggling to understand the utterances of a child who does not have the capacity to bring to articulate expression his experience.

How is one to to understand what happened to Nancy in this regard, her story only being inferable through the child's overhearing? Nancy is perhaps a prostitute, for Quentin remembers hearing others in the town tell the story of Nancy's teeth being knocked out by the white Baptist deacon, Mr. Stoval, after Nancy yells "When you going to pay me, white man?" Quentin hears Nancy's husband, Jesus, scoff at the "watermelon" under her dress. She replies, "it never come off your vine, though," yet Caddy, Quentin's sister, cannot understand the trope, asking "what vine?" Exposing his violence to the reader, Jesus replies, "I can cut down the vine it did come off of." "What makes you want to talk like that before this chillen?" Nancy says. Faulkner emphasizes that the children hear, but do not understand symbolic language. Mishearing and misunderstand cling to both speech and narration, parodying the uni-vocal symbolic register in which the adult narrator begins the story. It is somewhere in the intervals of the symbolic that Nancy sounds out:

Nancy whispered something. It was like oh or no, I don't know which. Like nobody had made it, like it came from nowhere and went nowhere, until it was like Nancy was not there at all; that I had looked so hard at her eyes on the stairs that they had got printed on my eyeballs, like the sun down when you have closed your eyes and there is no sun. "Jesus," Nancy said. Like this Jeeeeeeeeeeeeeesus, until the sound went out, like a match or a candle does. (*Collected* 296)

Quentin says to Caddy, "It's the other Jesus she means." There is a sonorousness of the word that allows Quentin to infer that Nancy does not mean her husband, Jesus.

As with "Wait" in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, Faulkner emphasizes the *ambiguity* of hearing, a rift between the *logikos* and the *pathetikos*, adding the letter "e" sixteen times to the word in its falling into sound or cry. It is a cry which Kuyk, Kuyk, and Miller relate to the call to Jesus in Afro-Christian spiritual. They provocatively attempt to locate the most mysterious elements of the story within Faulkner's attempt to incorporate the residual presence of African culture in the life of Mississippi, tracing certain motifs (such as carrying baskets on the head and sorcery) back to Mali and the Bambara people who composed the slave population of Oxford. Resisting readings which position the story as an "explanation" of tormented consciousness of Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, Kuyk, Kuyk, and Miller argue that Faulkner was an "outsider" to the residual African culture, unable to fully understand it, that lack of understand being registered by the story's narrative technique. The story certainly thrusts the reader into a world he or she cannot fully understand; yet, the central issue for a consideration of *Absalom, Absalom!* is the story as it negotiates two levels of hearing, addressing itself to readerly consciousness. The cry insinuates itself into the reader-voice as that which cannot be synthesized by the auto-affection.

The cry of Nancy is, however, also a kind of song. While there is no mention of the song in the story, "That Evening Sun" is titled after "St. Louis Blues" by William Christopher Handy composed in 1914, the year in which the adult Quentin narrates. It tells the story of a woman who has lost her man to another wealthier woman: "I hate to see when that evening sun go down / I hate to see I hate to see when that evening sun go down / 'Cause, my baby, he's gone left this town." In one of the few attempts to consider the role of black song in the story, Kuyk, Kuyk, and Miller call attention to Faulkner's title and locate a rather syllogistic purpose: "the blues



expresses a black woman's pain, 'That Evening Sun' expresses Nancy's" (38).<sup>63</sup> Yet, one must listen to the song in its specificity, as Faulkner perhaps had, given his likely attendance of Handy performances and his regard for music in a 1956 interview, "I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better," and a recurring emphasis upon the presence of black song in Yoknapatawpha.

The melody of "St. Louis Blues" is audibly from the spiritual tradition, yet its rhythm syncopated, which in the cultural moment of the story's publication, had become popularized and the basis of the foxtrot. Hardy writes of his decision to radically shift the song's time signature: "When St. Louis Blues was written the tango was in vogue. I tricked the dancers by arranging a tango introduction, breaking abruptly into a low-down blues." Like *Lord Jim*, "That Evening Sun" is organized by a modulation in narrative voice and its locatedness in its time. The story takes a radical turn away from one temporality into another, beginning with the adult only to fall into the pre-subjective. Neither song nor story circle back to their beginning. It begins in one time only to deconstitute it, to develop the time beneath time. Ellison's narrator will later experience such time in *Invisible Man* as he sinks into time immemorial, listening to Armstrong's 1929 rendition of "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue," a song about being left for a lighter skinned lover. It is a song that reflects on "the curse of Ham," the "sin that's in my skin." "I'm white inside, It don't help my case/ 'Cause I can't hide, what is on my face, oh!" The phrase ends with a cry, Armstrong then scatting at the word "face," as if deconstituting the identity to which it supposedly refers.<sup>64</sup>

The sound of Nancy that was "like singing" and "not like singing" is elaborated in the voice of Rosa as a *blue voice*. The blue note in jazz and blues performance, or the "worried" note, falls just below the pitch, at times suggesting the presence of the minor key in what is otherwise a major scale. It is a dissonance, a blue feeling. The blue note, as an interval, is a flattening of the note that allows it to be just below the order of expectation, to be heard as blue in relationship to an idealized note. In the popular performance of the Hardy's song likely heard by Faulkner, Bessie Smith seems to modulate her voice, finding consolation in singing (in the film *St. Louis Blues* [1929], Smith stars as a battered woman). "If I'm feeling tomorrow like I feel today, I'll pack my grip and make my getaway." Smith then modulates her pitch to address the woman who has stolen her man. As Angela Davis writes in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, "blues meaning is manipulated and transformed—sometimes even into its opposite—in blues performance" (26). "St. Louis Blues" seems both to give pleasure and to refrain from it, to ask for a double hearing. The "getaway" is not to be had from a physical location, but from the site of blue feeling, a recognition that momentary departure can only be in the moment of performance. In the tonal modulations of voice in relationship to melody itself, there is a longing for forgetting while song is at once a being otherwise, music being that which, as Adorno writes, "records negatively...the promise of happiness."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> As readers, they remain within the logic of symbolic expression when the sound that issues from Nancy cannot be linked to any coherent narrative, i.e. to what has happened to her. The sound exceeds her personally. Kuyk, Kuyk, Miller fail to comment on Jason's repeated question, "Am I a nigger, Nancy?" Jason's question entrenches the story within an American discourse of racial identity.

<sup>64</sup> I thank David Copenhafer for this suggestion.

<sup>65</sup> "Art records negatively just that possibility of happiness which the only partially positive anticipation of happiness ruinously confronts today" (*Music* 291). Adorno makes this enigmatic comment in the context of his discussion of dissonance in "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening" (*Music* 291). He argues in this essay that popular music "mocks" one's wish for happiness. "Light" music, he suggests, is "illusory and mendacious" (2001, 291). He seems to suggest that dissonance, because it shatters illusion or semblance, rather

In “That Evening Sun,” there are not simply sounds and shards of discourse, but a dissonance between two ways of hearing, just as the double entendres that the child listener cannot negotiate. The reader can “understand” what the adult voices say in the way the child cannot; the reader-consciousness articulates the adult voice where it is absent, collaborating with it by doing its work of signification (e.g. “watermelon” equals baby). When attending to what is a blue voice in relationship to narrative, however, the reader is thrown back radically into the aurality of the child who cannot organize what he is hearing. It is a kind of “pitch” just below narrativity. Reading ceases to be a collaborative response, for the sound of Nancy is extra-antiphonal: there is no narrative that might occupy its place. It is the primary substance of the allegorical, of all claims to signification. Even Saussure, who affords only an ancillary place to sound, recognizes such a sonic break: “Sound is merely something ancillary, a material that language uses.... Linguistic signals are not in essence phonetic. They are not physical in any way. They are constituted solely by differences which distinguish one such sound pattern from another” (Moten 13). If “it could speak,” Fred Moten critically writes, “it would have intrinsic value.” The shriek, scream, or cry is “the origin of the music that ought to be understood as the rigorous critique of the theory of value” (18). It is a critique of property and the private and proper that sustains it (13).

In a way that is central to *Abasalom, Absalom!*, these sounds, between two modes of hearing, gesture to a *suspension* of a certain time of actuality, a suspension that is only possible and sustainable in the space and time of music and reading.<sup>66</sup> Such a space is what Trinh T. Minh-ha describes as “undone intervals.” Such intervals “constitute interruptions and irruptions in a uniform series of surface; they designate a temporal hiatus, an intermission, a distance, a pause, a lapse or gap between different states; and they are what comes up at the threshold of representation and communication—what often appears in the doorway” (xii-xiii). The voice of Rosa, a break in the novel, occupies such temporality. It is somewhere between the heard-word and the said-word, between speech and song, happening and the impossible. Philip Weinstein suggests that “Rosa’s discourse is curiously poised between the telling and the told, the still-emerging present and the already-completed past. We read it as both subjective and objective; it carries her spontaneous feeling and yet remains impenetrable” (23). The substantiveness of that impenetrability, however, is not without its effect upon the both Quentin and the reader, Faulkner deliberately positioning the return to her voice in the middle of the novel, as a fulcrum, just before it breaks to the conversation between Quentin and Shreve as it will redirect the central narrative.

The voice of Rosa is as an address to the consciousness of the reader, the incantation of another sensibility. In that regard, one might say that in her refrain, “yes,” she speaks in the voice of unconscious as it knows no “no” according to Freud, what the narrator describes as “the logic-

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fractures reification of the listener. To read this dissonance in blues, however, is to read Adorno against himself, to hear jazz and blues expression otherwise. He cannot hear the temporal suspension and blue voices for which I am arguing as participating in critical aesthetics. In this particular essay, as elsewhere, he is highly critical of jazz and “jitterbugs,” arguing that music, produced and appropriated as a fetish for “regressive” listeners, is to “kill time” under capitalism (*Music* 310).

<sup>66</sup> If the reader will permit my anachronism, one might hear the temporality of John Coltrane’s parody, “My Favorite Things,” an epic twelve-minute performance that concludes with a series of minor notes where the original calls for the major. Coltrane’s saxophone disarticulates the final phrase “and then I don’t feel so sad” into a succession of modal notes liberated from the key, “sad” sinking lower in frequency until the performer reaches the limits of breath. The melody, as it becomes blue, suggests that song is a form of consciousness, a favorite thing that allows one to “not feel so bad” that is perhaps only possible as long as the interval of the music itself is sustainable.

and reason-flouting quality of a dream” (*Absalom* 15). “Ay, wake up, Rosa; wake up—not from what was, what used to be, but from what had not, could not have ever, been,” Rosa chants just after describing the event at the stairs (113). If we take seriously Freud’s thesis on the repetition compulsion as a way of thinking through literary history and the relationship between works, that refusal to admit Clytie’s experience in “Evangeline”—“you dreamed it”—is precisely that which lends the event its repetitive force—the “*tedious repercussive anticlimax*”—that which brings the scene at the stairs into retelling. The refusal, paradoxically, will not let it be fully banished until the last idiot sound, “sound and fury signifying nothing,” remains at the threshold of the burning house.

The central question to ask of the voice of Rosa, then, is perhaps not if it can be “said,” but rather, if it can be heard. Reclaiming the critical valence of Faulkner’s realism in the use of implausible language, Hale argues that “to the degree that a character’s monologue is “sayable,” to the degree that his interior monologue resembles his dialogue, a character has sacrificed his public self to the public norm.” Hale continues:

Faulkner thus establishes a spectrum of symbolic meaning for narrative discourse. Quoted dialogue represents the most extreme public expression; it stands as an objective record of a character’s public language. Mimetic stream-of-consciousness presented what a character might say if he could compose his thought. Private language, wholly unsayable language, is figured by nonmimetic vocabulary and tone.

Hale retrieves the sole monologue of the dying mother, Addie, in *As I Lay Dying*, not as “supernatural” (her monologue appears after her death), but representing “her need to represent her experience to herself in a language that can escape the conventionalism of public language” (14). Her “quest is for perfect autonomy; the only way the private self can be solely self-determined is to leave the public world altogether,” a self which Faulkner commits to death, as the title of the novel suggests (Hale 16, Sunquist 40). In that same way, Rosa is a woman who is neither wife nor mother and “attacks both the immediate family,” writes Deborah Clarke, “by feeding off of it, and genealogical continuity, but refusing to nurture it” (129). As Mr. Compson remarks of Rosa, “It is as though she were living on the actual blood itself like a vampire, not with insatiability, certainly not with voracity, but with that serene and idle splendor of flowers abrogating to herself, because it fills her veins also, nourishment from the old blood that crossed uncharted seas and continents and battled wilderness hardships” (105). Gesturing at once to Judith’s “nonmother” status, Henry having shot Bon before they could marry, Clarke writes that “The presence of the women not only defeats Sutpen’s patriarchal design, but the voice—and silence—of the women denies the grounds of narrative authority on which the novel is based” (128). The voice, precisely that which is thought to guarantee authority, is precisely that which undermines it.

In calling Quentin to her office, its “heat-laden air,” Rosa performs a certain gesture of patriarchal consignment so as to call Quentin into performing it otherwise with Shreve. The two boys share an alternative model of narration premised neither upon identity nor authority, but “*that love which gives up what it never had*” (*Absalom* 119). The voice of Rosa is alongside of logic, returning the reader to the ambiguity of hearing. “In a sense the whole of philosophy...consists in restoring a power to signify,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience..., which in particular clarifies the special domain of language” (155). Ross speaks of “Rosa’s passion-garbled account to Quentin,” yet it is perhaps more precisely that “expression of experience by experience,”

working upon Quentin's consciousness to effectuate a new modality of thought (Conrad's *Influence* 200). In hailing Quentin to her office, the voice of Rosa speaks from somewhere outside of the story as it has moved between fathers and sons—it is a “dense throng” of sound with which I began this present chapter.

The voice of Rosa is not private, as it is uttered aloud to Quentin; yet, it is “unsayable” and not simply in the implausibility of its language, but in reaching the physical limits of human utterance and the capacity for hearing—it seeks a new hearing. It is central that her voice was reared in solitude collected from overhearing. She is a witness to the bloody aftermath of the Civil War, yet unauthorized to tell the story she does, knowing only through “listening-solitude,” she being equipped only with

*that inverted canker-growth of solitude which substitutes the omnivorous and unrational hearing-sense for all the others: so that instead of accomplishing the processional and measured milestones of the normal childhood's time I lurked, unapprehended as though, shod with the very damp and velvet silence of the womb, I displaced no air, gave off no betraying sound.... (Absalom 116)*

How is one to receive the voice of Rosa insofar as it is grounded in overhearing? The ontology of Rosa's voice, a sound that begins in silence, is a critique of the logical movement between speaking and listening, listening and speaking, a critique of “seriality” insofar as it grounds not simply chronology, but identity.

In the *Phaedrus*, the dialogue in which Socrates makes his most important claim on behalf of the “living logos,” Socrates takes care to establish listening-in as a destabilizing force, pausing his argument, or rather tuning into an alternative order, in order to note how the landscape resounds with the cicada song: the cicadas, he notes, were once humans who died for their love of song. After having called attention to the pleasing cicada presence, Socrates and Phaedrus begin to dialogue on the nature of *eros*, incited by a Lysian oratory on the profits of being a lover. Socrates issues a challenge, arguing that the philosophic man ought not also be a lover, but rather a dispassionate and rational non-lover. Socrates then re-attunes himself to his surroundings and reconsiders the cicada song that had fallen into ambient forgetfulness during the course of the dialogue. His condemnation of the lover may have offended the Gods, for the cicadas, he tells us, are messengers to the Muses. He fears that they, having listened-in on the dialogue, will tell of his transgressions. The cicadas sound, though outside of the dialectic, reverses its course.

Rosa insinuates herself in the love story between Judith and Bon, fastening upon love as the remainder of novel's central authority. She falls into an incantatory *poesis* that cannot be comprehended, whose rhythms, cadences, and patterns fall between the sanctioned ways of hearing. She did not “spy” upon Judith and Bon, Rosa says, but rather became a part of

*that slow and mutual rhythm wherein the heard, the mind, does not need to watch the docile (ay, the willing) feet; [I] would think 'What suspiration of the twinning souls have the murmurous myriad ears of this secluded vine or shrub listened to? What vow, what promise, what rapt binding fire has the lilac rain of this wistaria, this heavy rose's dissolution crowned?' (Absalom 119).*

“Music, after all,” writes Adorno, “does not possess its object, is not in command of the name” (*Music* 140). Rosa is virginal and “grim haggard”—while her voice will be the material location in which certain desires can find both expression and fulfillment, critics fail to address the possibility that she has seduced Quentin with such a voice. This voice, being as it is not a transcription of dialogue, but a contact between voice and writing, poses a central danger: the

voice is disembodied, yet it burrows in the reader whose consciousness and body are on-loan, the errant desires finding there a lived location.

Listening-in is a privileged zone, being at once epistemologically outside and ontologically in-between. The lurker hears what he or she is not authorized to hear, and goes on to repeat those things—“*they could not have told you,*” Rosa repeats to Quentin in a curious refrain, acknowledging that her voice is at the limit of what she also repeats, “*they will have told you.*” There are two levels, the discursive and the acoustical. It is as if Rosa is borrowing authority from “them.” Then she turns around to say “they will not have told you,” insisting upon her unique knowledge—mainly the fact that she does indeed exist, no matter what “they will have told you.” Yet, the two phrases are a strophe and antistrophe, two contrasting metrical orders, which, in their conflict, work towards producing a new pragmatic of listening that cannot be circumscribed by the movement of the *logos* from father to son. Her voice is what Merleau-Ponty calls a “wild *Logos*,” for “the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion.”

It is with such an invasion that, in a letter to writer Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner associates his status as a writer insofar as *Absalom, Absalom!* is “the result of a regional curse.” “I’ll go further than you in the harsh criticism,” he continues to Cowley. “The style, as you divine, is a result of the solitude, and granted a bad one. It was further complicated by an inherited regional or geographical (Hawthorne would say, racial) curse. You might say, studbook style: ‘by Southern Rhetoric out of Solitude’ or ‘Oratory out of Solitude’” (*Speeches* 215-16). In this way, not simply the style, but the principle force of the novel is identified with the ontology of Rosa. As I have continually asked, how is one to understand the effect of the voice upon the novel, a voice upon writing, a writing-voice upon the reader-ear, the capacity for audition? Rosa speaks what Quentin calls “notlanguage” grounded in the “unrational hearing-sense.” Such a sense is neither rational nor deaf, is a third listening to a sonorous substance that cannot be properly “told.” Yet, it is at once notlanguage because it speaks the unfulfilled registers of the story, not simply the amalgamation, but in creating a vocalic space that might “remember” the unfulfilled at the origin of violence. As Clytie will say in “Evangeline,” in uncanny, amalgamative relation to this voice, “what I ain’t gonna tell you, you ain’t gonna hear.” Rosa is not a voice that tells. The question, then, is what becomes possible for Quentin to hear after having heard Rosa? Where does the narrative go once it has negotiated Rosa not once, but twice, the first time as puzzling entry into the novel, and the second time as a seductive remainder of all that the men have said?

#### *The Patriarchive*

The reader learns that Rosa calls Quentin to her office in order to ask him to accompany her to Sutpen’s Hundred to confront the “something” that has been living in that house. Yet, Faulkner renders that “day of listening” twice, first in chapter one and again in chapter five, the latter one in which the reader will not only be told what had been missing from its first rendition, but will be confronted with a voice that seems not to speak directly, but rather in the displaced registers of semantic speech. Rosa’s voice becomes charged in chapter five with a certain force. Why, however, does Faulkner find it necessary to repeat the scene in the office in chapter one and chapter five? As I have already begun to discuss in Quentin’s vision in chapter one, Rosa incants for Quentin that which he can never see as such, the man himself. Yet, he at once sees the construction of the house, what Derrida might call the “scene of domiciliation,” not as a picture, but a drama. As Rosa speaks, the reader is not yet given any direct discourse, knowing only that she speaks. Faulkner in that way emphasizes the acoustical modality of narrative incantation as it does not rely upon the words themselves, but a certain tonality, what

Benjamin describes in “The Storyteller” as lulling one into “inattention.” In Chapter Two, I insisted upon this modality as an modernist vocality, one that cannot be understood as “telling” or synthesized into the role of the authoritative and first-hand voice of early realism or the Victoria novel. Indeed, as I have noted throughout this project, Benjamin is curiously interested not in the living voice, but its contact with the written works of Leskov which provide the occasion for his reflection on the art of storytelling. Conrad punctuates Marlow’s narrative by returning to the listeners seated aboard the *Nellie*, listening to Marlow run on in the dark and “to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river.” In that same way, the reader—for again, the experience turns upon the readerly consciousness in a way that Conrad had only begun to accomplish—will encounter Rosa who sat in:

that air of impotent and static rage...talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked, quiet inattentive and harmless, out of the binding and dream and victorious dust. (*Absalom* 3)

As he listens, “Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag a house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing..., creating the Sutpen’s Hundred, the *Be Sutpen’s Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*” (*Absalom* 4).

Such a voice of *fiat lux* is the only voice that is instantiated without a prior having-heard; it is the only voice in the novel that does repeat, the phantasm first word that is the origin of all other words. As Ross describes, Faulkner’s beginnings as a poet are in romantic voice, in particular “The Power of Sound” in which Wordsworth invokes time as it began when “A Voice to Life Gave Being [I. 209].” The last stanza invokes a divine persistence: “...her stay/Is in the Word, that shall not pass away [II. 222-224].” Faulkner’s (year) Nobel speech returns to that ontology of sound. “In Faulkner’s version the ‘heavens dissolving’ becomes the ‘last ding dong of doom,’ and what lasts beyond time is ‘man’s puny, inexhaustible voice, still talking’ instead of ‘the Word;’ but it is still the resilience of voice that conquers ultimate silence” (Ross *FIV* 21). How is one to understand *Absalom, Absalom!* as it begins with the divine word of creation, invoked by Quentin’s experience of listening to Rosa, to conclude with Jim Bond’s “last idiot sound?”

Insofar as Faulkner invokes the idiot voice in the moment he most speaks on behalf of his *œuvre*, the inexhaustible voice still talking is bound to Faulkner’s own project of writing—to hear that remaining excess of first voice is to hear his intervention in the novel. As I will return to in the Coda, in letters to critic Malcolm Cowley Faulkner seems to fasten upon the voice of Rosa as *the* ontology of his style, what he called “Oratory in Solitude.” In the midst of incantation, Rosa’s voice disappears—“Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish;” it is dissolving into an acoustic space of hearing-without-listening that is just below the moving images and the symbolic order of the actions she invokes. “Maybe some day you will remember this and write about it,” Rosa says, after having called Quentin to see her “the quaint, stiffly formal request which was actually a summons, out of another world almost” (*Absalom* 5). It is as if Quentin is called towards the new novelistic practice that will become the novel, ungrounded in the *logos* as first word. One might understand *Absalom, Absalom!* as the result of such a hail had Quentin lived to write.

I wish to understand, however, the particularity of Quentin having been called to her office before turning to the dynamics of her voice as they will shape chapter five. Her voice, insofar as it has entrapped the air of Jefferson, is positioned as an archive. As it is imagistically incanted before Quentin as a listener, Sutpen's Hundred is too invoked as an archive, for as Derrida argues, it is from the Greek, *arkheion*, "initially a house, a domicile, and address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (1995, 2). The *archons* ensure the documents entrusted to them, accorded "the hermeneutic right and competence" to interpret them, what allows the documents to "speak the law:"

At the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible. ...They all have to do with this *topo-nomology*, ...with this archic, in truth, patriarchic, function, without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such. To shelter itself [Derrida recalls the root of logos in *legein* both to "shelter" and to "bond"] and, sheltered, to conceal itself. This archontic function...does not only require that the archive be deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate, and at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority. The archontic function, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of *consignation*. ...*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute disassociation, any heterogeneity, or *secret* which would separate, or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together. (3)

The house is the *topos* in which the law is secured by the *archons*, all "archic" being *patriarchic*. At the end of the novel, though the death of the last of the Sutpens "clears the whole ledger," Shreve fastens upon Jim Bond as the remainder of Sutpen's order: "'You've got one nigger left,'" he says. "'One nigger Sutpen left, Of course you can't catch him and you don't even always see him and you never will be able to use him. But you've got him there still'" (302). Indeed, the "conclusion" of the novel is not within the diegesis, but Faulkner's strange gesture of including both a chronology and genealogy. All events and figures are finally *organized*. All voice around time as facts becomes still—one feels the silence of chronology after so much talk, these facts bearing a strange testimony to their own ineffectiveness at the level of representation (as do Du Bois' musical staves and the beyond-narrative they indicate). They bear testimony to the violence at the heart of history as genealogy, one which Jim Bond sounds out.

In his critique of the patriarchic, Derrida at once gestures to an "invisible" scene of domiciliation and to the "secret" or "heterogeneity" which the archive as self-identical "gathering together" cannot tolerate. Jim Bond, the last scion and the limit of human speech and humanity itself, sounds out the invisible logic of the patriarchic that allows the *topo-nomology* to appear and be enacted as serial *bond*. *Absalom, Absalom!*, however, begins in the patriarchic. The narrator notes, within the first sentence of the novel, that Rosa sits in her "office" as it has been named by her father and shaped by what Mr. Compson later calls "the old virtues," their support in the anonymously self-fortifying, self-reproducing *belief*. The novel begins, not out of soundless Nothing (there is no *fiat lux*), but on the precipice of negating such belief. It begins in what I described in the introduction as the temporality of "coming to an end," a temporality within the *verge* of the object towards transformation:

From a little after two until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them. There was a wistaria vine blooming for the second time that summer on a wooden trellis before one window into which sparrows came now and then in random gusts, making a dry vivid dusty sound before going away. . . .  
(*Absalom* 3)

The physical objects seem to speak; there is an acoustical materiality in these sensible particulars. Adjectives accumulate without comma, that is, without pause or breath, as if narrative voice is literally holding its breath in this room, the consequences of breathing there being quite dire. The prose, in its cadences, is steeped in the southern. If there are pauses, it would be in the pronunciation, a slow rolling voice that lingered around each word, bringing the listener in the voice that speaks perhaps more than that which it describes. Nevertheless, this room is defined by the accumulation of *logos*, that is, not simply by endurance, but restless preservation. It has been hollowed out by the naming-function: “there is no archive without consignment in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression,” writes Derrida (*Archive* 11). Rosa guards an “implacable unforgiving,” which, in its tenacity, has itself acquired the status of a thing (*Absalom* 9). The air is heavy with thingness, the “dust motes” offering evidence that air carries more than air. Far from being fully gone, it settles into permanence “as if there were prisoned in it like a tomb all of the suspiration of slow head-laden time” (*Absalom* 6). Before the reader has even arrived, all motion has already been cut by an intransigence: the voice of an absent, yet continuing and fixed authority clings to objects, as if it would take new air to circulate new names, names derived not from knowing, but a child-like, unwavering belief.

#### *The Pragmatics of Narrative Knowledge*

Quentin is called to Rosa’s office because he is related to Colonel Compson, the closest thing to a friend Sutpen had had. Yet there is a certain porousness of Quentin in relationship to age—he is about to leave the south for Harvard—he is on the verge of forgetting; there is nothing left in the south for a young man. Rosa repeats time and again, “they will have told you,” recognizing that he has heard the story many times from his father and grandfather.

“The narrator’s only claim to competence for telling the story is that fact that he has heard it himself,” writes Jean-François Lyotard of “the pragmatics of narrative knowledge.” Listening in this way is a speech act, he argues, for “the current narratee gains potential access to the same authority simply by listening.” Lyotard continues:

The narrative “posts” (sender, addressee, hero) are so organized that the right to occupy the post of sender receives the following double grounding: it is based upon the fact of having occupied the post of addressee, and of having been recounted oneself, by virtue of the name one bears, by a previous narrative—in other words, having been positioned as the diegetic reference of other narrative events. The knowledge transmitted by these narration is in no way limited to the



functions of enunciation; it determines in a single stroke what one must say in order to be heard, what one must listening to in order to speak, and what role one must play (on the scene of diegetic reality) to be the object of a narrative. (21)

“Right” in this way is naturalized by the event of storytelling; it has not other ground than having heard. Yet, crucial to the instantiation of right is the invocation of the name and the listener’s own presence in the diegesis. Must not the listener in this way pass through the narrative incantation in order to become authorized? Rosa speaks in “that grim haggard amazed voice”—not “this voice” or “a voice,” but “*that* voice”—a voice heard before, a locution prior to the possibility of audition. Quentin heard, that much we know; but what the voice said, we cannot yet know, for Quentin was not listening, the “first part of it” being something he already knew.” Lyotard writes that in a culture of narrative, “the people are only that which actualizes the narratives” and that “they do this not only by recounting them, but also by listening to them and recounting themselves through them” (23). One’s authority to tell a story is grounded in having once been in the position of listener oneself. The act of telling thereby passes on the story as well as the right to tell it to another. The “narratee gains potential access to the same authority,” for each hero “was himself once a narratee and perhaps a narrator, of the very same story.” The name of the hero was “given to him in conformity with the canonic narrative legitimating the assignment of patronyms among the Cashinagua” (21). Narrative transmission is, then, a rite of passage in which an act of listening becomes an act of speech. The passage is neither listening nor speaking in itself, but the latter finding supposed fulfillment in the former. The narrative is a patrimony, transmitting simultaneously the story, its grounding authority, and the *name* which designates that authority.

As Quentin develops the registers of the story of Sutpen in his dialogue with Shreve, he humanizes the demon by giving him a childhood. Rapt in narrative incantation, which Longinus insists begins with the teller himself, he insinuates his subjectivity into Sutpen’s interiority, articulating as his own Sutpen’s own inner voices. Quentin has been hollowed out by the voices of fathers—he is a resonant commonwealth—yet, in allowing himself to become Sutpen by *diatyposis*, he performs an acoustical care that fractures the history of violent perpetuation of design. Indeed, it is the same care he performs in listening to Rosa and it is, perhaps, as I will return to, such listening that is being learned in that moment, making Rosa a central pedagogue outside of fathers speaking to sons.

Quentin and Shreve, close friends and yet decidedly different individuals, retell the story in a way that highlights an urgency to their encounter. Quentin, calling Rosa “Miss,” is invested in certain traditions and ways of knowing that cling to him from the south; Shreve, a Canadian and therefore a radical outsider, is flippant and playful, refusing to call Rosa “Miss” and most things that Quentin’s father has said. Importantly, theirs is a fiction constructed from the fragments of knowledge learned by Colonel Compson one night when authority was not at stake, but rather “what makes good talk over whiskey at night.” It is crucial that from this kind of talk, together with the hypnotic posture of incantation carried from his father’s letter as it invokes “the day of listening,” that Quentin will rescue Sutpen’s narrative and redirect its violence. He tells the story of his journey out of Appalachia to the Tidewater region, there to work with his family on a plantation. “He didn’t remember if it was weeks of months or a years they traveled” (*Absalom* 181). As Quentin incants the past, Sutpen “misses” the moment of his own transformation, as Almayer had the sunset. He is dislodged as fully cognizant agent. He says:

“...whether it was that winter and then spring and then summer overtook and passed them on the road or whether they overtook and passed in slow succession

the seasons as they descended or whether it was the descent itself that did it and they not progressing parallel in time but descending perpendicularly through temperature and climate—a (you couldn't call it a period because as he remembered it or as he told Grandfather he did, it didn't have either a definite beginning or a definite ending. Maybe attenuation is better—an attenuation from a kind of furious inertness and patient immobility while they sat in the cart outside the doors of doggeries and taverns and waited for the father to drink himself insensible, to a sort of dreamy and destinationless locomotion....”(181-182)

Sutpen and Quentin himself are in the undone interval in which subjects are being moved without moving themselves. This passage—a theory of duration—is one sentence, unlistenable accept through inattention, working towards reproducing the temporality it describes. Yet, such duration is not for its own sake: the reader is never allowed to lose the sense that Quentin develops a fictional account, registering in that way, the unfulfilled dimension of the past. As Sutpen had described it to Colonel Compson around the fire, his boyhood journey to the new town belonged to time immemorial, Quentin now imagining him “still moving on toward a place they had never seen and had no conception of, let alone wanted to go to” (*Absalom* 182). It is a moment of a-temporal sameness, in which land, Sutpen recalls, belongs to no one; yet, this temporality terminates once they arrive to the new world after what is narrated as a kind of middle passage irrecoverable by narrative. In being incanted as a youth, however, Sutpen ceases to be dynastic father; he becomes himself subject to forces that are themselves unorchestrated. The story, as Quentin and Shreve tell it, works towards redirecting the “furious inertness” of his order.

One day Sutpen's father gave him a message to communicate to the planter, at the threshold of whose house, the “boy-symbol at the door” is refused. The complicated scene at the threshold of the planter's door is the “beginning” of a man without origins. It is the site of Sutpen's unfulfilled coming of age by Lyotardian pragmatics. He is given a message which he carries in the name of his father; yet barred from transmitting by a negro doorman, he is unable to encounter the listening other. This is an intervallic moment that reifies the burgeoning construction of class and race consciousness in Sutpen. “He had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men not to be measured in lifting anvils or gouging eyes” (*Absalom* 183). At the door he sees through the other's eyes, a double consciousness, Sutpen viewing “his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace” (*Absalom* 190). Sutpen is developing a (double) consciousness, later reified as he approaches the front door, not “conscious of his appearance” in his worn garments or “of the possibility that anyone else would be than he was of his skin” (*Absalom* 185). Black men wear better clothes than he, an image which instills a knowledge-without-understanding that a body—as strength, skin, or endurance—is not alone enough to make one man better than another. It is through this newly instated class and race consciousness that he sees his father in a new way: as a figure without authority. The father's message, word, or name alone are not enough to make the boy heard. The terms of what make one man better than other, that is, authorize him more than another, hang suspended. Who is his father if he is not better than the doorman? Who is his father if the doorman can bar his message? Sutpen is left without the means to assert his father's authority.

Plato's *Phaedrus* provides the Ur-narrative that, while Faulkner does not cite it directly, provides a useful mapping for what happens to Sutpen at the door. Plato, like Sutpen, must resort

to a myth in order to guarantee the phantom term “authority.” To *author*, Socrates explains in his myth of Thamus and Theuth, is not *authorize*. He elaborates this claim by way of pre-historic clash between Thamus and Theuth, king and subject. Theuth brings to the king many new arts he has invented, among them art of writing:

Theuth said: “O King, here is something that, once learned, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory: I have discovered a position for memory and wisdom.” Thamus however, replied: “O most expert Theuth, one man can give birth to the elements of an art, but only another can judge how they can benefit or harm those who will use them. And now, since you are the father of writing, your affection for it has made you describe its effects as the opposite of what they really are. In fact, it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends upon signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing.” (275a-b)

The struggle between Thamus and Theuth is at once a clash between a father and a son—Theuth himself seeks to become a “father” of a legitimate art. To *author* and to *authorize* become radically differentiated, for “one man can give birth to the element of an art, but only another can judge how they can benefit or harm those who will use them.” Writing, as the son of Theuth, is rejected and unauthorized by the judgment of the king in favor of the spoken word, what Socrates calls writing’s “legitimate brother.” Socrates explains that writing “rolls about everywhere” and “always needs its father’s support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support” (275e-276a). The inability of Theuth to authorize his art of writing is reinstated in the apparatus of writing itself, a discourse that produces signs, yet fails to legitimize them, that cannot properly become itself, a father.

The triangulation of author-art-authority—the fact that the son cannot simultaneously author and authorize—is burned into Sutpen’s psyche at the planter’s door. His father has given him a message to give to the planter, yet he is barred by the doorman, told to go around to the back, and disallowed the event of living transmission. As Sutpen’s agony is articulated by Quentin, it as if he is overtaken by the ghost of Sutpen and the logic that had produced his violence; the reader knows from the first chapter that his ghost haunts voices, where “a more fortunate one would have had a house” (check cite). Quentin now lends a voice to Sutpen, a man who is not unlike Conrad’s Singleton in a foreboding silence (he simply touches Rosa on the forehead after returning from several years at War, just as Singleton could have summarized his life in the “six words” that the narrator will not repeat). If Singleton’s silence had been transcendental, Conrad driving towards the primary voicelessness of nature before a fall into communication, Sutpen’s silence is heard by Quentin as agony. The unrecognized child speaks in his unfulfillment through Quentin:

*He never gave me a chance to say and Pap never asked me if I told him or not and so he cant even know that Pap sent him any message and so whether he got it or not cant even matter, not even to Pap; I went up to that door for that nigger to tell me never to come to that front door again and I not only wasn’t doing any*

*good to him by telling it or any harm to him by not telling it, there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him. (Absalom 192)*

He expected “to be listened to because he had come” (*Absalom* 189). Fixed at the moment before transmission, however, Sutpen’s message is not repeated—his own father is left suspended, unauthorized. For Lyotard, the speaking voice must encounter a receptive other so that the addressee might then go on to occupy the post of addressor. This interval must constantly be in the process of re-orienting itself to new pairings. For Lyotard, one cannot *linger* in an interval. Sutpen is suspended in the interval between listening and speaking, at what Lyotard calls the “ephemeral temporality inhabiting the space between the ‘I have heard’ and ‘you will hear’” (22).

Is not Quentin’s *diatyposis* one *possible* pairing, one poetically incited by Quentin as he allows Sutpen’s negated potential to haunt him? His is a listening “post” alongside of pragmatics; it is that for which pragmatics cannot account, the lending a voice without seriality, logic, right, or law. Quentin continues to dramatize pragmatics so as to exorcise them. He is without, however, a “freedom” in relationship to this drama. Beginning the novel as he does in Rosa’s office, Faulkner is careful to assert Quentin as one who has had to hear and has been hailed, the hail inciting a space in which one does not *become* a subject of the law, for the hail reaches the listener as one with what Butler calls “a certain readiness to receive the call” (one knows one must turn, the law already burrowed in the body and psyche). Quentin recognizes that he cannot negate Sutpen without negating his own being, being as he is, composed of “defeated names.” “The possible and the real are in a dialectical relation that requires a special condition in order to be operative, and that condition must be one in fact,” writes Marcuse. That fact is Quentin himself, for Marcuse writes, “if the existing relations within a given social system are unjust and inhuman, they are not offset by other realizable possibilities unless these other possibilities are also manifested as having their roots within that system” (*Reason* 150-151). “Maybe it took Sutpen to make us all,” Quentin thinks to himself just after reflecting upon the history, theorizing it not as past, but potential:

*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn’t matter: that pebble’s watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple space, to the old ineradicable rhythm thinking Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (Absalom 210)*

This voice is inward, of “Quentin,” yet it articulates the conditions that make such a location more than itself. There is no longer a question of moving backward towards the origin; the fall of the pebble was not seen and it is not, therefore, recoverable; what is “seen, felt, remembered,” however, is its *effects*, the first pool feeding into the next. Yet, the second pool is of a different molecularity, it is a “having seen, felt, remembered” otherwise and reflects “in a different tone.” The two pools are attached as if by an umbilical cord; the second pool cannot take precedence over the first. Yet, the first pool is equally displaced from its origin, a missed event that is

experienced only as effect, as a moving across: the “ripple,” the effect, is more originary in its rhythm than the “fall” of any pebble as cause.

Insofar as Quentin, Shreve, and Father cannot be without Sutpen, Sutpen cannot be without Quentin and Shreve. In *diatyposis*, Quentin lends a voice to the unfulfilled registers haunting the logic of his experience. As Marcuse writes in “On the Problem of the Dialectic,” “To comprehend an historical object completely in its concrete reality, one has to grasp the totality of events.... Not only its positive moments should be brought into view, but also its negative moments which equally belong to it – what the historical object has been – and what it is becoming, and what it is not contributes to its reality, since this is what determines it and moves it” (1976, 21).

Quentin cannot redress the injury, but he can assume its voice and, speaking immanently from within its life, fulfill an alternative potency. Just as Quentin had in Rosa’s office, Sutpen-lent-a-voice-by-Quentin inwardly splits into two voices who argue with one another, attempting to reconcile the insult. Yet these inner voices, voices that are those of the historical object, are a failed metaphysical dialectics and pragmatics: one voice is unable to authorize what the other suggests as a course of action, unable to generate a judgment (“and the first: *Then what shall we do?* and the other: *I dont know*” [Absalom 190]). Sutpen argues with himself, thinking “if there were only someone else, some older and smarter person to ask” (Absalom 189). Quentin describes Sutpen’s self-conversation as a “coercion” of “conscience” (Absalom 222). Sutpen remains self-referential in his inward struggle to authorize and understand. He does not emerge from the rite of passage; rather, a monument rises to Sutpen’s innocence, “a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse: just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence rising from it like a monument” (Absalom 192).

In Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy, in a remarkable resemblance to Sutpen’s dilemma, Euripides undergoes a split as he sat in the theater, unable to understand how tragedy was organized, by what principle it could be recreated.<sup>67</sup> In this moment, the thinker within him takes precedence over the poet, replacing aesthetic *listening* with critical *thinking*. Euripides follows the demands of “two judges,” splitting within himself as a poet and a thinker, the one who is drawn to the chorus and the other who cannot, agonizing over its “incommensate quality.” My concern is not for Faulkner’s possible rendition of Nietzsche. My concern is rather for the struggle within the audience seeking to become artist as it anatomizes the agony undergone by Sutpen in being refused at the threshold. There are two forms of listening in *The Birth of Tragedy* that provide the central psychological registers of his doubled voice. The first is an “aesthetic” listening with which Nietzsche concludes his work, an ancient modality of Dionysian listening resuscitated by modern opera as it invigorates the most mysterious effects of drama. The second listening is that which aesthetic listening subverts, a thinking-listening that asks after the *coherence* of drama as an intellectual object. Sutpen, one might say, appears as Nietzsche’s Euripides who, as a theatrical spectator is overtaken by a critical thinking that effaces, indeed silences the voice of aesthetic listening. As a result of his split, Nietzsche argues, Euripides finds a model of tragedy that no longer relies upon the most enigmatic component of the chorus, that which he, as burgeoning poet, could not reproduce, though he pores over it “feature by feature,” “line by line,” attempting to understand its construction. There is, he discovers,

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<sup>67</sup> While there is no evidence to suggest that Faulkner read Nietzsche, in his biography of Faulkner, Joseph Blotner notes that Faulkner had received from his friend and important interlocutor, Phil Stone, a copy of Willard Huntington Wright’s *The Creative Will: Studies in the Philosophy and the Syntax of Aesthetics* (1916) as twentieth birthday present. Wright had published *What Nietzsche Taught* the year before.

something “incommensurable in every feature and in every line, a certain deceptive clarity and, at the same time, an enigmatic depth, the infinity of the background” that does not lend itself to critical penetration and yet is the source of tragedy’s most sustaining effects.

In that same way, the blocked threshold at the planter’s reproduces itself, anatomizing all other failures in the novel. For Sutpen’s refusal at the door initiates a mimetic desire to become what turned him away, rather than remain, like his own father, unauthorized (“so to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what he did” [*Absalom* 192]). Sutpen seeks to become the impossible in Platonic terms: to build a dynasty of which he is both author and authorizer. This institutes a curious amnesia by which he arrives in Jefferson as a man-without origins, his story only emerging through the work of fiction, developed from the one night he begins to remember around the campfire with Colonel Compson. He casts a new origin for himself, by *forgetting* all time before the moment at the threshold: “So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why” (*Absalom* 184). I do not wish to suggest such forgetting can be mapped upon Socrates’ critique of writing as poisonous to remembering; I do, however, wish to suggest that Faulkner insists upon a political act of remembering as storytelling—remembering, as it is defined in and by this incanted space, is a negative act, remembering not simply what happened, nor its repressed content, but that which could not be for Sutpen’s dynasty to become itself. “The liberating function of negation in philosophical thought depends upon the recognition that the negation is a positive act; that-which-is *repels* that-which-is-not and, in doing so, repels its own real possibilities,” Marcuse writes. They speak within a space of possibility.

In building Sutpen’s Hundred, in his forgetting, he becomes the *causa sui*, the initiator of all subsequent transmission, rather than persist at the interval. He repels at once his intermediary past in Haiti, brought to narrative by Quentin and Shreve, where Bon is born. Such a contradiction, however, is already at the heart of the *logos* as it conceals its own circularity. It is exposed by Quentin and Shreve’s restaging of the history of the *logos*, a critique, particularly by Shreve, who will refuse to call Rosa “Miss,” allergic to all such nomological formality. If he who authors cannot authorize, the author requires another subject to produce the climate of legitimacy, a dynamic that is inherent to the structure of spoken dialectics. As Cavarero writes of dialectic method, it is one which “proceeds by question and answer, submitting to the interlocutor’s words to verification, aims precisely toward the noetic vision of an idea that, as signified, is *already at the origin of the semantic function of words and of the logos that joins them* [emphasis added]” (39). The conclusion of the dialectic, its future on the other side of dialogue, is already inscribed at its origin in the authority of its medium. The dialectic auto-affectively asserts its own authority, *concludes* with its condition in the *logos* that is repeated and reincarnated with each dialectic. The conversation between Quentin and Shreve is not purely referential; it does not work backwards to that which has already had happened (as Sartre argues of Faulknerian temporality). There is “the incident, that’s there,” as Faulkner writes of his method of working up and then working away from an event; yet, this incident is with its unfulfilled potential, its negated registers: “*they never gave me a chance to say.*” Sutpen considers attacking the doorman, but “it’s not what you wanted to hit.” He is denied contact with the *force* that orders that he fulfill his function in the pragmatic yet at once disallows from such fulfillment, that force being, quite literally, a *contra-diction*, with two imperatives and two dictions. Quentin and Shreve do not (cannot) fulfill that message, that missed, uninhabited post; yet they can critique its ground as a phantasm.

The spoken word is *zoon* or “living,” Socrates asserts (246b-c). “Like any person,” writes Derrida, “the *logos-zoon* has a father” (*Dissemination* 80). “But what is a father?,” Derrida asks in a way that echoes Quentin’s own assertion that perhaps it took he and Shreve to make Father. Fastening upon a central tautology that secures the logic of paternity he writes:

In what way, indeed, is the father/son relation distinguishable from a mere cause/effect or generator/engendered relation if not by the instance of the *logos*? Only a power of speech can have a father. The father is always father to a speaking/living being. In other words, it is precisely *logos* that enables us to perceive and investigate something like paternity. If there were a simple metaphor in the expression, “father of logos,” the first word, which seemed the more *familiar*, would nevertheless receive more meaning *from* the second than it would transmit *to* it. ...One must thus proceed to undertake a general reversal of all metaphorical directions, no longer asking whether *logos* can have a father but understanding that what the father claims to be the father of cannot go without the essential possibility of *logos*. (1981, 81)

Quentin and Shreve conduct that reversal. “The good (father, sun, capital) is thus the hidden illuminating, blinding source of *logos*,” Derrida concludes. “And since one cannot speak of that which enables one to speak (being forbidden to speak of it or to speak to it face to face), one will speak only of that which speaks” (1981, 83). Quentin and Shreve become father to a silent/dead being. Death is insinuated into the face to face; Sutpen has been forbidden the encounter, but such an encounter, haunted as it is by dead and incanted voices, is no longer singular, autonomous, nor desired. At the novel’s conclusion, Quentin will go to the house to speak to Henry, the last living proper son of Sutpen insofar as Jim Bond, a great-grandson, has been denied. Their dialogue provides not the answer one demands of the face to face. It is rather *circular*, as the *logos* asserted by the dialectic can only be, living off of itself:

*And you are—?*  
*Henry Sutpen.*  
*And you have been here—?*  
*Four years.*  
*And you came home—?*  
*To die. Yes.*  
*To die?*  
*And you have been here—?*  
*Four years.*  
*And you are—?*  
*Henry Sutpen. (Absalom 299)*

The passage can be read as incantatory by virtue of its italicized similarity to the scenes where Quentin and Shreve join Bon and Henry on the battlefield. On the other side, the scene is absolutely crucial to the novel's structure, since it promises, but adamantly fails to deliver, the resolution to the plot. Finally, there is a sense in which it does not matter whether it happened or not. By this point in the novel, one might say, if it is incantatory, it is also authentic. Otherwise, Quentin would not be traumatized by it. “[I]t was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived,” the narrator remarks of this dialogue.<sup>68</sup> Shreve will remark that in her hating

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<sup>68</sup> It is perhaps bears mentioning that Henry is described as having “transparent eyelids...as if he were already a corpse” and that after recalling the dialogue, Quentin will think to himself “Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of

like a drug, Rosa “did not dare risk cutting off the supply, destroying the source, the very poppy’s root and seed” by saving Henry. “But at last she did reconcile herself to it” (*Absalom* 299). Because the novel is tragically *after* its own main events, the “face” of Sutpen, the object of “impotent and static rage” (he is, in this way, a reflection of the planter’s own missing face), never fully appears in *Absalom, Absalom!*—though Mr. Compson concludes his letter to Quentin with the “hope” that Rosa might have passed on to a place where she can meet her offender face to face, and thereby exacting revenge. As Irwin argues, the “revenge against time” is “the essence of the tragic” (4). The unfulfilled interval between addressee and addressor, the gap between the face to face relation—“*the brain recalls what the muscles grope for*”—propels the novel forward.

The acoustics of the modern novel augments and redirects that struggle in a way that Benjamin only begins to touch upon in his consideration of the novel as “the birthplace of the solitary individual.” In its voicings, *Absalom, Absalom!* continually confronts the absence of a transcendental, paternal origin, an origin which grounds Thamus’ authority to reject the “illegitimate.” Paternity in Socrates’ myth is at once the origin of all boundaries: “The boundary (between inside and outside, living and nonliving) separates not only speech from writing but also memory as an unveiling (re-) producing a presence from re-memoration as the mere repetition of a monument” (Derrida *Dissemination* 109). The “outside” begins “at the point where the *mneme*, instead of being present to itself in its lives as a movement of truth, is supplanted by the archive, evicted by a sign” (Derrida *Dissemination* 109). Derrida fastens upon the central contradiction of the dynastic drive:

A limitless memory would in any event be not memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always therefore already needs signs in order to recall the non-presence, with which it is necessarily in relation. ...Memory is thus contaminated by its first substitute...But what Plato dreams of is a memory with no sign. That is, without no supplement.

Is this not Sutpen’s dream, thwarted by the novel at the level of temporality in which there are always-already only signs of an event? Is not Bon’s return, the return of the *sign* to memory, haunting his monument as archive? As Quentin and Shreve incant the New Orleans drawing room where Henry was taken to call on Bon’s octoroon mistress and his child, V. Bon, Shreve interjects Quentin’s narrative with collaborative details, with no concern for fact, but rather what enhances the affective potency of the tale incanting “that drawing room...which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough” (*Absalom* 268). Yet, narrative voice in this moment *cedes* its authority and with it, its solitude.

In the “here” that is the Harvard room, the narrator now pauses to reflect upon the “there” of another room in New Orleans, granting itself not authority but *interest*, as Conrad’s narrators who listen:

Four of them there, in that room in New Orleans in 1860, just as in a sense there were four of them here in this tomblike room in Massachusetts in 1910. And Bon may have and probably did, take Henry to call on the octoroon mistress and the child, as Mr Compson said, though neither Shreve nor Quentin believed that the visit affected Henry as Mr Compson seemed to think... Perhaps Quentin himself has not been listening when Mr Compson related (recreated?) it that evening at home; perhaps at that moments on the gallery in the hot September twilight

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peace. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore,”” Faulkner literally book-ending the encounter with Emerson and Poe, it becoming a commentary on the American literary imagination.



Quentin took that in stride without hearing it just as Shreve would have, since both and Shreve believed—and where probably right in this too—that the child would have been to Henry only something else about Bon to be, not envied, but aped....(*Absalom* 268-269)

As they retell the story, a hole opens in narrative authority as such, in the story as it has passed between sons, and in the seriality of the novel's chronotope: "everything that becomes an image in the literary work," writes Bakhtin, "and consequently enters its chronotopes, is a created thing and not a force that itself creates." As the story of the *logos* that grounds such unidirectionality is restaged, however, *it* redirects, narrative becoming not a voice, but an ear in relationship to the orchestrated object, the literary world. The deictic force of this recreation is the negative of Emerson's sense that "life only avails, not the having lived," for the having-lived *redoubles*.

There are four of them together, called upon to restage the pragmatics of the unfulfilled dimension of the having-lived, the message insofar as it was never given, so that an alternative space and time of reception, the "true enough" might emerge. "That was why it did not matter to either or them which one did the talking," the narrator remarks, falling once again to the past tense (for the room of talking, as acoustical constellation, refuses the noumenal, the phenomenal, and the serial organization of diegesis), "since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing" (*Absalom* 253). It is at this moment that Shreve and Quentin restage the conditions of unfulfillment—"It would be not secret between [Henry and Bon] now; it would just be unsaid"—not so as to fulfill, but to expose the whole of which Bon is the dejected remainder as untrue (*Absalom* 269).

#### *The Novel as Rescued Fragment*

"*He sounds just like Father,*" Quentin will think of Shreve. Shreve is the outsider and with a certain freedom of improvisation in relationship to what he hears. The improviser, Ellison describes in his essay on Charlie "Bird" Parker, is the *mimus polyglottos*, the mockingbird whose song moves through "long successions of notes and phrases of great variety, with each phrase repeated a half-dozen times before going on to the next." The mockingbirds are "excellent mimics" who "adeptly imitate a score or more species found in the neighborhood." In that way, Parker's playing

was characterized by velocity, by long-continued successions of notes and phrases, by swoops, bleats, echoes, rapidly repeated be-bops—I mean rebopped bebops—by mocking mimicry of other jazzmen's styles, and by interpolations of motifs from extraneous melodies, all of which added up to a dazzling display of wit, satire, burlesque and pathos. (Ellison 223)

In its "irrepressible...mockery," rebopping is the internally dialogized discourse Bakhtin names "parody." In parody and the "concrete instancing" of the "intentional possibilities of language," works and persons become "capable of attracting its words and forms into their orbit by means of their own characteristic intentions and accents, and in so doing to a certain extent alienating these words and forms from other tendencies, parties, artistic words, and persons" (Bakhtin 675). Language for Bakhtin is a form of manifesting intention, yet it always-already "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (677). Each word "tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (676-677). "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others." One can never speak as oneself, for the medium of expression is already "shot through" with the intentions of others.

And yet, one may come to populated it by what he calls “expropriation.” “Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process” (677). It is process activated by literature for that “concrete socio-ideological language consciousness, as it becomes *creative*—that is, as it becomes active in literature—discovers itself already surrounded by heteroglossia and not at all a singly, unitary language, inviolable and indisputable” (677). This “difficult and complicated process” of expropriation is performed by Quentin and Shreve in the Harvard dormitory—it is a novelistic event. Quentin and Shreve’s exchange is “dialogic,” as many critics note, but it is, important ways, an implicit critique of Bakhtin’s own Platonic grounding. Their expropriation does not maintain a posture of “submission,” a circular domination in which having been dominated, one now dominates in turn. As Quentin begins, his emphasis is upon “I am doing the talking,” after having spent his life as a listener; he insists upon the event of talking as what Lyotard maps out as the event of coming of age. Yet, as Shreve intervenes, the two do not merely parody a form of speech, a way of speech, father’s speech or grandfather’s speech or way of talking—“*He sounds just like Father*”—they parody the *logos* as such. They parody the very intentionality and authority that seem to remain for Bakhtin *outside of parody as its discursive guarantee*; parody for Bakhtin is an aspect of an author’s literary discourse, its infection contained and suspended as one intentional aspect. Bakhtin’s sense of discourse remains grounded in the Platonic *logos* that carries with it its own authority; to receive the *logos* in dialectic, is to receive its grounding authority and intention. If what is exposed in parody, insofar as it emerges in the incantation, is an obscured *condition* of the other’s speech, then Quentin and Shreve’s parody exposes the groundlessness of authorial discourse, its own parodic repetition. Sutpen is displaced from the determination of his being, and “didn’t know just where his father had come from” (*Absalom* 181).

“Your old man got it wrong,” Shreve will repeat. As the tragedy of address is imagined by Shreve, Bon awaits Sutpen’s message. Waiting for the conferral of name from Sutpen, Bon is in the interval, the ephemeral temporality wherein presence is not yet conferred:

“...and Bon would say [to Henry], ‘He should have told me. He should have told me, myself, himself. I was fair and honorable with him. I waited. You know now why I waited. I gave him every chance to tell me himself. But he didn’t do it. If he had, I would have agreed and promised never to see her or you or him again. But he didn’t tell me. I thought at first it was because he didn’t know. Then I knew that he did know, and still I waited. But he didn’t tell me. He just told you, sent me a message like you send a command by a nigger servant to a beggar or tramp to clear out.’” (*Absalom* 272)

Central to Sutpen’s will towards infinite self-presence as it might alone assuage the affront is withholding his name from Bon. To assume the authority held by the planter is to assume, as with Theuth’s rejection of writing, the authority to reject the poisonous element; to become a “dynastic” father is to become a dynastic addressor. Sutpen becomes the planter, calling upon an intermediary to tell the boy that he is unauthorized to pass the threshold; yet, as Quentin and Shreve imagine it, in neither instance is a message transmitted. Sutpen addresses him in the tent as “my son;” yet Henry is not given a message to pass on to an other, an other who is his brother. Just as the intermediary at the door speaks on behalf of the planter but without literal message, Henry is too without message to give to Bon (“*And he sent me no word? He did not ask you to send me to him? No word to me, no word at all?*” [*Absalom* 285]).

Sutpen retains the message and intercepts interlocution. Just as at the planter's door, interlocution introduces a third term between sender and receiver, the barrier that cannot be passed. He becomes what turned him away. It prevents transmission of authority that remains in the dynastic sender's hands. At the moment Henry and Sutpen meet in the tent during war, however, Henry himself could not have been authorized by the father, Sutpen's own authority incanted by Quentin a phantasm. Sutpen himself was never allowed to address the planter with the message nor was Sutpen addressed by the planter in return. The young Sutpen does not fail to recognize the doorman as he who is without authority. Sutpen knows the doorman to be the decoy, "the child's toy balloon with a face painted on it" and "not what you wanted to hit," just as Rosa had recognized the phantasmatic force to which she cannot speak directly at the stairs, shouting "get your hands off me, nigger" as the only available order of speech (*Absalom* 186).

As Derrida, argues, however, seriality is perhaps more phantasmatic. "The value of writing will not be itself, writing will have no value, unless and to the extent that god-the-king approves it" (*Dissemination* 72). The "misery" of writing, "the distress of the orphan" quickly yields to *danger*: writing is a "criminal thing, a poisoned present" and "being nobody's son at the instant it reaches inscription, scarcely remains a son at all and not longer *recognizes* its origins" (77). Henry allows Bon to write one letter to Judith: "they would send it by hand, by a nigger that would steal into the quarters by night and give it to Judith's maid" (*Absalom* 273). Has there not been precisely the "reversal" of which Derrida warns? Sutpen will not recognize his origin as father in Bon. Where living *logos* recognizes the father, his "debt" to him, the "half dead" brother, unsustained by the life father, cannot "forbid itself patricide" (Derrida *Dissemination* 77). Sutpen is the *source* of his dynasty's end. Bon waits for Sutpen to speak in his own name, directly to Bon, to make some response: "*Maybe he will write it then. He would just have to write 'I am your father. Burn this' and I would do it. Or if not that, a sheet a scrap of paper with the one word 'Charles' in his hand, and I would know what he meant*" (*Absalom* 262). Without fully responding, Sutpen does not make himself answerable as the father of Bon. His laconic non-speech to Henry in the office and tent withholds authority, message, and name (the agony of his silence net yet voiced by Quentin and Shreve in its potential). There is an evacuation of message, Sutpen barring transmission so that he may remain the sole addresser. The fatal "mistake" which Sutpen so restlessly seeks after is the self-referentiality of infinite presence. He "signifies the same thing forever," as Socrates explains.

How is one to understand the *material* movement of Bon's letter to Judith in that regard, or the "scrap" of paper with his name he never receives? Does it not pose precisely the danger of the remainder? There is a transmission in the novel that moves outside of fathers and sons, for Judith is too a "woman who had been widowed before she had been a bride," taking in V. Bon because he is the son of Charles, "the son of the man who had bereaved her and a hereditary negro concubine" (*Absalom* 167-168). In telling the story of Judith and Bon's love letter, described too by Judith as a "scrap," Mr. Compson fastens upon a bond that is the unrecognized excess of Sutpen's logic, the dejected material out of which Rosa and Clytie will make her "the wedding gown and the veil from scraps—perhaps intended for, which should have gone for, lint and did not," pieces of one order that are most literally redirected: "*Because there was love Mr Compson said There was that letter she brought and gave to your grandmother to keep*" (*Absalom* 105).

The letter—passed between women—will be read by Quentin and in that moment, fuse with the writing to which Rosa hails him, the ontology of the novel itself; the letter from Bon is "without date or salutation or signature," just as the narrative voice slowly comes to cede its own

authority. Mr. Compson runs on, handing the letter to Quentin, “hearing without having to listen as he read the faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he looked at it and which might fade” (*Absalom* 102). Just as Bon will provoke the return of the remainder to Sutpen’s design—his “mistake”—he now invokes a temporality of the remainder:

*there was that one fusillade four years ago which sounded one and then was arrested, mesmerized raised muzzle by muzzle, in the frozen attitude of its own aghast amazement and never repeated and it now only the loud aghast echo...which lies over the land where that fusillade first sounded and where it must remain yet because no other space under heaven will receive it. (Absalom 104)*

The “dead tongue” of Bon is “incurably pessimistic;” yet, Judith saves the letter, giving it to Mrs. Compson, Quentin’s grandmother, who will not speak in the novel except in quotation through Mr. Compson: ““Me? You want me to keep it?”” (*Absalom* 100-102).

In passing the letter to her, testimony to time as scraps and remainders, alongside the *patriarchive*, Judith proposes a theory of responsibility that it is at the heart of the novel’s critique of identity as it is conditions violence. To be born is to be tied to others like marionettes, what becomes a transferential model of reading consciousness, Judith says:

“[...] like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying [...], and then all of a sudden it’s all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone there to remember [...], and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they don’t even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell [...]. And so maybe if you could go to someone, [...] and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself..., at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only passing from one hand to another, [...] something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it die someday, while the block of stone can’t be *is* because it never can become *was* before it cant die ever or perish.....” (*Absalom* 100-101)

Judith, like the novel itself, poses a call to remembering, invoking the present as it relies, not simply upon becoming-was, but the remainders, what the present has had to reject to be organized as itself. When Judith hands the letter to Mrs. Compson, she exposes the illusory, fallacious status of the *logos*, and participates in an exchange of “scraps.” There is an archivalism of women who keep and who wait for the men’s return; yet, the novel counter-organizes itself as such “scraps,” that which escapes the patriarchive and reneges its claim to totality.

The letter from Bon is improvised with stove polish, the only available “ink” at War by a certain tragedy of failed encounter, touches upon the one Quentin receives from his father at Harvard. The reading of that letter will throw him into a fit of memory in which he, with Shreve, will cast an alternative version of the story of Sutpen that will work towards undoing it. Quentin meditates on the letter from his father before him, yet it is articulated not by Quentin, but by the narrator, the novel now drawing itself from time as scraps, as if it has been overhearing and absorbing from what it hears the force of its own technique, as had Conrad in his experiments in mimetic voice in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*:

*Because there was love Mr Compson said There was that letter she brought and gave to your grandmother to keep He (Quentin) could see it, as plainly as he saw the one open text book on the table before him, white in his father's dark hand against his linen leg in the September twilight where the cigar-smell, the wistaria-smell, the fireflies drifted, thinking Yes I have heard too much , I have been told too much; I have had had to listen too much, too long thinking Yes, almost exactly like Father: that letter, and who to know what moral restoration she might have contemplated in the privacy of that house, that rooms, that night, what hurdling of iron old traditions since she had seen almost everything else she had learned to call stable vanish like straws in a gale...*

As he then imagines Judith speech to V. Bon about his child (there are voices behind voices), she says, "*It does not need to have any name.*" The name is patrilineal. Yet, in "hurdling of iron old traditions," this movement of fragments is without such seriality. Emerson had enjoined the reader to lift his "iron lids," in repudiation of the past, a past which the novel, at the level of technique, will refuse to synthesize away even as it refutes its ground. Insofar as the novel adopts the movement of the fragment at the level of technique, the letter moves multi-directionally between the Compsons, Shreve, a narrator, Bon and Judith—and the movement of their voices is just alongside of that which orders the filial, as "that something [that] was the irrevocable repudiation of the old heredity and tradition" (*Absalom* 277).

Judith's gesture of effacement, not to give Jim Bond a name, the remainder of the filial bond, is the negative of Colonel Compson's offer to help erase V. Bon from Jefferson, insofar as it is organized by the question, "*what are you.*" Judith's act of a-nomological rescue forces the novel into the temporality of a musical movement, for as Barthes writes of the grain of the voice, the fragment which is not the *logos* and does not offer itself to interpretation, "*it moves, as in something is moving in the chain of the signifier.*" As Quentin and Shreve "accomplished the overpassing," they "forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other—faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true...in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false" (*Absalom* 253). It is as if Faulkner provides the dialectical conditions, in an immanent engagement with its negative, that might make the Emersonian consciousness possible, Emerson too having rejected what he calls "foolish consistency." Such a consciousness, however, cannot ground a national identity, literature, or "voice" insofar as they categorically rely upon seriality as exclusion.

Conrad's theory of the novel, I have argued, was guided by a struggle to insert himself in the tradition of the novel to which he felt himself to be an outsider. Cathecting the English language within the world of his novels would paradoxically revise it, imbuing it with an experimental sense of narrative time and voice responsive to the ontological dilemma of belonging, one which Lukács only begins to touch upon in his theory of the novel as the form of homelessness. Paradoxically, it is insofar as Faulkner adopts a Conradian temporality of acoustics, driven by what I have called the "wayward voice," that he is able to bring what James calls "the terrible human past" to bear upon the novel as history.

Insofar as the works of Faulkner exist in an echoic relation, both with each other and within themselves, Faulkner is working through, at the level of technique, what one is to "do" with unfulfillment such that it might not persist, as it does for Rosa, as infinite suffering. Reflecting on National Socialism as an émigré in America in 1960, Adorno argues that the expression "working through the past" has become "a modish slogan." "In this usage 'working

through the past' does not mean seriously working upon the past, that is, through a lucid consciousness breaking its power to fascinate. On the contrary, the intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory" (*Auschwitz* 3). In the incanted image, Quentin is fascinated with the image of violence. Yet, he wants, as Adorno might say "to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive" (3). There is a double bind that afflicts Quentin and the novel's own movements and ways of listening. Quentin and Shreve perform a break in fascination that cannot be accounted for by "the old virtues." There is a recognition of a suffering that cannot be illusorily assuaged through any recourse to the whole—as identity or name—that propels it through exclusion.

## Coda: A Quite Different Way of Listening

Perhaps Quentin himself has not been listening when Mr Compson related (recreated?) it that evening at home; perhaps at that moment on the gallery in the hot September twilight Quentin took that in stride without hearing it just as Shreve would have...

—William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

This project began with Conrad's theory of vision and concluded with Faulkner's radically exterior sense of sound. Both writers engaged with materials that exceed the world of their novels and indeed, point to new ways of seeing and hearing outside of the novel. I have tried to show how their sensibilities are modernist, not only in the sense that they can tell us something about modernism as a project, but in that their modernism can tell us something about why we should continue to read these works "long after the last note has been struck." In both writers, I have located ways of hearing that are only possible in writing and yet, they force us to reconsider how we hear or what is considered eligible for hearing. They work towards inciting an expanded acoustical capacity. In the way that characters seem to hear old sounds and old stories differently in order to redirect their substance, these are works that require a kind of attention that can be both lulled and incredibly focused, engaging the reader in an activity that is both acoustical and visual, the acoustical accessing alternative regions of the image.

Benjamin's way of seeing has proven to be a most motivating moment in the history of studies of literary modernism: the "protective eye" is relinquished by the experience of walking in the street, the "dialectical image" rescues the past, and the "optical unconscious" of the photographic image propels the sense that modernism provides what Woolf calls "the world seen without a self." On a physical level with the close-up, both cinema and photography allow one to see what is missed by consciousness in the faculty of natural sight. Siegfried Kracauer extends this sense in his epilogue to *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960). In a section titled "Moments of Everyday Life" he gestures to, in continuation of his Marxist works from the late 1920s, cinema's rescue of the concrete particular and the retrieval of the ignored, most basic substance of physical reality. Because feature films, he writes quoting Balázs, are preoccupied with "physical minutiae as well as the decline of ideology it is in fact inevitable that our minds, fragmented as they are, should absorb not so much wholes as 'small moments of material life'" (303). These small units or elements are "intended to advance the story to which it belongs, but it also affects us strongly, or even primarily, as just a fragmentary moment of visible reality, surrounded, as it were, by a fringe of indeterminate visible meanings" (303). We have experienced such a fringe in Conrad, particularly as he pauses narrative action to negotiate the terms of an encounter. He heightens our awareness of the kinds of sounds that happen just below the level of attention. As Benjamin writes

close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. (*Illuminations* 236)

In what Benjamin calls "distraction," in contrast to contemplation, the mass "absorbs the work of art," rather than being absorbed into it (239). Through Conrad and Faulkner, then, we are

beginning to sense how *listening* can be similarly engaged in fragmentary activities and how in doing so, it can assume a critical function.

I have addressed in this project the critical, ethical, and political possibility of an acoustical fragment. Conrad and Faulkner provide numerous sounds, tones, and voices through which to ask if the acoustical fragment is merely the audible variant of collage and montage, or rather something else. Once one is rescuing through sound and not simply sight, what becomes possible? As Benjamin argues in his essay on mechanical reproducibility, to absorb the cinematic fragment before it is seized upon by the understanding is paradoxically a heightening of the capacity for political consciousness; perception is reorganized. In the course of history “the human apparatus of perception,” itself historical, is faced with a “task,” he argues, the film viewer now noticing the object in an “incidental” rather than “rapt” fashion, a tear in mystification. Kracauer rejoins, writing that thought “disengages itself” from plot, action, a championed belief or a conflict to “open up a dimension wider than that of the plots which they sustain” (303). As if echoing Conrad, who writes in the Preface “all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile,” Kracauer argues that film is the distinctive medium of life in modernity, that “this dimension extends, so to speak, beneath the superstructure of specific story contents; it is made up of moments within everybody’s reach” (303). In the recourse to the sensible particular, there is a pluralism and the fracture of ideology. Film is quintessentially modern, however, because it keeps pace with the phenomenal world. It seems to exceed our own ability to perceive it, penetrating superstructure by making it *visible* as a structure.

The critical function of the visual versus the acoustical was raised by Benjamin in a 1940 letter Adorno who had read “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility” and sent in reply his “The Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening.” Adorno’s essay is a decidedly critical reading of technology that argues against the redemptive reading of technology posed by Benjamin, one who had found in silent cinema democratic possibilities, attracted to the critical gesture of the principles of montage. Adorno’s essay, however, is a critique of the technological means of musical dissemination as a debasement of both music and the listener. As if in direct response to Benjamin (he is not cited him by name in the essay), Adorno argues that the listener of “hit songs” is as debased as the cinema spectator who “no longer knows whether the film has alienated them from reality or reality has alienated them from the film, as they wrench open a great formless mouth with shining teeth in a voracious smile, while the tired eyes are wretched and lost above” (*Music* 303). There is a “masochistic mocking of one’s own wish for lost happiness” (304). Adorno’s way of hearing music under capitalism allowed him to see film (sound-film) differently than Benjamin, finding not transport into the sensory conditions that might facilitate democracy, but alienation from reality. His essay is a critique of the individual under capitalism (the whistling “radio ham” who “lies to himself” about reification). Adorno concludes with the form of political listening called for by the atonal music of Schoenberg and Webern. As Benjamin himself notes in his response, Adorno is most cryptic in his conclusion. Adorno, in his typically aphoristic fashion, has very little to say, in the context of this essay, about these composers.

Nevertheless, one might turn to Adorno’s comments about dissonance made earlier in the essay in order to understand precisely what he argues for in contrast to regressive and commodified listening. Dissonance, as I argued with Nancy’s blue note in “That Evening Sun,” is an interval not sanctioned by normative or traditional tonal harmony. It can interject a tone not implied by the key and, in more radical instances, the piece of music can be without a key, developing the relationships between tones in a free and undetermined way. Dissonance can be



theorized in terms of how Conrad and Faulkner work with incitement, suggestiveness, and implication at the level of hearing. On one level, one anticipates a certain piece of information and is given another, as in delayed decoding; in Faulkner's case in particular, the reader is made to hear what narrators do not say directly, what exceeds the official or sanctioned narrative. Adorno writes that dissonance "rejects belief in the illusion of the existing harmony" (291). Faulkner, we have discovered, worked in a similar fashion, the novel unfolding such that the logic guiding the preservation of racial categories is revealed to be constructed and guided by antinomies. "Dissonance," however, is the denigrated motif of Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*. Drama is "lyricism of the soul" and "intoxication of a soul gripped by destiny and so made song" (45). The epic gives way to the novel in the "false searching for an aim that is not longer clearly and unequivocally given" and with it, there is "the disintegration of a reality-become-song" (41, 59). In Dante, "every solitary voice that falls silent on earth is there awaited by a chorus that takes it up, carries it towards harmony and through it, becomes harmony itself" (59). In contrast, the novel can only be self-reflexive in its search in a world in which nothing is directly given (60). It is "fundamentally abstract" (71). While Lukács writes that every form is determined by an "incompletely resolved dissonance...which therefore threatens [it]," this figure becomes central to his discussion of the novel as the disruption of epic song. "The dissonance special to the novel, the refusal of the immanence of being to enter into empirical life, produces a problem of form whose formal nature is much less obvious" (71). The novel cannot make us whole, the individual being fundamentally fragmented, dispersed from the whole, and dissonant with his or her own self.

How is one to receive the acoustics of the modernist novel in this regard, a novel organized by "another art altogether" and a "sinister resonance?" Its fragmentary sounds—tropes released from a narrative whole—burrow in the capacity for audition. "Dissonance" is more rigorously employed by Adorno, a careful listener, and it is registered in its critical function: it fractures belief in apparent world as it is organized under capital. Given Adorno's comments about the world of advertisements, it is as if dissonance in music fractures the belief in a certain order of the visible. Atonal music, Adorno seems to suggest, is not simply dissonant with itself, but with the visible world in which it sounds out. There is a jarring sound—a cognitive dissonance—which one can no longer "synch" with reality, the image of the world to which the radio ham whistles as if in accompaniment. In that same way, the reader had heard the shrieks of the jungle against Marlow's narrating voice, against the logic of colonialism itself. The regressed listening hears a harmonious sound-track. In contrast, the howls, wails, cries, shouts, moans, and calls the cling to the world of Conrad and Faulkner are acoustical fragments that address critical listening, that continue to vibrate into the world after reading. As Slavoj Žižek might suggest, "it is no longer appropriate...to say that the sound 'accompanies' the flow of pictures; rather, the sound-track has in a sense taken over the function once exercised by the establishing shot. It gives us the general perspective, the 'map' of the situation... while the images on screen are reduced to isolated fragments."

In negotiating Benjamin's befuddled response to the end Adorno's essay (he does not quote it), one might return to Adorno's concluding remark that Mahler "crystallizes the whole" as totality; the work of Schoenberg and Webern, in contrast, "is nothing but a single dialogue with the powers which destroy individuality—powers whose 'formless shadows' fall colossally on their music" (315). Though Nietzsche is not cited in this essay, Adorno echoes Nietzsche's own theory of opera as the destruction of the *principium individuationis*, which Conrad and

Faulkner each locate at the origin of violence. On the question of Mahler, Benjamin writes in his letter to Adorno, what reaches us as a most suggestive fragment:

The subject matter of your work touches on my own in two respects.... Firstly, in those parts which relate certain characteristics of the contemporary acoustic perception of jazz to the optical perception of film, I cannot decide whether the different distribution of light and shade in our respective approaches is due to theoretical divergences or not. Perhaps it is only a case of apparent differences between two perspectives which are in fact equally directed upon different objects. I do not mean to suggest that acoustic and optical perception are equally susceptible to revolutionary transformation. This may explain the fact that *the prospect of a quite different way of listening* [emphasis added], with which you conclude your essay, is not immediately clear, at least to someone like me, for whom Mahler is not a completely intelligible experience. (*Correspondence* 295)

He confesses there may be “theoretical divergences” and that they pertain to different objects, the visual and acoustical. While one could fill a volume with the differences between the late-romantic composer Mahler and the atonal music Schoenberg, what is important for our consideration of an acoustics of the novel, its expansion of an acoustic capacity, is that Benjamin exhibits a more limited ear, one that is not able to distinguish fully between two radically different approaches, within the acoustical, to musical material by composers and listeners. Adorno hears one form of music as being invested in the “whole,” while another is invested in the moments of troubling and disruptive sonority. How can music be fragmented or whole? We seem to grasp this idea more immediately with visual objects, for music, being as it is in time, is considered to be a continuous stream of sound, punctuated by moments of silence. It is, from beginning to end, a single entity. These thinkers were not writing from the perspective of late twentieth-century musical practice (one that hears music, especially recorded music, as fragmentary pieces to be assumed and reassumed in different ways). Yet, Adorno had already noted in the fetishism of music essay how “regressive” listeners seize upon the chorus and demand and wait for its return. Some fragments of melody are more palatable in that way and inspire our fetishism; we cling to them as jingles, anthems, and soundtracks. The dissonant fragment, however, like Conrad’s “sinister resonance,” is ambiguous; it is not seized by the intelligence and is broken off from a larger whole or narrative. In other words, the dissonance is a *remainder of musical narrative*, of ideology itself—it is not that which, as in the sonata form, tells a story. In the sonata form, there are themes and counter-themes that resolve at the end of the piece. Each section works towards that resolve. It is crucial that in a later essay, “On the Contemporary Relationship of Music and Philosophy,” Adorno is drawn to Beethoven’s “The Goodbye” not for a theme, but for a single sound, a passing moment. The “quite different way of listening” that Adorno exhibits is the ability to hear how some music wants to be heard as a whole and how other music wants to be heard as fragmentary.

On another level, however, Benjamin provocatively claims that Adorno’s essay has forced him to recognize that sound-film perhaps breaks the revolutionary potential he had seen in silent film, “which produced reactions that were difficult to control and hence dangerous politically.” Were he to consider sound-film, it would “constitute a critique of contemporary art, which would provide a dialectical mediation between your views and mine.” Benjamin does not elaborate, but he does suggest that *only* cinema as a seeing-without-hearing can be dangerous politically. This “different way of listening” suggested for Benjamin by Adorno is perhaps itself

a hearing-without-seeing (if by “seeing” we mean Adorno’s reference to the visible world of advertisements and commodities to which one whistles along). The dialectical mediation between Benjamin and Adorno perhaps resides in Conrad’s “another art altogether,” in struggling to *incant* lost happiness as it paradoxically allows happiness to become real in and as aesthetic experience. There must be a dialectical *suspension* between sound and vision, the threshold of auto-affection, in which the aesthetic becomes political. The aesthetic merging of the acoustic and the optical in sound film forecloses such critical suspension—it is an alienation from reality, the sound-image becoming complicit with the illusions of reification, as with Plato’s worst fears of mimesis in the cave.

Benjamin, however, was able to hear *stories* in this way. He had argued that stories are like “pilings of layers” that are not “expended” but rather “continue.” They are available to be retold in different ways, to be actualized by a different set of circumstances. In resistance to imitating the theater, Eisenstein had distilled cinema to the smallest unit of the frame placed in “conflict” with another frame so as to produce a heretofore un-thought of “concept.” The “third image” is the critical moment that allows the viewer not just to infer ideology, but the presence of its seams—it can be made and unmade. The critical acoustical fragment, in this way, remains of a totality. Benjamin had seen this in collage and montage, had heard in the “tracks” of storytelling in Leskov’s frame narratives, but had perhaps not heard it in music. With Faulkner, there are sounds—howls, moans, and cries, i.e. dissonances—that are heard and reheard, are remainders of totality and push the writer into rewriting, are the connective tissue between works.

With Conrad and Faulkner, then, we are confronted with two writers who heard and listened to the act of composition in “quite a different way.” While both writers experienced a moment of vision as one impetus for the work, the image of Caddy climbing up the pear tree in *The Sound and the Fury* and the image of Almayer stepping upon the jetty in *A Personal Record*, both of these images were swathed in sound. Throughout this project, I have deemphasized the visual register and argued for a certain crucial interdependence between seeing and hearing. I have undertaken this project not because hearing is more important than seeing or because the visually-oriented account of modernism is invalid, but because it does not allow for a whole series of questions to arise, questions concerning, in particular, the irrecoverable vicissitudes of the activity of writing, and modernist writing in particular.

Is there a modernist act of writing? This question perhaps seems strange: we usually think of the product itself being modernist; the novel bears certain traits that one can associate with a larger project of modernism. But can one write as a modernist? One can write as a modernist in the sense of making use of modernist technique—troubling omniscience, the unfolding of plot, and the sense of the conclusion of action; one can evacuate a moral “lesson” and turn to the sensory experience of characters. More towards the physical experience of writing, one can write, as the surrealists did, “automatically” or, as Joyce did, within a “stream of consciousness.” But is there a way of working through one’s material resources as a writer—the language that is available, the habits, practices, and tools of paper and pen—that is modernist, particularly if modernism is, as Paz writes, “the continual breaking away?” Is there something modernist about Faulkner’s plastic sense that “These people belong to me and I have the right to move them about in time when I need them,” his allowing a fourth section to be appended to *The Sound and the Fury* after it had already been published, or revising whole novels for anthologization, what was a certain defiance of the finality inhering to print-culture? Do these works and people remain always incomplete, breaking away? Was there something modernist about Conrad’s

urgently writing the first pages of *Lord Jim*, “Tuan Jim: A Sketch,” not on paper, but in the blank pages torn from an old family volume of Polish poetry, copied out by his grandmother? It was a hybrid contact, on the material level of the page, between two worlds, two histories of reading and knowledge, two identities and exigencies. Is all literary writing—the act of composition as pursued in its vicissitudes, its gestures, fragments, and incompleteness, and not in its final product—to some degree, “modernist,” owing to a sensibility that is at times suppressed as a central part of the narrative and at times allowed to supercede the work’s supposed claim to completion?

What a writer experiences when he or she writes is largely unavailable both to critics and the writer him or herself. In some cases, one only has the final published version of a work, the bits and pieces that participated in the process being lost, discarded, or illegible. When they are available, one can attempt to trace backwards from dates a sense of what happened, of why a writer made certain choices, revisions, or cuts. There is a kind of visual assembly that becomes possible, as in “Tuan Jim: A Sketch” or the Langford annotated manuscript of *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which one can quite literally see words and sentences that have been struck through, erased, written over, and rewritten. The text ghosts itself, indicating possibilities and alternative potentials, what Rosa Coldfield calls “the might-have-been.” In Conrad’s case, however, we have seen how he included a page from *Almayer’s Folly* in a letter to Poradowska, a letter that I argued was defaced in the fullest sense of the word. It is so illegible such that it could not have been given as a gift for reading; it was rather a gift of death, visual testament to Conrad’s agony and deconstitution under the act of writing. It is a testament, however, that places Conrad as a writer into tropological relationship to his characters. The face of James Wait is itself defaced, a “tragic” and “misshapen” mask.

The relationship between the manuscript page and the face of Wait opened my discussion upon an acoustical activity that cannot be separated from the visual. What is that acoustical activity? On one level, one hears how the voice of Wait, in the moment of his death, expires to become “gibberish” and “dumb speech.” That voice functions in relationship to the trope of “gibberish” in Conrad’s letters; in other words, it collaborates with how he heard his own voice as a writer and how he wrote of his voice, both directly and in its displaced registers. There is then, an act of *critical hearing* where the literary historian must ask after resonances between works, fragments of works, passing references, and comments about writing in order to construct a different kind of narrative than that made available by the course of visually tracing revision. On another level, the acoustical activity of literary history does not belong to reading alone, but inheres in the event of composition: compositional hearing is not linear, but recurrent.

Recall, for example, how Conrad writes *A Personal Record*, his memoir of coming to writing. He remembers that he had heard, he had heard, heard and heard again of Almayer; he does not tell the reader what he had heard *about* him. The sound of the name, like that of Sutpen, was floating in the air. What we had noticed in *A Personal Record*, however, is that in the moment Conrad explains the origin of *Almayer’s Folly*, he begins to remember having heard of Almayer—he suddenly writes a passage so remarkable in its musical beauty that Conrad is essentially *rewriting* his novel and creating a rival version. Watt calls the beginning of *Almayer’s Folly* “an initial glimpse” and a “visual impetus”—Conrad saw Almayer and was entranced. Conrad attempts to place himself *outside* of that memory, outside of the act of composition, so as to “see” it: he reflects on it and observes how it began. Yet, in the moment of writing of writing, he is thrown back into an acoustical memory that challenges that activity of seeing his writing. It is then that his explanation dovetails, emerging as fictional or non-explanatory prose. There is

something about hearing and literary writing that are so intertwined for Conrad—as a writer, which is not necessarily to say a “person” or “self”—that one implies the other.

The way Conrad wrote, or heard the act of writing, seems to have everything to do with modernism. In other words, there is a kind of sympathy between the challenges posed by his works (and by reading them) and the challenges he experienced as a writer. On the one hand, he was trying to become legitimate as an English writer, and on the other, he was someone who seems to be aware of his “modernism” at least as early as the 1917 Author’s Note to *Heart of Darkness*. In that essay he notes a radical transformation in his writing. In order to adequately register it in all of its power and ambiguity, he continues the trope of the “continued vibration” as it had also been raised in his post-*Nigger of the “Narcissus”* encounter with the phonograph. This trope, I argued, was already intertwined with Conrad’s desire to find a neutral voice and to gain acceptance. The vibration is the matter beneath all things that connects across difference. Yet, the trope departs from that personal register. In the Author’s Note, Conrad returns to the trope that make itself least available to the language of epiphany or momentous change: the *continued vibration* is a trope that is incomplete, that implies new iterations.

Those qualities are undoubtedly modernist and I have argued they suggest a modernist acoustics. In that way, I turned to Faulkner and heard a similar defiance of convention and way of working. For Faulkner, it was the bellow or moan, the voice of Benjy as he remembered Caddy, that seemed to indicate the radical nature of the experiments he was about to begin. As it plays out in *The Sound and the Fury*, this sound is not fully explained; it takes effect, it is enforced, but neither described nor linked to an affective origin. The reader has to attempt to *hear* Benjy as Benjy heard himself, what courts a different kind of attention to the novel than attending (as I noted Kracauer argues of cinema) to action or plot. What is *happening* is of secondary importance to the affects accumulating around it. The bellow “comes up”—the verb for such activity is most elusive—in “Twilight,” presumably the first draft of *The Sound and The Fury*. I argued that such a repetition suggests that Faulkner was steeped in an acoustical imaginary, turning to sounds as pivots for his project in the moment he was “shutting the door” on publishers. The bellow of Benjy was uncanny and Benjy himself is not a very suitable subject for traditional narrative; he was, as Faulkner writes, “the idiot.” I asked, however, how the sound of Benjy bears a strong relationship to the sound of Nancy in “That Evening Sun.” The relationship between those two texts is not fully chronological: it is impossible to assemble the proper or original order of Faulkner’s drafts (though some have tried through analyzing the penmanship and the paper he used, attempts that proved inconclusive). I argued that to try to organize them in that way, would resist Faulkner’s most compelling critique of the logic of filiation, i.e. the attempt to organize and categorize bodies in time.

The acoustics of his practice is *fragmentary*. The “order” is not fully recuperable by literary history and not simply because of that lacuna, but because there is something of *sound*, as I have argued throughout this project, that defies the logic of origination. There is both an *afterhearing* and *beforehearing*. As Faulkner wrote “Evangline,” he concluded with a howl at the burning home; yet, in that moment, he *already* appears to be hearing how he will conclude *Absalom, Absalom!* I have connected that movement of sound to Faulkner’s critical project, for in seeming to hear Nancy and Benjy as making the same sound, or rather, as resonating, he defies the laws that argue against that commiseration, or miscengenation and the laws that had once designated what counts as “black.”

When did Faulkner first hear such a sound? When did it enter his consciousness as a sound that was possible for writing? What is the “model” for this sound? These are questions

that are not only unanswerable, but seem to miss the point: when listening to composition, one engages in an activity that is not limited to the developmental progress of a writer, tracing a first version to a more advanced version. Certainly, some attempts are more successful than others. “Evangeline” was unpublished and if it had been “fleshed out,” one has the sense that it could not have become *Absalom, Absalom!*. That short story reaches a certain limit or has a limited capacity. But again, that limit is hard to fully ascertain: is “Evangeline” a “draft” of *Absalom, Absalom!* or some other kind of text? Do the terms drafting and revision, as we traditionally conceive them, remain appropriate as one attempts to reckon the repetitive relationship between pieces of writing? What counts as a “whole” work and what is rather relegated to the “piece” or “scrap,” as Judith Supten has her letter from Bon? What is it within a given “attempt”—the French *essai* is perhaps more appropriate—that meets a certain limit and cannot be extended any further, indicating to the writer that he or she must simply start over? What, in that instance, is to be discarded and what is spared as a pivot for a new piece of writing, or discarded once and retrieved later? Once one begins to think of literary history in terms of the micro-levels of single words or even sounds, one has that sense that a certain material can be continually vibrating, as Conrad would have it, not only between differing versions of a texts, but between words that are apparently unrelated, across genres, across writers and nationality.

In that way, I have pursued in Conrad and Faulkner a British and American modernism as it was entangled with the European. As Conrad writes the 1897 Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* he is hearing English through hearing French. As a Polish-born native, he was an overhearer in relationship to both languages. Faulkner, in order to critique the aftermath of the Civil War, makes uses of his own transnational history of reading. I have also heard James is a kind of residual voice behind these authors, someone who himself moved between the British and American imaginaries, and turned to Flaubert, Maupassant, and the Russian writers.

James provides a compelling example of what I mean to suggest by this transnationalism, namely, a series of residual echoes or “resonant strings of remembering” as Faulkner has it. In the 1908 preface to revised New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James describes how this novel began in an act of watching. To access that vision, however, he rehears the words of Turgenev, quoting him on just this issue of beginning writing: “If I watch [figures] long enough I see them come together...I see them placed, I see them engaged in this or that difficulty” (4). “Trying to recover here,” James writes, “for recognition, the germ of my idea, I see that it must have consisted not at all in any conceit of a ‘plot’...” (4). This should remind us of Kracauer’s claim that an aesthetics of the fragment diverts our attention away from plot and towards minor details. James argues that for the novelist, there is rather a set of *relations* that moves “by a logic of their own...” (4). He then seizes upon the character, a “subject,” the young woman, Isabel Archer. Yet, that notion is admitted to be “a projection of memory upon the whole matter of growth...” (4). James finally confesses, against seeking an absolute origin, that there are “lurking forces.” He asks what it means for the writer to attend to “these possibilities of recovering, from some good standpoint on the ground gained, the intimate history of the business—of retracing and reconstructing its steps and stages.” Such reconstruction is only *almost* possible, he seems to insist; for instead of retracing or mapping the process, he then submits to an acoustics, recalling “a remark that I heard fall years ago from the lips of Ivan Turgnieff in regard to his own experience of the unusual origin of the fictive picture” (4). James continues to argue for writing that appears to be visual, yet is simultaneously directed by hearing haunting words:

It began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him

and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were. He saw them, in that fashion, as *disposables*, saw them subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful to the creatures themselves, the complications them would be most likely to produce and to feel. (5)

As James *pieces together* the origin of writing, he notes two phenomena: a “fictive picture” that seems to fragment as quickly as it has surfaced (it calls for the writer’s piecing together) and the way that writing is hearing the words of other writers. There is both a seeing and a hearing, neither of which can be fully described as an epiphany. These modes are held in provocative *suspension*. If that suspension were to be resolved, James, and his reader, would effectively *have* the origin of his novel. On another level, James argues that characters live out certain fates, while not living out others (as we have noted with Rosa, Judith, Sutpen, and Bon), since there is an act of “selection.” There is a train of associations, forgotten or way-laid possibilities, which combine to form the “intimate business” of a writer.

That James confesses that his art of fiction is without regulation and technique, that it is impossible to recover, is crucial for the definition of modernism activated by this project. In refusing, as Conrad does in *A Personal Record*, to narrate a linear process of writing as sedimentation, accumulation, and revision, there is a way of thinking through writing that places James on the threshold of the Victorian period. There is a lack of concern for the whole; there is an attendance to pieces, of which the novel is itself representative. What is the “whole” work if it is not the culmination and completion of an organized process? As James asks in another context, where does experience “begin and end?” What is left out? What is neglected? Where do those possibilities go? What James describes, then, is a thoroughly modernist way of thinking about writing. “To arrive at these things is to arrive at my story,” James quotes Turgenev. “As for the origin of one’s wind-blown germs themselves,” James then writes, “who shall say where they come from? We have to go too far back, too far behind, to say.”

What has just happened? Insinuated into the creative temporality of writing is a time of modernity as what Calinescu calls “a sense of *unrepeatable time*” and “*historical time*, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards” (13). The moving onwards suggests that we are lost to ourselves: as with Conrad in *A Personal Record*, the moment he tries to create a stable narrative about the past, the ground shifts beneath him. And *yet*, James suggests, there is an echoic phenomena. The words of the Russian writer return to James in the moment he reflects upon how his novel both began and was revised. Such repetition does not mean that time is “reversible;” *and yet*, there is a reiteration, a movement, and transformation. To make matters more complicated, there are several, multi-directional generations of hearing in James’ remarks. James writes of Turgenev *as if in the voice of Conrad*, “Other echoes from that same source linger with me, I confess, as unfadingly—if it be not all indeed one much-embracing echo” (6). This phrase could have been uttered by Marlow’s recollection of Kurtz. James had read and rigorously commented upon Conrad’s novel just after its publication. In other words, James appears to rewrite his own experience of having read *Heart of Darkness*; he appears to retroactively weave it into an account of a novel written almost twenty years prior. As James reflects upon the revised first edition of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880-1) for the New York Edition in 1908, one might argue that James now incorporates Conrad into his “projected memory” of the process of composition, not only what it was to have written *The Portrait of a Lady* in the first instances in

the 1880s, but it was to have *revised* that work post-Conrad. There is an overdetermined ghosting of voices, voices within voices, that is not reducible to influence.

Again, the moment one attends to these instances of hearing, a quite different way of thinking through literary history unfolds. Should not James merely be said to have influenced Conrad? Why rewrite another writer? Faulkner appears to have rewritten a passage from *Lord Jim*, one describing Marlow seated at the verandah, in order to describe Mr. Compson seated at the gallery about to talk to Quentin. But towards what purpose and with what effect? What is it in a writer that one wants to imitate or “sound like,” and how is that imitation achieved? How is that imitation then heard by the reader? By what means can we negotiate the echo-effect that defies linear or uni-directional genealogy? What does it mean that I, as a reader, remember James having written of the echo in a way that echoes Conrad? What is such an echo? Is it willful, accidental, or contingent? What of echoes with texts that a particular writer has not read, echoes that, in other words, come about only through the reader’s history of reading? Are those echoes to be discounted and are they without historical precedent? An enormous volume of questions concerning acoustics and historicity unfolds.

Such relatedness between time and the acoustic has been emphasized by the history of western musical aesthetics. “Music is transitory,” writes Thomas Dalhaus. “It goes by, instead of holding still for inspection...[T]he fact that music is a process, not a lasting thing, is enough to grant it only a slight, vanishing degree of objectivity. Audible things are sensed not as things out there, but rather as events surrounding us and invading us, instead of keeping their distance from us” (11). In ontologies of music since Hegel, the “becoming” of sound relates it to the present-tense and the experience of unfolding. As Cavarero argues:

sight...perceives every object that is in front of the onlooker—objects that are characterized by a certain permanence in space and time. They are stable, lasting, present...Hearing however is bound to temporality and perceives distancing sounds only in their dynamic succession; melody is not generated by sequences; it is a sequence. (27)

Sequence, however, relates not simply to loss, but to haunting. In his negotiation of Marlow and Kurtz, Conrad was sensitive not simply to the forward moving and successive direction of the acoustic, but its echoic capacity, its being as reverberation and refrain. Indeed, Marlow hears Kurtz’s last words in a haunting refrain, one that overtakes the present-tense location of the drawing room; the past radically impinges upon it. Marlow is thrown backward by the invasion of sounds, an acoustic involuntary memory.

The acoustics of the modernist novel brings with it not just the problem of time, but specifically the problem of the past. If modernity is time conceived as “historical” or uncyclical, the problem is how to negotiate the fact that some experiences return without being fully retrievable. They have been loosened from a larger grand narrative that might provide meaning and stability. The “continued vibration” perhaps operates below the threshold of conscious awareness: there is that which cannot be seen, but it is heard.

I find in James’ use of the term “echo,” then, a dramatic performance of what Conrad perhaps means by rescue. Had I not remembered this term, however, their echoic relationship is not wholly irretrievable—it is not a singular chance that must be grasped at. The relationships between works, and with it, a transnational modernism, bears itself out in multiple ways if one begins to listen. Does one listen more closely, or read and read again? Is it intuitive or masterable? As a cursory response to such questions as they are opened by this project, one might return to Lyotard’s comments about listening in traditional oral culture. In a central



moment of “The Pragmatics of Narrative Knowledge,” he theorizes the temporality of recitative listening and singing that has consequences for a way of thinking through the an acoustical literary history of modernism. Lyotard writes:

[Recitation] exhibits a surprising feature: as meter take precedence over accent in the production of sound (spoken or not), time ceases to be a support for memory to become an immemorial beating that, in the absence of a noticeable separation between periods prevents their being numbered and consigns them to oblivion. Consider the form of popular sayings, proverbs, and old maxims: *they are like little splinters of potential narratives or molds of old ones, which have continued to circulate on certain levels of the contemporary social edifice* [emphasis added]. In their prosody can be recognized the mark of that strange temporalization that jars the golden rule of our knowledge: “never forget.” (22)

This way of approaching the act of listening, applied to the literary, has two consequences. The first is that it suggests that works are not contained or whole to themselves. Bits of “saying” move on the social edifice in a temporality that is not linear and is, at times, without motivation or prerogative. The “immemorial beating” consigns an already lost origin to oblivion. Indeed, one effect of Faulkner’s critique is that the individual is divested of “voice;” the voice is not one’s own property to have. One cannot number the periods, saying *here* my voice begins and *here* it ends. The second consequence comes to us by way of Rosa. She has two refrains in her song: the “they will have told you” and “they could not have told you.” These are “molds” of old narrative and “splinters” of potential narratives. The location of the old ones is quite clear: Quentin’s body is resounding with them. “Isn’t it all we can say that they come from every quarter of heaven, that they are *there* as almost every turn of the road?” as James writes of the “wind-blown germ” (*Portrait* 6). Where, then, are the potential narratives to be located? Again, their existence is illustrated by Quentin. Some narratives or versions are “potential,” as with Quentin and Shreve’s fictional version of the story that affords Sutpen a tragic dimension. Yet, that does not mean such potentials are without material *existence*. Quentin tells the story of Sutpen that was blocked by the story he had told of himself. Both modalities, the mold of the old and the splinter of potentiality, “have continued to circulate on certain levels of the social edifice.”

Quentin’s listening, an acoustical rescue, is that intersection. It is invaluable to an acoustical literary history struggling to articulate itself. To rescue is to attend to both the fully realized and the not-fully-realized. Quentin’s listening is at the crux of an authoritative voice, established by the fathers, and renegade voice, that of Rosa, a voice that has not be fully heard or pursued in its significance. As Quentin inhabits the immemorial beatings of the fathers, he remains under the spell of what Bakhtin calls “authoritative discourse.” “It enters our consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and it stands and falls together with its authority. ... Authoritative discourse cannot be represented—it is only transmitted” (683-684). While Bakhtin means religious and political discourse (such as the Constitution or prayer), his sense of authoritative discourse has consequences for a way of thinking through writers as they “assume” the discourses of other writers and how the novel can return us to an auditory world after reading. Does not the writer take on fragments of discourses, revealed to be divided at their origin? There appears to be suggestive moment of auditory passage for Bakhtin, a *passage* in which authoritative discourse, “an indivisible mass,” takes on what one might call a *different voice*. Bakhtin theorizes

“internally persuasive discourse,” the word as it is “half-ours” in “the everyday rounds of our consciousness.” This process, as Bakhtin describes it, is entirely enigmatic:

Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions.... More than that, it enters into intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. (685)

What Bakhtin calls “freedom,” however, Derrida names “auto-affection.” The inner voice for Derrida feels spontaneous, as it is generated from within, always-already lined with the so-called exterior. The inner voice is idealized only through repetition. Yet, in emphasizing a “struggle,” Bakhtin allows us to inhabit the moment of passage that I have argued defines the strange temporality of Rosa’s chapter in *Absalom, Absalom!*. There, Quentin is “crossing over” from a listener to a speaker. Conrad and Faulkner incite this struggle in their reader. With Faulkner in particular, Porter argues, “we are reading in at least two registers,” attempting to understand what is taking place while a second register is organized by “the ongoing effort to sustain one’s defenses against the force of a voice...” (*Faulkner* 54). These voices unremittingly speak until one must become *involved*.

What is it to be involved? Quentin’s first question to his father after Rosa calls for him is why he should care. What is this story to him? James had rightly insisted that in becoming a consciousness, the novel is no longer concerned with a moral *per se*. The novel does not edify nor does it harm. Yet, in becoming a consciousness and addressing itself to a consciousness, the novel now suggests a perceptual transformation. Inciting such a transformation, Faulkner brings the novel to its limit the middle of *Absalom, Absalom!* with the voice of Rosa. If the reader began by sharing Quentin’s indifference, a sounding out at length now attacks that containment. One is no longer contemplative or indifferent. The reader is critical and demands the kind of rigorous retelling posed by Quentin and Shreve; the reader is *now* with the ears to hear such a discourse.

Throughout this project, then, I have been involved with these writers in an act of listening. I have tried to recuperate the intertwining between the acoustical and the written in order to develop a way of working with literary history that develops the problems posed by the voice rather than foreclosing them. I have not “organized” texts, but worked within their echoes, how they move backwards and forwards. In other words, the structure of the project begins to argue for a way of working with textuality that is not to be limited to modernism. The set of problems that open up when one begins listening to writing can conceivably happen with any number of writers from any given period.

As if in response to this quandary, in “The Death of the Author” Barthes argues that we must de-privilege the figure of the Author and replace it with the concept “scriptor.” The scriptor is a depersonalized term, one that suggests both writing a “script” for performance and a kind of haunted dictation that defies the bourgeois, commodified value of the Author as an “individual,” one who is intentional, motivated, and who owns what he has written. All writing, Barthes argues, is a “tissue of quotations.” While Barthes begins his essay by arguing that “writing is the destruction of every voice,” he suggestively concludes with hearing, turning to Jean-Pierre Vernant’s research on the “constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, its texts being woven from words with double meanings that each character understanding unilaterally (this

perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the ‘tragic’)” (148). Barthes continues, gesturing to the space of impersonal hearing:

there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him—this someone being precisely the reader (or here, the listener). Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused....The reader is the space where all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (148)

Reading is a temporary “holding together” of fragments. Is writing, however, a “total existence” if reading continually raises the possibility of new fragments? From where do these fragments come? If in Chapter One, I argued for the necessity of history, biography, psychology of the writer, in Chapters Two and Three I enacted the form of “rescue work” that Conrad describes in his essay on James. Conrad’s voice, I suggested, is inflected by a personal predicament and is to be heard in the superaddition of tropes, stratified as fragments across the *œuvre* that will be heard differently and reconstituted in oscillating ways. My reading became a temporary holding together, one performance of Conrad’s desire for belonging. The novelist, Conrad argues, upholds the “rescued fragment,” indicating a certain practice of reading that reanimates that fragment. While Barthes gestures to “loss” of double meaning, he at once gestures to a retroactive preservation, a holding together that is temporary, itinerant, and often undertaken with lawlessness. We learned from Faulkner, however, that such lawlessness poses a resistance not to the past or motivating forces, but rather to identity. While Barthes locates in the “Death of the Author” the novel as the point of the voice’s disappearance; he writes in “Grain of the Voice” that “There is no neutral voice and if sometimes that neutrality, that whiteness of the voice occurs, it terrifies us, as if we were to discover a frozen world, one in which desire was dead” (*Responsibility* 280). The voice, then, is the heterogeneous: it is not an object that one owns, like property or motive, but it is a force that moves through the world, the writer, and the work, activating and reactivating desires.

To begin to engage reading as listening is necessarily to move into non-neutral terrain. In order to achieve the status of a mere grammatical subject, the category of the narrative voice, as imagined by Genette, must suppress any relationship to phenomenal hearing—Conrad and Faulkner force one to ask what texts and narrative voices have to “do” in order to achieve neutrality. I argued that in displacement, there is alongside of the speaking voice an adjacent dimension. Even as written narrative moves horizontally in time, it simultaneously develops space within itself to be “heard” multiply both by the reader overtonally. In any tone, there is the fundamental frequency and a series of frequencies which make that tone possible, yet occupy another register—a single note is always plural in its registers. The sensitivity of the Conradian “registering temperament” cannot be approached monotonally, but rather as a series of overtones that conspire in the reader, his or her capacity for perception, in complex ways. This violent “row” and “howl” are not the object of description, but the disarticulations of narrative discourse itself, the personal voice by sonorous substance. How is the reader to hear the relationship between sound and speech, and sound and narrative? Does the narrative speak “over” their

sound, mastering their equivocation? Does the reader master in turn? Or rather, does the sound come-up alongside of narrative, alongside of readerly voice, one's most personal property, to challenge its domain? Where now does the reader's voice stand? What is left of voice? As Conrad and Faulkner everywhere suggest, one can only seek it in its fragments. One must hear and hear again.