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Nailed Down to the Past:
Nostalgia, Masculinity, and Corporeality
in American Literature, 1900-1950

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to the memory of Professor Emory Elliott,

whose generosity, insight, and unshakable belief

in his students continues to inspire me.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation will argue that, in addition to the widespread popular cultural perception of nostalgia as a saccharine, lachrymose phenomenon in which people yearn for an ostensibly kinder, gentler time, a number of early twentieth-century literary texts note how white males use nostalgia to express anxiety whenever apparent threats to their power manifest themselves as marginalized individuals' endeavoring for progress. Whereas progress looks forward and attempts to improve upon the past, nostalgia looks back, regarding the past as the ideal which must be reproduced.

An introduction discusses the historical development of nostalgia as concept. Each of the four chapters discusses a characteristic of nostalgia as manifested in texts by Faulkner, Weldon Johnson, Cather, Fitzgerald, Dreiser, and Chesnutt. The first chapter describes depression insofar as nostalgic individuals exhibit unhappiness with the present circumstances in which they find themselves. Such misery results from an inconsistency between the nostalgically idealized vision of the past and the disappointing present. The second chapter addresses desire, noting that nostalgic people yearn for a better past

precisely because of their disappointment and frustration. Desire can never be fully satisfied, even when people obtain what they believe they want.

The third chapter addresses destruction directed inward; individuals unable to imagine a future conforming neatly to their vision of the world as it should be—and presumably was in the past—believe they have no other choice than to commit suicide.

When individuals blame the incoherence between the desired past and unsatisfactory present on others, they direct the destruction outward—the final chapter's focus. In death, the memories of individuals consigned to discursive oblivion or physical death or both are preserved by those who destroy them in ways that maintain white males' advantage in power asymmetries. A conclusion considers how to apply the features of nostalgia analyzed in this dissertation to the literature published in the 1950s and 1960s.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The early twentieth century in the United States was marked by rapid developments and changes as well as fiercely nostalgic opposition to that change. On the one hand, African-Americans gained emancipation after the Civil War, yet after Reconstruction they faced discriminatory measures such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and Jim Crow laws while enduring the varied manifestations of the "separate but equal" doctrine established in the Supreme Court's 1896 decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony argued passionately on behalf of women's suffrage, which the nineteenth amendment of the U.S. Constitution granted in 1920, though this victory did not ameliorate many of the struggles women faced in the workforce, in the domestic sphere, or in other various aspects of their daily lives. Scientific advances continued with unprecedented speed, yet many of these inventions served nefarious purposes. The mass devastation caused by this weaponry made many long for a time that they perceived to be no longer accessible–the innocence prior to massive military conflicts such as the World Wars or the U.S. Civil War in which people could remain blissfully oblivious to the violence and devastation wrought upon the lives of both those on the battlefield and those keeping the home fires burning. With rapid changes affecting every aspect of American life–cultural, social, sexual, racial, and scientific, among others–some individuals did not welcome the change but instead resisted it angrily, vehemently, and sometimes even violently through a nostalgic yearning for an ostensibly kinder, gentler past that they believed to be superior to the

present. Such belief was mistaken, however, given that the years immediately following the Civil War saw some emancipated African-Americans making progress. People remember the past as they wish to believe it rather than as it actually occurred.

My dissertation rests upon the central precept that nostalgia consists of a yearning for another time or place (or both) because of an intense dissatisfaction with the present and an inability to perceive a better future. When no hope lingers that the future will even remotely resemble the sought-after past, individuals can take several actions in the illusory hope of fulfilling their elusive yet constantly nagging nostalgic desires. People can destroy themselves because the future cannot resemble the longed-for past, they can act violently toward others who threaten the realization of the past in the future, or they can disempower those who threaten their ability to wield power over others and fulfill their yearning. Nostalgia can function nefariously, becoming a motive for disenfranchising individuals on the basis of their race, gender, class, religion, or sexual orientation, among other threads of identity. The nostalgia that characterizes American literature during the first half of the twentieth century consists of three characteristics: desire, depression, and destruction. These characteristics—depression and destruction more overtly negative, desire generally though not always more positive—contrast sharply with the sentimentalized and sweetly lachrymose attitude so often manifested in collective and individual cultural perceptions of nostalgia. I am not by any means suggesting the popular and more positive notion of nostalgia entirely lacks in value or that it cannot be used toward a more productive good, but this dissertation will focus predominantly upon the more problematic uses of nostalgia as a means of enforcing and

entrenching power asymmetries while fomenting oppression. In what follows, I will explore how nostalgia enables these inequities through its impact upon corporeality and masculinity in selected American literary texts of the first half of the twentieth century. I have selected these two aspects upon which to direct my focus because they are both so directly related to the circulation of power in the specific time period and location being considered here—the early 20th-century United States. Situated within this context, I am intrigued at how much anxiety exists about the preservation of the integrity of white masculinity and bodies. Conversely, I am interested in how white males are willing to direct destructive impulses either inward toward themselves or outward toward others when the likelihood of realizing their nostalgic yearnings seems especially unlikely. Though nostalgia does not manifest itself in all writers of the period, my study will analyze texts by those writers describing individuals who remain trapped in their past and unable to press on toward the future or accept a present that they perceive as unsatisfactory.

When first coined in Johannes Hofer's 1688 medical thesis, the term "nostalgia" (a combination of the Greek words *nostos*, meaning homecoming or return, and *algos*, meaning sorrow or pain) initially referred to an affliction of the body (Starobinski 85). Doctors of the time believed that nostalgia could ultimately be fatal or have long-lasting physical effects for its sufferers, as Hofer documented the condition in the case of Swiss soldiers away from the home front for the first time and suffering from homesickness. Around the mid-19th century, a change in the classification of nostalgia as malady occurred. Under the pressure of criticism from practitioners of medicine, nostalgia was

reclassified an ailment of the mind rather than one of the body–a conception of nostalgia as mental infirmity that has remained firmly implanted in both the medical and cultural consciousness ever since. My dissertation will negotiate between nostalgia's impact upon the body and the mind (while also troubling the distinction between these ostensibly binarized terms), imagining how a yearning for the past stems from inner unhappiness. I will also consider how external forces and discursive pressures exert themselves upon the bodies. My understanding of the relationship between body and mind is inspired by Elizabeth Grosz's schema in *Volatile Bodies*, in which she imagines the body as formed both from the inside out (as subjectively experienced in relation to one's body) and from the outside in (as inscribed from the outside, whether that be discursively or through the pressure or violence of other individuals or groups). As Grosz notes, such a model "problematiz[es] and rethink[s] the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside." (xii) I also wish to imagine the body as a dynamic, constantly changing force subject to flux, contestation, conflict, and context-bound redefinition rather than as an *a priori* transhistorical given.

Each of the four chapters contained within my dissertation contains a novel by William Faulkner in addition to other works by a number of significant literary figures of the time. I have selected Faulkner as a thread running throughout—though not dominating—my dissertation because the disjunctive temporality and other modernist

techniques that he employs in his work bear examination in relation to nostalgia. I will consider whether temporal fragmentation, which sometimes encourages readers to reassemble events into reasonably coherent narratives, inheres a certain nostalgia for an idealized and logically ordered past. In other words, does the fracturing of narrative time inculcate in readers a desire for the correctly ordered past–a yearning that may never be fulfilled, given the degree to which the fragments cannot be reassembled? Conversely, does the modernist play with narrative temporality mirror the frustration inevitably experienced by nostalgic individuals trying to recapture a past, the recollection of which is at best hazy and disjunctive? I am also interested in considering how Faulkner's modernist aesthetic represents nostalgia, particularly given his interest in the decay of South following the Civil War; in my estimation, Faulkner is the writer of nostalgia par excellence of this period in American literature. I have chosen to consider several of his works alongside other writers of the time—Theodore Dreiser, James Weldon Johnson, Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Charles W. Chesnutt—who represent in their works individuals who struggle to dissociate themselves from the past, most of them with little or no success. Faulkner's work will also help me think about how bodies, both white and black, are shaped and sometimes even damaged by individuals' longing for an idealized past–usually the antebellum South irrevocably changed by the Civil War. I am particularly interested in thinking about the dangerous and destructive aspects of nostalgia that exercise themselves within the context of a number of American scenarios in which people struggle to maintain control over situations, even resorting to violence if need be.

As Jean Starobinski notes, Johannes Hofer was not the first to observe the unhappiness of people far removed from familiar settings; however, "[t]he novelty was in the attention which the candidate paid to it, in his effort to convert this emotional phenomenon into a medical phenomenon, exposing it, in so doing, to rational inquiry." (84) The medicalization of what was once just a feeling suggests that such yearning and desires can be diagnosed, treated, and cured—and, moreover, that nostalgia can affect its sufferers to the extent of causing physical or psychological damage ranging from the minor to the catastrophic. According to Starobinski's famed treatise on nostalgia in the 1960s, *nostos* refers to a return while *algos* connotes sorrow; writing about nostalgia nearly four decades later, Svetlana Boym agrees with Starobinski that *nostos* suggests a return home, but she translates *algos* as longing (Starobinski 85, Boym xiii). This dissertation will incorporate the aspects of *algos* suggested by both Starobinski and Boym; the yearning of nostalgic people for another time and place constitutes a vital component of studying nostalgia, but the sorrow experienced by people unable or unwilling to forget their past remains an equally essential element of the study of nostalgia. Both longing and sorrow deserve attention in this analysis, though I have found longing of particular use insofar as desire is a structurally necessary component of the nostalgia considered throughout this dissertation. I will pay particular attention to sorrow in my first chapter, though traces of sorrow will manifest themselves throughout my discussion. Longing will constitute the primary focus of my second chapter on desire, and—much like my attention to sorrow—it will reappear throughout the text.

Hofer equated the term “nostalgia” with homesickness, believing that these soldiers developed physical illnesses due to their sorrow at being uprooted, however temporarily, from the Swiss towns that they had never left prior to their military service. The effects of such an ailment as homesickness could range widely; as Boym has noted, the physical symptoms of nostalgia could debilitate the sufferer no more than the common cold; however, according to Hofer, not all symptoms of nostalgia manifested themselves so meekly. In its most pernicious expressions, nostalgia as medical condition could prove excruciatingly painful, thoroughly debilitating, or even fatal. (xiv) Though subsequent medical research has demonstrated that the symptoms documented by Hofer in association with nostalgia instead resulted from a range of diseases such as meningitis, tuberculosis, encephalitis, and pleurisy, at the time he believed that the mental sorrow caused by homesickness could cause physical damage or even death. (Starobinski 98-99) The fear of nostalgia as debilitating and destructive disease spread throughout Europe, and no one was immune to it; as Starobinski notes, “[A]ll peoples and all social classes were vulnerable to it, from Lapps in Greenland to Negroes serving in slavery.” (95) The public health panic over nostalgia began to lessen around the mid-nineteenth century, once physicians believed they had satisfactorily discredited Hofer's claim that nostalgia had physical manifestations or could prove fatal, as if it were a contagious disease such as the plague or tuberculosis. Convinced that a yearning for the past and sorrow in the present existed exclusively in the sufferer's mind, these doctors consigned nostalgia to the emergent practices of psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. As the basis for treating nostalgia changed, so did the focus of nostalgia itself; Hofer first documented

nostalgia as a yearning for another place, yet many subsequent instances of nostalgia as psychological ailment often focused upon the return to another time in the past rather than another place. My dissertation will attempt to bridge the gap between body and mind in analyzing nostalgia by arguing that as manifested in its depictions in early twentieth century American literature, nostalgia functions as an expression of (predominantly white) males' sorrow with the present and desire to return to a better past in which they can exercise the power they believe to be their unquestioned right, even if they must use destructive means to regain that power. Bodies become the screens on which white males violently project their anxieties about progress while also yearning for the idealized past that lingers so irrevocably in their memories. The anxious reiteration via nostalgia of white male power—which, if it were unquestioned, wouldn't even require a statement, much less a constant reassertion of that power—complicates and potentially even troubles the mind-body binary.

With whatever degree of accuracy, the very term “nostalgia” often conjures idyllic images of Norman Rockwell paintings gracing the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*—a simpler, happier time pushed aside by the pressures of adult responsibilities. While such positive idealization of the past comprises an important aspect of nostalgia, to which I will devote considerable attention in my second chapter on desire, that yearning does not lack any readily identifiable motivation. Rather, as nostalgia manifests itself in the early twentieth century literary texts I analyze throughout this work, people yearn for another putatively better time because the present thoroughly disappoints and fails to satisfy. In a passage from *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* that inspired my dissertation title,

Julia Kristeva imagines the thoughts of melancholic people unable to direct their focus away from the past:

> Riveted to the past, regressing to the paradise or inferno of an unsurpassable experience, melancholy persons manifest a strange memory: everything has gone by, they seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days, I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future . . . (60)

Even when people return home, they find the familiar settings that they have pictured in their minds utterly changed and inconsistent with their vision of the halcyon past. In speaking of being nailed down to the past, Kristeva here employs figurative language; she does not speak of flesh being penetrated and torn by nails being hammered into it. Instead, she speaks of a mental incapacitation and inability to move on from the past into the present and toward the future. As I will argue throughout this dissertation, particularly in the latter two chapters, the psychic inability to break free from the grip of the past—to be nailed down to it and unable to escape it—can prove physically damaging or even fatal. Even when the future seems filled with promise, nostalgic individuals cannot shake themselves free from their pursuit of a past that they can never attain. Only the recapturing of the past matters; the failure of such a pursuit renders the future irrelevant and even immaterial.

Arthur Dudden has traced a tradition of "romantic pessimism" in American culture, which runs counter to the popular idea of an American faith in progress, that each generation would see a better life than the one before it. Indeed, Dudden argues that American history is characterized by this pursuit of the past: "Throughout the history of the American people in fact, the seeker for clues to the essence of their past can discover

a deep-seated, heartfelt, romantic longing for the yesterday that is gone but is never to be forgotten." (516) Though the past becomes increasingly distant, nostalgic individuals do not allow the memory—however opaque, romanticized, or inaccurate—to disappear entirely. Many of the inhabitants, particularly though not necessarily exclusively many white males, of early twentieth century America long for another better time largely because the present does not meet their expectations or because they find themselves opposed to the rapid change occurring on every front—social, technological, and sexual, among others. According to Dudden, nostalgia as manifested in America occurs in opposition in progress:

> As opposed to what the late Clyde Kluckkohn termed the 'romantic optimism' of the faith in progress, a romantic pessimism characterizes the mood of nostalgia. By contrast with the state of things as they are, there comes beseechingly to mind a preference for things as they once were, or, more importantly, *a preference for things as they are believed to have been.* (517; Dudden's emphasis)

Nostalgic individuals resist and resent progress while remaining firmly rooted in the past or, as Dudden would have it, their version of the past—"*things as they are believed to have been.*" Social progress, an article of faith for dominant expressions of American culture, becomes a source of fear and resentment rather than one of celebration; the notion of progress becomes a galling obscenity rather than a laudable concept.

Given the nostalgic person's resistance to progress, the cure seems logical: restore the previous conditions in which the person lived and to which that individual desires a return. However, simply returning to the longed-for place or time, even if it were possible, would not soothe the nostalgic sufferer's distress. Dudden notes that when nostalgia was still believed to manifest itself physically, people believed that the physical

wounds caused by that sorrowful yearning often were not completely healed even if the sufferer got what he or she wanted and was allowed to return to the yearned-for place:

> For the Romantics, nostalgia was a disease which could neither be cured nor assuaged. In the eighteenth century, doctors stated plainly that it would be cured by returning to one's native land. This was too simple. The nostalgic did not stop eating his heart out; the wound did not heal. (Dudden 94)

Dudden's discussion of the Romantic perception of nostalgia implies a transition in the representation of the malady from a yearning for a familiar place to a longing for the halcyon days of the past. In the 19th century, a return to the homeland did not suffice to cure the nostalgia that doctors considered to manifest largely, if not entirely, in physical symptoms—even if the disease had a mental underpinning of desire for a better past. As opposed to the Romantic understanding of nostalgia explained in Dudden's quote above, this dissertation will argue that in early 20th century America, nostalgia impacts both body and mind, defying the medical profession that insisted on nostalgia significantly adversely affecting either one or the other but not both simultaneously. Yearnings for yesterday inscribe themselves forcefully and violently upon bodies; the more pleasant past ostensibly cannot occur without a heavy price in blood.

I have noted at several junctures in this introduction that this dissertation will focus predominantly upon nostalgia as experienced by white males, and I wish to devote a few remarks to what I mean by that term. In his essay "White," Richard Dyer perceptively notes that whereas a wide swath of disparate racial, ethnic, and tribal identities have been discussed and analyzed in academic discourses, both on their own merit as well as in relation to a wide variety of texts in film, literature, and other media,

whiteness often gets overlooked. Individuals—even those carefully studying racial and ethnic identities—assume that the term remains static and transhistorical, which is hardly the case. The racial tensions facing the United States in the early 20th century do not necessarily closely resemble those facing us one century later, around the time of this dissertation's composition. Immigrants such as Italians and the Irish were demonized, Jews were mistreated and disparaged, immigration restrictions were enforced to prevent Asian immigrants from even entering the United States, and as already noted above, blacks had the rights ostensibly granted by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Bill of Rights diminished by discriminatory measures legitimated by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Amidst all this discrimination and disdain for a large number of racial, ethnic, and tribal groups, we might be able to identify the general group of white males who in large part contribute to this oppression, but what do we mean when we refer to whiteness here? We could be speaking of Faulkner's southerners who cannot forget past defeats and yearn for the ostensibly triumphant antebellum days; we could be referring to the farmers of the Plains so often discussed in Cather's work; we could be referring to those whose European ancestors traveled to America several generations prior. The notion of whiteness must remain flexible, but it is—for better or worse, and for the purposes of exegetical and heuristic convenience in my writing here—inextricably linked to the notion of who possesses the ability to exercise power over others while limiting others' agency. I recognize that such a definition might sound defeatist while acknowledging that pockets of resistance existed at the time, yet the extensive historical record suggests that much of the tension and

animosity existing in early 20th century America results from the passionate clinging of white men to a past that has largely been decimated by the political gains of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

I would like to conclude my introduction with a few brief remarks regarding my definition of masculinity since I am focusing this dissertation upon the relationship between nostalgia, gender (especially white masculinity), and corporeality. Though much of this dissertation will focus upon ostensibly traditional masculinity as manifested in biologically and anatomically defined males, I have included in chapter 2 a reading of Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, in which a female character, Drusilla, manifests characteristics typically associated with traditional masculinity such as aggression and violence when she masquerades as a Confederate soldier for the nostalgic purpose of staving off the South's imminent demise in the Civil War for as long as possible. This particular reading is meant to trouble the notion that masculinity remains the exclusive province of putatively biological males—an idea promulgated by gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, both of whom argue that masculinity is not tied to male bodies. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, even biologically or anatomically male individuals may find themselves experiencing anxiety about their masculinity to the extent that it must be constantly and nervously reasserted. Similarly, in a society in which the putative taint of black blood becomes a source of shame for many whites, individuals strenuously and anxiously reassert their whiteness, regardless of what their lineages and bloodlines suggest. Although I recognize and on some level sympathize with the idea that various threads of identity are fictions and constructions

rather than transhistorical givens, I also recognize the tremendous power exercised by these fictions—not to mention by the individuals who possess the power to have some control over which fictions and constructions are granted legitimacy—to oppress and harm those upon whom these identities are forcibly inscribed or even voluntarily assumed. I do not mean to suggest that Drusilla's drag is either entirely subversive or purely reactionary; it remains a complex combination of the two as Drusilla defies codes of gender-based behavior and appearance at the same time that she fights on behalf of the perpetuation of the antebellum society that relies so heavily upon the slave trade and demeaning perceptions of blacks. As a woman assuming at least a significant degree of control over the family estate due to the death of her father and fiancé in the Civil War, Drusilla is a white woman of property who chooses to dress as a soldier to protect the life and antebellum society she and her family have always known. Her example illustrates the complexity of subversion within a constraining cultural context governed by the paternal law, as Judith Butler notes in her chapter "Subversive Bodily Acts" from *Gender Trouble*:

> If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the [paternal] law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (119)

Across a large swath of political affiliations, the nostalgic desire for the past—whether reactionary or subversive, whether innocent or dangerous (and yes, it can be one or the other or both)—can compromise the corporeal and mental integrity of a large range of

individuals. It is those persons, both fictive and real, who have suffered in the name of preserving an oppressive past, about whom I think as I write what follows.

Chapter 1: "A Hell That Is Not to Be Lost": Depression and Dissatisfaction with the Present

I

In this chapter, I will undertake an analysis of two early 20th-century novels that represent how the nostalgia of a community or geographic region manifests itself in depression and dissatisfaction with the present, the effects of which cause psychological and even physical damage upon bodies[1]. Implicit in such unhappiness is the yearning for the more idealized and at least somewhat fictionalized past that has long since departed. Both Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and the unnamed narrator of James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) express an unhappiness with the present based on unpleasant and traumatic past events. Though both of these characters keenly experience disappointment and dismay as individuals, they also bear the burden of historical events that have inexorably shaped the world around them and that have resulted from the actions of large groups of nostalgic individuals. Quentin cannot escape the specter of the North's triumph in the U.S. Civil War and the subsequent postbellum deterioration for which southerners in the early 20th century (and, to some degree, even today) continue to cling fervently to their resentment, depression and anger; the unnamed ex-colored man who narrates Johnson's novel cannot escape the history of racial animosity and tension that complicates his decision about the racial identity he chooses to present publicly. These novels are linked by their connection

1 While nostalgia has not generally been understood as an exclusively male "problem," I have chosen to focus upon the manifestations of nostalgia seen in masculine—though not necessarily always male—bodies as represented in early 20th century literary texts insofar as this project will contribute to conversations in the field of masculinity studies and American literary studies.

to the legacy of slavery.[2] In what follows, I offer an analysis of an African-American character who ultimately presents himself publicly as white as a means of contrast, showing that male characters of other identities than white (complex and contested a term though that racial identity itself is) are also represented in texts of the time as sufferers both of nostalgia and of the effects that it causes on large groups. Though both of these men struggle against the constraints of a collective nostalgia grounded in an individual unhappiness with the present, to which Quentin and the ex-colored man sometimes submit as well, that displeasure and depression manifests itself in large part because of the collective nostalgia and resistance to progress on display around them.

Freudian psychoanalysis, the practice of which emerged in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century (around the time in which both of these novels are set), has focused upon the ways in which unhappiness about the past manifests itself forcefully and ineluctably in people's lives, even if unconsciously. Quentin's sorrow and hatred suggest an instance of melancholia much like that described by Sigmund Freud in his famous essay "Mourning and Melancholia," written in 1915 and published in 1917. According to Freud, mourning occurs when an identifiably traumatic loss has occurred and an individual copes with the loss—for example, the death of a loved one or the termination of a romantic relationship. By contrast, melancholia's roots prove much more difficult to identify since the object of the melancholic individual's sorrow does not always seem readily apparent to those around the sufferer. Individuals suffering from melancholia

2 We will see this connection profoundly manifested again in chapter 4, in which I will discuss nostalgia-motivated violence directed outside the self in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* and William Faulkner's *Light in August*.

often reproach themselves violently, though Freud argues that such self-reproach suggests anger towards objects of love or desire that the person has lost. Melancholy need not occur exclusively in love relationships among individuals; Quentin's ambivalent relationship with the South, which his Harvard friend Shreve McCannon deems as hatred, could qualify as a melancholic expression of unhappiness tinged with a veiled hatred toward the object of desire. As Freud notes, a range of circumstances can enable a melancholic person's ostensibly inexplicably strong expression of sorrow and hidden anger:

> In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence. This conflict due to ambivalence, which sometimes arises more from real experiences, sometimes more from constitutional factors, must not be overlooked among the preconditions of melancholia. If the love for the object—a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. (588)

Melancholics feel "slighted, neglected, or disappointed" by the loss of reminders of the past—whether people, places or objects. As a result, such people remain rooted in the past, unable to extricate themselves from "conflict due to ambivalence" that causes them to simultaneously love and hate these objects of love and desire. On the one hand, individuals suffering such wounded feelings resulting from the loss of an object outside the self find comfort in a "narcissistic identification" directed inward and substituting for the love that the sufferer feels for the missing object. On the other hand, the melancholic focuses his or her hatred upon a "substitutive object"—the self, according to the above

passage—that takes the place of these painful reminders of the long-lost (and never to be regained) past and finds directed toward itself the hatred and sadism the melancholic wishes to express toward the lost object of love.

Individuals suffering from melancholia or even healthy mourning find themselves expressing anger towards others, including themselves, as John Bowlby notes in *Loss: Sadness and Depression*: "There are good grounds for believing that even in healthy mourning a person's anger is often directed towards the person [or, for those suffering from nostalgia, the time] lost, though it may equally often be directed towards other persons, including the self." (29) Imbued with melancholic yearning for what they have lost, nostalgic people vacillate between loathing directed inward toward themselves and outward toward others while also engaging in the self-love of narcissism and the love of and desire for their love objects.

The glorious past idealized and prettified by nostalgic people—such as the antebellum South revered by Yoknapatawpha County's residents—can never be reclaimed and might not even exist, no matter how much they might fixate upon what has transpired in years past. Julia Kristeva observes in *Black Sun* that through such insistent and relentless clinging to the past, individuals maintain the existence of that pain, no matter how morbid it might appear to those oriented toward progress. The wounds stays fresh and keenly painful as individuals cling to the wound of traumatic separation from the better past. Such a focus upon the past collectively experienced constitutes a narcissistic preoccupation and a masochistic re-aggravation of the embarrassment, anger, and pain besieging the community still reeling from the postbellum sting of defeat more than four

decades after the Civil War's conclusion. The masochistic self-infliction of collective painful memories and reminders of the better past that has been lost help individuals preserve the ideal society that becomes a distant, hazy, and even fictionalized memory as time passes: “By belittling and destroying themselves, . . . this is also a roundabout way of preserving it [the Thing, to which Kristeva refers as the object of desire] . . . elsewhere, untouchable.” (Kristeva 48) By constantly reminding themselves of this painful legacy, nostalgic individuals preserve the idealized past “elsewhere,” an idealization that remains “untouchable” and inaccessible because of their nostalgic attitude toward it.

As Kristeva suggests, those who suffer from depression remain acutely aware of the pain resulting from a longing for the thing they desire, yet they vehemently preserve the longed-for object both in spite of and as a means of perpetuating the agony and anguish the preservation of that object of desire might cause: “They know they suffer . . . but ceaselessly maintain their omnipotence over a hell that is not to be lost.” (46) In a postbellum world in which Southerners feel disenfranchised, depressed, and imposed upon by the Emancipation Proclamation and other policies with which they disagree, the reanimation of the idealized antebellum past enables Southerners to imagine a world in which they can reclaim the power and omnipotence that they have lost. As a result, they cling intensely to the “hell that is not be lost” referred to by Kristeva in the above quote. Southerners' wounds constitute their collective cultural identity—not just the physical wounds suffered on the battlefield on the Civil War, but also the embarrassment and anger of losing access to the way of life to which they were accustomed. Granted, the past for which Southerners yearn has problems of its own, but to the white, land-owning

residents of the southern United States, that past remains infinitely superior to the struggles of the postbellum world. As I have noted in my introduction to this dissertation, nostalgia need not consist in all circumstances of an easy choice in which individuals express a preference for a past they clearly recognize as superior to the present; nostalgia can also result when individuals yearn for the less unpleasant of two undesirable sets of circumstances. No matter how excruciating the constant reminders of the Civil War may be, Southerners continue the process because the suffering builds up their collective cultural anger, sadness, and displeasure—an energy they can put to use in instituting the repressive policies that allow them to minimize, negate, or reverse some of the gains made by African-Americans after the Civil War and thus restore the sought-after past. They prefer to direct their sorrowful and angry energy outward toward others rather than inward in the guise of masochism.

As the distance of time from the Civil War to the present moment in the South expands, the breach of time expands and shows through the putatively *ad infinitum* repetition of stories that neither individuals nor groups can access the hoped-for past, as Saidiya Hartman notes in *Scenes of Subjection*: "Repetition enables the recognition of the self and points to that which can never be fully recollected and to the impossibility of restoring that which has been breached." (76) The nostalgic person is not content to recall an event just once; people yearning for the past return to the memories of that time frequently only to face, or perhaps avoid, the harsh realization that those good times will not return due to the "impossibility of restoring" them. As more time passes and further temporal distance separates nostalgic individuals from the past for which they yearn, such

individuals—much like the white southerners in the novel—appear unbowed by the reality of not restoring that past. Hartman notes that temporal distance suggests the ways in which individuals cannot access the past: "Breach triggers memory, and the enormity of the breach perhaps suggests that it can be neither reconciled nor repaired." (76) As the chasm between that past and the present yawns ever wider, nostalgic individuals become ever more dissatisfied with the present and hope to return to the past, which "can be neither reconciled nor repaired"—regardless of whether nostalgic people recognize the impossibility of restoring the past. Some nostalgic people simply do not care that the amount of time has stretched to an ever-longer duration, finding themselves content to live in a past to which they nail themselves down. The ever-widening enormity of the temporal breach between the yearned-for past and the depression-inducing present also renders the bodies of white males such as Quentin or "white" males such as the ex-colored man traumatized by the aftereffects of war ghostly, devalued, or irreparably damaged.

II

Despite the advantages that Quentin Compson appears to enjoy in being accepted into a program of study at Harvard, a passage in the early stages of Faulkner's novel *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests that "two separate Quentins" emerge, illustrating his inability to extricate himself from the past in the southern United States—Yoknapatawpha County, specifically—rather than orient himself toward his promising and exciting future (Faulkner 4). The first of these two separate Quentins "prepar[es] 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 which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times." (4) This version of Quentin prepares to move away from the South geographically but also will distinguish himself from the South in that he seeks to make progress as the South remains sunk in the miasma of postbellum defeat. This aura of failure consistently reiterates itself thanks to the "garrulous outraged baffled ghosts" who express themselves so insistently that an audience has no choice but "having to listen." The second of these Quentins split by the tensions between past and future, between progress and nostalgia "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 . . ." (4) This second version of Quentin resulting from the psychic splitting becomes a ghost himself rather than someone oriented toward the future; he has no choice but to listen to the outraged ghosts dwelling upon the past. Despite his youth, Quentin exists as a ghost himself. By dint of the time and place in which he was born—in other words, through no conscious exercise of agency or volition on his own part—Quentin becomes a ghost, an incorporeal but faintly apparent reminder of the disappointment and devastation of defeat that has irrevocably changed the genteel and idealized antebellum society for which Southerners still nostalgically yearn. As almost any individual would, Quentin understands himself not in a vacuum, isolated from others, but rather he comprehends himself both in relation to the community of which he constitutes a part and situated within a specific cultural context—for him, that of the southern United States several decades following the South's defeat in the Civil War.

Granted, the theory of mourning and melancholia focuses upon individuals rather than groups of people, yet individuals such as Quentin finds themselves constantly immersed in a collective nostalgia propagated by white Southern culture.

The figures of the antebellum South continue to haunt Yoknapatawpha County, yet these ghostly figures consist not only of the people described in the letters and stories but also the people telling those stories. When he finds himself psychically split, Quentin feels as though he has become a ghost, even at such a young age and filled with such potential. Quentin's body becomes a receptacle for the past commandeered by the anger and sorrow of his forbears; his body constitutes a ghostly presence in its own right, rather than that of a person ready to progress and change:

> [H]is very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence. (7)

Quentin's body serves as a repository, a receptacle for remnants of the miserable past for the South most poignantly punctuated by its defeat in the U.S. Civil War. His body contains these “stubborn back-looking ghosts” that have still not recovered from that war's effects and devastation. He does not retain sole ownership and proprietorship of his body, as it remains in the possession of past generations as well. His body does not belong to him alone; instead he exists as a commonwealth, defined as either a body of people politically organized into a state, or an association or federation of autonomous

states. What federation of states does Quentin's body constitute—the mass of Confederate states that defiantly seceded and that was led by Jefferson Davis during the Civil War, or the cluster of states that has suffered heavily under the memory of defeat in that same protracted conflict? Whatever freedom Quentin experiences in his body turns out to be that of impotence—powerlessness to do what he wishes (or anything at all, for that matter). Because Quentin cannot freely enjoy his own body but must instead share it with the community, corporeality becomes not an individualized and deeply personal characteristic, but rather it consists of a communal and collective experience in which the residue of forbears' experiences remain inextricably stamped upon the lives of those who follow. Such an idea seems Freudian, insofar as neuroses are passed down through successive generations. Quentin's life exists not for him to enjoy new and novel experiences; instead, he becomes a receptacle for the past to which he receives constant exposure even from his birth and from childhood play. In other words, he becomes "a victim of History," as Barbara Ladd describes Quentin in her analysis of the text (35). As illustrated by Quentin, collective cultural depression and nostalgia obsessed with history and the past can render an individual ghostly and incorporeal while largely if not entirely subsuming their individuality—even though Quentin himself seems more haunted than a ghost at this point in the narrative.

III

This disconsolate and anguished atmosphere in the South does not materialize out of nowhere for youths such as Quentin. He and other children living in the South in the

nearly half-century following the Civil War's conclusion find themselves constantly immersed in the environment of failure to the extent that it becomes a familiar presence that can easily trigger widespread depression about the deleterious changes experienced in the region. He does not need to listen to his father recollect the events taking place during these bygone days because he already understands by virtue of constant exposure to them: "*But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will do:*" (Faulkner 172; his emphasis). In this moment, Quentin expresses himself in the second person, using "you" to refer to himself (he uses "I" earlier in this section of the novel, not included here). As a result, he occupies the positions of both a You and an I—a split emblematic of the plurality inherent in the idea of the commonwealth. The tales of the South's fall from grace told to Quentin as commonwealth need not be spoken aloud; Quentin's surroundings communicate to him and other denizens of Yoknapatawpha County the inescapable collective cultural displeasure with the present. Even in ostensibly carefree moments of childhood play, Quentin and his contemporaries find themselves constantly reminded of the past: "*[W]hat your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering, who had been here before, seen these graves more than once in the rambling expeditions of boyhood . . .*" (172; Faulkner's emphasis) When Quentin hears of events much like those described throughout the novel, he is not hearing them for the first time. These reminiscences instead pluck "*the resonant strings of remembering,*" since the graves representing the carnage wrought by the war are

constantly on view, reminding Quentin and others of the physical devastation and cultural dismay precipitated by the South's defeat in the war. Quentin's keen sense of collective Southern memory originates from continuous exposure to the nostalgia of a community that is not eager to languish in the painful past of defeat rather than move on and progress. Rather than progress toward a better future, this community prefers to dwell upon its "hell that is not to be lost." Jaime Harker notes in her discussion of the text how "[t]he South is usually imagined as 'grounded,' a 'fixed' space immune to the changes, materialism, and moral relativism of modernity. 'Sense of place' brings with it any number of clichéd ideologies: family, stability, morality, tradition." (39) Steeped in the traditions to which they still cling decades after the Civil War's disappointing (for them) conclusion, southerners such as the residents of Yoknapatawpha County remain set in their ways and unwilling to allow the forces of modernity to reshape their lives in any meaningful way.

The events leading to the decline of the antebellum South cause those who recall them constantly such agony because, according to Quentin, these events impact the lives of successive generations rather than existing in a vacuum and having no significance outside of the moment in which they occur, largely because people dwell on their recollections (whether first-hand or second-hand) of these events and relentlessly obsess over them. Quentin and others southerners can be haunted not only by the specters of other people but also of events so utterly devastating and dispiriting to community morale and pride that they cannot be effaced, ignored, or forgotten. Submerged within the past of the Sutpen family and the South as a whole, Quentin wonders whether individual events

do not end once they are completed but instead have far-reaching repercussions and reverberations: "*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished.*" (Faulkner 210; his emphasis) This statement suggests that events do not occur in a single moment, lacking impact in any subsequent moments. Any occurrence does not happen in isolation, hermetically sealed from, and thus unable to exert any impact upon, any other individual event or happening. Any given event exerts numerous effects—sometimes slight, sometimes significant, sometimes severe and devastating—that can extend beyond (sometimes well beyond) the initial moment and place in which the incident occurs. Under such circumstances the South can remain haunted by the Civil War's damaging effects even more than four decades after the last cannon fell silent and Confederate troops surrendered. Other historical events are so utterly consumed by this nostalgia that they cannot become significant or register as strikingly in the collective cultural consciousness of the South. Though the individual events concluded long ago, their effects remain, hanging over the land and its people, who cannot help being plagued by sour memories. The past as a source of nostalgia would not exist without the present and the temporal gap between the two that creates a depressive displeasure with the current time. David H. Evans notes that "the past in fact, has always been the creation of the present. The individual does not stand under the burden of history; the individual is, and should recognize itself to be, that history's origin." (144) While I disagree strongly with Evans' contention that individuals do not stand under the burden of history—indeed, much of the force of Faulkner's novel results from the ways in which his characters, particularly Quentin, struggle under the weight of the past—I do agree with his claim that

individuals' impressions of the past emerge from the present and play a critical role in the shaping the history that individuals promulgate and perpetuate.

Whatever memories individuals have of the past, such as the recollections of the Civil War that dominate much of the thinking of Faulkner's characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, seem deeply rooted in what modern medical science would describe as a complex set of neurological and physiological processes. Miss Rosa, whose recollections serve as the basis for much of the novel's unique narrative structure, suggests that memory consists not of complex chemical interactions within the body but instead is created by our immediate, visceral, and physical sensations in those remembered moments. Individuals remember that to which our bodies have access as experience, yet those recollections provide people with an imprecise means of remembering and, for the characters in this novel, remaining firmly rooted in the depths of depression:

> *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 of dream.* (Faulkner 115; his emphasis)

According to Miss Rosa, memory does not exist as such; instead, people rely upon sensory impressions that are much more likely to mislead individuals because it is comprised purely of sensory impressions, the sum total of which confuse the people experiencing them rather than helping them obtain an accurate recollection of events. As a result, people become confused and depressed because they cannot live up to the idealized past that in all likelihood does not resemble the actual past, whether that differential remains slight or significant.

Why would southerners so insistently cling to the defeat suffered at the hands of Union troops rather than moving on? Quentin's father Mr. Compson expresses comparable bafflement at the illogical goings-on in the Sutpen household, but his statement could just as easily apply to the South's obsession with its loss:[3] "But who knows why a man, though suffering, clings, above all the other well members, to the arm or leg which he knows must come off?" (72) Mr. Compson presents in this moment a keenly useful insight in considering the relationship between the body and nostalgia. Nostalgia as psychic event robs the sufferer of the ability to press forward and progress. Rather than dwelling on the parts of the historical body that remain intact after defeat, the South instead focuses upon what has been lost—in part, its reputation, but also the right to own and control slaves. Southern society yearns to exercise these phantom limbs that have been removed on the field of battle. This process of resuscitating a gangrenous and dead past provides Southerners with the opportunity to lament the good times (or, at the very least, the better times) that have passed and express a range of poisonous emotions about the events in the Civil War that precipitated that change. Even if those past times were not ideal, the perception takes root perniciously because the present circumstances exhibit evident inferiority when compared with the past. As represented in the novel, the collective obsessive nostalgia for the past experienced in the southern United States

3 Early in the novel, Quentin repeats Miss Rosa's claim that the suffering brought upon the South during the Civil War results from the strange goings-on transpiring in the Sutpen household (i.e., Sutpen's avarice and the nearly-consummated incestuous relationship and potential miscegenation between Judith and her half-brother Charles Bon); in other words, the problems that befall the South and linger so prominently in the community's memory constitute a punishment brought upon the South for the misdeeds of the Sutpen family, whose name and bloodlines can be annihilated only through such devastating violence and upheaval. For more on the relationship between the South's collective suffering in the Civil War and the misdeeds of the Sutpen family, see my discussion in part IV of this chapter below, particularly on pp. 32-34 during my discussion of Miss Rosa's ulterior motives for telling her story to Quentin.

renders individuals such as Quentin unable or unwilling to resist having that history manifest itself everywhere.

Such yearning for a better past becomes particularly pronounced in the midst of the defeat that Quentin's friend Shreve McCannon notes as pervading the entirety of the South's collective cultural preoccupation:

> We dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? Something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? A kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forever more as long as your children's children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas? (289)

Shreve wonders how the South can continue to exist while hanging on to the past so insistently, breathing it in "like air," and experiencing "wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory" at events concluded nearly a half-century ago. The anger toward the North seems unlikely to subside and will probably be inherited by subsequent generations—the gift of their dismayed, disheartened forbears. Shreve does not understand how events turned out in history's final assessment: who exactly enjoys freedom, and who has been defeated? Shreve is also questioning the account of events narrated by Quentin and underscoring the distorted sense of events held by southerners such as the young Compson. On the one hand, white Southerners cannot escape the painful past of defeat in the Civil War that caused the freeing of the slaves. As the slaves gain their freedom, white Southerners find themselves yoked to the bondage of defeat, depression, and displeasure with their radically altered situation. On the other hand, the

reaction that resulted after Reconstruction caused Jim Crow laws and other oppressive actions and policies. Such restrictive measures could be considered a loss for African-Americans, who do not enjoy the freedom of the white Southerners, who in turn hang on to their pain and enjoy their hell, of which they do not want to let go. All of these remarks are particularly surprising to hear from the mouth of Shreve, a Canadian—not a native-born American, much less a southerner—who somehow still understands with such clarity and immediacy a world in which he does not live. Shreve attempts to show Quentin the unflinching reality of the anger and hatred (about which I say much more at the conclusion of the next section) embedded in his sorrow, holding up a mirror to the stories with which Quentin has become so obsessed. One could perceive Shreve's attempt to expose Quentin's ambivalence toward the South as a potentially therapeutic gesture, though young Compson himself might not see it that way. Nonetheless, Shreve can reproduce and recall the physicality and sensuality of the Sutpen family with a precision that eludes Quentin, who remains bogged down in nostalgia and denied the opportunity to tell the Sutpens' story both by other characters (Mr. Compson, Miss Rosa, and Shreve) as well as his nostalgia-imbued depression.

IV

With so many eloquent people around to pass on the memories that help individuals keep alive their collective depression and yearning[4], why should Miss Rosa

4 I am not suggesting that Faulkner seeks to maintain the depression and anger of the Southern community. Faulkner is certainly not uncritically endorsing the nostalgia exhibited by the characters he represents (and I would argue that none of the authors discussed in this dissertation exhibit such an obliviously rosy perspective on the nostalgia they represent in their characters). While Faulkner might

select Quentin to receive the memories? The telling and retelling of these stories figures prominently in the collective nostalgia and depression of the region, given that individuals cannot recall the past that has disappeared unless accounts of that past remain in circulation for people to share and freely disseminate. In the novel's first few pages, Miss Rosa offers a practical consideration for Quentin hearing her stories of the past: “So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it.” (5) Rosa recognizes the emergence of the literary industry as a means of making a living or adding to one's income: “You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines.” (5) She suggests a practical rationale for retelling the stories; he can afford to support his wife by writing these stories for a magazine.

Quentin believes that Miss Rosa's ulterior motive for telling the stories focuses not upon his economic security but rather the retelling of the story so that communities as a whole, whether in the northern or southern United States, can understand the failure of the Civil War to preserve the antebellum way of life so prized by residents of the South:

> *It's because she wants it told* he thought *so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth*. (6; Faulkner's emphasis)

Quentin believes that Miss Rosa wishes this story told so that he can record the tales for

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be diagnosing the depression that pervades throughout Southern society, he does not seem as optimistic or certain about the possibility of curing that nostalgic sorrow.

successive generations, not because Miss Rosa desires glory for herself or others involved in the story. He imagines that she would like to have these recollections told to people of whose existence Rosa has no inkling; she will never meet these people, nor does she know their names. According to Quentin, Rosa perceives the story of the Sutpen family as a cautionary tale. Miss Rosa believes that the sins of Thomas Sutpen—particularly, though not exclusively, his willingness to allow his illegitimate son Charles Bon to romance his daughter Judith, even though neither Judith nor her brother Henry know of their relationship as half-siblings—have been delivered upon the South as a whole. The tales being told by Miss Rosa presumably argue that through incest, miscegenation, greed, and whatever other putative abominations of which Rosa could find Thomas Sutpen guilty, he has visited upon the South condemnation and judgment for his sins. We as readers draw this inference from Miss Rosa's belief that the entire South must suffer to prevent Sutpen from bringing about further evil. These memories will remain alive to warn those who hear it, though whether Southerners, suffering from nostalgic depression and unwilling to listen to calls for change in race relations, would be receptive to such a discussion remains unclear. In the family chronicle told by Miss Rosa, Sutpen must be punished because he knowingly sanctions miscegenation and incest (and ironically perceives the former as worse than the latter), just as the entire South suffers not just for Sutpen's misdeeds but also for its other ostensibly comparable atrocities (including, though certainly not limited to, miscegenation via sexual violence) taking place during the antebellum times nostalgically lionized by the Southern community and sorrowfully lamented in the novel's narrative present.

Who gets to tell the story and keep these stories circulating within the collective cultural consciousness while also making decisions about how to represent the events in the Sutpen family history? Quentin's individual dreams and desires are buried under the weight of maintaining family expectations for him to go to Harvard and to honorably represent the Old South. As one of the most prestigious universities in the country—if not the most prestigious university—Harvard affords Quentin the opportunity not only to obtain a high-quality education, but also to become a gentleman who can admirably represent the South with dignity. As I noted earlier, the ghosts of the antebellum South inhabit his body, which he cannot claim for his own and which render him a ghost as well, even in what should be the prime of his life during his studies at a vaunted university. Throughout the novel, Quentin almost always serves as the audience for others' recollections—whether imagined, speculated, or seemingly authentic—about events that occur at Sutpen's Hundred. Rather than exercising the agency to relate the history of the Sutpen family himself, others tell the story for Quentin. Though "Quentin struggles valiantly to shape his story from a wider world perspective," as Merrill Maguire Skaggs notes in his discussion of the novel, young Compson ultimately lacks the agency to shape how the story is told and relies upon the choices made by others (129). Miss Rosa tells most of the story, though Quentin's father, Mr. Compson, also interjects some details into the narrative as well. Even Shreve takes over the narration near the story's end, about which I will say more below. Only rarely does the novel afford Quentin a voice to express his own beliefs about what happened at the estate. The differing voices present a complex and at times contradictory portrait of the Sutpen family, but no one

voice stands out among those who tell the story, as Peter Brooks points out: "[I]n this novel which pre-eminently concerns fathers, sons, generation, and lines of descent, there seems to be no clear authority, not even a provisional sort, for the telling of the story . . ." (291-292) Others' voices overwhelm and silence Quentin's own, though no one voice takes over and dominates entirely. That being said, the story ultimately becomes Quentin's due to his inability to extricate himself from either the story of the Sutpen family or the legacy of the defeated South. As a young man, Quentin should represent the hope and promise of the future, yet instead he becomes laden down with the air of defeat, despair, and sorrow. This is not to say that other characters in the novel are not depressed, but Quentin's unhappiness seems all the more startling given his position as the vanguard of the young generation seemingly filled with promise and limitless possibilities[5] to admirably represent Yoknapatawpha County as a well-mannered and well-educated Southern gentleman. The trauma experienced by the South and the attendant depression and nostalgia that emerges as a result subsumes individual identities such as his. Quentin has no choice but to identify with the South through his constant exposure to the defeat that pervades the air of Yoknapatawpha County.

Quentin's lack of control over telling the story manifests itself most noticeably near the novel's end when he speaks with his Harvard schoolmate Shreve, who comes to Harvard from his home in Canada; as a result, not only is Shreve not a Southerner, he is not even an American. His family comes from a place even further north than the northern Americans who caused the South's defeat. Though estranged from the events

5 For more on the unfulfilled promise of the youth in future generations, see my discussion of Dodie Carteret and Tom Delamere in Charles W. Chesnutt's 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition* in chapter 4.

described therein, once Shreve has learned about the events contained herein, he takes over telling the story, leaving Quentin only to respond and interject occasionally. He suffers a lack of control over the South's history, just as southerners find themselves unable to control the historical forces that lead to the region's downfall after the war.

No matter who tells the story—whether Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson, Shreve, or even in fleeting moments Quentin himself—the accounts given within the novel remain a complex mixture of facts and conjecture. Some events described in the novel consist of no more than speculation, yet they find themselves woven into a narrative based on facts and the first-hand account of events seen by Miss Rosa. Even though Miss Rosa wishes for Quentin to pass on the Sutpen family's story—in part for the potential practical benefit that Quentin could gain from selling the story to a magazine, but more significantly from the need to make future generations aware of why the Sutpen family's behavior caused the suffering of the South in the Civil War (according to Miss Rosa)—the extent to which those transcribed stories accurately remind the listeners of the real events remains unclear, as Mr. Compson notes:

> [T]hey [i.e., Southern ancestors] dont explain [the seemingly improbable goings-on in the Sutpen family] and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable . . . (Faulkner 80)

Individuals exhume from receptacles such as "old trunks and boxes and drawers" these letters that purport to reveal the events of the mysterious past; however, these documents do not provide a full, accurate, or clear picture for the reader to follow.[6] Readers assume that these documents will provide the key to unlocking the mysteries of the past; however, these artifacts are left behind by ancestors who ultimately "dont explain and we are not supposed to know." The documents lack the explanatory power that individuals would assume such materials would have. As we will see below, even the lone remaining document from the events described in the book—a letter written by Judith—lacks explanatory force, instead suggesting the difficulty, if not outright impossibility, of preserving past events via accurate representation, as opposed to nostalgic attachment. As the temporal distance and breach expands between the past and the present, the letters that detail past events become increasingly illegible like "Sanskrit or Chocktaw"—languages that Mr. Compson and almost all other southerners would find themselves unable to read because they constitute a part of the United States' past in the form of the "vanishing native." The reader of these letters can see the figures of the past, but only dimly.

The letters written by Miss Rosa and other Southerners, combined with the stories passed on to successive generations, constitute at best an imprecise means of disseminating information about the longed-for past times the South seems so eager to preserve in its depression. Whereas Southerners in the early 20th century struggle to come

6 This moment shows how the novel is in part about writing histories, which relates to melancholia insofar as the cure for such sorrow involves melancholic individuals rewriting their history to change their attachment to a lost object.

to terms with the past, Judith Sutpen—whose romantic woes constitute the crux of the novel's dramatic tension when her brother Henry fatally shoots her half-brother and aspiring paramour Charles Bon—expresses much greater cynicism about whether people can impact the future significantly. Her inability to see a meaningful future is consistent with the portrait of the nostalgic individuals discussed in this dissertation's introduction—people so preoccupied with the past that they cannot envision a future. Conversely, Judith's despair about the meaninglessness of the past diverges from the characteristic of nostalgic individuals, who invests the past with so much value that they cannot stop thinking about it. The only physical reminder of the past consists of a letter written by Judith. The only artifact presented for posterity argues that the preservation of the past ultimately proves futile:

> [Y]ou make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, 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 they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way[.] (100-101)

This account of preserving memories contrasts sharply with Miss Rosa's belief that Quentin can profit from writing her stories for a magazine or Quentin's conviction that Miss Rosa wants the stories told so people can understand how Thomas Sutpen's evil behavior contributed to the downfall of Confederate forces in the Civil War. Judith's ideas also resonate with the ways in which people tell the stories in the novel itself, each of them finding themselves both mixed up in and unable to extricate themselves from the complex interrelation between the Sutpen family and the South's defeat in the Civil War.

Judith expresses pessimism about whether people can even make a meaningful impression by trying to preserve their memories. According to Judith, people's interactions with one another are inextricably linked. The strings that restrict people from exercising some degree of agency—or even from having any agency altogether—become confusingly and complexly intertwined so that people become utterly immobilized. Judith likens the situation to that of a group of marionettes whose strings become so tangled together that each individual puppet finds its movement restricted or prohibited altogether. Southerners in the novel's narrative present experience a comparable psychic paralysis. Judith's ideas seem consistent with Quentin's philosophy that events do not occur in a vacuum and have far-reaching implications, yet Judith complicates such ideas by suggesting that people do not have the power to act when experiencing the consequences of significant events. People instead languish in anonymity while laboring futilely to "make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed." (102) Even if events can exert an impact in the future, individuals cannot preserve their individual experiences for subsequent generations, as all people remain consigned to the oblivion of anonymity, according to Judith. The pervasive nostalgia that so thoroughly suffuses Southern society could be pulling the strings, burying most—if not all—individual experiences under the historical accounts of events impacting larger communities.

Judith's letter constitutes the one piece of physical evidence of the events that have taken place in the book that still remains in existence in the novel's narrative present of the early 20th century. Despite her insistence upon the inexorable pull of anonymity

and oblivion, Judith creates the one “undying mark” that persists to buttress the complicated story that others—Miss Rosa, who was there for most of the events; Mr. Compson, who lived in the area but was either not yet born or too young to know about these events; and Shreve, who is too young and lives nowhere near the places in which these events took place—tell through their largely or completely second-hand narratives.

The depression of Southerners is ostensibly caused by the Northerners who caused the irrevocable damage to antebellum society; however, Quentin's emotions about the stories with which he has become preoccupied and obsessed seem much more complicated and difficult to identify. Is he only a depressed and disheartened southerner, weighed down by memories that he cannot elude? Such a reading does not adequately account for the loathing Quentin demonstrates toward the community of which he has been part, no matter how vehemently he vehemently denies Shreve's question, “Why do you hate the South?”, turning his masochistic energies inward toward the collective identity with which he remains so indissolubly linked. (303) Quentin immediately and vociferously attempts to repudiate Shreve's question, both out loud and in his internal dialogue: “'I don't hate it,' Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; 'I dont hate it,' he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*” (303; Faulkner's emphasis) Quentin vehemently tries to deny without success his hatred of the South and of the past with which he is nonetheless obsessed and in which he is complexly and inextricably enmeshed. His fervent denials suggest an attempt to cover the hatred that Shreve has correctly identified or at the very least ambivalence toward the South with which he has been so preoccupied

through hearing the stories about the Sutpen family. Quentin's repeated hearing of the South's hardships and trials functions differently from the Southerners who retell the stories to imagine the better times and to continually re-aggravate the depression, nostalgia and anger that will motivate attempts to retake their ostensibly omnipotent power through poll taxes, Jim Crow laws, and comparable oppressive acts. By contrast, Quentin hears these stories and possibly takes pleasure in hearing of the South's hardships, enjoying the debasement and suffering experienced in the South. Since he as an individual constitutes part of the South, such behavior could be construed as masochistic. Along with his fellow southerners, he is being punished for Sutpen's sins, though he was not even born yet at the time that the Sutpen family scandalized and antagonized the community. His ambivalence toward the South and its nostalgia for antebellum society commingle complexly with his and others' relentless resuscitation of the past.

V

Absalom, Absalom! engages with the history of slavery and legacy of racism in the deep South; similarly, James Weldon Johnson's short novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* considers the impact of slavery and racism not just in the South, but also throughout the United States and in Europe as well. Nostalgia and depression need not occur exclusively in white characters such as the residents of Yoknapatawpha County. The narrator of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* experiences an irrevocable and lifelong trauma in his childhood when he discovers that, contrary to his appearance, he is

not white as he thinks but is actually black. He discovers his true racial identity when his teacher reveals the information in front of the narrator's classmates. As someone who can comfortably pass, the narrator has no inkling of the truth about his bloodlines and lineage. When he discovers the truth in school, he resents the brusque way in which his teacher informs him about his racial identity: “Perhaps it had to be done, but I have never forgiven the woman who did it so cruelly. It may be that she never knew that she gave me a sword-thrust that day in school which was years in healing.” (12) The narrator compares the revelation of his racial identity to a grievous and potentially mortal physical wound, from which he finds it difficult, if not impossible, to heal completely. The wound remains painfully fresh and present throughout the remainder of his life, and he suffers from depression, unhappily longing for the time in which he did not possess such an acute awareness of his true racial heritage. The narrator's representation of the wound also invokes the tradition of the knightly battle and Southern cavalier, insofar as the language of the “sword-thrust” recalls duels and battles taking place to burnish the fighters' honor. Among other passages in the book, the above passage notes how the sorrow of the present and the subsequent injustices manifested in it can manifest themselves powerfully much like a wound inflicted upon the body. The narrator of Johnson's novel experiences an agonizing break from his past; the narrator's knowledge motivates his unhappiness with the present and subsequent yearning to return to the days of innocence, naïveté, and obliviousness regarding his racial identity. Those halcyon days become permanently inaccessible now that he has learned the truth. The wound must remain with him, regardless of future circumstances. This revelation causes everyone,

including the narrator himself, to reassess the indicators of his racial identity that mislead everyone for so long. According to the narrator, his altered perception of his racial identity equals physical pain, which can sometimes cause only temporary affliction, but at other times it can leave lasting, lingering, and stinging wounds from which recovery occurs slowly and agonizingly at best. The narrator likens the pain experienced psychically to the intense pain resulting from a physical wound caused by a sword because the agony caused by the insult feels as if a blade were slicing flesh, penetrating excruciatingly into the deeper recesses of a person's body. These initial psychic wounds form the basis for the unhappiness and depression later experienced by the narrator as he comes to grips with his transformed sense of self.

Even though the trauma of discovery occurs relatively early in the ex-colored man's childhood, he remains sharply sensitive to the pain of the event. He notes that unpleasant events responsible for destroying the happier times of the past exist as agonizing recollections that no temporal span, no matter how expansive, can ever fully heal:

> In the life of everyone there is a limited number of unhappy experiences which are not written upon the memory, but stamped there with a die; and in long years after, they can be called up in detail, and every emotion that was stirred by them can be lived through anew; these are the tragedies of life. (13)

Realizing that his exposure as black has traumatized him irreparably, the narrator cannot ever hope to elude or efface the sorrow caused by realization of his blackness, initially perceived by him as devastating and humiliating. The narrator believes that our recollections of the past, stamped with a die, remain unaltered as time passes. Compare

the permanence of this process to writing, in which writers can erase, cross out, or change their thoughts accordingly. The memories of traumatic events are instead stamped upon our recollections, never to be effaced under any circumstances, much like the wounds caused by swords leaving a scar that does not goes away for a long time—or does not disappear at all. Such disappointments and shocks do not dissipate in the memory but instead remain as fresh and potent as when the psychic wound was first inflicted. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, however, the details that we recall as years pass by do not necessarily remain consistent and are subjected to the caprices of memory. The shock of sorrowful and traumatic events remains, yet our recollections of those details become hazy as time passes. People might think that they recall with precision and exactitude past events, particularly those that remain most vividly in individuals' memories, whether because people enjoyed them so much or especially because they traumatized individuals so profoundly. As time passes and we relive those events anew in a form subtly and gradually altered over time, we do not realize the ways in which memory distorts, reshapes, and recasts these events until our recollections bear only a scant resemblance to the events as they originally occurred and as we recalled them shortly after having experienced them. Though memory allows us to recall events, those memories constitute an imperfect and imprecise means of preserving and accessing the past. The fantasmatic dimensions of memory aids the melancholic by trying to defend against the trauma—with an arguable degree of success.

VI

Imperfect though those memories may be, some of the narrator's most vivid recollections of his childhood involve the development of his musical talents. In his youth the ex-colored man learns to play the piano by practicing classical pieces by the most highly respected European composers. This music proves a means of refuge for him once his teacher publicly reveals his blackness, resulting in his "forced loneliness: I began to find...greater pleasure in music." (16) No longer able to access the whiteness to which he was comfortably accustomed, he turns to the classical music from Europe; the narrator accesses the identity for which he yearns by playing the music so closely associated with that identity. He reaches back to a cultural past in which, had he lived at the time of these sonatas' composition, he could not have participated. The ex-colored man's retreat into this classical tradition initially intensifies after his mother's death; the townspeople stage a fundraiser for him at which he plays Beethoven's "Sonata Pathetique." (35) Though seemingly unintended, the narrator's focus upon European composers suggests nostalgia for the past of the culture of Europe, and of whiteness by extension.

After traveling to the southern United States and working for a low wage, the narrator visits New York, where he gains exposure to ragtime—a musical form that revises his attitude toward his musical abilities. Having stopped developing his musical talents, the narrator begins to sharpen them again after hearing ragtime in a New York club. As a precursor of jazz music, ragtime comprised an important part of a musical tradition regarded globally as uniquely American at the same time that "it appeals universally," according to the narrator, who also notes that "[i]n Paris they call [ragtime]

American music." (73, 63) While lacking much of the improvisation present in the performances later labeled as jazz music, ragtime "used syncopated rhythms" also characteristic to jazz music, as noted by Cristina L. Ruotolo in her analysis of the novel. (256) Ragtime draws upon the European tradition for source material; for example, the narrator first gains attention for his ragtime re-styling of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." Ragtime's relation to nostalgia and the past becomes more difficult to identify compared with that of classical music. Ragtime pieces invoke the European musical tradition, yet they also transform and reconfigure that tradition rather than faithfully and exactly reproducing it. These older pieces serve as a means for flexible re-interpretation. They suggest that the past can be re-shaped; however, the past still remains a presence, albeit in changed form. According to the ex-colored man, musicians do not create their work *ex nihilo*, emerging from nothing; they must instead rely upon works of the past, though whether that borrowing constitutes a form of nostalgia remains complex and difficult to discern: "The fact is, nothing great or enduring, especially in music, has ever sprung full-fledged and unprecedented from the brain of any master; the best that he gives to the world he gathers from the hearts of the people, and runs it through the alembic of his genius." (Johnson 73) Ragtime musicians refer to a complex musical heritage of not just European classical music but also other African-American musical traditions such as jazz and sorrow songs. (Ruotolo 253) This musical genre allows black

performers simultaneously to enhance and to pay homage to African-American musical precursors.[7]

The musical traditions of African-Americans provide a means by which the narrator imagines that he can begin to repudiate the shame he initially feels about his racial identity. While playing ragtime music during his travels in Europe with his white male patron, the ex-colored man begins to yearn to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of the black race. During his travels in Europe, the narrator decides to return to America and study African-American musical traditions, even though doing so would require him to claim his blackness publicly, whatever consequences might follow from such a decision. The patron argues that the narrator should not willingly immerse himself in the difficult circumstances faced by African-Americans and exacerbated by the discriminatory practices initiated by some whites in the service of a depressive nostalgia for a past in which whites had unquestioned power over blacks:

> "My boy, you are by blood, by appearance, by education, and by tastes a white man. Now, why do you want to throw your life away amidst the poverty and ignorance, in the hopeless struggle, of the black people of the United States? Then look at the terrible handicap you are placing on yourself by going home and working as a Negro composer; you can never be able to get the hearing for your work which it might deserve. I doubt that even a white musician of recognized ability could succeed there by working on the theory that American music should be based on Negro themes. Music is a universal art; anybody's music belongs to everybody; you can't limit to race or country. Now, if you want to become a composer, why not stay right here in Europe? I will put you under the best teachers on the Continent. Then if you want to write music on Negro themes, why, go ahead and do it." (105)

7 Ruotolo offers another perspective on the performance of European music by the ex-colored man: "[A] familiar message to the black artist aspiring to succeed in 'European' cultural practices: however talented he might be, the pianist will never surpass the level of amateur." (260) In other words, no matter what their degree of diligence or determination, black musicians seeking to participate in the production of European culture might find themselves regarded as limited in abilities or amateurish.

The patron suggests that the narrator will be mistaken in returning to the southern United States to study slave songs. By revealing himself as black, the narrator will only make his life harder. Both men have been able to enjoy the pleasure of their travels in Europe, and the patron encourages the narrator to remain rooted in that recent past rather than disturb their enjoyment by digging into the more distant past of African-American music. Though the narrator believes he could develop his talent and help end racism in acknowledging himself as a black man and studying the music of the black community,[8] that progress will prove painful indeed, emotionally and perhaps even physically.

Once he publicly declares and admits to his blackness, the narrator hopes to advance a theory that would strengthen African-Americans' position in the American musical canon. According to the patron, the ex-colored man will meet resistance to his well-intentioned project because so many white Americans resist progress defined as racial equality while remaining firmly rooted in nostalgia for putatively better times, as noted in the introduction to this dissertation. The patron hopes to preserve the existing arrangement by which the narrator remains in Europe, continues to pass as white, and does not disturb or change the pleasant memories of the present and immediate past. He perceives the struggle for civil rights as "hopeless" and unworthy of the ex-colored man's struggles; by doing so, he might unwittingly grant legitimacy to hierarchies of racial superiority because he cannot perceive a world in which blacks can achieve equality. By returning to the United States and his embracing his black heritage, the narrator would

8 Roxanna Pisiak offers an alternative reading of the narrator's behavior, arguing that it often smacks of condescension toward the blacks he wishes to help, however well-intentioned such assistance may seem: "Too often the narrator can be criticized for patting blacks on the head, much as his mother's customers once patted him on the head." (106)

supposedly be throwing away the gifts and talents that ostensibly would be put to use most effectively if he remained in Europe. Though the patron perceives music as a universal art, he undercuts his statement by insisting that Americans would resist the type of music the narrator would wish to study and make available to the public, as a result of which the narrator would likely sink into depression.

VII

Hesitant to have the ex-colored man leave his employ, the patron argues that the narrator would find himself immersed in considerably more difficult circumstances while examining slave songs. The patron recognizes that the difficulties encountered by blacks who do not enjoy the luxury of passing available to the narrator preceded the Civil War, but the battles that tore the country asunder for four years did not remedy the existing problems but instead exacerbated them:

> "This idea you have of making a Negro out of yourself is nothing more than a sentiment; and you do not realize the fearful import of what you intend to do. What kind of a Negro would you make now, especially in the South? If you had remained there, or perhaps even in your club in New York, you might have succeeded very well; but now you would be miserable. I can imagine no more dissatisfied human being than an educated, cultured, and refined colored man in the United States. . . . We hit slavery through a great civil war. Did we destroy it? No, we only changed it into hatred between sections of the country: in the South, into political corruption and chicanery, the degradation of the blacks through peonage, unjust laws, unfair and cruel treatment; and the degradation of the whites by their resorting to these practices, the paralyzation of the public conscience, and the ever over-hanging dread of what the future may bring." (106)

The patron argues that the narrator will be ill served by publicly acknowledging his blackness; the ex-colored man would be better off staying in Europe. Because so many

Americans of the time resist the progress of African-Americans and prefer to remain firmly rooted in the antebellum past in which discrimination against and limited opportunities for blacks were common practice, the patron argues that the narrator should concentrate solely upon his own education and self-improvement—here manifested as making intellectual progress as an individual—instead of worrying about contributing to the black race's social progress.

In the opening line of the passage quoted above, the patron derides the narrator's plan as "nothing more than a sentiment." In this moment, the patron ascribes to the narrator's ideals the trait of sentimentality, a putative fault ascribed to women of the time and earlier. Critics of the genre believed that sentimental fiction often exploited and manipulated the emotions of the female readers; detractors lambasted the novels as ephemeral, pointless, and largely if not completely lacking in aesthetic value because such "fiction behaved subversively and misled female desire," according to Nancy Armstrong in her study of the domestic fiction so heavily reliant upon sentimentality. (15) Quoting the *Practical Education* manual published in 1801 by Maria Edgeworth and her father Robert, Armstrong notes the effects of sentimental tales: "This species of reading cultivates what is called the heart prematurely, lowers the tone of the mind, and induces indifference for those common pleasures and occupations which, however trivial in themselves, constitute by far the greatest portion of our daily happiness." (qtd. in Armstrong 15-16) Such a pedagogical philosophy presumes that women are ostensibly naturally predisposed to be led by their emotions and influenced by their exposure to various pleasures. Just as women reading sentimental fiction might become swept away

in the emotions of the tale, so the patron believes the narrator has become caught up in his desire to help those with whom he shares a racial identity and, as such, identifies emotionally. In other words, like the readers of sentimental domestic fiction, the narrator might allow his emotions to influence him rather than relying upon rational thought. Among other instances, sentimentality can occur when individuals wish to see a pathetic or pitiful plight ameliorated. Slavery exists as a monster that has not died entirely by any stretch of the imagination; the Civil War might have killed it in the form known to Southern whites in antebellum times, but instead the conflict brings it back in deeply and perniciously transformed shape as manifested in a number of levels in American society. These new oppressive measures are certainly not slavery *per se*; instead, they negate some of the gains experienced by blacks as a result of the emancipation that freed them from the status of property. Through repressive measures, including but certainly not limited to poll taxes and Jim Crow laws, whites clinging to nostalgia for the antebellum past try to find methods to suppress racial progress for blacks. The education the ex-colored man would receive by studying the slaves' sorrow songs would only intensify the narrator's awareness of these injustices rather than lessening or nullifying those inequities, either for him or for other blacks. Such learning would only find the narrator lamenting sorrowfully the plight of blacks and might even make him susceptible to depression—from which he already suffers to a degree, given his frustrations over his racial identity.

As blacks aspire to the progress craved by the narrator and viewed with skepticism by the patron, they hope to demonstrate what prejudicial and oppressive white

nostalgia continues to maintain: the putatively inferior abilities of blacks. While on his return voyage to the United States after leaving his patron, the narrator meets another passenger who observes the positive advances that blacks have made and continue to make in the following speech:

> "[T]his great, big, incontrovertible fact stands out—the Negro is progressing, and that disproves all the arguments in the world that he is incapable of progress. . . . Our detractors point to the increase of crime as evidence against us; certainly we have progressed in crime as in other things; what less could be expected? And yet, in this respect, we are far from the point which has been reached by the more highly civilized white race. As we continue to progress, crime among us will gradually lose much of its brutal, vulgar, I might say healthy, aspect, and become more delicate, refined, and subtle. Then it will be less shocking and noticeable, although more dangerous to society." (Johnson 111)

Sympathetic to the plight of blacks in the United States, the narrator's acquaintance here notes that African-Americans have progressed; however, in doing so, they risk the sometimes more subtle violence that white Americans regularly commit. Some whites have often legitimated atrocities and violence against blacks for dubious reasons and upon the basis of scant or nonexistent evidence; the retribution they seek ostensibly seems more genteel compared to the putative offenses for which blacks receive punishment.[9] This violence still manifests itself, including through the lynch mob murder that occurs at the conclusion of the novel's second-to-last chapter. As a result, the move away from the past and sameness toward progress could result in potential violence and turmoil. Whatever progress the blacks make seems to be counteracted by racist white repression and oppression to stop these gains. Furthermore, this progress does not always

9 I would point out, however, that crime as an umbrella term of course encompasses much more than just violence against blacks—or even just violent crime altogether.

live up to its name. Is becoming like whites necessarily progress? The narrator's acquaintance likely has his tongue firmly planted in his cheek as he insinuates that blacks will make progress once they begin to act more like the whites whose behavior is certainly not beyond reproach or critique.

VIII

Like Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the body of the narrator in Johnson's novel becomes invested with the past and haunted by the individuals who have struggled and suffered violently on the basis of battles over power and progress, often on the basis of race. During a train trip from Nashville to Atlanta, the narrator witnesses two men—one a Northerner, the other a Southerner—arguing about the Civil War. The ex-colored man listens, content to remain a spectator to the heated debate between the two men:

> In the course of a short time the controversy narrowed itself down to an argument between the old soldier and the Texan. The latter maintained hotly that the Civil War was a criminal mistake on the part of the North and that the humiliation which the South suffered during Reconstruction could never be forgotten. The Union man retorted just as hotly that the South was responsible for the war and that the spirit of unforgetfulness on its part was the greatest cause of present friction; that it seemed to be the one great aim of the South to convince the North that the latter had made a mistake in fighting to preserve the Union and liberate the slaves. (116-117)

The Union man argues that the South remains unable to forget about and move on from its defeat in the Civil War—a prominent theme throughout Faulkner's fiction as well. Like many of Faulkner's novels, the South as here characterized remains rooted in "the spirit of unforgetfulness." As noted above, in *Absalom! Absalom!* Shreve McCannon

wonders why the South so doggedly hangs on to its painful memories of defeat in the Civil War, so much so that the poisonous miasma of anger at that failure pervades successive generations. The South remains inextricably linked to its past, unable to progress, and humiliated by the changes implemented during Reconstruction. As a result, Southerners instituted and implemented oppressive measures such as Jim Crow laws meant to counteract the gains achieved by African-Americans through the Emancipation Proclamation and during Reconstruction. The South's "spirit of unforgetfulness" causes it to keep alive the cause of reminding the North that according to the Confederates, the Union did not need to undertake the conflict, ostensibly causing all the pain, misery, and depression to white Southerners as a result (while largely, if not completely, overlooking the pain and suffering experienced by generations of African-Americans in the antebellum and postbellum periods). As fascinated as he might be by the discussion of the South's unforgiveness over issues of race and power, the ex-colored man does not participate in this dialogue about the effects of the past; instead, just as occurs with his racial identity that enables him to pass, he functions as a spectator rather than as an active participant. The narrator does not see the South alone as responsible for and indulging in racism; he sees even benevolent northerners and Europeans—like his patron, for instance—as participants in the same racism that he observes in his role as a spectator.

Another event observed by the narrator as a spectator causes him to change his attitude toward the public presentation of his racial identity. After witnessing a white mob brutally murdering a black man with no apparent justification or proof for so doing, the ex-colored man—ashamed that Southerners with "their notions of chivalry and bravery

and justice" could permit and participate in such atrocities—decides to renounce his racial identity (138):

> I argued that to forsake one's race to better one's condition was no less worthy an action than to forsake one's country for the same purpose. I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race; but that I would change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead. All the while I understood that it was not discouragement or fear or search for a larger field of action and opportunity that was driving me out of the Negro race. I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals. For certainly the law would restrain and punish the malicious burning alive of animals. (139)

The narrator hopes to exist in a liminal third space in which he will not deny his blackness nor acknowledge his whiteness. He instead allows the world to take him at face value, no matter what subsequent evaluation might result. As has often been the case during his life, others with no previous knowledge of the narrator will likely regard him as white, misreading the same corporeal clues that also mislead the ex-colored man in his early childhood. The narrator feels that he does not need "to go about with a label of inferiority pasted" across his forehead; blacks whose skin color unmistakably identifies them as black have no choice, but the narrator can exercise agency in resisting the violence that brings such embarrassment to a portion of the United States. Individuals who pass as white exercise agency in assuming and publicly acknowledging a racial identity inconsistent with their lineage, yet consistent with their outward appearance; they resist the biological models of identity that insist upon clear-cut notions of blood-based

identity originating from birth and fixed for life.[10] Clinging to notions of racial superiority, some whites continue to perform vicious acts of violence toward blacks; these whites' depression over a lost past of ostensible greater authority with few, if any, restrictions or controls motivates them to take action to suppress any gains or progress made by African-Americans.

Furthermore, as the narrator indicates at the conclusion of the passage quoted above, whites do not hesitate to treat blacks "worse than animals." Though the narrator claims he does not repudiate his blackness due to "discouragement or fear," such a statement might be disingenuous: if at least some whites can act violently toward blacks as if they were animals, how might those same whites behave toward someone who pretends to be white, only to be discovered to have black blood coursing through his veins? According to the notions of blood-based identity vehemently perpetuated by some whites, purity exists in white blood alone and not black blood, which instead supposedly possesses the ability contaminate. Individuals such as the ex-colored man who can successfully pass trouble the distinction between the pure and impure, between the original and the putatively tainted copy,[11] as Donald C. Goellnicht observes: "The distinction between the 'original' (pure-white/self) and the 'copy' (tainted/black/other) can no longer be drawn with certainty, casting into doubt the very notion of an original." (129) Many whites do not acknowledge this potential for subversion; they instead prefer

10 For more on the relationship between bloodlines and racial identity, see my discussion in chapter 4.

11 Consider also Robyn Wiegman's discussion of the ineffectiveness of terms of racial identity in *American Anatomies:* "Of course, bodies are neither black nor white, and the range of possibilities accruing to either designation contradicts the assurance of these categories to represent, mimetically, the observable body." (9) The inability of raced bodies to neatly conform to the limited possibilities presented by the terms "black" and "white" suggests the inefficacy of those terms in representing what can be seen.

to maintain notions of inequality to which they cling nostalgically—maintaining those distinctions by violence if the need arises.

The idea of equality for which combatants fought and died in the Civil War feels illusory; the ideal of fairness and the fantasy of incorporation and integration give way to the harsh realities of intolerance, segregation, and the fear of difference. The narrator feels shame that his identification as black could result in an immediate threat to his body, largely on the basis of the beliefs of many whites—not just southerners, but also some northerners as well—about blacks, such as their ostensibly animalistic and subhuman nature, coupled with the happy plantation myth that suggests blacks' happiness with slavery. These whites desire to wield power over blacks while yielding no control to them. According to the narrator, the South's attitudes about race seem badly antiquated: "The Southern whites are not yet living quite in the present age; many of their general ideas hark back to a former century, some of them to the Dark Ages." (Johnson 138) Within the confines of such anachronistic prejudiced attitudes about blacks, depressed and angry Southerners cling desperately to the nostalgic yearnings for the supposedly superior past rather than bestowing upon blacks the rights, privileges, and liberties guaranteed to any other American citizen. The invocation of the Dark Ages also harkens back to the narrator likening the revelation of his true racial identity to receiving a stab wound from a sword—a weapon used in warfare during that distant past.

Struggling against the preconceived notions and stereotypes upon which such antiquated ideas about race rest, the blacks who struggle show that members of the race have the same complexity and humanity as members of any group. When sharing his

secret as an adult with his fiancée, the narrator finds himself taking on the traits of the physical characteristics typically associated by blacks; consequently, he feels imposed upon him the racial identity toward which he has expressed such ambivalence:

> Then I told her, in what words I do not know, the truth. I felt her hand grow cold, and when I looked up, she was gazing at me with a wild, fixed stare as though I was some object she had never seen. Under the strange light in her eyes I felt that I was growing black and thick-featured and crimp-haired. (149)

In revealing his identity to his affianced, the ex-colored man imagines himself assuming the physical features more consistent with noxious and insidious stereotypes of the black male. Even though his body, much like that of many such people who pass, does not upon a cursory glance bear the traces of his lineage, he feels as if his body metamorphoses dramatically as a result of his acute self-consciousness about his fiancée's reaction to his racial identity. In this moment the past and the narrator's bloodline intrude to write themselves forcefully, violently, and unmistakably upon his body, even if only in his imagination. Johnson uses such stereotypes such as those keenly felt by the narrator in this moment to illustrate how a person who passes such as the ex-colored man remains abundantly and poignantly aware of the pervasive contemporary attitudes about racial identity, not to mention the potential threats to his safety that he will face if publicly exposed. Though his fiancée ultimately finds herself willing to overlook the narrator's racial identity, which will continue to remain a secret, and marries him anyway, he finds in this moment what he perceives as a shame in his racial identity: "This was the only time in my life that I ever felt absolute regret at being colored, that I cursed the drops of African blood in my veins and wished that I were really white." (149) Such a statement

seems disingenuous, given that the narrator has often expressed unhappiness with his situation, including after first learning of his black heritage, as noted above. Yet he finds himself struggling with that identity as he faces the potential rejection of the woman he loves. The narrator wishes for the evidence of his past to disappear altogether; he longs to disavow his lineage so he can return to the past in which he lived free from and largely oblivious to the fetters of rigid and confining institutionalized identity. These early days in the narrator's childhood comprise the halcyon past from which he ostensibly falls, never to regain the innocence or joy that he originally possessed.

At the novel's end, the narrator finds himself no longer living for his own benefit but for the benefit of his children; he possesses sole custody of them after his wife dies. He wants his offspring to remain happy and oblivious to their racial lineage, knowing the strife that would besiege them should their heritage become publicly known: “It is to my children that I have devoted my life. I no longer have the same fear for myself of my secret's being found out, for since my wife's death I have gradually dropped out of social life; but there is nothing I would not suffer to keep the brand from being placed upon them.” (153) Despite his despair and seclusion, the narrator derives some sense of purpose in raising his children while shielding them from accusations and revelation of the truth. The ex-colored man no longer considers himself a social creature; like Quentin, he seems to have retreated from people by and large, keeping the company only of a small coterie of trusted individuals. The language of corporeality infiltrates the narrator's anxiety about his children's exposure; he would do anything to “keep the brand from being placed upon them.” The mark of race indicates ownership, much like a cattle

brand.[12] Such language suggests not just the immediacy with which these perceptions would become situated in the children's bodies like a mark that cannot be effaced, but it also indicates the extent to which anxiety and anger about racial mixing can result in the dehumanization of individuals born from miscegenation. Even though, like the ex-colored man, his children bear no perceptible signs of their racial heritage, the narrator worries that once such information becomes public knowledge, it would remain firmly affixed to the children, much like a white-hot brand searing into the tender flesh of livestock and inexorably marking them for life. The narrator perceives the social stigma faced by his children as a physical mark that, even if their outward appearances suggest nothing of their lineage, would nonetheless remain potent and permanent. That mark would also apparently deprive them of some status as not only not white, but also as not human. The ex-colored man believes that the nostalgia experienced by whites—whether northerners or southerners, whether Americans or Europeans, whether benevolent or malevolent—and directed toward blacks imposes physical dangers and psychic pain upon those whose black identities are either openly acknowledged or ultimately exposed, even if against their will. Whites' nostalgic desire to maintain distinctly separate strata of racial identity result in sorrow and hardship for the blacks forced to conform to such models. The collectivity imposes its nostalgic vision upon the individual.

12 Regardless of the extent, if any, to which owners and overseers branded slaves during the existence of the slave trade in the United States (though, frankly, it's difficult to imagine at least isolated instances did not occur), numerous other forms of cruel and deliberate violence against slaves, meted out by owners and overseers, left lasting physical scars. Consider a few prominent examples from American literature beyond the historical scope of this project: first, the brutal whipping experienced by Aunt Hester and witnessed by the young Frederick Douglass in the first chapter of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (15-16); and second, the scarring that resembles “a chokecherry tree” on Sethe's back, resulting from a vicious whipping in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (16-18).

As the novel concludes, the narrator acknowledges that he has been able to avoid such traumatic exposure and humiliation by occupying a spectatorial position rather than that of somebody actively involved in the well-being and advancement of the race:

> It is difficult for me to analyze my feelings concerning my present position in the world. Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life; at other times I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people. (153)

The ex-colored man perceives himself as a privileged spectator who has been able to discern the hardships suffered by African-Americans from a vantage point that, as a person who can pass, has allowed him to avoid that adversity and those corporeal threats to the same full extent. No matter what his lineage might indicate, he feels cowardly due to his inability to proclaim publicly and unashamedly his racial identity. He even waxes nostalgic, "possessed by a strange longing for [his] mother's people." The privileged spectatorship enjoyed by the narrator allows him to do what many blacks cannot; given enough distance, both temporal and geographical, his appearance can mislead others—particularly whites—into believing that he is not black. The privilege inherent in the spectatorship results from the ex-colored man's ability to evade detection as a black man based on appearance alone. In this particular instance, privilege results from others' inability to determine correctly the ex-colored man's racial identity just by looking at him. He can watch the struggle between blacks and whites unfold in Jim Crow America with little to no personal risk because he can assume the identity of a white man with a white wife and white children who can pass unbeknownst to whites without threat of discovery.

Seeing how other blacks agitate for their civil rights, the narrator feels at times that his focus upon protecting his children amounts to a trivial concern at best: “Beside them I feel small and selfish. I am an ordinarily successful white man who has made a little money. They are men who are making history and a race. I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious.” (154) The ex-colored man has eschewed the progress of the black race in order to ease his children's lives and shield them from scrutiny, torment, trauma, humiliation, and potential violence. In so doing, however, the narrator works against (or, at the very least, does not in any meaningful way aid) the progress of the championing of African-Americans' rights at the turn of the twentieth century. Idealizing the future of the individuals working to better the race in the way nostalgia idealizes, the narrator simultaneously minimizes the violence and nastiness of it, as well as the occasional tedium associated with the work. He becomes estranged from the history of his race and cannot actively participate in agitating for civil rights or studying slave songs, although the struggle can remain deeply rooted in his memory as he cannot help but reflect upon the past:

> My love for my children makes me glad that I am what I am and keeps me from desiring to be other wise; and yet, when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent, I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. (154)

To attain peace for his children, the narrator has compromised and sacrificed his commitment to racial solidarity and equality, not to mention the study of the black musical traditions that he once found so fascinating. Though he believes he has exercised his agency and “chosen the lesser part” in choosing to disavow his blackness

permanently, his choice involves not so much the identity itself as a legitimation of the system of racial identity within which he exists, as Jennifer L. Schulz notes: "He can no more choose to give up his birthright than choose to become ex-colored; he has instead chosen a system in which racial hierarchy locks him into a process of public self-denial and psychological self-doubt reflected in his physical sense of loss and of being lost." (36-37) In distancing himself from his true racial identity, the narrator finds himself trapped in—or, to use the language of this dissertation, nailed down to—a permanent sense of repudiation, doubt, and loss.

Such loss manifests itself in a number of ways. The ex-colored man realizes that the music he so ardently loves—both the syncopated ragtime music and the European classical tradition to which ragtime and other jazz modes refer—can no longer constitute a form of meaningful expression for him. He is silenced, unable to imagine his future, except in his children, or to relive the past that he found so joyful. Just as his musical transcripts yellow with age and disuse, representing a deteriorating possibility to do something benefitting the African-American community, so he can continue to find no opportunity to reach out to others, instead remaining linked to the ghosts of his past and the depression that follows from having lost his grip upon "a vanished dream, a dead ambition, [and] a sacrificed talent," for all of which he yearns nostalgically. Through their whiteness, his children become ghostly extensions and reminders of his relationship with his wife. We as readers learn almost nothing about them as individuals; they never become fleshed-out characters whose innocence arouses our sympathy as the narrator seeks to shield them from exposure and hardship. Like the outside world, we as readers

find ourselves shut out from learning about the narrator's children in any substantial detail. In his seclusion, the ex-colored man finds himself increasingly distanced, disenfranchised, and disconnected from the community to which he might have contributed so productively. He was and will continue to be unable to take part in that movement. That being said, the narrator of Johnson's novel has at least assumed a personal identity—something which Quentin, beleaguered by the past that haunts him and pushes into the identity of a commonwealth rather than an individual, cannot claim.

Johnson's novel optimistically notes the increasing range of possibilities for African-Americans and a greater flexibility in personal racial identity; nonetheless, the narrator views those same opportunities for blacks as constrained and limited. As a result of his lack of involvement in the progress of the black race, the question begs itself: Through his inaction, does the narrator contribute to the repressive nostalgia rampant in depressed and angry Southern communities? The ex-colored man certainly laments his refusal to accept his black identity, but he justifies that rejection upon the basis of protecting his offspring. He ultimately creates to some degree the past for which he nostalgically yearned and which, when lost, sends him spiraling into a deep depression. He now can pretend to be the white person he was in the halcyon days before his teacher ever exposed the narrator's identity. Whereas during his childhood the narrator had no inkling of his true lineage, the ex-colored man as an adult can pretend to be white while recognizing the precariousness of his identity and how easily exposure could harm not only him but also his children. The present in which he finds himself is not ideal; it does not resemble the past prior to the discovery of his blackness. He experiences inner

torment by his lack of participation in political activism on behalf of his race. Like Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!,* the ex-colored man retreats into isolation, though he can to some degree attain the yearned-for past that seems so utterly inaccessible to Quentin as he copes with the devastation caused by the Civil War for residents of Yoknapatawpha County several decades after the fact. The ex-colored man attains that past, though not without great cost and regret. Johnson's narrator exemplifies one of a number of instances to be noted throughout this dissertation in which individuals yearn to return to a better past. Most individuals, however, do not enjoy even the remote degree of success achieved by Johnson's narrator; instead, the desired past remains inaccessible and elusive, much like it does for Quentin.

Chapter 2: “Translated into the Vulgar Tongue”: The Frustration and Disappointment of Nostalgic Desire

I

In what follows, I will analyze three novels—Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* and William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*—while attending to how these three works address the notion of desire in relation to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century nostalgic desire that can only continue to be frustrated and disappointed. Whether the characters in these novels willingly concede as much, their nostalgic yearnings for an idealized past remain doomed to disappointment. Each novel features a character—Godfrey St. Peter, Jay Gatsby, and Drusilla—who has become obsessed with a specific yet misguided vision of an idealized past to which that individual seeks to return, yet for whom such access will always be denied because no such past ever existed. Whether slightly or significantly, the inexorable march of time causes changes that make the satisfying fulfillment of desire impossible—even when it seems that people are getting exactly what they want—because of the very nature of desire itself. Fitzgerald's novel represents a well-known instance of nostalgia in American literature—Gatsby trying to recapture his past romance with Daisy Buchanan. Though I would not reduce a rich and complex novel such as Fitzgerald's to a simplistic moral, one could argue that Gatsby's death results from his inability to successfully reproduce the past for which he yearns and the nastiness of what he idealizes. In the separate individual novels being considered in this chapter, the distance between the ideal and the reality becomes dangerous, not just for Gatsby, who is killed as a result of his

unsuccessful attempt to satisfy his nostalgic yearnings, but also St. Peter and Drusilla, both of whom are imperiled but not killed through their attempts to cling to the past and the stories about the putatively better times that motivate their nostalgia[1].

As noted in the previous chapter, disappointment fuels nostalgia when individuals seek to keep the longed-for past alive while resisting forces of change. Such disappointment results in part from the lack of resemblance between the actuality of present circumstances and the dreamed-for but ultimately unattainable ideal situation; consequently, disappointment results in part when desire can never be fulfilled. A number of the identity-based conflicts taking place in early to middle twentieth-century America occur because whites—predominantly male, but sometimes females as well, as we shall see—desire a return to the past that can never be fully or satisfactorily achieved; only frustration and disappointment can ensue. In the wake of events such as the South's defeat in the Civil War and the intensifying anxiety about maleness and masculinity in an increasingly industrialized nation, many whites find themselves yearning for an idealized past that more complex political and social realities render incapable of return.

As a means of coping with the harsh reality so inconsistent with collective and individual nostalgic yearnings, stories and myths keep the sought-after past alive. The American cultural fascination with the past is perpetuated in part by the stories that the culture tells about itself. In *The Fatal Environment*, Richard Slotkin notes how such myths take on lives of their own: "Myths are stories, drawn from history, that have

1 I am not suggesting that the desire to return to the past is in and of itself always inherently dangerous; I am instead noting the potential for an all-consuming desire to resuscitate a dead or dying vision of the past to prove dangerous or physically damaging.

acquired through usage over many generations a symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of the society that produces them. Historical experience is preserved in the form of narrative; and through periodic retellings those narratives become traditionalized." (16) Accounts of historical events can take on mythic proportions as they are told, retold, and reshaped over time. Facts become blurry; some perspectives and viewpoints gain privilege, while others are scuttled off into discursive oblivion. These stories also prove vital to the culture that retells them; they provide a means of knowing or speculating about the origins of the existing society as well as its present. The correct story doesn't always get told, however, since no such account exists due to truth being a discursive construct; often the story's contours become reshaped for political or social expediency. The stories that become most widely told and most deeply embedded in a given culture's traditions are not necessarily the most accurate ones; for whatever reason, these recirculated versions become part of the tradition and are often have ascribed to them a truth value of which they are most likely at least in part undeserving, if not much more so. The stories that gain the greatest circulation and credence within a given culture or society often are told by and to the advantage of those in power—which, in the case of early twentieth-century American society, would predominantly belong to some white males[2] seeking simultaneously to preserve their own power and privilege while denying those same things to others.

2 We should of course keep in mind the ways in which class inflects and complicates this picture; not all ethnic groups associated with whiteness in the contemporary moment possessed the same relation to power and privilege in the early 20th century.

Stories, which can then take on mythic proportions as they are shaped and reshaped by their tellers for politically expedient purposes, become a means of investing history with values that cannot be critically challenged: "Myth is invoked as a means of deriving usable values from history, and of putting those values beyond the reach of critical demystification. Its primary appeal is to ritualized emotions, established beliefs, habitual associations, memory, nostalgia." (19) Myths and stories that retell history, albeit with whatever varying degree of veracity, are often reshaped and transformed to suit the cultural and social purposes of the larger group seeking to wield power over others, while finding values from the past that are manifested and usable in the present. However, the yearning that these stories evoke must elude critical analysis on some level because the past and the present are different from one another, no matter how myths might attempt to draw parallels between the two. If these values become demystified, then historical accounts run the risk of being exposed as fraudulent or inaccurate, shaped to serve the purposes of those in power or to suppress the narratives or details that do not neatly fit within the grander historical sweep of the story.

In considering the demystifying effect on the believer of the myth, we can see a comparable situation described by Freud in the relationship between the patient and the psychoanalyst. When a patient receives treatment, the psychoanalyst can tell him or her what is going on, but those remarks have no effect until resistance is overcome, as noted in "On Beginning the Treatment":

> A strong resistance has come to the front in order to defend the neurosis; we must take up the challenge then and there and come to grips with it. Energetic and repeated assurances to the patient that it is impossible for no ideas at all to occur to him at the beginning, and that what is in question is

> a resistance against the analysis, soon oblige him to make the expected admissions or to uncover a first piece of his complexes. (Freud 373-74)

No matter how much the psychoanalyst might first reassure a patient, some wariness and resistance to treatment is inevitable. Once that resistance is overcome, the patient can begin to make statements that help the psychoanalyst more accurately address the patient's neuroses. Similarly, critical analysis of myths and stories like those discussed by Slotkin exposes them as artificial rather than natural—i.e., the way it supposedly really happened, the way the story has always been told because of its ostensible accuracy—and heightens awareness of the constructed nature of the stories while threatening to peel away the veneer beneath which lurk discrimination and disempowerment disguised as a yearning for kinder, gentler, and simpler times. That being said, nostalgic people won't recognize the artificiality of these ostensibly objective historical accounts and myths about the past unless their resistance is overcome, much like the neurotic in analysis who finally realizes the truth of what the psychoanalyst says and lowers his or her resistance to treatment.

Slotkin notes that the investment of historical accounts with mythological import blends and blurs temporal boundaries. The past is dragged along by the historical memory embedded in myth, weighing down the present:

> When historical memory is carried by mythological metaphors, it is falsified in the most fundamental way. It is not simply that the making of legends alters or misrepresents the facts of historical cases—it may even be that certain myths are accurate in the representation of important details. What is lost when history is translated into myth is the essential premise of history—the distinction of past and present itself. The past is made metaphorically equivalent to the present; and the present appears simply as a repetition of persistently recurring structures identified with the past. (Slotkin 24)

Historical memory, regardless of the degree to which myths represent it accurately, blurs the boundary between past and present, thus resulting in a confusion of temporal states. The past remains inexorably tied to and a part of the present and is constantly seen manifesting itself in the present; as a result, the two cannot be distinguished from one another, and the past continually reemerges in the present. The "Otherness" of the past is lost, in addition to the potential of the present to be different. Within such a purview nostalgic individuals inevitably find themselves constantly exposed to the past while living in the present, seeking the ideals of the past that such nostalgic people believe are inherent in the myths that have gained such traction in the present culture.

In the early twentieth century, Americans no longer have available to them a blank canvas upon which to project their desires for expansion and conquest, as Frederick Jackson Turner notes: "There is not tabula rasa." (38) A blank canvas—whether geographical, political, cultural, social, or otherwise—does not exist upon which Americans can presumably inscribe their colonizing and imperialist desires. The idea of the tabula rasa is itself a myth; the land comprising the current United States may have been a blank slate at some point long ago, but it has since been written upon century after century, generation after generation, by the Native-Americans who have lived on the land, followed by others who occupied the territory. As Anne Raine states in her analysis of Willa Cather's novel *The Professor's House*, "[I]n the twentieth century, nature *is* material culture: not virgin territory, but a set of social discourses and practices . . ." (125; Raine's emphasis) In other words, the land and the nature and other objects associated with it and located on it are not divested of meaning, but are themselves "social

discourses and practices" situated within a specific historical context constantly being written and rewritten. As the territory of the United States expands and becomes increasingly populated, the history written upon the slate becomes increasingly complex. Instead, like Godfrey St. Peter—the title character of *The Professor's House*—some Americans seek to reestablish some connection to the past, which consists of the fantasy that never actually existed. While beyond the province of this particular dissertation, even the contemporary vogue in recent decades for art, architecture, and clothing that owes a considerable debt to Native American aesthetic and cultural traditions shows the ways in which Americans are indebted to these traditions while also reaching back to them as artifacts of a simpler time in which control over lands and peoples could ostensibly be easily harnessed. Rather than considering the lands of the tribal communities as a tabula rasa, we should instead consider them as a palimpsest—a multi-layered text upon which is written and rewritten a variety of histories as the land and its inhabitants change.

A substantial portion of the struggle for power in the United States (as well as the desire for power and a return to a simpler time, all of which actuate the struggle) occurred at least predominantly among men, though we should of course not diminish or trivialize the contributions of women, even if those contributions occurred not in the theater of war but in important activities such as settlement, homemaking, and "civilizing." For example, in *The Professor's House*, the central relationship in the novel consists not of Godfrey St. Peter's marriage to wife Lillian, but rather his close friendship with his pupil Tom Outland. These relationships among men prove to be central in structuring the anxiety men have about the past while also providing a space in which women cannot

thrive because, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men*, "[I]n any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarichal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence." (25; Sedgwick's emphasis) This desire for homosocial relationships in delineated and explained by Sedgwick, who observes that

> "[h]omosocial desire," to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. "Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact, it is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire," of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society , is radically disrupted. (1-2)

The relationships of Tom Outland with both his mentor Godfrey St. Peter and his colleague on the mesa, Rodney Blake, seem to be located in the homosocial realm described by Sedgwick, in which the relationship between men becomes of at least equal, if not greater, importance than those in which women take part. St. Peter's wife, Lillian, finds herself increasingly displeased with Outland as her husband becomes less concerned with the matters of most vital interest to her. Whereas Sedgwick speaks primarily of erotic triangles in which two men compete for the affection of a woman, we see in the instance of Cather's novel a man and a woman—Tom and Lillian—competing for Godfrey's attention, though it is not entirely clear that Outland seems himself in competition with Lillian. While Sedgwick theorizes the homosocial and the homosexual

as part of a spectrum of sexual identities, no evidence in the novel exists that any of the novel's most significant homosocial relationships—particularly Tom's relationships with either St. Peter or Rodney Blake, the man who helps Tom discover the cliff-dweller city on the mesa in the American Southwest—traverse into an area of the spectrum we would refer to as unmistakably homosexual. Regardless of how we would classify male-male relations in the text, the happiest and most idyllic moments in the novel consist of ones in which men are by themselves—all-male families with women silenced or on the periphery.

St. Peter's yearning in the book has also a component of sadness to it that I have noted previously comprises an important characteristic of the nostalgic individual. In her book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart states that "[n]ostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience." (23) Nostalgia remains inaccessibly rooted in the past and does not ultimately focus upon the desire for a specific object. Even if someone believes that the retrieval of a specific sought-after object will bring happiness, the fulfillment of desire, whether by attaining an object—including even the idealized past—or through some other means, will ultimately prove unsatisfying and disappointing. Nostalgia reaches back prior to the present of lived experience to that which can no longer be accessed—and, in fact, never existed at all—and which can only cause frustration and sorrow.

Those suffering from nostalgic desire find themselves repeating that yearning relentlessly, albeit to no meaningful productive end: "Nostalgia is the repetition that

mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition and denies the repetition's capacity to form identity." (23) Repetition ultimately does not prove satisfying; it must always disappoint, as the individual's desire is never fully sated. No matter how many times an individual seeks to repeat an activity that purports to bring back the idealized past, the repetition will always prove itself inauthentic. As a result, repetition cannot shape our individual or collective identities except to the extent that it manifests frustration and anger at being an unsatisfactory means of accessing the sought-after past; consequently, repetition does shape our identities, and we are nostalgic.

The discussion of people's wants and desires has also provided ample fodder for psychoanalytic practitioners such as Jacques Lacan, who frequently discusses desire in his famed seminars. In "The Signification of the Phallus," Lacan notes that "desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)." (580) Lacan argues that desire consists of the "appetite for satisfaction" subtracted from the "demand for love." In other words, desire results when an individual's language cannot satisfactorily express one's needs. There is something excessive in desire, captured by the notion of a demand for unconditional love, so that regardless of what evidence of love we receive, we are never fully satisfied. Our desire always exceeds our needs. A person might express a longing for a specific object or individual, yet even once the request is granted, that person will still not be happy. Lacan suggests that the language used by individuals in the Symbolic realm does not allow them to adequately articulate their desires which will always go unfulfilled. People will remain

haunted by the promise of fulfillment and wholeness that can never be fully realized. Similarly, any nostalgic desire will never be fulfilled, in large part because—to use the old saw—you can't go home again. Indeed, nostalgia has the structure of desire itself; consider Sedgwick's definition of desire from *Between Men* as "the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship." (2) In addition to considering desire as motivating the relationship between people, as Sedgwick discusses, we can also consider nostalgic desire as the force shaping an individual's relationship to the past, present, and future. A person might exhibit hostility toward the present, fear of the future, and yearning for the past; these desires to have the present and future conform to the vision of the past shapes the individual's way of seeing and living in the world.

Lacan's discussion of the mirror stage also focuses upon this idea of an unfulfilled promise. Around or before the age of two years, the youngster recognizes herself or himself in the mirror. In other words, the picture in the mirror no longer seems like that of an other external to the self. The child equates the image in the mirror with the person perceiving the image. Lacan notes the image becomes an Ideal-I—the child sees the fragmentary, incomplete image in the mirror and perceives that image as whole, complete, and masterful. The child's misunderstand rests upon a *meconnaissance*, or "*function of misrecognition*," of the fragmented, partial image as representative of the child's whole body (80; Lacan's emphasis). As a result, the desire for wholeness and completeness can never be fully satisfied because of the child's mistaken self-perception; this wholeness and power is not attained in adulthood, either. The vagaries of time also

reshape and distort our understanding of the past, and even if that idealized object of desire—whether the Ideal-I or something else—were attained, one would still experience disappointment. Consequently, the nostalgia we possess for people, places, and things is a subjective creation of our own minds, attitudes, and biases rather than an objective reflection of events as they supposedly really happened. Chasing down ideals that they can never fully restore or relive, Gatsby, St. Peter, and Drusilla find their longings continually frustrated and exacerbated.

Much like the relatively affluent and highly regarded scholar Godfrey St. Peter in Cather's novel, Jay Gatsby, the main character of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* and a quintessential example of a nostalgic character in twentieth-century American literature, lives a life that others around him would seemingly admire. He throws grand parties at his estate and fascinates all those around him. His success story seems typical of the American dream—someone who flourishes and succeeds through moxie, grit, and determination, much like a character in the standard Horatio Alger story pulling himself up by his bootstraps and working diligently toward great success. Riding a wave of prosperity hastened at least in part by rapid modernization, individuals such as Gatsby reflect the dramatic changes taking place in urban metropolises such as New York City, where, according to Lauraleigh O'Meara, "[i]n Fitzgerald's day, the city was constantly metamorphosing." (58) In a time of such expansive changes, it seems inevitable that at least some people would look back to the past with longing. Despite the rapid changes hastened into place by the forces of modernity, industrialization, and urbanization, the chain of events in the novel leading to the failure of Gatsby's dream and

ultimately his death suggest that the American dream proves to be difficult if not impossible to access for those of putatively inappropriate class, gender, or racial backgrounds. Like New York City and its surrounding areas, Gatsby tries to undergo a metamorphosis from Midwesterner Jay Gatz into the affluent and debonair businessman James Gatsby, only to have his past violently and fatally intrude upon his life. Gatsby's dream itself is dubious, built on a foundation of exploitation. When these people such as Gatsby attempt to access the dreams to which they cling, violence becomes the means by which those hopes are brutally and ineradicably erased.

As told by the novel's narrator Nick Carraway, Gatsby is a man of mysterious origins which come to light once Tom Buchanan, the husband of Daisy (Nick's cousin, a woman with whom Gatsby rekindles a passionate relationship) endeavors to find out more about this man who threatens his putative domestic tranquility. Gatsby engages in apparently shady dealings with Meyer Wolfshiem, a Jew whose representation as such is apparent from his racialized physiognomy. Unlike Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which I discussed in the previous chapter, and in which physical appearance deceives and misleads people trying to identify a person's racial identity, in the instance of Wolfshiem we see a character whose identity is clearly manifested through Fitzgerald's unmistakable representation of the stereotype of Jewish physiognomy. Wolfshiem becomes a mentor to Gatsby, even though Meyer is himself an outsider, both in terms of his Jewish identity and in terms of the disreputable criminal activities in which he participates. Gatsby cannot attain his success through more conventional channels in large part because his past is so mysterious—or, as the novel eventually

reveals, mundane. Once Gatsby dies, his father comes to the funeral and reveals that his son's name is Jay Gatz, potentially signifying a Jewish identity like that of Wolfshiem, who is unmistakably marked as Jewish and represented as less than honorable.

In an attempt to live the American dream, Gatsby forges a new identity for himself. Gatsby becomes a self-made man not only in that he makes his fortune but also in that he both constructs and radically reconstructs his identity. At the novel's conclusion, Nick argues that Gatsby was trying to reclaim a success and a life that had already passed him by. His past would inevitably catch up with him and destroy the manufactured reality upon which he had established his financial and social success in the novel. In trying to recreate the past he had nostalgically desired in rekindling his relationship with Daisy, Gatsby fabricates a self that, as it begins to unravel, ultimately destroys him. Gatsby wants the past he could have had years ago during his romance with Daisy when he had not yet established himself. The love Gatsby seeks with Daisy and the American dream that Gatsby relies upon to gain his wealth seem incompatible to some degree.

Gatsby imagines and idealizes his relationship with Daisy to a highly unrealistic extent. The reality that he experiences as the novel's narrative present unfolds can never satisfyingly approximate, equal, or surpass Gatsby's dream or expectations:

> There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams–not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart. (101)

In this moment, Nick tries to imagine how Gatsby actually perceives Daisy compared with his nostalgia-saturated expectations of her. Carraway can at best speculate about what he perceives to be Daisy's inability to fully meet Gatsby's expectations and fulfill his nostalgic desire. According to Nick, Gatsby has elaborated his idea of Daisy to a point that nothing could ever fully satisfy him; Gatsby has "store[d] up in his ghostly heart" a yearning for what he wants and is unable to attain: the love of Daisy. The language of ghostliness suggests both the incorporeal and the dead or dying dreams of Gatsby, much as the language of ghostliness worked in *Absalom, Absalom!* Nick describes for the reader the fantasy of another man—Gatsby; in giving voice to those fantasies, he assumes a creative control and willingness to embellish just as potentially deceptive as Gatsby's own self-fashioning. Gatsby's illusion has become so large and all-consuming that it has taken on a life of its own—one of "colossal vitality" that suggests great energy but also potentially a lack of control. Gatsby—and Daisy, too—function as creations of Jay Gatz, forged and elaborated upon with creative passion, something to which Gatsby continually adds and enhances. The language of the "colossal" also suggests the idea of the colossus as double or as a version of the self that can be used in rituals. Nicole Guetin discusses the connection between memory and such rituals in the novel: "The celebration of sumptuous feasts is just a means to recapture the past. . . . [T]hese feasts become ritual ceremonies where the protagonist plays the part of a celebrant-priest amidst his faithful guests." (22) The lavish parties given by Gatsby become a way of recovering and further embellishing some idea of Gatsby's fabricated self, with Gatsby himself not just a celebrant but also a leader of the ritual. Even as the dream seems increasingly attainable,

regardless of the repetition of such rituals, Gatsby continues to embellish and enhance his nostalgic hopes and aspirations, while simultaneously and unwittingly increasing the likelihood of a devastating disappointment. Gatsby creates his false part and seeks to restore his relationship with Daisy by creating this fictionalized self, “adding to it” as if sculpting. Rather than relying upon his past as it actually happened, he seeks to recreate his past in order to fabricate a better future in which he can return to the happy times he enjoyed when he was Daisy's paramour.

In transitioning from Gatz to Gatsby, James fills out the myth that becomes his public appearance: “He was left with his singularly appropriate education; the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man.” (Fitzgerald 107) The myth of Gatsby's past becomes an increasingly concrete reality that accumulates further nuances as it takes shape. The language of “vague contour” refers to the initial sketch of Gatsby, transformed from Gatz while also suggesting that, like any work of art, the idea of Gatsby is something that Jay Gatz creates and fabricates, beginning with rough sketches and eventually fleshing out those initial outlines. That being said, this sentence is written in the passive and presented from Nick's point of view, suggesting that Gatsby's attempt to exert control and agency over his self-creation might not be the exercise of complete power and independence Gatsby would necessarily think it to be. He becomes increasingly substantial as he gains his education from Meyer Wolfshiem and presumably leaves his past as a mid-Westerner behind. The temporal breach between Gatsby's true past and his fabricated present expands, filling out the vague contours of his constructed

past and present in the desired hope of achieving a future that reflects the part of his past that he enjoyed the most.

Nick speaks with Gatsby about his designs for a relationship with Daisy—the primary goal Gatsby seeks to achieve in creating his persona. The two express diametrically opposed attitudes toward the ability to return to the desired times of yesteryear and relive them:

> "I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past."
>
> "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"
>
> He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand.
>
> "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see." (116-117)

Gatsby believes that the past—his love with Daisy, specifically—can be repeated. In doing so, however, he overlooks the fact that he has to become wealthy and tony to regain her affections; moreover, he assumes that she would have changed in such a way that she would appreciate those changes in him. If Gatsby showed up on Daisy's doorstep in the same circumstances and displaying the same behavior he did during their initial interactions years back, she would certainly express no interest whatsoever in him. Gatsby wants to return to his past romance with Daisy, though he also recognizes that the situation cannot be identical—he must be changed in order to please her.

The desires of yesterday that still dominate today are readily accessible, easily within reach, and something that can be grasped, according to Gatsby, who is constantly preoccupied with the past, as are other characters. This fascination with the past manifests itself in the novel, both in the characters' constant discussion of the past as well as the use

of flashbacks. The novel's use of flashbacks provide information to readers about the past that Gatsby perceives as ideal, yet the novel's use of flashbacks also reminds both characters in the novel and readers outside the diegesis of the inaccessibility of that sought-after past, as Gautam Kundu states:

> [A]s a technique the flashback, with its linguistic and semantic implications of a past recaptured and resurrected, becomes synonymous with the meaning of the text: fixation on the past, but one that is evoked in a certain way: romantically and nostalgically heightened. Finally, the memory flashbacks in Gatsby are a part of the novel's formal strategy of distancing: Nick and nearly everybody else from Gatsby's past, and the readers from what they read (and come to know) about the narrative and the men and women who people it. (57)

Like Gatsby, we constantly look back to the past that Gatsby hopes to repeat, albeit in modified form now that he has achieved the financial success not enjoyed by Jay Gatz. These flashbacks indicate Gatsby's preoccupation with his past, "romantically and nostalgically heightened." Though the flashbacks and references to the past demonstrate the yearning and desire so utterly manifested in Gatsby, they also distance readers and characters alike from the past, showing how these ideals and hopes can never be satisfactorily realized or fully attained. Still imbued with hope that he can make his dreamed-for past a reality in the present, Gatsby believes he can force the present and the future to conform to the idealized and fictionalized past that he has created for himself and upon which he has based his striving for Daisy throughout the years since their previous meeting. Gatsby ultimately does not fix everything the way it was before, though it should be pointed out that circumstances do not work to Gatsby's advantage to begin with—he failed to keep Daisy from marrying Tom, just as in the main events of the novel he does not persuade Daisy to leave her marriage with Tom. His boundless

optimism ultimately proves unwarranted; Gatsby prefers “imagined to the real, [and] the irrecoverable romantic past to the inescapable material present,” as Scott Donaldson notes, yet his unwillingness to root himself in the real and in the “inescapable material present” ultimately proves his undoing. (97) Gatsby hopes to change history, but ultimately history repeats itself instead as Gatsby's disappointment continues unabated, this time manifesting itself fatally. Nostalgia leads to Gatsby's fatal failure, as does the rottenness of the dream itself—an ostensibly promising future built on a foundation of lies, violence, exploitation, and criminality.

All of Gatsby's efforts are invested in the hope of recreating his relationship with Daisy and trying to relive the past. The question remains as to what he seeks to retrieve, whether his relationship with Daisy, a version of himself, or something else that he cannot identify: “He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. . . .” (Fitzgerald 117) In recovering Daisy, Nick believes that Gatsby might even be trying to recover a part of himself. If we compare this idea of oneself that goes into loving in this novel to the representation of that idea in the novels discussed in the previous chapter, we note that the ex-colored man and Quentin love not people but rather places (the South, for Quentin, about which he is at the very least strongly ambivalent) or ideas (freedom for the ex-colored man's race). By comparison, Gatsby loves a person, about whom he has thought so much and whose relationship with him he has embroidered to such a degree

that she becomes an incorporeal ideal to some degree. Attaining a relationship with Daisy becomes not the end in and of itself, but rather a means to the end of attaining something indefinable that Gatsby desires in and for himself. Gatsby seeks to retrace his steps to encounter the desired unnamable quantity or object that will make him complete. He wishes to find a happier part of himself in the past, which was not necessarily a kinder, gentler, simpler past, as nostalgic people so often refer to yesteryear, yet it nonetheless remains preferable to the present. Gatsby relentlessly seeks to create a vision of his future in the present by forging the elements of the past in ways that please him. In other words, the past version of himself resembles his mirror self, much like the child described by Lacan who experiences the mirror stage and recognizes in the image of his or her body an illusory wholeness. Like the myths and stories discussed by Slotkin, Gatsby's perception of himself mistakenly collapses past into present instead of recognizing the differences between the two.

Gatsby's doom initially seems so unlikely—circumstances appear to have lined up perfectly for the realization of his nostalgic fantasy: he artfully conceals his past as Jay Gatz, and he establishes the wealth that makes him an even more attractive prospect for Daisy. Triumph would seem inevitable and within reach, yet Gatsby does not realize as death hastens toward him that his dream has already evaporated and disappeared: “He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.” (189) Though Gatsby's dream must seem frustratingly attainable to him,

the possibility of it being achieved has already diminished and disappeared altogether. He seems unable to realize the unlikelihood, if not outright impossibility, of making his dreams a reality. Michael Nowhin points out this lack of reflection in Gatsby, connecting the dearth of thinking processes to Gatsby's corporeality: "Like an African American, an unassimilable ethnic American, or, more fundamentally, a woman, Gatsby's selfhood is inextricably identified with his body: he is portrayed as having little capacity for the critical self-reflection of an intellectual subject." (81) Not only is Gatsby not capable of the careful reflection that could have helped him realize the difficulties and outright impossibilities inherent in his plans, he is also identified with his body, much like racial, ethnic, or gendered "others" (problematic though that term is).

Because Gatsby is so utterly associated with his body and with racial and gendered alterity, he threatens heteronormative white masculinity, represented by men with "old money" such as Daisy's husband Tom Buchanan. Whereas Gatsby expresses a nostalgia for altering an idealized past from his own life, Tom expresses a nostalgia not for his own past but for a collective cultural and social past in which models of racial purity predominate. Gatsby cannot be any longer whatever he was in the past with Daisy, because she does not want the Jay Gatz of that past time; instead, she wants the rich, cultured, and well-educated Tom Buchanan, who reflects both the American ideal as well as unsavory racism, class exploitation, and greed. Gatsby's nostalgia reflects an anxiety about reproducing and preserving a sought-after romance, whereas Tom's nostalgia seeks to maintain social and racial hierarchies on the basis of blood-based accounts of identity. In his first conversation with Nick, Tom mentions a book containing racist ideals that

advocates keeping racial bloodlines distinct and pure, particularly in the case of white blood: “Well, it’s a fine book and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be–will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved.” (Fitzgerald 17) Tom relies upon models of blackness that depict blacks as animalistic and dangerous. Though he does not specifically mention blacks in this moment, he does assume a certain responsibility on behalf the white race to maintain racial purity: “It's up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or those other races will have control of things.” (17) While it is not entirely clear to which “other races” Tom refers, his later anxieties about intermarriage between whites and blacks, discussed in the next paragraph of this dissertation, suggest that blacks contribute to Tom's racial anxieties at least in part. He seeks a past in which racial origins are supposedly pure and easy to trace and detect with the naked eye. Tom refers to pseudoscience that appears to legitimate the claim of racists and white supremacists who advocate separation between whites and blacks as a means of preventing miscegenation and the subsequent mixture and contamination of racial and familial bloodlines. Early 20th century leaders of the eugenics movement such as Charles B. Davenport described the work of the movement as “the science of the improvement of the human race by better breeding.” (1) To help the human race realize its full potential, contamination between racial bloodlines should not happen, according to eugenics arguments much like those advocated by Tom, who argues that if white bloodlines do not remain distinct, they “will be utterly submerged,” presumably by the black bloodlines so utterly noxious to him. Tom recapitulates the ideas

of eugenicists such as Davenport, who argues that the (pseudo)scientific practices of eugenics enable "the salvation of the race through heredity." (Davenport 260)

Tom equates the mysterious Gatsby's rather thinly veiled attempts to woo Daisy with the dangers inherent in intermarriage, a practice believed by Buchanan to endanger the project of eugenics. Tom links his anxieties and racial screed with Gatsby: "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out. . . . Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white." (137) Intermarriage would constitute what for Tom is an unacceptable mixing of racial bloodlines that would no longer allow the racial purity of the fabricated past that he seeks. Such mixing constitutes a threat to social institutions such as the family; Tom's own family seems under threat because of Gatsby's return. The commonality of threat, added to fear and hatred of the unknown, links Gatsby and racial intermarriage in Tom's perception. Tom compares Gatsby to racial intermarriage insofar as both pose a threat to the security of Tom's privileged life. Gatsby as self-made success story does not rely upon old money to make his way in the world; he unsettles the assertion that those in the upper classes are there because of a naturally ordained right, much like Tom believes that whites are naturally superior to other races. If the races were to intermarry, then his beliefs in racial superiority would be shaken, undermined, and troubled. Because Gatsby seems to be a "Nobody from Nowhere" who somehow made a substantial fortune, his whiteness seems to come into question—or possibly he is not white enough for Tom.

Fitzgerald's novel provides a classic example of nostalgic desire in American literature; just as Tom relies upon nostalgic yearnings that legitimate differences between whites and blacks, Drusilla in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* relies upon nostalgia to legitimate her desire to fight on behalf of and for the preservation of the antebellum South—a society deeply rooted in anxiety about the separation between the races. Just as Gatsby fails to reproduce the longed-for past, so Godfrey St. Peter also fails to fully and satisfactorily reproduce the desired past of his childhood or of his times with Outland on the mesa. All of these novels address issues of race—Jews and blacks in Fitzgerald's novel, blacks in Faulkner's novel, and Native-Americans in Cather's novel (all of these groups in relation to whites in each text). In these novels, nostalgic desire comprises a dangerous and even potentially deadly means of legitimating and perpetuating power asymmetries through the perpetuation of stories that burnish the idealized past that differs so sharply from the actual present.

II

Willa Cather's 1925 novel *The Professor's House* possesses multiple layers of nostalgia, the first of which is the collective fascination with the deceased Tom Outland. Cather's novel depicts the life of Professor Godfrey St. Peter, who recalls how Outland, his favorite student, has impacted his life. The scientific breakthroughs that Outland discovers while inventing the Outland engine and its various beneficial processes during his studies become the source of great wealth, though Tom himself does not get to enjoy the fruits of his labor, as he dies serving in the military in World War I. Outland's death

engenders infighting and bickering among St. Peter's family members and other members of the community, who dispute both how Tom should be remembered and how the earnings from his patented inventions should be distributed. St. Peter's daughter Rosamond and her husband Louie Marsellus plan to build Outland, an ornate and lavish home that will also contain a reproduction of Outland's study and work area. The estate constitutes Rosamond (who, as Tom's fiancée, was the beneficiary of his will) and Louie's attempt to reanimate Tom Outland for their own purposes—memorializing Outland while also profiting from those seeking to know more about him and to capitalize upon his inventions and discoveries.

The past becomes all the more important in Cather's novel given that Godfrey St. Peter earns his living as an historian; he constantly researches, reads about, and writes about the past. In creating the multi-volume *Spanish Adventurers in North America* for which he has received much acclaim within the scholarly community, Godfrey has contributed to the recollection of bygone days, albeit while doing so with scholarly precision. Though he travels to Europe to research the subject, his notes and other materials always find their way back to the old home he stubbornly insists upon keeping. He absorbs the results of his research so deeply that he seemingly incorporates them into his body: "[T]he notes and the records and the ideas always came back to this room. It was here they were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place in his history." (16) Cather employs useful figurative language here to suggest St. Peter's relationship to history—as something to be consumed, digested, and incorporated into the body, rather than as an abstraction to be pondered in the mind. This moment unsettles the notion of

history—particularly as manifested in St. Peter's scholarship—as exclusively the province of the mind. History becomes fully embodied, something experienced with the body as if it were tangible even centuries after the events occurred. Furthermore, the content St. Peter gleans from his research constitutes material to be "woven into [its] proper place in his history," much like a weaver consciously selects threads to be incorporated into a tapestry. Such a metaphor illustrates that Cather's novel is not arguing for an atemporal, transcendent historical truth. Just as St. Peter makes choices as he designs and constructs his history, so Cather makes choices about the structure of the novel, the narrative present of which focuses upon the St. Peter clan and the middle of which flashes back to Outland's recollections of the mesa. Cather could quite easily have restructured the novel to conform more neatly to a linear narrative structure, beginning with Tom Outland's story and continuing through his acquaintance with the St. Peter family, his death at the battlefield at Flanders, and the subsequent squabbling about Outland's legacy. She places Outland's story in the middle of the novel as St. Peter prepares to edit Outland's recollections of the mesa and prepare them for publication—Godfrey will edit, shape, and construct the history to conform to his vision of the experience of the mesa as Outland told him and as the professor has experienced in his sojourn to the southwest with Tom. The past for which nostalgic people yearn exists at least in part as a fiction constructed by their minds, however innocuously such reshaping occurs.

This section of my discussion will address the posthumous nostalgic desire for Outland; two additional layers of nostalgic desire represented by Outland's fascination

with Native American living and artifacts and St. Peter's desire for his own past will merit discussion later on to illustrate the extensive thematic representation of nostalgia in the text.[3] These three stages are roughly commensurate with the three major sections of the novel: the fascination with Outland dominates in all the text up to Outland's story positioned at the novel's middle, which then focuses upon Tom's interests in Native American relics. Once Outland's story concludes, much of the story's brief remainder focuses upon St. Peter's nihilistic despair and his desire for his past—revised with Outland as a prominent part of it, even before the two actually met.

The memory of Tom Outland looms large for not only St. Peter and his family, but also the surrounding university community and the greater scientific community at large. Even though Outland dies on the battlefield in Europe during World War I, his scientific discoveries and the memories others have of him remain potent and omnipresent, shaping the lives and relationships of St. Peter and his family. Despite the centrality of Outland's story to St. Peter's own life, Godfrey cannot imagine writing about his relationship with Outland, despite requests to describe their interactions: "I can't explain just how I feel about it, but it would somehow damage my recollections of him, would make that episode in my life commonplace like everything else. And that would be a great loss to me. I'm purely selfish in refusing your offer; my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue." (50) Though St. Peter's sons-in-law Scott and Louie have asked the professor to share his recollections of Outland and

3 Much of St. Peter's scholarly research has focused upon Spanish adventurers who are responsible for the decimation of native communities much like those revered by Outland. St. Peter glosses over the destruction and damage done to these communities by focusing upon the "adventures" experienced by these explorers.

potentially contribute to the Tom Outland brand name and nostalgic cottage industry that has emerged posthumously, Godfrey refuses to make such memories available for public consumption.

St. Peter's refusal is all the more startling given his remarkable facility with words as a scholar who was written multiple lengthy histories, including his multi-volume work on Spanish adventurers—an accomplishment which would lead one to assume that he does not struggle to articulate his ideas in language, nor that he finds these histories unworthy of being translated into any tongue, vulgar or otherwise. Articulating his memories of Outland—which are presumably more deeply felt and personal than even the histories about which he writes so passionately and trenchantly[4]—would be comparable to translating those moments into a vulgar tongue that cannot possibly do justice to what he perceives as such pristine memories. St. Peter sees his experiences with Outland as expressible only in another language, and utterly incomprehensible to the uninitiated or inarticulate. Sharing those memories with others—particularly for the seemingly commercial purposes that Louie and Rosamond seek—can only besmirch Outland's memory rather than burnishing or lionizing it.

Ironically, despite his hesitation in talking about Tom, the novel consists predominantly of attempts to undertake the very task Godfrey finds so thoroughly

4 The novel initially appears to endorse the histories written by St. Peter, although it eventually complicates that endorsement by presenting Tom and Rodney's discovery of several cliff dwellers' bodies (including that of Mother Eve) on the mesa. Such a discovery enables Tom—and St. Peter as well—to see history in all its complexity. Note in my discussion below in section IV how Tom is responsible for Godfrey's revitalized scholarship via a romance "of the mind."

distasteful—articulating memories and recollections of Outland[5] while explaining his importance as a presence in the family's life, even long after Tom's death at Flanders. St. Peter prefers to keep his recollections of Outland in pristine condition by not attempting to put them into the constraining medium of language, acknowledging his selfish motives in so doing. St. Peter prefers to keep his memories for himself rather than have them sullied by the relentless scrutiny and commercialization surrounding everything in Tom Outland's life; consequently, he does exhibit selfishness in being unwillingness to share those memories with others, no matter how noble his intentions presumably are in refusing Scott and Louie's request to share his recollections. Compare St. Peter's refusal to speak aloud of Outland to Miss Rosa's desire for Quentin to tell the stories of the Sutpen family in *Absalom, Absalom!* Whereas Rosa wants Quentin to tell the stories—perhaps for financial gain or simply to tell about the damage caused by the Civil War or by the Sutpen family members themselves, not to mention as a means of further punishing Sutpen in subsequent generations—the story must be told, whether by Quentin or, as it often transpires in Faulkner's novel, others such as Miss Rosa, Shreve, or Quentin's father. Unlike Miss Rosa's desire for stories to be retold and shared with others, St. Peter doesn't see his relationship with Tom as something that should be subject to articulation through language and presented for public scrutiny; he does not want to render his friendship with Outland "commonplace," which is the fear that likely actuates St. Peter's opposition to the building of the outsize and excessively ornate Outland estate, its construction of the shrine to Tom, and the recreation of his office environment and

5 These memories are narrated from a third-person point of view, with the notable exception of "Tom Outland's Story" at the center of the narrative, told in first person by Outland.

apparatuses. The professor clings to the inexpressible past in which Outland now so prominently features, rather than thinking of the present or future in which his discoveries have caused such discord over money while also sparking much excitement in the scientific community. As long as Tom in death remains distant, inaccessible, and incommunicado—a source of desire never to be satisfactorily accessed or reached again—then St. Peter remains happy with his inexpressible memories. Once he puts those memories into language—which he ultimately does anyway, albeit through the editing of Outland's journal entries rather than through Godfrey's own language—that memory becomes cheapened and sullied in some way. He ultimately reshapes Outland's narrative more subtly in preparing it for publication rather than trying to find "vulgar language" of his own in which to tell the stories.

The beneficiaries of Outland's patents—Rosamond and, by extension if not explicitly named in Tom's will, her husband Louie—attempt to profit from Tom's memory through the public display of the material elements of his work environment, to be restored in pristine condition at the Outland estate. In some of its manifestations, nostalgia functions to restore what can no longer speak for itself or, in some circumstances, what has been deprived a voice or the agency to speak. Nostalgia can signal a desire, particularly for places, objects, and living beings that are now lost or that never existed in their present form in the first place. Tom's memory remains alive, thanks to the burgeoning scientific interest in his commercially profitable work on the Outland engine and to the continual fascination with the fallen war hero. To St. Peter and other members of his family, the image of Tom emerging from this interest in his work and life

seems largely if not entirely inconsistent with the Tom they knew—the intelligent, recalcitrant, well-read, and inventive young man who shyly ingratiated himself into the family. The current fascination with Outland in the novel's narrative present focuses by and large upon his scientific breakthroughs; the personal aspects of his life are often dominated by his status as one of the war dead.

Tom receives nostalgic attention and taxidermic reanimation from those who wish to learn more about his scientific endeavors, as noted when St. Peter's son-in-law Scott describes a conversation among some friends and admirers of Outland:

> "We had poor Tom served up again. It was all right, of course—the scientific men were interested, didn't know much about him. Louie called on me for personal recollections; he was very polite about it. I didn't express myself very well. I'm not much of a speaker, anyhow, and this time I seemed to be talking uphill. You know, Tom isn't very real to me any more. Sometimes I think he was just a—a glittering idea. Here we are, Doctor." (94)

Scott's expression that Outland was "served up again" makes the commodity that Outland has become seem as if it were consumable like food that could be served up to meet the demand for it. Though no transubstantiation here occurs and the specter of cannibalism presumably does not loom large, the desire to consume what the Outland brand name and cottage industry perpetuate exists among Outland's scientific admirers. The body that is somehow consumable and so utterly transmogrified into embodied things rather than remaining an idea died on the battlefield at Flanders, only to unknowingly return to the scene of Tom's scientific discoveries, where he will provide grist and fodder for conversations about the ways in which his work can continue to earn money and generate further related scientific research. The extent to which Outland suffers in dying the death

that made possible the commercialization of his inventions[6] remains unclear, if not altogether irrelevant, to those fascinated by Tom and his work.

According to Scott, the legacy that Outland leaves after death causes staggering difficulties for those left behind in imagining the dead man as a corporeal being since "Tom isn't very real" to him now. Scott often wonders if Outland "was just a—a glittering idea." As Tom increasingly becomes consumed and reproduced in the form of a tourist attraction enticing visitors to the Outland estate that attempts to reproduce the environment in which he worked, Scott laments how far these reproductions stray from what he perceives as the putatively real Tom. Though the fascination with Outland continues uninterrupted, the breach between the socially unsure, humble young man and the ostentatious Outland estate seems to widen even more with time. Scott envisions Outland as a glittering idea, radiant and attention-getting, yet no longer linked to the lack of interest in material wealth and respect for relics that marks Tom's recollections of the mesa in the form of journal entries Godfrey has decided to edit, compile, and annotate, and which comprise the central section of the novel. He remains an illuminated yet distant memory much like the one Kathleen recalls with the professor—the Tom who belongs to those who remember the man rather than the money that his inventions

6 Several passages in the novel suggest Outland's misunderstanding or underestimating the commercial potential inherent in his inventions. The beneficiary of his estate, Rosamond notes that Tom didn't understand how much profit his inventions could realize: ". . . Tom was so impractical, Father. He never thought it would mean more than a liberal dress allowance for me, if he thought at all." (49) Later in the novel, Godfrey himself suggests that Tom did not even consider the likelihood of needing a will anytime soon because he was so immersed in the present and had no doubts about having a future: "I don't think it occurred to the boy that the will would ever be probated. He expected to come back from the war and develop the thing himself." (118) When Outland dies, a savvier businessman like Louie Marsellus can begin to realize the tremendous financial promise in Outland's work.

generate. Regardless of how the various family members perceive Outland, all their memories of him are saturated with idealization and fantasy.

The focus on Outland as scientist effaces Tom as soldier; the novel never touches upon the details of Tom's military service, nor does it address the minutiae of his death. The account of Tom's military service focuses mostly on his hasty departure to fight; in other words, when Outland bolts to Europe to join the Foreign Legion at the behest of his teacher Father Duchene, he makes a chance decision that ultimately results in his death, consequently enabling both the commercialization of the scientific discoveries such as the Outland engine around which the discussion of Tom circulates. In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry notes how the stories and representations of wartime injuries and deaths resort to a number of strategies in expressing that pain, one of which is eliding it altogether, much as occurs in the accounts of these characters in describing Outland's wartime death: “[The act of injuring in war] may be *omitted* from both formal and casual accounts of war” (Scarry 80; her emphasis). The account of Tom's wartime death in this novel embodies Scarry's assertion that some accounts of wartime pain disregard the corporeal damage caused by combat. Accounts of Tom's agony, surprise, heroism, or other miscellaneous behavior in death do not contribute to the narrative of scientific invention or prosperity gaining such traction among many characters in the novel. No such stories exist that can adequately describe how Outland became one of countless individuals consumed by the carnage of World War I. None of the other characters in the novel conjecture about it; furthermore, the text does not provide any evidence from Tom himself in the form of letters or diaries about his

participation in the war. Given the novel's willingness to reproduce Tom's memories of the mesa in such the detail, the severely limited mention of Tom's death at Flanders is all the more surprising.

St. Peter's daughter Kathleen notes that Tom, who has long since perished on the field of battle in World War I, remains a presence in the lives of the community and the family, yet different versions of Tom exist. "Kathleen smiled wanly. 'Yes, and now he's all turned out chemicals and dollars and cents, hasn't he? But not for you and me! Our Tom is much nicer than theirs.'" (Cather 112-13) Whereas Outland willed his patents to St. Peter's daughter Rosamond, who shares the profits from the discoveries with her husband Louie Marsellus, St. Peter and the other family and community members do not receive financial gain. According to Kathleen, the memory of Tom that exists for those seeking to profit from Tom's death consists of nothing more than "chemicals and dollars and cents"—tangible physical objects that remain largely disconnected from the memories of Tom scattered throughout the text or from other ways of remembering him, such as the Professor's and Kathleen's. The professor's prize pupil undergoes a transformation in his death in World War I that the novel does not depict—from bodily presence to money, machinery, and chemicals. Tom's death contributes to a disembodied capitalistic gain, both for the scientists helped by his discovery of the Outland engine, and for the individuals, especially Rosamond and Louie, who earn a fortune from the fruits of his research.

Kathleen's statement that "[o]ur Tom is much nicer than theirs" suggests that nostalgia and memory create different versions of memories and the objects, events, and

individuals contained within those recollections. The Tom that remains animated by Rosamond and Louie, for whom building the outsize and ostentatious Outland estate ostensibly seems an apt tribute, differs markedly from the one constructed by Kathleen and St. Peter, who cherish the horse blanket Tom gave St. Peter as a memento of simpler times early in their relationship with Outland. Either way, the members of the St. Peter family focus their nostalgia for Tom through material objects—whether the elaborate Outland estate dreamed up by Louie and Rosamond or the simple, hand-woven horse blanket cherished by Kathleen and the professor. The phrase "Our Tom," in which Outland's name is preceded by a possessive pronoun, suggests a certain ownership and collective experience of the past that St. Peter and Kathleen share to at least some degree. However non-commercial Kathleen's recollections of Tom may seem, they remain just as problematic as Louie and Rosamond's unabashed commercialization of Outland's memory. Kathleen's comparison of "Our Tom" to the man being figuratively taxidermically reanimated and preserved for public presentation at the Outland estate contributes to rather than opposes the commodification of Tom since Kathleen could just as easily be discussing with St. Peter how her car is nicer than someone else's car. By imagining Rosamond and Louie's relentless marketing of Outland's memory as beneath her, Kathleen proves a kind of snob who earns cultural capital, if not actual capital, through her Tom. Any other salable material object would readily substitute in that sentence and make sense. Such unabashed materialism in retrieving memories of Outland sharply conflicts with Tom's reverential treatment of artisanal goods, most notably of the cliff dweller artifacts he finds during his time on the mesa in Arizona. Granted, Kathleen's

recollections of Tom are associated with specific material objects such as the hand-woven horse blanket and the turquoise, but these objects are appreciated not for their exchange value or ability to fetch a high price, unlike the rather brazen profiting undertaken by Rosamond and Louie in building the Outland estate. Tom's artisanal artifacts would seemingly attract the attention of any museum curator, yet he does not seek profit in the ways that Rodney believes they should ultimately gain from their discoveries on the mesa. Kathleen's recollections of Tom do not describe a man entirely devoid of connections to material objects; Outland instead reveres and respects them in and of themselves, rather than to the extent that he can appropriate them for financial gain.

III

Outland's desire for closeness to the past of Native American community manifests itself in "Tom Outland's Story," the tale situated in the middle of the novel and interrupting the narrative present. Cather incorporates the story of Outland's adventures of the mesa into the middle of the text; as noted above, St. Peter edits and readies Tom's journals and papers for publication. St. Peter looks to Tom's past at the same time that Cather encourages the reader to do the same. While living on the mesa with Rodney Blake, Outland (not to mention St. Peter in his vicarious fascination with Outland's tale) comes into contact with the remains of a Native-American culture. When Outland and Blake explore the remains of the cliff dwellers' city, they discover pottery and other artifacts as well as the remains of several dead bodies. Eager to keep alive the cliff-dwellers' culture so that others may know of their contributions, the two decide to try to

make others aware of the culture to which they have no immediately discernible immediate connection. The two explorers prove nostalgic for a time and place that seems largely, if not entirely, removed from the circumstances of their lives up to this point.

They hope to generate interest in the proper treatment and preservation of these antiquities, for which purpose Outland travels to Washington filled with idealism: "When I saw it [i.e., the mesa containing all of the remains of the cliff-dweller city], I told myself, I would have done my duty by it [i.e., traveling to Washington, D.C., to seek help from the government]; I would bring back with me men who would understand it, who would appreciate it and dig out all its secrets." (202) Though Outland goes to Washington, D.C., in the hopes of having the artifacts placed in the Smithsonian, where they can be cared for properly, he instead finds himself frustrated by bureaucratic runaround. Even when the Smithsonian director expresses some interest in the artifacts, he laments the unlikelihood of further exploring the remains due to lack of federal funding: "He said he'd like to take the first train down to my mesa. But it required money to excavate, and he had none. There was a bill up before Congress for an appropriation. We'd have to wait. I must use my influence with my Representative. He took my pottery to study it. (I never got it back, by the way.)" (211) Acting as an emissary of the government, the curator takes the items—over which Tom assumes a degree of ownership, referring to them as "my pottery," seemingly contrary to his insistence that the artifacts belong to the Native-American community. Once the curator receives the items, their final destination becomes unclear—whether placed on prominent display to remind others of the cultural contributions of these cliff dwellers or, more likely, tucked

away in storage and languishing in obscurity. We can see in this moment a parallel with Tom's contribution—which items become valued and memorialized. The mummification and hiding away of the relics serves as a kind of memorial, though only for Tom and Rodney.

Dispirited by the bureaucratic red tape he encounters in the nation's capital, Tom returns to the mesa, only to find that Rodney has sold the remaining artifacts to Fechtig, a greedy German collector. Tom assumes a proprietary interest in the remains to the extent that he even identifies with the Indian people who lived in the cliff-dweller city (however problematic that identification might be). Like the Native-American people, Tom seems himself as an outsider and a foreigner. Geneva M. Gano describes Outland's status as an outsider, comparing him to the Jewish character Louie Marsellus: "...Tom is, like Louie, 'foreign.' That is, in making Tom a Westerner, and connecting him to New Mexico in particular, Cather distances him literally and figuratively from the representative 'American' places of the novel, the American Everytown, Hamilton, and the national capital, Washington, DC." (105) Tom does not easily fit in either in Hamilton, the town in which much of the novel's events take place, or in Washington, D.C., to which he travels in a futile attempt to generate attention for the cliff dwellers' artifacts among museum curators. Both Outland himself, and St. Peter as well, associate Tom strongly and irrevocably with the American Southwest and the mesa, rather than the most conventional and ostensibly civilized landscapes occupying other portions of the novel. Whereas Tom is not foreign on the basis of his religion, much like Louie Marsellus, his reverence for the artifacts of the cliff dwellers suggests, coupled with his passionate fascination with

the land of the Southwest, makes him difficult to understand by most others—except Godfrey St. Peter, of course. Remember that little is known about Outland's parents, who died relatively early in Tom's life. Rodney instead perceives the Native-American pottery as a means of economic exchange and opportunity for both him and Outland: "Who else would have bought it, I want to know? We'd have had to pack it around at Harvey Houses, selling it at a dollar a bowl, like the poor Indians do." (Cather 218) Blake sees an opportunity to make a mint from Fechtig; considerations of respect for the native culture itself appear not to have even registered in his consciousness, if his remarks to Outland offer any such accurate reflection. If he had not seized this opportunity, Rodney believes that the two men would have been reduced to the same economically desperate measures that Native Americans themselves employed in peddling their wares. He does not even consider that perhaps money did not constitute a primary consideration for Tom in the treatment of the relics.

In the last conversation the two men have, they argue vehemently—Rodney in favor of the economic gain that otherwise would not have been possible, Tom in defense of the respect needing to be accorded to such items. Tom believes that to commodify these items sacred to the cliff-dweller culture is to show disrespect toward it. We can see a likely parallel in the lack of interest Outland displays in profiting from the fruits of his research during his lifetime. Tom says that Rodney has taken liberties in selling the items that overstep his bounds and show no propriety or respect for the cliff-dwellers:

> But I never thought of selling them [i.e., the items], because they weren't mine to sell [even though he refers to the objects as "my pottery" in the quote cited above]—nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no

> other ancestors to inherit from. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. (219)

Tom does not believe that these antiquities belong to Native-Americans. He instead believes that all Americans collectively have some right to these items as a way of being connected to a past otherwise silenced or relegated to oblivion. In a country such as the United States that is recently founded by immigrants, the idea of a distant past connected to the land is difficult to find—yet it can be accessed in the history of Native tribes. As a result, the mythic past of people living on the land in years gone by becomes the possession of the community living in the country in the contemporary moment. Outland also notes that young men like Rodney and Tom, who have little sense of their respective ancestries, can find a connection to an awe-inspiring, moving, and meaningful past through these items. The Germans already possess an exhaustive cultural tradition spanning centuries, so Tom argues that they hardly need to be appropriating other cultures merely for the purpose of displaying them as *objets d'art*. Tom believes the artifacts are primarily about history rather than aesthetics; he appreciates the items for their significance as remnants of a vanished culture rather than solely on the basis of their value as ornamental objects.[7] The German collector's fascination with these goods stems from his desire to own them for their beauty rather than out of any well-intentioned interest in respecting, revering, or remembering the cliff-dweller people who produced the goods; though art can help those who own or view it recall the artist, no evidence in

7 I am certainly not suggesting that any object has value solely on the basis of its utility, nor am I suggesting that the aesthetic value of any object is irrelevant or unimportant. I am instead concerned about the ways in which fixation exclusively upon an object's aesthetic value can potentially erase or problematically transform, silence, or efface a cultural history—sometimes containing death, destruction, and disempowerment.

the text suggests that Fechtig is motivated by such beneficent gestures. Tom preserves the pottery in the hope both of preserving some reverential appreciation for the people who made it and of making the items available to the public; conversely, the collector's acquisitive hoarding represents a desire to acquire the objects purely for their beauty, saving them for private display while utterly ignoring the cultural legacy so inextricably linked to those items, including the mysterious end of the cliff-dwelling people suggested by several corpses found on the mesa.[8] Tom expresses a yearning for closeness with a past of which he has little or no understanding, whereas the collector desires the material goods while contributing to the silencing and destruction of the cultural legacy from which these goods emerged.

Native-American cultural identity has been imperiled by the impulse for conquest and land acquisition manifested through the United States' expansion, and Cather's novel represents a rather complex portrait of how nostalgia contributes to the potential silencing or destruction of a group.[9] Even some time after departing from the mesa, when Outland first meets St. Peter's family, Tom still seethes when thinking about how these items were

8 The evidence of violence toward the cliff dwellers left behind on the mesa is inconclusive at best. On the one hand, Tom and Rodney observe evidence that the woman to whom they refer as Mother Eve was likely "murdered; there was a great wound in her side, the ribs stuck out through the dried flesh. Her mouth was open as if she were screaming, and her face, through all those years, had kept a look of terrible agony." (192) Conversely, while visiting Tom and Rodney on the mesa, Outland's teacher Father Duchene speculates that after having experienced violent extermination elsewhere, the cliff dwellers apparently lived free from violence in the cliff city, given that no evidence exists of violence toward the few corpses found on the mesa: "What I cannot understand is why you have not found more human remains. The three bodies you found in the mortuary chamber were prepared for burial by the old people who were left behind. But what of the last survivors? It is possible that when autumn wore on, and no one returned from the farms, the aged banded together, went in search of their people, and perished in the plain." (199)

9 We can link the Fitzgerald and Cather in this respect by thinking about class identity as well as racial identity. Tom sees anyone who is not already a part of the wealthy classes as somebody already "othered" and utterly abhorrent, even to the point of racializing those like Gatsby whose fortunes have suspicious origins. Tom prefers to keep the races and classes separate, consigning those "others" to discursive silence.

not accorded their proper respect, which makes it all that much easier for him to give two beautiful turquoises found among the mesa's artifacts to the young children Kathleen and Rosamond as "pretty playthings for little girls": "'Museums,' he said bitterly, 'they don't care about our things. They want something that came from Crete or Egypt. I'd break my jars sooner than they should get them.[']" (103, 102) Tom suggests that, like Fechtig, Americans possess a desire to know about cultures other than their own. This moment also provides a commentary on the cultural import of American museums, which allow people the opportunity to view objects belonging to other times and places without having to travel to those various locations spanning the globe. Whereas Fechtig is interested in the artifacts of Native-American culture, Americans themselves ostensibly have more interest in the remains of putatively more exotic destinations such as Egypt rather than relics more immediately connected to the recent American past. Tom desires a more meaningful connection to that past that must ultimately always be frustrated and disappointed; this is not to say that such objects cannot be meaningful in contexts outside of the museum, but places such as museums do provide an environment in which these relics can be well taken care of and made available for public viewing. That being said, Outland's willingness to give the turquoises to the St. Peters' young daughters seems at least to some degree inconsistent with the reverence in which he claims to hold the items. Though presumably more respectful than the disinterest of museums or exploitation of collectors, the two young girls likely perceive these items exactly as Outland describes them—playthings, not the remnants of a culture that has been decimated, whether through violence or other means. Despite his mysterious origins and orphan status,

Outland does not seem to possess any kinship with the tribes with whom he so strongly identifies while living on the mesa and whose items provide a tenuous link to that culture. Given Outland's own mysterious origins,[10] Tom's fascination with the cliff dwellers' artifacts suggests a desire for a more readily definable origin.

Regardless of the respect with which Tom regards the pottery and other artifacts of the cliff dweller community to which he feels such a strong connection, the girls will most likely use the turquoises, whereas Fechtig will just look at the pots. Such disparity in the treatment of these objects suggests an opposition set up in the novel between use and display. Though the pots are functional and have a practical purpose for which they were used among the cliff dwellers, Fechtig sees the pots as purely ornamental objects to be put on display while likely ignoring, minimizing, or trivializing the historical context within which those objects were initially created.[11] Collectors such as the German acquire these beautiful items without giving a thought to the context within which those items were produced. He appreciates the hazy aura of "otherness" from the past that these relics and antiquities evoke, yet Fechtig does not bother to learn about the specific history associated with these items, nor does he attempt to make these items available for public viewing so that others can more fully understand and appreciate the history of these

10 Tom's parents both died when he was a baby. His father "had a cramp or something [while swimming], and was drowned," according to the young Kathleen, who repeats the story told to her by Outland early in his acquaintance with the St. Peter family. (105) Tom's father's death causes the health of Tom's mother to worsen, and "his mother died in the mover wagon" when "Tom was a baby." (104) Outland was left in the care of a kindly couple living near the site at which Outland's mother's mover wagon stopped once she fell gravely ill. Unlike Outland, Rodney Blake—who "liked to be an older brother" to Tom—had blood kin, but "[h]e'd run away from home when he was a kid because his mother married again—a man who had been paying attention to her while his father was still alive." (165, 164)

11 The role of religion in the use of these objects also merits consideration. Though the novel provides no conclusive evidence or discussion about the use of the pots and other objects in sacred ceremonies, it is possible that the cliff dwellers could have equated the removal or misuse of these objects with sacrilege.

native people. The untamed wilderness of the American West and the relics and antiquities contained within it give not just Tom but also Godfrey the opportunity to rekindle and live out a youth seemingly lost after the rigors and responsibilities of adulthood appear. One function of Tom and Godfrey's return to the mesa is the opportunity to enjoy carefree activities of youth such as camping while discovering objects such as those now possessed by Fechtig or the Smithsonian museum curator.

These attempts to recapture the past rest in part upon the collection of items that a tourist or visitor could potentially consider a souvenir, much like those objects found in the cliff dwellers' village; Susan Stewart notes that people acquire such objects not for their practicality but instead for their connection to the past: “The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.” (135) Much like the pottery Outland finds on the mesa, souvenirs refer to the past, yet—at least in the case of the pottery from the mesa—some of them constantly and forcefully remind us of the decimation of the native peoples and the violent erasure of much native history from the dominant American narrative. Despite its potential practical use as a container, the pottery generally doesn't serve any meaningful purpose for collectors other than as ornamental object. That being said, the artifact still possesses great value not just as ornamental piece but also as historical remnant, as Walter Benjamin observes: “The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable.” (223) A work of art cannot be separated from its place within tradition, described by Benjamin as

a fabric. Think about how Cather uses the language of threads and tapestry to describe the means by which St. Peter creates his histories, described above. The work of art is thoroughly enmeshed in an historical tradition from which it cannot extricate itself, just like the pieces of the histories St. Peter weaves together combine to create a story, a myth, and an adventure.

Art pieces such as the relics of the cliff dwellers—and the language used to describe those objects, for that matter—do not exist in a vacuum, utterly isolated and disconnected from the historical context of their original production, as Pierre Bourdieu notes in *The Rules of Art*: "[T]he categories engaged in the perception and appreciation of the work of art are doubly linked to historical context: associated with a social universe which is situated and dated, they are also the object of usages which are themselves socially marked by the social position of their users." (297) Like the categories used to describe them, these artworks instead remain in a relation to history that is dynamic and changing; furthermore, the "social position" of the person using or perceiving the art object becomes important. The value of a pot changes, depending on whether it is being perceived by a cliff dweller, by Tom, by Fechtig, or by a museum curator. Consider how the initial practical use of the pottery by the cliff dwellers differs so markedly from the ornamental use and aesthetic appropriation and appreciation of the object by Fechtig, for example. Such objects possess value in varying degrees for their utility, beauty, and economic worth. In his essay "The Market of Symbolic Goods," Bourdieu notes how symbolic goods—which are the products of what he describes as "the system of cultural production"—contain value for both their worth both economically and aesthetically:

“Symbolic goods are a two-faced reality, a commodity and a symbolic object: Their specifically cultural value and their commercial value remain relatively independent although the economic sanction may come to reinforce their cultural consecration.” (1233) Bourdieu sees works of art as instances of symbolic goods; they are both commodities and symbolic objects worthy of artistic appreciation and admiration. We must be careful not to entirely separate aesthetic beauty, practical use, and commercial value into realms that never overlap, as the categories of value for objects can combine and interpenetrate, as Bourdieu notes in the introduction to *Distinction*:

> [N]othing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even 'common' (because the 'common' people make them their own, especially for aesthetic purposes), or the ability to apply the principles of a 'pure' aesthetic to the most everyday choices of everyday life, e.g., in cooking, clothing, or decoration, completely reversing the popular disposition which annexes aesthetics to ethics. (5)

Even an object as seemingly common as a pot can possess aesthetic beauty; within the context of early 20th-century aesthetic appreciation, admirers of art can enjoy a work such as a piece of pottery, even though it is a “banal or even 'common'” object used for everyday purposes. We must consider, however, whether in this particular instance of his appropriation of cliff dweller artifacts Fechtig has “annexe[d] aesthetics to ethics” or, in fact, has prioritized aesthetics over ethics, removing these items from their original context with no apparent intention of displaying them for others to see and understand their historical origins, mysterious though they are to Tom.

As the phenomenological present seems increasingly displeasing and inconsistent with one's desires, the possibility of living in the past becomes increasingly tantalizing; as

a result, some start to believe that the acquisition of souvenirs can provide a means of that transportation to the experiences of the past: “The nostalgia of the souvenir plays in the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be 'directly lived.'” (Stewart 139) Nostalgia, particularly when buttressed by the acquisition of souvenirs, only heightens a person's awareness of the temporal breach that stretches ever wider as time passes, reminding individuals of the inaccessibility of the past. Stewart describes the tourist experience as prelapsarian insofar as tourism and souvenirs evoke in the owners a searching for the ideal space prior to the fall, or prior to being corrupted (in the case of nostalgic desire by the inability to ever get back to the ideal past)—that can be directly lived.

In general, the yearned-for past becomes not an individual's own past—however it is embellished—but rather the past of other people, a larger collective cultural memory with which individuals attempt to link themselves, much as Tom Outland attempts to do through his fascination with the Southwest in which the mesa and the cliff dwellers' city is located. Godfrey shares Tom's interest in the region; the professor realizes that his fascination with the region has helped his scholarship on the Spanish adventurers exploring the “new world”:

> When St. Peter first began his work, he realized that his great drawback was the lack of early association, the fact that he had not spent his youth in the great dazzling Southwest country which was the scene of his explorers' adventures. By the time he had got as far as the third volume, into his house walked a boy who had grown up there [i.e., in the Southwest], a boy with imagination, with the training and insight resulting from a very curious experience; who had in his pocket the secrets which old trails and stones and water-courses tell only to adolescence. (Cather 234-35)

The experience that revitalizes and transforms Godfrey's scholarship of the Southwest results not from hours upon end sitting in a library; St. Peter instead finds himself inspired by the "curious experience" that Outland experiences firsthand while living on the mesa and finding the relics of the long-since-dead cliff dwellers' city. St. Peter regards the seemingly incorporeal and intangible secrets, myths, and stories held by Outland as if they were tangible objects that could be experienced bodily, since he describes Tom as having "had [them] in his pocket."

Does part of the fascination with dead or dying cultures, from which Outland gains the secrets he shares with St. Peter, result from an interest in the past as the breach between past and present widens? Stewart argues that people suffering from nostalgia finds themselves fascinated by the temporal distance between the present and the sought-after past:

> The nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the referent itself. Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, an erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence. (145)

Nostalgic desire paradoxically relies upon both the separation between past and present and the constant intrusion of the past into the present. Those who suffer from nostalgia do so because they believe they have lost something which can never be reclaimed and which they do not want to reclaim. Stewart observes that "[n]ostalgia cannot be sustained without loss." Nostalgia structurally requires some disappointment or coming short of the ideal, which in turn causes the nostalgic individual to continually strive for the fulfillment of a goal that cannot be attained. The gap between desire and realization must always

exist in nostalgia; indeed, desire "is nostalgia's reason for existence." Though it seems counter-intuitive, people prefer loss to satisfaction because loss allows an individual to strive toward an ideal that is shaped by the contours of imagination, desire, and passing time. Nostalgia can only be satisfied if the gap between past and present can be completely erased. While it is possible for the boundary between the two to be blurred, the two never completely overlap one another perfectly. If individuals could be content with their present lived experiences, then they would no longer be nostalgic nor would they continue to desire that which they do not have. However, people who long for the past find themselves unable to catch up to what they want. For example, Tom can never fully or satisfactorily acquire the "*lived* experience" that Stewart argues is so central to the fulfillment of a nostalgic desire; as a result, some gap must always remain between past and present. Tom cannot relive the past, which was never his own anyway, because he desires to desire, rather than to have. Tom's success as a scientist is aided in part by his willingness to pursue ideas in the laboratory—not for materialistic gain but rather to see where his work takes him and what advances his research can create. Tom cannot bring the past into the present as satisfactorily as he would like, whereas Quentin Compson and the ex-colored man find themselves relentlessly assailed by a past constantly intruding into the present due to the numerous reminders of that past by others around them. For St. Peter, as we shall see, the past, in which Tom Outland plays a central role, constantly reappears in the present, reminding Godfrey of his relationship with his star pupil.

IV

The homosocial relationship between Tom and Godfrey becomes the central focus of the novel[12] and provides the basis from St. Peter's desire to return not only to his past but also to the places prominently featured in Outland's stories of the mesa. It is not Outland's intellectual prowess but rather his vivid recollections of the mesa that enable St. Peter to feel as if he were younger and to yearn for what he believes is a simpler time in his life because of the fantasy he maintains; as a result of their homosocial relationship, Outland provides St. Peter with a form of nostalgia that enables him to desire a return to his past: "He had had two romances: one of the heart [i.e., his marriage to Lillian], which had filled his life for many years, and a second of the mind [which refers to Tom]—of the imagination. Just when the morning brightness of the world was wearing off for him, along came Outland and brought him a kind of second youth." (234) Tom provides St. Peter with a second youth and a romance of the mind and imagination rather than of the heart; Tom's stories about living on the mesa, coupled with the trip that the two take to the region, spark new creativity and passion in St. Peter for his work, as Danielle Russell observes in her discussion of the novel: "The young man brings the landscape of literature alive for St. Peter. Scholar and adventurer step out of academic discussion and into the Southwestern region." (43) Tom brings alive the experience of accessing another culture and another history, far from the routine of everyday life with which Godfrey is becoming increasingly disinterested. Rather than viewing his scholarship as dry and

12 Merrill Maguire Skaggs argues that "Cather's *most* male-centered world is developed in *The Professor's House*," though he also contends that Cather successfully creates a range of female characters including Lillian, Kathleen, Rosamond, Augusta, and Mother Eve. (181-82; Skaggs' emphasis)

abstract, Godfrey instead can envision being in the places Tom has seen—and about which St. Peter himself writes. Consequently, the homosocial bond between the men results from their appreciation for the area—something Godfrey's wife Lillian cannot fathom. The homosocial relationship between Outland and St. Peter helps generate Godfrey's nostalgia for this place so indissolubly associated with a distant past. The language of romance conveys the intensity of the bond between the two, though no suggestion of anything beyond friendship overtly manifests itself anywhere in Cather's text. The young student makes St. Peter's perspective vivid once again, renewing and refreshing his life. Not only does Outland impact Godfrey personally, but Tom also refreshes Godfrey's perspective on his scholarly work: “If the last four volumes of 'The Spanish Adventurers' were more simple and inevitable than those that went before, it was largely because of Outland.” (Cather 234) The homosocial relationship here becomes a means of returning to a better past, one in which St. Peter himself did not seem to have such closeness with other men. Though St. Peter has inhabited a largely masculine world in interacting with colleagues and students and in writing about the world of the Spanish adventurers, those relationships often (though not always) seem to suggest the drudgery of routine rather than the passionate and enthusiastic response generated in the professor by his pupil's stories about the mesa. Such a relationship does not occur without problems, as the tension and emotional distance in Godfrey and Lillian's marriage increases.

Given such an at times difficult and burdensome present, Godfrey retreats into the comfort of the past—and not necessarily just his own. Rather than yearning only for the

yesterdays of his youth, Professor St. Peter becomes fascinated with Tom's account of his time on the mesa in Arizona with his friend Rodney Blake. The pristine natural backdrop against which "Tom Outland's Story," the tale that interrupts the novel's narrative present, takes place contrasts sharply with the demands of everyday modern life foisted upon the professor by his wife, adult daughters, and sons-in-law. For example, he has constructed an impressive new house for Lillian, yet he insists upon retaining the old house, and maintaining his old study, cramped as it may be and filled with lifeless forms used by the seamstress Augusta. These dull and lifeless forms provide the only female company Godfrey has in a space in which he writes his scholarship on the conquests and adventures of male explorers in discovering a new world. St. Peter thus participates in nostalgia both for his own past and for the past of another (Tom Outland). Though he might be fascinated by Outland as an individual, St. Peter also harbors an interest in the natural setting of the mesa untrammeled by modernity or the pressures of daily life. St. Peter's nostalgia for the mesa reflects not just a fascination with Tom Outland but also his investment in a collective cultural nostalgia possessed by many white males of means—the Western U.S. as a means of escape from the rigors of civilization and of modernity in a space that provides a putative return to origins and a simpler way of life.

Though Godfrey and Tom are able to revisit the locations so important to Outland's past, the two are unable to travel to the sites so significant to the professor's early adulthood. Outland and St. Peter had planned to take a trip to Paris to see the sights so familiar during Godfrey's travels there as a young man, but Tom's enlistment in the war effort intervenes: "To this day St. Peter regretted that he had never got that vacation

in Paris with Tom Outland. . . . Not that it mattered. It might have mattered to Tom, had not chance, in one great catastrophe, swept away all youth . . . and almost Time itself." (Cather 236) Whether as a "glittering idea," cluster of memories, scientific marvel, or money-making wunderkind (albeit in death), Outland evades the representation of corporeal damage, pain, and suffering in his own body because the third-person narrator of the novel and the characters who report on him offer no information about the pain he experiences in his dying moments on the battlefield. The passage quoted above refers to the "catastrophe" of Tom's death, which could refer either to the severity of violence experienced by Tom, the impact felt by those who learned of Outland's death, or both. Tom's death "swept away all youth"; such language offers no sense of the pain experienced by Outland, instead treating that death as if it were a pile of dirt unfortunately swept into a dustpan by forces beyond the control of Tom or anyone else. Godfrey had hoped that Tom and he would one day travel to France, the country in which Outland ultimately dies and inadvertently hastens the creation of this Outland cottage industry, yet the professor had envisioned that the trip would occur under markedly different circumstances. Contrary to expectation, France becomes the location of Tom's premature death rather than the place in which St. Peter can revisit an earlier portion of his life, evoking a form of nostalgia as a longing for the past that cannot be entirely accessed. Had they been able to travel to France together, St. Peter's nostalgia would undoubtedly have been frustrated by the changes he would have noticed from the idealized setting that he recalled from his early adulthood. Though nostalgia does indeed take place as a result of Outland's visit to France, it occurs not because Godfrey gets to

revisit the places he frequented in his youth, but rather because Tom's death spontaneously creates a worshipful and even fatuously idolatrous fascination with Outland's work, personality, and life. Godfrey and all the others so fascinated with Tom are left to wonder what might have been had Outland survived the first World War, as Stephanie Durrans observes: "[T]he figure of Tom Outland...emerges as Cather's attempt to reconcile the competing claims of science and religion, of worldly pursuits and desire. However, his untimely death brings to the fore the demise of such optimism." (189) Tom brings together science (in his invention of the Outland engine and its various scientific processes) and religion (in his reverence for the relics of the cliff dwellers' society, whether he understands their spiritual practices or not), fusing the desire for another place and time with the material objects remaining from that time. Once Tom dies, however, hope for all of these elements to be meaningfully and productively fused together fades. The various elements mentioned in Durrans' quote becomes largely if not entirely separate, rather than reconciled as they were in Tom's work.

Though Godfrey certainly laments the loss of Outland, he also notes that had Tom survived the war, he would have been involved in the mundane minutiae of daily living—tasks which St. Peter believes such a rare talent like Outland should not partake in due to the drabness and repugnance of such duties:

> And suppose Tom had been more prudent, and had not gone away with his old teacher [i.e., Father Duchene]? St. Peter sometimes wondered what would have happened to him, once the trap of worldly success had been sprung on him. He couldn't see Tom building "Outland," or becoming a public-spirited citizen of Hamilton. What change would have come in his blue eye, in his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas? A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. His fellow scientists, his

> wife, the town and State, would have required many duties of it. It would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to "manage" a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that. He had made something new in the world—and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others. (Cather 236-37)

Had Tom survived and returned to Hamilton, Godfrey believes he would have been ensnared by "the trap of worldly success." Note the language of physical confinement here, though traps can also be mental; success constitutes something that immobilizes, paralyzes, and renders progress or movement—whether physical or intellectual—difficult if not outright impossible. In other words, prosperity and success constitute something not pleasurable but rather a source of confinement in drudgery and the repetition of daily routine in "meaningless conventional gestures." Such fixation upon convention seems hardly appropriate for a man such as Outland, whose unconventional thinking has revolutionized science via the Outland engine, and whose unconventional experiences on the mesa profoundly shaped both Tom's and Godfrey's lives. Godfrey wonders what changes would have occurred in Outland's life as manifested in specific parts of Tom's body—his eye, his thumb, and his hand, which in particular would have had many demands made upon it both by the scientific community and by Tom's wife. Godfrey's belief in the value of homosocial relationships—coupled with potential skepticism, if not distaste, toward heterosexual marriage—manifests itself in this moment, as he regards Tom's wife as a "woman who would grow always more exacting." When Tom had departed for war, Rosamond had been Tom's love interest, though Godfrey never mentions her by name. In satisfying his wife and the many others clamoring for his

attention, Tom would participate in a wide range of meaningless gestures, including writing pointless letters. Godfrey cannot imagine Outland having any sort of a future, particularly one so wholly unpalatable or tied to the drudgery of everyday tasks; Outland's death almost seems necessary to preserve this vision of Tom that has become so important to him—part of Tom being the explorer on the mesa making remarkable discoveries in the American Southwest, and the other part of Tom being the scientific experimenter making vigorous intellectual progress in the laboratory in Hamilton. Such work seems far removed from the ostentatious and garish "Outland" estate that Godfrey is convinced Outland would never have built.

As he ponders Outland's story and expresses relief that Tom does not have to face the mundane and dispiriting routines of daily life, St. Peter realizes that the person Godfrey truly is, is the little boy in Kansas; the life lived following that time does not really belong to the adult scholar and family man:

> But now that the vivid consciousness of an earlier state had come back to him, the Professor felt that life with this Kansas boy, little as there had been of it, was the realest of his lives, and that all the years between had been accidental and ordered from the outside. His career, his wife, his family, were not his life at all, but a chain of events which had happened to him. All these things had nothing to do with the person he was in the beginning. (240)

Godfrey sees his life not as a monolithic totality, but as a collection of lives, with him at various points and ages constituting different (and differentially real) lives. His adult years seem to be something beyond his control over which he can exercise little or no agency; his adulthood seems not as real to him as his boyhood, which seems most vivid to him. The situation in which he currently finds himself does not relate to the person he

once was, likely contributing in part to the malaise in which the professor currently finds himself. The young St. Peter who Godfrey perceives as the most real version of him possesses a connection with the Earth that doesn't manifest itself with all the trappings of his success as a scholar: “The Kansas boy who had come back to St. Peter this summer was not a scholar. He was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water.” (241) The most real version of St. Peter is not only a little boy, but he is also a primitive, someone dissociated from the world of social niceties and acquisition in making money as a well-known writer and educator. He is interested only in the elements of the earth rather than the trappings of his success; he wants to go back to the land, as he and Outland once visited—the places in Outland's memory that also constitute part of the past that St. Peter seeks for himself. Godfrey takes a great interest in putatively primitive peoples such as the cliff dwellers, even though their interests were surely more varied than the “earth and woods and water” that so completely held his interest during his youth. He takes on somebody else's past as his own, basing his nostalgia not just upon his own previous experiences but also the assimilated experiences of another person whose explorations in a largely unsettled region of the country differ so markedly from the purportedly civilized life he leads.

Godfrey initially does not realize that these primeval urges inherent in his idealized self can return to him:

> What he had not known was that, at a given time, that first nature could return to a man, unchanged by all the pursuits and passions and experiences of his life; untouched even by the tastes and intellectual activities which have been strong enough to give him distinction among his fellows and to have made for him, as they say, a name in the world. Perhaps this reversion did not often occur, but he knew it had happened to

> him, and he suspected it had happened to his grandfather. He did not regret his life, but he was indifferent to it. It seemed to him like the life of another person. (242-43)

He imagines this earlier primitive self as someone who exists prior to all the experiences of his life. St. Peter is not even touched by his "tastes and intellectual activities," which have brought him to the position of scholarly preeminence in which he finds himself. Though he doesn't regret his life and the situation in which he now finds himself (a successful scholar who, as the novel's end reveals, will soon be a grandfather for the first time), he finds himself indifferent. St. Peter ascribes the greatest importance and value in his life to his vicarious fascination with Tom's experiences on the mesa—events not even occurring in his own life. Godfrey's relationship with Outland seems to trump all the others.

V

Though many of the examples of nostalgic desire and white male masculinity discussed in this dissertation focus upon putatively biologically (i.e., anatomically or genetically) defined males, masculinity need not limit itself to men.[13] Under the aegis of masculinity, some women can yearn nostalgically for an idealized other time or place,

13 Though this dissertation is focusing primarily upon nostalgia as experienced by men, I am certainly not suggesting that nostalgia is the exclusive province of men. I am particularly interested in considering how nostalgia manifests itself in relation to masculinity, yet I do not want to imply that nostalgia and femininity (or nostalgia and women, for that matter) are utterly incompatible. As noted in my introduction, I am bringing this example of female masculinity into my discussion to complicate my understanding of how masculinity and nostalgia work together in ways both reactionary and subversive. The statement following the sentence preceding this footnote is not intended to suggest that women exhibiting the traditional traits of femininity cannot yearn nostalgically; a range of individuals representative of a broad spectrum of sexual identities can experience nostalgia, although we must be careful not to assume that nostalgia manifests itself identically for all people (or that it even occurs at all, given that it is not something experienced transhistorically).

such as occurs in William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, in which Drusilla fiercely advocates for southern resistance to Union incursions during the Civil War to the extent that she is willing to dress in the guise of a Confederate soldier to maintain the idealized antebellum South—or at the very least, prolong its defeat. Her reactionary nostalgia for antebellum times motivates her donning the garb of a male soldier—a practice that could be considered subversive and liberating or threatening and dangerous, depending on the perspective of the individual perceiving her drag.

By assuming the identity and dress of a male soldier to help defend southern honor and pride, Drusilla exemplifies female masculinity, a concept discussed by Judith Halberstam: "[F]emale masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing." (1) Putatively authentic male masculinity can be perceived as such only to the extent that supposedly inauthentic masculinities such as female masculinity manifest themselves. Halberstam notes that tomboyism and other expressions of female masculinity are quashed, particularly as they occur in adulthood and become more apparently long-lasting and, consequently, more threatening: "Gender conformity is pressed onto all girls, not just tomboys, and this is where it becomes hard to uphold the notion that male femininity presents a greater threat to social and familial stability than female masculinity." (6) Male femininity is more threatening—at least in the perception of mainstream American society—than female masculinity because it commingles all the traits associated with the feminine stereotype—gentleness, nurturing, and so forth—in the

body of a man, who is presumed to be someone more aggressive, physical, and emotionally muted. Female masculinity troubles the distinction and delineation between differing types of gender-bound behavior, showing the flexibility and transitivity of gender identities, as noted by Halberstam in her article "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity": "The breakdown of genders and sexualities is in many ways, therefore, an endless project, and it is perhaps preferable therefore to acknowledge that gender is defined by its transitivity, that sexuality manifests as multiple sexualities, and that therefore we are all transsexuals." (767) Drusilla's situation exemplifies how ostensibly liberatory female masculinity specifically—and sexual identity in general—can be put to the use of nostalgia and reactionary political purposes.

Our first glimpse of Drusilla in the novel occurs when she rides to meet her cousin, her horse's neighing preceding her: "Then we all heard the horse at once; we just had time to look when Bobolink came up the road out of the trees and went across the railroad and into the trees again like a bird, with Cousin Drusilla riding astride like a man and sitting straight and light as a willow branch in the wind. They said she was the best woman rider in the country." (Faulkner 88-89) Drusilla rides her horse astride—a position at the time often considered appropriate for men, instead of the ostensibly more ladylike sidesaddle position. She does not attempt to conform to the female norms of behavior imposed upon her by her surroundings. The phrase "sitting straight and light as a willow branch" does suggest a certain delicacy and the commingling of the typically aggressive, rough masculine behavior and gentle, delicate feminine behavior. The two appear to coexist in Drusilla's initial mannerisms prior to her donning the garb of a

Confederate soldier. She has gained a reputation not as the best rider overall in the country, but rather as the best woman rider in the country. Drusilla has gained distinction among women as uniquely capable in her abilities to handle horses.

When Union soldiers attempt to burn down the home of Drusilla's family, she vehemently attempts to defend it without success. Note that she wears a dress while doing so, still willing to fight (ostensibly like a man) while wearing a garment that suggests the trappings of traditional normative femininity:

> "When They come to burn the house Dru grabbed the pistol and run out here, she had on her Sunday dress and Them right behind her, she run in here and she jumped on Bobolink bareback without even waiting for the saddle and one of Them right there in the door hollering Stop and Dru said Get away or I'll ride you down and Him hollering Stop Stop with his pistol out too–" Cousin Denny was hollering good now: "–and Dru leaned down to Bobolink's ear and said Kill him Bob and the Yankee jumped back just in time; the lot was full of Them too and Dru stopped Bobolink and jumped down in her Sunday dress and put the pistol to Bobolink's ear and said I cant shoot you all because I haven't enough bullets and it wouldn't do any good anyway but I wont need but one shot for the horse and which shall it be? So They burned the house and went away–" (90)

Drusilla—here referred to as Dru, a masculinized nickname—attempts to stop the destruction of her family's home, much like a male property owner presumably would, as stereotypes and legal conventions of property ownership at the time would suggest; however, Dru ultimately fails to keep the Yankees from wreaking destruction on the homestead. Dru is willing to prevent Union soldiers from getting material for their war effort, even to the extent that she will destroy livestock. She even jumps on the unsaddled horse and rides it bareback. She likely exhibits such behavior believing that such destruction will presumably help preserve or at the very least forestall the destruction of the antebellum south that she seeks to keep alive and well. Furthermore, like her cousin

Bayard Sartoris, Drusilla perceives her nostalgia for the past as a matter of not just regional pride in the Old South but also family honor for the Sartorises. In his analysis of the novel, Charles Hannon makes a comment about Bayard that would apply equally to Drusilla, since she also "is nostalgic for a version of southern history that produced the Sartorises as a first family of the South in their own minds and in the minds of other Yoknapatawphans." (24) Preserving the antebellum past would enable the continuation of the Sartoris family legacy as well; Drusilla's nostalgia for the past is one in which she and her family members maintain power and prominence in the community. Her nostalgia for a better past carrying on into the present motivates her violent and putatively unladylike defense of her home. She is unafraid to destroy her property—her prized horse Bobolink—to keep the Yankees from taking much-needed supplies from her family's homestead.

After the Yankee attack on her home, Drusilla decides to join with the Confederate forces by masquerading as a soldier. She undertakes a route of action that would be potentially scandalous and subversive to the townspeople in the service of a reactionary and ultimately oppressive political goal, suggesting that cross-dressing and drag do not always have to be put to exclusively positive or politically expedient uses; Drusilla's use of drag is politically expedient, although her politics are abhorrent. One significant physical detail that Drusilla alters to achieve her goal is her hairstyle: "Her hair was cut short; it looked like Father's would when he would tell Granny about him and the men cutting each other's hair with a bayonet. She was sunburned and her hands were hard and scratched like a man's that works." (Faulkner 91) Drusilla assumes a more

masculine appearance by cutting her hair short; she does not adopt the trappings of a traditionally feminine appearance because she wants to make her appearance as a man more authentic. Given the circumstances, it would be more practical for her to assume the garb and behavior of a man while in war; otherwise, she would likely have no choice but to leave the battlefield and return to her homestead. She achieves this brutally short cut seemingly through a method like that of the male soldiers, who would cut their hair with a bayonet. This particular detail of her look at least seems consistent with the appearance of other men and other soldiers in her regiment. Her body also contains details suggesting how convincing her disguise is—sunburned skin and hands hardened by exhaustive and exhausting manual labor on the field of battle, though such physical characteristics are not necessarily possessed exclusively by men, since many women developed such rough hands from working in the fields. Faulkner's text does not state that at any point during Drusilla's participation in battle does anyone question her new, masculine gender identity. In other words, she succeeds in her drag performance in the midst of war.

This extensive physical transformation,[14] which is at least effective enough for her to always escape detection among the rank and file, is ultimately put to the use of a nostalgia that recognizes defeat but at least wishes to extend the life span of the antebellum south, even knowing that the end is imminent and inevitable: “She probably

14 Faulkner provides information about Drusilla's transformation as soon as she is first introduced in the novel. When we first read about her, she is meeting her cousin Bayard Sartoris (the son of Drusilla's uncle and regiment leader, John Sartoris) and has already acquired some aspects of a soldier's appearance, including hair cut short, as if with a bayonet. (91) At the same time, Denny—who is Bayard's cousin and Drusilla's sister—tells Bayard about Drusilla's attempt to protect the family's property and goods from Union soldiers while Drusilla wears a dress. (90) In other words, when Drusilla is first introduced, we as readers get to compare the masculine aspects of her appearance with some of the feminine aspects of dress and appearance of which she is capable.

told us the reason for it (she must have known)–what point of strategy, what desperate gamble not for preservation, since hope of that was gone, but at least for prolongation, which it served. But that meant nothing to us." (96) The prolongation of the past is all that is left since the preservation of the past is no longer possible; Drusilla and other Confederate soldiers are attempting to keep dragging the antebellum past along into the present for as long as the confident and triumphant Union forces will allow them to do so. At this point, the Confederate forces are reduced to "desperate gamble[s]" rather than thoughtful strategy. Hope has disappeared, and now nostalgia has become stronger than ever, seeking to keep the antebellum South on life support for whatever fleeting moments remain.

Drusilla's physical transformation to preserve the south seems to have also had effects upon her psyche that suggest a more masculine discipline to hide their emotions in response to the terrors of war that have affected loved ones near and dear to her: "[S]he [i.e., Louisa, Drusilla's mother and the aunt of narrator Bayard Sartoris] had expected the worst ever since Drusilla had deliberately tried to unsex herself by refusing to feel any natural grief at the death in battle not only of her affianced husband but of her own father . . ." (189) Drusilla has experienced loss during the war, suffering the loss of both her father and her fiancé. The fact that she is involved with a man suggest a willingness to participate in heteronormative relationships, and the masculinity she ultimately exhibits on the battlefield seems to be one more obviously preoccupied with equal rights than with asserting women's superiority to men. The idea of Drusilla unsexing herself refers a famous line of dialogue from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which Lady Macbeth tries to

remove the supposedly sensitive and loving qualities in the ostensibly typically feminine nature to aid in the plot to kill King Duncan and bring her husband to the throne. Drusilla unsexes herself in refusing to feel grief about death of her fiancé or her father. The idea of unsexing suggests the lack of sexual identity altogether (neither masculine nor feminine) rather than the repudiation of femininity in favor of masculinity, even though Drusilla's stolid response to the death of her father and fiancé suggests a more typically masculine reaction to such news. Drusilla chooses to behave in ways not consistent with the behavior typically associated with any gender. She decides to unsex herself instead of masculinize herself when she handles emotions; rather than becoming overwhelmed with emotion at the death of her fiancé and her father, she instead remains focused upon defending the South. Such unsexing becomes necessary for her to participate in the violence meant to delay the demise of the antebellum South.

In Drusilla's case, her transformation on the battlefield from woman to man consists not just of behavior but also apparel. In this particular instance, clothes make the man (but not only clothes—behavior is important here as well) in the service of nostalgic yearning for antebellum times. Once Drusilla returns from battle, she scandalizes her mother and others because of her behavior, having dressed "[i]n the garments not alone of a man but of a common private soldier." (191; Faulkner's underlining) Part of the offense stems not just from Drusilla dressing as a man, but also her assimilation of a lower class identity and wearing the garb of a "common private soldier," joining the ranks rather than elevating herself above the lower classes, as would seem more fitting for a member of the highly esteemed Sartoris family. Her transgression possesses both a gender-based and a

class-based component. Drusilla does seem to reject at least in part the class divisions of the Old South, which she is also striving so diligently to defend and preserve in combat. An individual possessing Drusilla's upper-class identity would presumably seem out of place as a private soldier, but again Drusilla does not seem to encounter any resistance or suspicion about her true identity during combat.

As Drusilla's mother expresses horror and shame at her daughter's having run off to fight with the confederate troops as a common soldier, Drusilla is equally aghast that her mother has insinuated that she was somehow involved in sexual impropriety during her time as a soldier: “That John [her uncle and the commander of the battalion in which she fights] and I–that we– And Gavin [her fiancé] dead at Shiloh and John’s home burned and his plantation ruined, that he and I– We went to the War to hurt Yankees, not hunting women!” (197) Drusilla attempts to make her mother and others realize that she dressed in her disguise pretending to be a man to support the Confederacy's cause rather than to hunt women. Notice that Drusilla's remark tacitly raises anxiety about same-sex attraction; though when donning the robe of the soldier she is supposedly male, she is not “hunting women” like male soldiers in the ranks. Her mother's anxiety results not from fear about Drusilla being sexually intimate with other men; she instead worries about her chasing women, which raises the possibility of lesbianism, though nothing else Drusilla says or does in the novel suggests any such sexual orientation. Dru addresses the notion of lesbian desire in this moment rather than noting any sexual misconduct between her and any of the other soldiers. Given the scope of the devastation experienced in the south during the Civil War and the urgency of the need to defend the region, as well as the

widespread casualties, including those of people near and dear to Drusilla, she cannot fathom how her mother can focus simply upon the scandal of her daughter dressing as man to fight in an ostensibly honorable war to preserve the past and satiate nostalgic desire. Her mother and others who consider Drusilla's behavior scandalous rely upon nostalgic stereotypes of how women have behaved properly in the past and supposedly should still behave, even following the defeat of the South and the collapse of antebellum society.

Drusilla suffers defeat of her own once she returns from losing on the battlefield, when she is forced back into the world of femininity by her mother: “She [Drusilla] was already beaten. Aunt Louisa made her put on a dress that night.” (201) Drusilla puts on the trappings of conventional femininity, forced to disavow her recent past of masquerading as man, even if in the ostensibly noble service of serving in the troops during wartime. Wearing a dress represents a sign of defeat for Drusilla since she must now conform. She wears such traditional garb throughout the remainder of the novel's events. Prior to making such concessions to normative dress, Drusilla participates in two wars: not just the Civil War but also her own war or gender—one that might be more progressive and subversive than her war against the Union.

Though Drusilla is disheartened by being forced back into normative femininity, John Sartoris, who commanded Drusilla and the other soldiers during battle, tries to encourage Drusilla not to be so upset: “'What’s a dress?' he said. 'It dont matter. Come. Get up, soldier.'” (201) According to John Sartoris, a dress doesn't matter, and Drusilla is still a soldier at heart. In other words, clothes do not necessarily always have the power of

transformation. One could interpret this snippet of dialogue as simply an attempt to humor Drusilla and lift her spirits, but it also suggests that a soldier is not identified as such exclusively by what she or he wears. Drusilla attempted to stop Union soldiers from taking her family's possessions earlier in the novel while wearing a dress, doing so capably and honorably. Being a soldier and serving nostalgic purposes does not consist of or result from what you wear; such a notion seems a rather progressive and subversive idea that sharply contradicts the reactionary nostalgia in the service of which Drusilla and others fight so tirelessly. Drusilla's potential for unsettling gender-normative behavior is noted by Thomas Inge and Donaria Romeiro Carvalho Inge, who state that Drusilla is a woman "of independence and courage" who demonstrates "the irrelevance of culturally imposed gender roles in society. Androgyny can be a powerful and liberating force." (181) I do not quite share Inge and Inge's optimism for the power, liberation, and the troubling of gender norms always inherent in cross-dressing, though I do recognize the *potential* inherent in subversive gestures such as Drusilla's drag. At the same time, we need to recall the ways in which Drusilla's putatively transgressive behavior is quickly disdained and "corrected" by her mother and others in the community once they learn of Dru's disguise. Unlike others who are aghast by her cross-dressing, regardless of the presumed nobility inherent in her attempt to nostalgically preserve and perpetuate antebellum society for a little longer, John is willing to see Drusilla as a true soldier; because Drusilla appropriates her masculinity in the heat of battle, her femininity is altered permanently—though apparently only for John and not for others in the surrounding community, including her disapproving mother.

Drusilla attempts to persuade her mother that her participation in the war was imbued with a sense of collegiality and that she was treated like a fellow combatant serving in defense of antebellum preservation: “Cant you understand that in the troop I was just another man and not much of one at that, and since we came home here I am just another mouth for John to feed, just a cousin of John’s wife and not much older than his own son?” (202-203) Drusilla tries to get her mother to realize the truth. She says she wasn't much of a man, although neither were many of the other rank and file, because they were destroyed by the war's end. According to Drusilla, she was regarded as an equal; no evidence exists in the novel that any of the other soldiers ever harbored any suspicion about her gender identity. Others willingly allowed her to participate in the confederate troops' attempts to keep antebellum times alive, though only because they thought she really was a man. Drusilla would not even need to have this argument with her mother if she actually were a man since the combat in which she participates is considered a standard activity for any man in that historical moment. Since returning from defeat, she was simply “another mouth . . . to feed” in the Sartoris household, almost making herself sound as if she were a child to be taken care of, particularly since she says her age is so close to that of John Sartoris' young son, Bayard, through whom much of the novel's perspective is focused.

Despite not believing herself to be much of a man, Drusilla nonetheless romanticizes and idealizes fighting and dying in pursuit of an ideal such as the nostalgic preservation of the antebellum south, long after she has returned to the trappings of normative femininity. This romanticism manifests itself in a conversation she has with

Bayard: “There are worse things than killing men, Bayard. There are worse things than being killed. Sometimes I think the finest thing that can happen to a man is to love something, a woman preferably, well, hard hard hard, then to die young because he believed what he could not help but believe and was what he could not (could not? would not) help but be.” (227) Drusilla can't help what she believes, and she considers honorable the love of a man, thereby supporting heterosexual notions of romantic love. Dru also says that the love between a couple should be followed by men who “die young” believing “what [they] could not help but believe.” In other words, men who grew up in the South immersed in the antebellum world and died defending it seem to have little control over the path their lives take; her fiancé and father, both of whom were killed in battle, are among those she celebrates in this moment of honorable defense of the south in pursuit of nostalgic desire. Such men do not control their beliefs; they cannot help but believe in the ostensible rightness of antebellum society, for which its residents yearn as its existence is compromised and threatened, and all its attendant political ramifications. Drusilla sees in such sacrifice and lack of control a certain fatalism, though she does also nostalgically romanticize their sacrifice as the “finest thing” imaginable.

The heroism ascribed to soldiers fighting on the battlefield seems hollow and empty to Drusilla, as she notes long after the last battle has ended: “I used to see a lot of blockade runners in Charleston. They were heroes in a way, you see–not heroes because they were helping to prolong the Confederacy but heroes in the sense that David Crockett or John Sevier would have been to small boys or fool young women.” (244) These heroes became mythic and fictionalized figures in the local lore of the land. The idealized past

indeed becomes empty and void of meaning, something to be lamented as foolish rather than as grounded in reality. Heroism is a sham, something only believed in by children and women too naïve to know better. Drusilla does not say that individuals such as Crockett and Sevier are entirely lacking in heroism, given that she sees the blockade runners as "heroes in a way." People may desire the good old days in which such heroes existed, yet they fail to realize how these whitewashed plastic saints, created by myths and stories passed on through the generations, do not accurately represent what it means to be a hero. These heroes might legitimate and perpetuate collective cultural desire, yet the content of their character seems hollow and superfluous, unlike the rank and file soldiers who do not seek glory but instead seek to serve admirably and honorably in defense of the Confederacy. Though Drusilla might harbor some suspicions about the authenticity of the heroism displayed by such figures involved in the war, this does not necessarily diminish her nostalgia for the antebellum past; furthermore, her remarks should not be considered reflective of a commensurate disillusionment manifesting itself more broadly among southerners, since they most likely revere figures such as Crockett and Sevier as part of the mythology of past times to which they desperately cling. This moment does not negate or delegitimize the nostalgia Drusilla has experienced previously for the antebellum South; it instead complicates that nostalgia, showing that she does not necessarily harbor an uncritically rosy perception of heroism held by the other southerners around whom she lives and whose nostalgic yearnings might be even more intense than hers.

Given the sexual subversion of Faulkner's novel, it is all the more surprising that the structure of this novel does not engage as frequently in the modernist temporal fracturing and stream-of-consciousness writing so manifestly on display in Faulkner works such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* In such a novel that follows a relatively linear sequence of events and that is, in comparison to other more challenging Faulkner novels, relatively straightforward in its structuring and narration of events, we find Faulkner providing subversion not so much with structure as we do with the stereotypes attached to gender-based content. At the same time, Faulkner's novel questions—while also potentially even reinforcing on some level—the southerners' nostalgia for the antebellum past.

No matter what stories people might tell themselves as a means of keeping alive ideals that do not resemble the reality of the situation[15], nostalgic desire always remains frustrated and at least partially unfulfilled. As we have already begun to see, the fulfillment of desire often—though not always—entails a need for destruction, as the next chapter will more fully address. One example from this chapter can be seen in Drusilla's desire to maintain the antebellum past by joining the Confederate army; during her service in the military, she and other soldiers attempt to violently and destructively forestall for as long as possible the demise of antebellum times nostalgically yearned for by southerners. When desire cannot be fulfilled, then the yearning for destruction can be directed inward by those who cannot envision a future without their desires fully

15 No agreed-upon reality exists that would satisfy people of all races, genders, classes, and other modes of identity. The conflicts between various classed, raced, and gendered interests result in multiple mythic versions of history, each of which serves the interest of dominant groups.

satisfied. The yearning for destruction does not function independently of nostalgic desire; instead, it consists of a reaction against the frustration and disappointment of unfulfilled desire that occurs in some, though certainly not all, circumstances.

Chapter 3: "The Jagged Line of Separation": The Nostalgic Person's Self-Destructive Drive

I

In this chapter, I will analyze the self-destruction of three characters who cannot extricate themselves from their yearning for a better but ultimately unrecoverable past: G.W. Hurstwood in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Paul in Willa Cather's "Paul's Case."[1] All of these men remain haunted by a past to which unpleasant circumstances have precluded all possibility of a return. Only Hurstwood longs for the actual past to which he can no longer return, whereas Quentin and Paul desire constructed and fabricated pasts that do not in any significant ways resemble the reality of the past. Quentin's prelapsarian ideal and Paul's self-fashioned ideal both constitute an idea of return in that, even though the past for which each of them respectively yearns does not at all resemble what actually happened, they have both become desperately and even pathetically determined to incorporate these prevaricated events into their personal histories and strive toward them nostalgically as an ideal to be attained. Both Quentin and Paul try to recreate a different and better past that possesses highly fictionalized elements. All three characters are willing to risk social scandal to keep their dreams of an idealized past alive—both Hurstwood and Paul embezzle from their employers, and Quentin attempts to invoke the specter of incest in a desperate ploy to shield his sister Caddy from the social stigma of having a child out of wedlock. For some nostalgic white males who recognize the utter

1 Though each of these works contains a nostalgic character being analyzed within this chapter, none of these works are themselves nostalgic, of course.

futility of their attempts to recapture the elusive and illusory past, self-destruction becomes the only feasible option. In such instances as we see in these novels, suicides functions as a form of narrative critique, illustrate these characters' inability and utter failure to move on, leaving the past behind, living in the present, and pressing toward the future. Because of the inaccessible ideal past, no future can exist for such men.

Given such despair over the future and attempts to return to the past, nostalgia can be a conservative force.[2] It attempts to restore what once was, but is no longer, accessible; in some circumstances, it even attempts to create a past that never really existed or has been overly idealized or romanticized. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud modifies his earlier theorization of the pleasure principle by suggesting that not every mental activity seeks to increase pleasure. Indeed, some actions committed by people seem to cause them unpleasure. Though mental events demonstrate a tendency toward the pleasure principle, "that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure." (6) Freud suggests that the reality principle might sometimes intervene by causing individuals to delay their immediate pursuit of pleasure in favor of a less direct long-term pleasure obtained after an interval of displeasure; however, he acknowledges that the reality principle does not account for many circumstances in which individuals act in ways that suggest a complex interrelation between pleasure and unpleasure. For example, Freud speaks of the *fort-da* game played by a young child who throws away a reel attached to a spool and shouts "*fort*" (gone), then pulls on the string to

2 That being said, nostalgia can also work progressively, if the present really is unacceptable and the past was indeed preferable.

bring the toy back, after which he states "*da*" (there). Freud suggests that this youth's activity provides him with a mastery and control that he cannot achieve when his mother comes and goes of her own volition, independent of the child's wishes. The reel represents the mother; by throwing the reel away and bringing it back, the child can assume control over her comings and goings symbolically—an agency lacking in the child's real-life interactions with the mother. Through the repetition of the game, the child attempts to work through and transform the past unpleasant event of the mother's unwanted departure, which he endures passively, into a pleasurable game in which he can assume the active position. Freud also observes in a footnote how the same child would duck below a full-length mirror, ostensibly making himself disappear as a result (14). The child attempts to create both a presence and absence for himself–an ability to leave as he likes while remaining present to see that absence. In other words, whereas the child must sit passively in the room, waiting for his mother to return, in ducking below the mirror the child can be both absent in having control over when he "leaves" (i.e., when he cannot see himself in the mirror) and present in knowing that he exercises control over being unable to see himself. Freud suggests that the active re-creation of a moment once experienced passively might be motivated in part, though not entirely, by a desire for revenge due to the lack of control initially experienced by the child.

When children insist upon playing games such as *fort-da* or having a parent tell a story in the exact same way numerous times, those children are manifesting their instincts for a return to the past in an attempt to exert mastery over it, even if only symbolically, although they repeat the event as a contemporary occurrence, rather than simply recalling

it in memory. According to Freud, living beings such as these children act upon "*an instinct [which] is an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*" (43; Freud's emphasis). Organisms achieve this earlier state by relieving themselves of tension, whether pleasurable or displeasing. The lowest level of tension is inanimate matter; life is organized, which requires energy. The most all-encompassing manifestation of this urge to restore an earlier state of things appears in what Freud refers to as the death instinct, given that "*inanimate things existed before living ones*" (46; Freud's emphasis). Freud argues that "*the aim of life is death*," since individuals' instincts are essentially conservative (46; Freud's emphasis). Though sexual instincts might act in the interest of self-preservation, they do so to the extent that they ostensibly ensure an organism is following the correct, proper, and complete path to its death, rather than having that death occur prematurely or unexpectedly, although nobody can really master death. Freud's theorization suggests that the ultimate return to origins constitutes a return to the organic. Nostalgia can manifest an instinct for death and destruction insofar as some individuals unable to achieve the fulfillment of their desires find themselves with no other choice than to die rather than to press on unhappily. Nostalgia is an expression of the death drive insofar as it is a conservative force that seeks to return to an earlier state of things; it does not look toward the future, instead keeping its attention firmly fixed on the past.

Some people suffering from nostalgia consider the prospect of a future without some fulfilled desires an untenable and unbearable future. They want the past restored, as if they were returning to the womb, and that cannot happen. As Howard Kushner notes in

American Suicide: A Psychocultural Exploration, at least some individuals who take their own lives do so because what they seek in the past cannot be recovered, no matter what they do:

> Through a series of strategies, many of which contain elements of repetition compulsion, both the suicide and the hero [of the American frontier myth, to which Kushner likens the "unconscious dynamic of suicidal behavior"] seek reunion with lost love objects. For an actual suicide, the available alternative strategies may prove unsatisfactory because the object sought has been lost forever and the rituals available [to help the suicide cope with his or her sorrow] have proved inadequate. (192-93)

No matter what coping strategies or mechanisms some individuals might attempt, they ultimately find themselves frustrated and disappointed, regardless of the strength of compulsion driving nostalgic individuals to repeat the behaviors. In such circumstances, they become the nostalgic people described by Kristeva in the quote featured in my introduction: people nailed down to the past who cannot imagine a future and who instead prefer to foreclose any possibility of a future by ending their lives.

Even though suicide entails people taking their own lives, the pressures that create such a combustible situation lead to that choice, both inside the suicide's psyche and from the outer world constantly imposing itself upon the person. Citing a study near the end of the nineteenth century by Emile Durkheim, Kushner notes that the pressures of living in the world often contributed substantially and potentially entirely to the predicament faced by those who considered no other option than suicide viable: "[M]odern life was the killer." (2) Even though suicidal people undertake the deed responsible for extinguishing their lives, the world in which they live—which, in the early twentieth century United States of America, consists of a world marked by progress and change as well as

resistance to those forces—bears some responsibility as well. The historical, social, and cultural context in which individuals live—particularly the past which haunts the nostalgic person and the present that can never fully satisfy—can cause some individuals to turn to the most drastic means necessary for relief from their sorrows and stresses. For such persons, life becomes unlivable if it does not match the fabricated and hazily recalled past that some nostalgic people idealize. Kushner points out that in the early twentieth century, psychologists and other social scientists debated vehemently about whether the individual or the social possessed greatest responsibility for individuals' violent acts against themselves: "Social and popular theorists attributed suicide to the conditions brought about by modern urban civilization, while psychiatrists insisted that suicide's etiology was rooted in individual disorder—whether organic or psychological." (61) The pressures of modernity and the rapid changes brought about by it, seemingly impacting every aspect of life, make the lives of people more complicated; at the same time, though sweeping changes in society certainly place stress on the individual who yearns for a simpler time, an individual, case-by-case, context-bound component to suicide indisputably exists as well.

Regardless of the relative burden of blame to be assigned to both the individual and the society in which the suicidal individual lives, the nostalgic suicide's life is marked by a lack of control more than in most lives and a resultant despondence. Quoting Durkheim, Kushner notes that the individual contemplating such a suicide consists of "a man abruptly cast down below his accustomed status [who] cannot avoid exasperation at

feeling a situation escape him of which he thought himself the master,[3] and his exasperation naturally revolts against the cause, whether real or imaginary, to which he attributes his ruin." (qtd. in Kushner 3) Feeling a lack of control and an inability to have the present reflect the longed-for past, the individual tries to assert agency in the situation much like the baby in front of the mirror in the earlier example from Freud. Whereas the baby can successfully achieve some degree of agency, the suicide feels utterly bereft of hope when attempts to exercise control fail. The cause of unhappiness could be real, or it could be the product of the nostalgic individual's imagination. In some cases, that source may be external to the self, in which case such violence may be directed against others; in other instances, in which the likelihood of changing external circumstances or others' behavior to resemble the idealized past more closely becomes difficult if not outright impossible, the individual chooses to act violently against himself or herself. Kushner includes a quote from Durkheim articulating these two scenarios: "If he recognizes himself as to blame for the catastrophe, he takes it out on himself; otherwise, on someone else. In the former case there will be only suicide; in the latter suicide may be preceded by homicide or by some other violent outburst." (qtd. in Kushner 3)

Granted, the suicidal person blaming himself as argued by Kushner may seem incompatible with suicide resulting from the inability to make the past present again, which seemingly aligns suicide with the depression and melancholia discussed by Freud. A brief return to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," discussed in greater detail in my

3 Consider examples from all the stories discussed in this chapter in which characters lose control of situations over which they had considered themselves masters: Hurstwood's precipitate fall from rubbing elbows with the elite, Paul's realization that he cannot continue living the ritzy life as his embezzled funds dwindle, and Quentin's pathetic and ineffective attempts to persuade his father of an incestuous relationship between himself and his sister Caddy.

first chapter, will help us see how melancholia and suicide are connected, as well as how an individual can indeed shoulder the blame while remaining fixated upon nostalgia:

> So immense is the ego's self-love, which we have come to recognize as the primal state from which instinctual life proceeds, and so vast is the amount of narcissistic libido which we see liberated in the fear that emerges at a threat to life, that we cannot conceive how that ego can consent to its own destruction. We have long known, it is true, that no neurotic harbours thoughts of suicide which he has not turned back upon himself from murderous impulses against others, but we have never been able to explain what interplay of forces can carry such a purpose through to execution. The analysis of melancholia now shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object—if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world. . . . In the two opposed situations of being most intensely in love and of suicide the ego is overwhelmed by the object, though in totally different ways. (588-89)

Freud acknowledges that neurotics, including those suffering from melancholia, harbor thoughts of violence directed both inward toward themselves and outwardly toward others. Aggression directed toward the self seems utterly illogical, given that "we cannot conceive how that ego can consent to its own destruction." Freud argues that a melancholic individual can kill himself only if his ego can treat itself as if it is an object, and it is capable of "direct[ing] against itself [i.e., the ego] the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world." In other words, individuals suffering from nostalgia and melancholia can direct their violence inward because they can see themselves as objects and direct their aggression toward themselves much as they would direct it at objects in the external world. Such individuals believe that the violent erasure of the source of their sorrows,

even if it means their own brutal death, will provide relief—even if such relief comes with a heavy cost, as happens for Hurstwood, Quentin, and Paul.

II

In the concluding chapter of Theodore Dreiser's 1900 novel *Sister Carrie*, G. W. Hurstwood—once a manager of a ritzy nightclub in Chicago—finds himself destitute and friendless in New York City, having embezzled from his employers to fund a getaway marriage with Carrie Meeber, who has since left him to pursue her career as a stage actress. Unable to find employment, Hurstwood becomes increasingly apathetic in the later stages of the novel, finally paying fifteen cents for a room in a run-down shelter: "a dingy affair—wooden, dusty, hard." (484) After undressing himself and pressing his coat against the door crack to seal the room, he turns on the gas jet to asphyxiate himself and lies down on the bed, lamenting the pointlessness of trying to improve his station after his dramatic fall from grace: "'What's the use?' he said, weakly, as he stretched himself to rest." (484) Hurstwood's great fall results in apathy, despondency, and finally suicide.

Amy Kaplan notes that critics refer to Hurstwood's rapid decline as "the apogee of Dreiser's realism," and indeed his fall is all the more startling given its stark contrast with the considerably glitzier circumstances in which he finds himself when we first meet him in the novel. (151) The manager of a ritzy Chicago nightclub, Hurstwood rubs elbows with the social elite. The money he earns from the job does not situate him in the same social strata as the clientele of the club, though his wife and daughters use Hurstwood's money to affect great social prestige and find good marriageable suitors for the daughters.

How does a man such as Hurstwood who seemingly has such a great situation in the novel's early stages find himself despondent and ultimately willing to use the gas jet to asphyxiate himself in the novel's concluding chapter? The instincts, appetites, and rash impulses that so often dominate characters in naturalist literature cause Hurstwood to make impetuous decisions with unexpectedly long-term effects that he ultimately regrets, leading to a constant nostalgic yearning for his past station which, when he realizes the impossibility of its fulfillment, leads him to destroy himself.

Hurstwood's startling fall seems all the more remarkable considering that no other character in the novel suffers so profoundly when one compares the beginning of the novel with its end. *Sister Carrie* depicts the life of Carrie Meeber, who arrives in Chicago from a small town only to find herself adrift in the city as she first seeks to find a career, and then later attempts to survive after tempestuous relationships with two men–Charles Drouet, a silver-tongued salesman reluctant to commit to her, and G. W. Hurstwood, a manager in a swanky club who becomes obsessed with Carrie to the point of embezzling from his employers and deceiving her to ensure that she flees to Canada with him. Deceiving Carrie into believing that Drouet is hurt and that Hurstwood and Carrie must travel by train to see him, Hurstwood persuades her to flee Chicago with him for Canada and, later, New York. At the end of the novel, she ultimately attains success as a stage actress, but she does so only once she leaves Hurstwood, who fails to find gainful employment even as the couple’s finances dwindle to a perilously low level. Such disgrace and poverty is far removed from the relative affluence in which Hurstwood lives when, in a state of extreme emotional instability precipitated by the legal threats of his

wife, who begins to suspect his extramarital dalliance, Hurstwood embezzles from his employers, vacillating before doing so. Not thinking clearly, he instead focuses upon the excitement being with Carrie rather than seriously contemplating more practical considerations such as the impact upon his reputation and family should be choose to take the money. Yoshinobu Hakutani notes that "Hurstwood's action is always motivated by adventure, not by the kind of planning an ordinary businessman would contemplate." (Dreiser 33) He finds himself compelled to steal the money, though he almost immediately regrets his decision once the safe door snaps shut, independent of his doing. Hurstwood's nostalgia for a past no longer accessible to him immobilizes and ultimately consumes him; he cannot imagine a future in which the ritzy past does not comprise an essential component. The novel's great romance appears to be not between Carrie and either Drouet or Hurstwood; it is instead the doomed passionate yearning of Hurstwood for a past to which he can never return.

After being introduced to Carrie by erstwhile paramour Charles Drouet, Hurstwood becomes fascinated with Carrie despite his long-standing marriage. He does not seem particularly satisfied with his marriage, given that his wife and children are more interested in gaining social prestige than they are in respecting him, as Kaplan notes:

> His family surrounds him with an air of affluence and authority that ultimately lends prestige to his resort, but the discrepancy between his family's conspicuous consumption and his lack of social power undermines his authority at home. His wife and children long to enter the high society—families of bankers and industrialists—that they imitate. Thus Hurstwood's ambiguous social position spawns desires in his family which he cannot fulfill, and his impotence leads them to ignore him as head of the family. (147)

In their yearning to gain ever-greater social mobility, Hurstwood's family members willingly present an image consistent with that of the classy, debonair persona he assumes as a host at the club. That being said, Hurstwood cannot adequately provide for his family the ritzy lifestyle for which they all yearn as a result of his close contact with the wealthy elite; consequently, his family will not respect him despite his status as the head of the household. Kaplan notes that because Hurstwood's "home serves as an extension of his work," he and his family must look the part: "Just as his job requires that he act as an advertisement for the resort he manages, his family's conspicuous consumption serves as a banner for his own success and affluence." (143) In giving his family a taste of life among the wealthy, he cultivates in his family members an expectation that they will not only rub elbows with the rich but that they will also have access to the money and privileges of the rich, inevitably leading to their disappointment and frustration. Hurstwood does not miss his interactions with his family members, nor does he yearn for them later in his life; his nostalgia will focus upon the joy he experienced in hobnobbing with the wealthy during his work at the club.

Hurstwood does not realize how much he would miss his job and his proximity to the wealthy in the moment he decides to steal money from the club and abscond to Canada. The host tricks Carrie into fleeing with him across the Northern border of the United States once he embezzles, committing his crime as if acting upon impulses beyond his control. Dreiser's novel is a famous example of the naturalist literary movement, the works of which often portray characters acting upon such uncontrollable instincts such as greed, hunger, and sexual appetites. The environment in which people

live exerts an influence over people, who cannot control themselves as they often make decisions that cause them harm in the long run. The choices individuals make to satisfy these impulse-bound appetites usually bring about their destruction at the story's end. Unable to make the decision despite his desire for Carrie while nonetheless experiencing what T.J. Jackson Lears refers to as "fitful longings for a new life," Hurstwood teeters indecisively between stealing money sitting out on his desk and doing what is right by putting the money back in the safe. (67) The decision does not result from Hurstwood exercising his own agency, however; it only becomes final once the safe door slams shut independent of his doing, and the money remains sitting on the desk after Hurstwood has taken the funds out to look at them, at which point the employers would know of Hurstwood's error and some level of impropriety would become inevitable. Once he acts upon this impulse to embezzle without being seemingly able to control it, he regrets his action almost instantaneously: "'I wish I hadn't done that,' he said [immediately afterward]. 'That was a mistake.'" (Dreiser 255) Once the safe door slams shut, thus removing the possibility of any further choice because he believes he must now take the money, he laments his lack of options, though he continues with the plan he had initially imagined. He later yearns for a time in which he had not made this mistake that will complicate his life considerably and will not allow him to return to the parts of his past that he enjoys, such as associating with the upper-class individuals who meet him at the club;[4] however, he does not yet recognize the magnitude of the consequences facing him

4 Though Hurstwood does enjoy the fringe benefit of rubbing elbows with the wealthy at his job, he also has some embarrassing constraints placed upon him at the club, as Kaplan observes: "Despite Hurstwood's managerial position, he has no financial control over the business, and is not even permitted to handle the money in the cash register. His job is to act as though he were not working, to

after this decision. Acting upon appetites may provide momentary gratification, yet it will not provide long-term satisfaction. Rather than appreciating his job, in which he rubs elbows with the upper crust, he finds himself unsatisfied enough to participate in criminal behavior as a means of being with Carrie. He has yet to realize how great a price he will pay for such a momentary lapse in judgment; his past will come back to haunt him constantly.

Hurstwood struggles, recognizing that the key to what he perceives as his freedom with the desired Carrie is available to him if only he takes the money; competing against that desire is the need for duty and loyalty to the employers whom he has served so faithfully for years: "To those who have never wavered in conscience, the predicament of the individual whose mind is less strongly constituted and who trembles in the balance between duty and desire is scarcely appreciable, unless graphically portrayed." (252-253) Hindered by a weak mental constitution attributed to him by the narrator, Hurstwood thinks predominantly of the present, allowing his desire for short-term satisfaction to win out rather than thinking about how his future might be impacted by one poor decision. I am not suggesting that his thoughts about his embezzlement and subsequent actions are not complicated; indeed, the struggle he experiences in deciding whether to take the money before the safe door slams shut illustrates that he is not just a ne'er-do-well who eschews all consideration of the consequences for his actions. A conscience encourages its owner to behave appropriately in all circumstances, yet the characters in naturalist

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appear as the generous host rather than as the paid employee." (147) His job is to present a suaveness and urbanity that appeals to the club's clientele, yet Hurstwood is not trusted to handle the large sums of money involved in transactions at the club; such reluctance on his employers' part ultimately proves justified, given Hurstwood's subsequent embezzlement.

literary works instead find themselves compelled by impulses, desires, and appetites focused on immediate satisfaction. The daily rigors of duty at the club that have made his life possible in that moment of wavering seem less pleasurable than the ostensibly more enjoyable life with Carrie made possible by fleeing with the ill-gotten gains.

While in Canada, where he has absconded with Carrie to avoid arrest and prosecution for embezzlement, he begins to regret his decision, even contacting his former employers, who state that they will happily forgive the crime if he returns the money, which he does. After doing so, he is tormented by the realization of the wonderfully swanky lifestyle now far behind him; rubbing elbows with the upper crust no longer seems possible now that he is firmly ensconced among the hoi polloi:

> The troubled state of the man's mind may be judged by the very construction of this letter. For the nonce he forgot what a painful thing it would be to resume his old place, even if it were given him. He forgot that he had severed himself from the past as by a sword, and that if he did manage to in some way reunite himself with it, the jagged line of separation and reunion would always show. He was always forgetting something—his wife, Carrie, his need of money, present situation, or something—and so did not reason clearly. Nevertheless, he sent the letter, waiting a reply before sending the money. (277)

This passage describes Hurstwood's disconnection from his past, likening it to the violent corporeal severing achieved with a sword. Even if Hurstwood can reconnect with that past on some level by appeasing his employers and sending the money back, "the jagged line of separation and reunion" would still remain noticeable, showing that Hurstwood has not always been in that position, but instead forcibly removed himself from it, only to recognize the error of his ways and the foolishness of the impetuous desires that led him to such trouble in the first place. His desire to return to life among the upper classes

causes him to momentarily forget “what a painful thing it would be” to revisit the club and its patrons, whose perception of him would likely be irrevocably altered. The trust would no longer manifest itself as fully as it had in earlier days, no matter how assiduous his efforts to rectify his besmirched image. In seeking to resuscitate his sought-after past, Hurstwood fleetingly forgets “for the nonce” everything else that would potentially complicate or prevent a return to the situation—not only the embarrassment and awkwardness of returning to his former station, but also “his wife, Carrie, his need of money, [and] present situation.” Not only does instinct cause Hurstwood to make the foolish decision that ultimately destroys his happiness, which in turn causes Hurstwood to destroy himself, but those same impulses—rather than rational thought—cause him to look beyond the reasons he decided to embezzle (his love for Carrie) and the consequences of his impetuousness and criminal behavior (embarrassment, financial instability in the long term). In this moment the novel shows Hurstwood's intensifying obsession with returning to the past, regardless of the embarrassment it could potentially cause him to return to his previous circumstances at the club from which he stole.

With Hurstwood realizing that he cannot go back to his former station, he and Carrie travel from Canada to New York, where he finds the signs of wealth and his past all about him yet utterly inaccessible to him:

> A man of Hurstwood's age and temperament is not subject to the illusions and burning desires of youth, but neither has he the strength of hope which gushes as a fountain in the heart of youth. Such an atmosphere could not incite in him the cravings of a boy of eighteen, but in so far as they were excited, the lack of hope made them proportionately bitter. He could not fail to notice the signs of affluence and luxury on every hand. (282)

While Hurstwood does not fall prey to the naïveté so manifest in youngsters, he lacks the positive desires and strength of hope that would seemingly encourage him to persevere in spite of his difficult circumstances. This passage should not necessarily be taken at face value, though; Hurstwood does seem on some level to be "subject to the illusions and burning desires of youth," even if the narrator seeks to deny it; Hurstwood seeks to find joy in utterly material and superficial pleasures related to living in, or at least being in the presence of, the lap of luxury. Though he can be in the presence of the ritzy in New York City, he can no longer have the same proximity or level of interaction with it that he had in Chicago. He sees the signs of his past among the ritzy and glitzy everywhere he goes, constantly aggravating the pain from the sword-like tearing asunder that he experiences in relation to that happier time—even if he also experienced unhappiness because of his contentious relationship with his wife and daughters, another circumstance motivating him to flee with Carrie at the time. Even if Hurstwood will not acknowledge as much in this moment, the appetites and "cravings of a boy of eighteen," bolstered by the similar desires of his wife and daughters, are largely what landed him squarely in this mess in the first place, leading him to a life filled with regret. Among the other texts discussed in the dissertation up to this point, I find nostalgia most closely linked to materialism in the attempt of Rosamond and Louie in *The Professor's House* to use the profits from Tom Outland's patented discoveries to fund the garish Outland estate as a memorial to Tom[5]. In that instance, however, wealth functions as the means through which the tribute to Outland's past becomes possible; however, in Dreiser's novel, modern materialism and

5 *The Professor's House* contains no indications that either Louie or Rosamond has any other source of income than from Tom Outland's patents—or that they intend to earn money from any other means.

access to the affluent becomes the end object of Hurstwood's desire rather than the means of fulfilling his desire.

Hurstwood has to start over, being unable to invoke his connections. He finds himself struggling to make ends meet and support himself and Carrie. He lives in New York City, where wealth is regularly on display for the masses, but such large sums of money—or proximity to the individuals who possess such large sums are no longer available to him—a sign to him both of his age and of the ways in which his present circumstances have disconnected him from what he realizes now he truly values:

> He knew it to be true that unconsciously he was brushing elbows with fortune in the livelong day, that a hundred or five hundred thousands gave no one the privilege of living more than comfortably in so wealthy a place. Fashion and pomp required more ample sums, so that the poor man was nowhere. All this he realized, now quite sharply, as he faced the city, cut off from his friends, despoiled of his modest fortune, and even his name, and forced to begin the battle for place and comfort all over again. He was not old, but he was not so dull but that he could feel he soon would be. (282-283)

He has no choice but to "begin the battle for place and comfort all over again." The comfort Hurstwood enjoyed in the past resulted from the position he enjoyed at his job; note how the passage links comfort with place, which in this novel can refer to a job opportunity.[6] In such a large city, nobody knows of his past—for better or worse. They do not know he once efficiently ran such a swanky club, but they also don't know of his past mistake in embezzling from his employers. Either way, the signs of affluence constantly remind him of his failure and his inability to connect with the past for which he yearns.

6 The use of the term "place" in *Sister Carrie* can be somewhat confusing since it is also used multiple times during Hurstwood and Carrie's search for permanent lodging in New York City to refer to a place to live. The language of "place" when used to refer to a job occurs on pp. 330, 356, and 395, among other instances in the novel.

He cannot even rely on the reputation that he once had; his good name has no influence over prospective employers. The reasonably ample sums he once earned that allowed his wife and daughters to live the high life no longer roll in steadily. Forced back to square one, he feels as if he has aged, even if he has not. Time has weighed heavily upon his shoulders, forcing him to recognize the yawning and seemingly unbridgeable gap between the ideal past and the brutal present.

Dispirited by his grim job prospects and the almost certain unlikelihood that he will return to the swanky life he enjoyed before stealing the money, Hurstwood becomes obsessed with his past, unable to imagine his future or even try to consider how he can provide for Carrie: "As for Hurstwood, he was making a great fight against the difficulties of a changed condition. He was too shrewd not to realize the tremendous mistake he had made, and appreciate that he had done well in getting where he was, and yet he could not help contrasting his present state with his former, hour after hour, and day after day." (287-288) Hurstwood's obsession with the past manifests itself seemingly *ad infinitum*, never dissipating or disappearing. He realizes the foolishness of his ways, and he knows that the image he had so carefully cultivated and built up over the years has been demolished because of one hasty, rash action. Unlike the other characters discussed up to this point in this dissertation—for example, the characters in Faulkner's works that are living with the ghosts of decades past—Hurstwood's nostalgia results from impetuous and ill-conceived decisions. Granted, someone like Fitzgerald's Gatsby strives to restore an idealized past, yet the unraveling of Gatsby's constructed persona occurs gradually rather than as the result of one impetuous decision. By comparison, one mistake tears

asunder all of Hurstwood's hard work, annihilating his carefully crafted and cultivated persona as a suave, urbane host at the ritzy nightclub. Faced with an unbearable and disappointing present, Hurstwood cannot help but constantly compare his fallen state to his more luxurious and affluent past. He fights against his changed situation, struggling mightily with a past that refuses to lie dormant or stop inflicting painful reminders.

As Carrie gets out of the apartment and finds work so that she can earn some money for the household, Hurstwood remains stuck in the past, his nostalgia starting to consume his body: "Little eating had thinned him somewhat. He had no appetite. His clothes, too, were a poor man's clothes. Talk about getting something had become even too threadbare and ridiculous for him. So he folded his hands and waited—for what, he could not anticipate." (389) Hurstwood has stopped eating, in part because of financial hardship, but also due to an apparent lack of interest and his diminishing appetite for life and for any meaningful future whatsoever. Rooted in what Lears describes as a "helpless passivity," Hurstwood no longer even bothers to try to dress well, much as he did back in the halcyon days of his work at the club. (67) Such a lack of concern for his appearance ostensibly decreases the likelihood of returning to his idealized past, yet Hurstwood seems immobilized and paralyzed by the wholly unsatisfactory present. He does not even try to feign any interest in getting a job or elevating himself beyond his present situation, even though his apathy will guarantee that he can never return to something akin to the elevated position of the past. Conversely, trying to obtain gainful employment would at least hold out the possibility for such advancement, even in a place such as New York City, although Hurstwood's inept and unlucky experiences in trying to procure work

ultimately show the struggles he will have in so doing. Getting back to his desired place as club host no longer seems possible. The desire for the past has begun to consume him, both mentally in the sense of occupying a singular focus, and physically in the sense of actually eating away at his malnourished, underfed body. He becomes increasingly gaunt and hollow as his connection to the yearned-for past yawns ever wider; he becomes immobile, sitting at home and refusing activity. The man once such a presence at a luxurious noble club wastes away in anonymity, as do those suffering from depression and melancholia.

Though Carrie and Hurstwood initially travel to New York City and blend into the vast anonymous masses, Carrie soon achieves great success as a stage actress, though she is ultimately prompted into finding gainful employment as an actress once Hurstwood refuses to work. Carrie enjoys a life of great prosperity and moved out of their modest apartment, while Hurstwood enters into a life of misery that culminates in his suicide in a shelter. The present does not satisfy Hurstwood—an understandable reaction given his rapidly worsening circumstances. As he continues to stay inside, refusing to even try to find work because he considers the effort pointless, his body wastes away, as perceived by Carrie but spoken through third-person narration shortly before she moves out of their apartment: "[N]ow he seemed not so shiftless and worthless, but run down and beaten upon by chance. His eyes were not keen, his face marked, his hands flabby. She thought his hair had a touch of gray. All unconscious of his doom, he rocked and read his paper, while she glanced at him." (419) Hurstwood is gradually enacting the process that occurs instantaneously for Paul in Cather's story "Paul's Case," discussed in much greater detail

later in this chapter. Paul jumps in front of a train, killing himself because he cannot imagine a future in which he cannot enjoy the life of luxury constituting a vital part of his fabricated past. Similarly, Hurstwood finally breaks down, recognizing how significantly removed his present circumstances are from the life of privilege and association with the elite as a nightclub host prior to his embezzlement. He sits in the chair, rocking back and forth—though he is moving in rocking the chair, he is ultimately going nowhere and exerting energy that ultimately results in no progress or productive end. While sitting in the rocking chair, Hurstwood reads newspapers that collect in piles. These chronicles of past events remind him of yesterdays that were much more pleasant for him, but which his impulsiveness has now rendered inaccessible. Once thrown out of the apartment, he lives on the streets before finding refuge in a shelter, where he seems so utterly removed from the idealized world that he cannot imagine being tormented by these thoughts further.

As his life winnows away, winding down to its nadir, Hurstwood prefers to imagine himself in the past: "Here his preference was to close his eyes and dream of other days, a habit which grew upon him. It was not sleep at first, but a mental hearkening back to scenes and incidents in his Chicago life. As the present became darker, the past grew brighter, and all that concerned it stood in relief." (444) The present becomes increasingly unpleasant, as abject poverty looms large. Leslie A. Fiedler notes the desperation to which Hurstwood is brought as he nears the nadir of his life: "[H]e has been harried from failure to failure, his pride and virility broken until he crawls in the slush, begs a few dollars from the woman he has wronged." (252) As a result, Hurstwood

retreats into the past, referring back to more pleasant scenes and incidents. He compulsively recalls pleasurable events of yesteryear, re-enacting them in his mind instead of having to cope with the disappointments of the present. He ultimately resorts to asphyxiating himself, unable to imagine a present or future in which he cannot have the trappings of the wealth with which he surrounded himself at the club. The process of his self-destruction lasts quite a while and actually begins with his hasty choice, or perhaps even earlier, when he first met Carrie and his obsession began. Either way, his body is consumed by nostalgia resulting from the disconnection he experiences from his past.

III

In William Faulkner's 1929 novel *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin Compson destroys himself because of an obsessive nostalgia for a past to which he cannot return. A student at Harvard, Quentin lives far away from all of his family, including his sister Candace, nicknamed Caddy, with whom he has an unusually intense and close bond. Though his father has sold much of the family's acreage to send him to Harvard, Quentin remains immersed in the trauma of losing his sister, who gets married and leaves Yoknapatawpha County after getting pregnant. The prestige of going to such a great school matters little to Quentin, who notes that he would have preferred if his brother Jason had received both the opportunity and the subsequent pressure following from that chance: “Let Jason have it. Give Jason a year at Harvard.” (Faulkner 77) Quentin's circumstances would suggest that he has a future filled with promise ahead of him, yet despite the prospect of a first-class education at a prestigious school and the possibility of

a well-paying job, material comforts, and powerful connections, Quentin remains unhappy. T.J. Jackson Lears notes that in the novel, “Amid all the accumulation, manipulation, and creation of things, there is inevitable loss.” (147) Quentin cannot prevent the loss of happiness and stability in his life that occurs as time relentlessly and remorselessly marches on. Dissatisfied and dismayed with an existence inconsistent with the ideal to which he continually looks back—his childhood, during which he enjoyed time with his sister Caddy—Quentin plans to drown himself in a body of water near campus; he even purchases two six-pound weights to help weigh himself down: “'Maybe you want a tailor's goose,' the clerk said. 'They weigh ten pounds.' Only they were bigger than I thought. So I got two six-pound little ones, because they would look like a pair of shoes wrapped up. They felt heavy enough together . . .” (85) His desire to remain underwater—weighed down to ensure he does not accidentally resurface—and drown himself outweighs his desire to live in a world in which he cannot return to the close relationship with his sister and preserve her honor; in other words, the ideal becomes a fantasy of horror. In keeping with Faulkner's modernist project, we do not get a direct statement or description of Quentin's suicide; indeed, the closest we come to such a recognition of Quentin's plan occurs when he discusses how to drown his shadow: “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 of the package [containing the six-pound weights] like two shoes wrapped up lying on the water.” (90) The novel also includes several oblique references to the shame, sorrow, and further hardship brought to the family by Quentin's suicide; these references are scattered throughout each of the other three parts of the

novel. None of these potential concerns can keep Quentin from carrying out his plan; preferring not to exist in a world in which he is constantly reminded of what he has lost, as occurs frequently throughout not only Quentin's segment of the novel but also the entire text, he would rather kill himself instead—the most severe cure for such unsatisfied nostalgic yearning.

Like Hurstwood, Quentin becomes so plagued by memories of an unrecoverable past–particularly his relationship with Caddy which is closely connected to ideas of female and family history so highly valued in the old South–that he cannot bear to face the future. Quentin imagines an ideal space in which he and Caddy can live alone and the past can be restored, before he left for school and she left town married and possessing a sullied reputation: “Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us.” (79) Quentin idealizes a hellish yet (for him) satisfying moment in which only he and Caddy exist, freed from the fetters of past family torments and Caddy's disgraced reputation. This happiness can only occur when everything else has “finished”; here we see a language of finality and closure that presages Quentin's willingness to hasten his own demise. He does not object to the two siblings being the subjects of scandal; indeed, he seems to think that only something dreadful—which Quentin imagines as incest—could sufficiently distance the two from the rest of the world. Though the passage suggests his desire for an end, Quentin also hopes for a future—albeit one in hell, one in which happiness seems obviously attainable—in which he can restore and exclusively focus upon the one relationship from his past that appears to trump all others in its

importance. Even if he is in hell, he finds some satisfaction from being with Caddy. Such desire cannot possibly be fulfilled under the circumstances; the reality does not even remotely approximate the ideal that Quentin establishes in such a moment as this. Because his relationship with Caddy cannot be finished and the future and present can never tolerably resemble the past that he obsessively idealizes, Quentin commits suicide.

As the boundaries between past and present continue to blur in a world saturated with nostalgic yearning, Quentin imagines that he and Caddy can live alone, even if in hell, freed from the castigation of others: "*If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame.*" (116; Faulkner's emphasis) The two would have to be "more than dead" to truly enjoy the horrific bliss that comes from being looked down on for Quentin's imagined sin of incest, which he thinks can convince others caused Caddy's unwanted pregnancy. Death would not protect him and Caddy from the scorn of society, but at least the two of them could suffer together. As noted previously, nostalgia need not exist simply as the preference of one ideal situation over another clearly inferior situation. Nostalgia can also result from the preference for one better, yet still flawed, set of circumstances over another. Even if he were suffering in hell, Quentin would still find comfort in being alone with Caddy and hidden from the disdain of others judging them because of their disgrace.

Such nostalgia for better even if not ideal times, actuated by a largely self-invented past and unfulfilled desire, results in the unhappiness that causes Quentin's suicide. Quentin's parents place the burden of expectation squarely upon his shoulders by

selling some of the family's land so they can afford to send him to Harvard. Quentin doesn't express much interest in going to Harvard, though he ultimately attends school there anyway. He seems more obsessed with the past with the present, particularly his relationship with Caddy. When his sister becomes pregnant and is forced to marry, Quentin laments the scandal that results from Caddy's promiscuity, wishing he could change the past and take upon himself the social stigma resulting from her sexual activity: "I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin . . ." (78) Quentin longs to take upon himself the opprobrium of a lost virginity, which presumably does not cause the same social stigma for men that it does for women either in Yoknapatawpha County or among the children of the well-connected and affluent on the Harvard campus.

Unafraid of further embroiling himself in scandal or disgrace, Quentin attempts to persuade his father Jason that the pregnancy was the result of incest between him and Caddy. Whether he does so out of a sexual interest in Caddy or instead as an unusually drastic means of defending his sister's reputation[7] remains unclear, though the latter option seems the more likely of the two. He attempts to construct a narrative which the father immediately knows has no truth value. Quentin tries to exert control over a family history moving in directions he finds entirely undesirable as he tries to persuade his father:

7 Quentin's desperate prevarication is all the more shocking because incest is so much more abhorrent than premarital sex. Quentin's thinking is so muddled and so utterly focused upon his own hellish satisfaction—paradoxical though that term might sound—that he would gladly bring shame upon himself and his sister (who is already ostracized), even if it means invoking the name of the most repulsive sexual activity.

> he [i.e., the father Jason] i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldnt have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you had committed incest otherwise and i [i.e., Quentin] i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been (176-177)

Quentin's obsessive, depressive nostalgia sublimates natural human folly into horror. As counter-intuitive as it might sound to a rational person, Quentin yearns to take the embarrassment caused to the family by the natural human folly of Caddy's promiscuity and marriage and redirect it into what he illogically perceives as something more socially and culturally acceptable: the horror of incest. In so doing, he wishes for the world to flee from him and Caddy "of necessity," as a result of which isolation it would seem that the sound of the world "had never been." Quentin wants to remove Caddy from the sound of the world—presumably including accusation and gossip—and instead find a silent world in which a lack of sound or expression results in a greater peace and isolation from that world. The novel's negative assessment of sound is implicit in the novel's title, which invokes Macbeth's despairing speech after Lady Macbeth's death in the latter stages of Shakespeare's play; like Macbeth, Quentin believes life is a story "[t]old by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing." (*Macbeth* 5.5.26-27) Any attempts to communicate or express oneself, whether lucid or clear much like the prose in the fourth section of the novel or incomprehensible like the descriptions included in the first section of the novel narrated by Benjy, are doomed to fail and further torment people, reminding them of the long-gone and utterly inaccessible past. Quentin tries to make an already bad

situation for Caddy much worse, albeit for himself in addition, in order to return to the past that he so desperately attempts to salvage to no avail.

Despite his attempts to prevent Caddy from wedding an unnamed individual[8]—an event that would increasingly distance the real present from the hoped-for past—Quentin cannot stop time from marching forward and initiating further change in the lives of the Compson family. Caddy's wedding ceremony itself provides Quentin with further opportunity to yearn for a past closed off to him. As he describes Caddy's apparel during the wedding ceremony, he evokes the Garden of Eden and the fall of man: "*That quick her train caught up over her arm she ran out of the mirror*[9] *like a cloud, her veil swirling in long glints her heels brittle and fast clutching her dress onto her shoulder with the other hand, running out of the mirror the smells roses roses the voice that breathed o'er Eden.*" (81; Faulkner's emphasis) Comparing Caddy's departure from the Compson household after her scandalous pregnancy—running into the arms of another man and away from Quentin and the rest of the Compson family—to the existence of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden prior to the fall of man, Quentin links together two instances in which scandal ruins an ideal place to which one would long to return. He longs to return to the happier past with Caddy—a prelapsarian space in which scandal does not exist,

8 The identity of Caddy's husband isn't entirely clear; he isn't even named in the text. He doesn't appear to be Dalton Ames, one of Caddy's paramours, who is mentioned by name in the novel.

9 Keep in mind that this passage is located in the section narrated by the manchild Benjy. We can imagine Benjy fixating upon the image of Caddy in the moment of preparing to walk down the aisle, only to have that image disappear once the ceremony begins and after she departs from the family home to live her new life as a married woman. In this moment, the mirror becomes a source of pain (rather than a source of pleasurable mastery, much like for the child discussed by Freud who ducks under the mirror), since it takes Caddy away—both as image and as embodied presence—from Benjy.

even if suffering does[10]—just as anyone believing in the fall of man and doctrine of original sin would yearn to return to the Garden of Eden one day. Whereas the Garden of Eden constitutes a place free from hardship and suffering when one is allowed admittance, the ideal space in which Quentin and Caddy can live free from the burden of stigma even if the environment seems hellish; however, as long as the two could be together, Quentin would be perfectly happy. The sensory detail of God breathing over Eden seems ambiguous, though I have chosen to interpret it as the vitality of God suffusing the territory of the Garden of Eden with life. Note the use of the preposition "over," as if God is exercising dominion over the entire territory rather than a small portion of it. In other words, the entirety of the Garden of Eden is touched by the presence of God—a truly ideal space, particularly given the natural imagery of roses immediately preceding the reference. Though an interpretation of this passage could perceive God as benevolent, this same language could refer to God expelling them from the garden, given that the preposition "over" suggests someone assuming control over a large territory, rather than simply breathing or speaking somewhere in a given space. This language could suggest something awry in the prelapsarian space. I consider this moment infused with the interpretative significance of both readings, suggesting the ambivalence manifested in the fraught situation the Compson family in learning to let go of Caddy,

10 Above all else, Quentin—mired as he is in the depths of debilitating, disorienting, possibly incurable, and ultimately deadly mental illness, rather than simply experiencing "the blues"—simply wants to be alone with Caddy. He does not want to be around other family members, friends, schoolmates, townspeople, servants, or anyone else. He does not care if he is ostracized. The prelapsarian space is one that is largely isolated from other human beings—though not from God—and is a place of freedom and joy, which are qualities that seem to sharply contrast the rather hellish existence idealized by Quentin in his distorted perception of reality, yet he desires such a way of living as a means of saving Caddy from what he perceives as an inferior living situation in the present.

who is clearly a dynamic and compelling presence in the home. Unable to let Caddy live her new life and much preferring that she return to her older one—even if it isn't possible for her to do so—Quentin is perfectly satisfied with his hell that is not to be lost.

Even the source of Quentin's impotent and pathetic prevarications—Caddy herself—realizes the foolishness of his attempts to concoct outrageous lies in an attempt to salvage her reputation and as a result have circumstances more closely resemble how they once were, even though such attempts will always fail. In a bald-faced, impotent attempt to salvage some of his and Caddy's pride, Quentin tries to fabricate the story of incest between the two, but even Caddy—the person Quentin is trying to protect—recognizes the obvious falsehood inherent in his claims of a taboo sexual relationship between the siblings. In wanting to restore an earlier state of affairs in his life, Quentin believes that protecting Caddy's virginity will bolster the family pride and reputation, yet such attempts at convincing himself ultimately prove delusional, if not illusory. Kristin Fujie argues that Quentin is ultimately more interested in circumventing the ravaging and damaging effects of time, which has carried Quentin increasingly further away from the idealized space of his childhood play with Caddy, than with Caddy's virginity itself: "[I]t is not the 'certainty of Caddy's destruction' that seems to haunt him, but the suspicion that there was, after all, nothing there to destroy, because Caddy was 'never virgin' . . . she was always already implicated in the corrosive effects of time and circumstances . . ." (125) Clinging to his delusions and irrational thoughts, Quentin believes he is saving Caddy, when what he considers "saving" would only result in more suffering for both of them—though at least they would be together; Quentin does not see that ultimately he

wants to reverse the effect of linear time's unending march, bringing Caddy back to the idealized space and time of the South during childhood. Quentin's attempts to refurbish the past for his own purposes seem woefully inept, leaving Caddy to pity her sexually inexperienced, naïve, and desperate brother:

> [*W*]*e did how can you not know it if youll just wait Ill tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid you think it can but wait Poor Quentin youve never done that have you and Ill tell you how it was Ill tell Father then itll have to be because you love Father then well have to go away amid the pointing and the horror the clean flame Ill make you say we did Im stronger than you Ill make you know we did you thought it was them but it was me[.]* (148-149; Faulkner's emphasis)

Desperately attempting to hang on to precious memories of childhood—which, if its fragmented representation in the novel is any indication, was not all that enjoyable to begin with—Quentin evokes in Caddy a reaction of pity and pathos. She feels sorry for him, suggests that her brother lacks in sexual experience, and seems more resigned to her fate. On the other hand, Quentin continues to fight the inexorable changes over which he can have no control.

Even once Quentin moves away from the family home to attend Harvard, he remains haunted by the recollections of his sister. When his boorish classmate Gerald and other acquaintances engage Quentin in conversation about seemingly innocuous topics after Quentin is released from police custody on trumped-up charges of kidnapping an immigrant child, the discussion inexplicably triggers in Quentin a violent reaction: “'The first I knew was when you jumped up all of a sudden and said, 'Did you ever have a sister? did you? and when he said No, you hit him. I noticed you kept on looking at him, but you didn't seem to be paying any attention to what anybody was saying until you

jumped up and asked him if he had any sisters.'" (166) As the quote from Durkheim in the introduction to this chapter notes, suicides may sometimes direct their anger outward toward others in addition to directing their violence inward. Despite the large physical distance between Quentin attending school at Harvard and the Compson family home in the South, he remains absorbed by recollections of the past, as Eric Gary Anderson observes: "[E]ven when physically removed from the South, he imaginatively transports his Southern home place with him to the North and infuses that particular home ecology with a loaded, highly charged power that the North cannot match. His trauma is grounded, place-based." (37) The distance between Harvard and the South intensifies Quentin's sorrow and fixation upon his relationship with Caddy rather than lessening them. While Quentin's assault of Gerald results in young Compson being injured significantly worse than his sporting colleague, Quentin still finds himself obsessed with his sister, dragging his past along with him as he remains unable to cope in the present and envision a future. Quentin remains reluctant to engage in the present, yet he remains fixated upon it to the extent that it does not conform to his vision of an ideal past. He drags the past into the present conversation, even bringing himself—normally a mild-mannered, meek, sensitive, and ineffectual young man—to the point of violence that he initially directs outward ineffectually before directed it inward fatally. The text structurally mimics Quentin's sorrowful absorption in the past, which intrudes violently and suddenly in the more coherent narrative of Quentin's interactions with his classmates after being released from jail.

Such unbearable sorrow further manifests itself as Quentin cannot bear to live in an environment with such unrelieved suffering; as a result, suicide seems the only tenable option. Faulkner's modernist techniques, which include an extremely disjunctive representation of time, represent in part Quentin's struggles in the text. The past continues to intrude upon his life, providing him constant anguish and agony afresh. In a linear narrative, even though past events can linger in the minds of the characters, some temporal and textual distance exists between events. In Faulkner's novel, however, events that occur far apart from each other temporally are placed right next to other as memories intrude constantly into the narrative present, fragmented, fractured, and sometimes with little evident rational connection between ideas. Such connections might make perfect sense to the characters within the narrative—or maybe they do not, given the considerable anguish experienced at the relentless intrusion of the past into the present—yet the reader experiences what Merrill Maguire Skaggs refers to as "the need for and longing for order." (69) An occurrence that would seem quite distant from the present moment can resurface instantaneously, without warning, to reopen the psychic wounds it has previously caused. In such a moment, we see the repetition of trauma of the *fort-da* game discussed by Freud; past events over which an individual had no control resurface in the present, prompting a person to seek some means by which to repeat the unpleasurable activity in some different form as a means of asserting the agency initially missing in the moment of trauma.

Constantly assailed by the incursion of such memories, Quentin cannot bear to think of the past anymore. Time causes him pain, not just mentally but also physically, as

represented metaphorically in the novel when Quentin breaks his watch, which in turn cuts him, thus demonstrating the dangers inherent in time:

> I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on. I turned the face up, the blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better. Jesus walking on Galilee and Washington not telling lies. Father brought back a watch-charm from the Saint Louis Fair to Jason: a tiny opera glass into which you squinted with one eye and saw a skyscraper, a ferris wheel all spidery. Niagara Falls on a pinhead. There was a red smear on the dial. When I saw it my thumb began to smart. I put the watch down and went into Shreve's room and got the iodine and painted the cut. I cleaned the rest of the glass out of the rim with a towel. (Faulkner 80)

Quentin damages the watch, apparently intentionally; in destroying the watch, he also wounds himself, causing his thumb to hurt and bleed in the process. The watch continues to click away, time still relentlessly, remorselessly, and impassively moving along with constant and linear precision, leaving the past ever further behind and causing those who suffer from nostalgia to continue to distort and romanticize even further the idealized past for which they strive, albeit to no fully successful end. The passage also foreshadows Quentin's suicide; whereas Jesus walks on the water of the Sea of Galilee and the truth-telling George Washington famously crosses the Delaware, Quentin will soon find himself immersed in water that can provide relief for his psychological torments, though only through the most extreme and irreversible sacrifice of all: death, also a false baptism in itself.

Quentin later explains his rationale for destroying the watch by distinguishing between a dangerous mechanized and measured time as opposed to a more vital form of

time: “Because Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life. The hands were extended, slightly off the horizontal at a faint angle, like a gull tilting into the wind.” (85) Clocks apparently murder time, and since temporal distance comprises an essential part of nostalgia, then the clock's precision counts away the past that becomes ever distant and ever further unattainable. The Old South, from which Quentin is physically if not mentally distant, seems to be a premodern culture somehow more vital than a society subject to the rigors, calculation, and precision of mechanical innovations such as timepieces. The clock represents mechanical progress and, subsequently, modernity. Clocks measure time in a linear fashion, much like the masculine time of linear progress as opposed to the cyclical and monumental time associated with femininity, all discussed by Julia Kristeva in her essay “Women's Time”: “[F]emale subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression, and arrival—in other words, the time of history.” (192) Linear time as history is associated with masculinity, according to Kristeva, who states that psychoanalysts would refer to linear time as “'obsessional time,' recognizing in the mastery of time the true structure of the slave.” (192) The clock that marks off time precisely and continuously becomes a source of pain for Quentin. As the gap between the idealized memories of his childhood with Caddy and the hellish present widens, Quentin's obsession intensifies, and he becomes enslaved by the clocks that drag him along in the present, toward the future, and ever further away from his past. Time comes to life once the clock stops; by destroying

the clock and remembering his father's words, Quentin tacitly agrees with this philosophy, imagining time as more vivid and less subject to scientific rigor and mathematical precision. Granted, Quentin likens the hands of the watch to a gull in the wind, but notice that he does so only after the watch has been damaged and the hands no longer move. If the watch remained functional and the hands continued to move, he could not make such a comparison—even though the image of the gull in the wind is filled with motion: the blowing of the wind and the gull's flight. In a temporality more subject to the vagaries of the imagination, much like the modernist time jumps throughout the novel, the past and the present can commingle and mix inextricably, no longer wholly or neatly separated from one another. In their relentless insistence upon linear temporality, clocks murder time; in the modernist move toward disjunctive temporal jumbling, time takes on new life as the past continually haunts and mingles with the present for a nostalgic individual such as Quentin. Freud's theorization of the death drive suggests that all our activities are directed toward the completion of our life cycle; if modernism subverts conventions of linear time, then death itself is not necessarily an all-consuming end (though it is an end of the life in the physical body, of course),[11] nor is the past ever completely put behind us. Memories can continue to haunt us even after a person has died or a relationship has ended or irreversibly changed; such memories besiege and torment Quentin relentlessly to the point that his hatred for himself as an object becomes so intolerable that he must direct his hostility inward, much like the melancholic described by Freud who turns to the desperate measure of suicide.

11 For more on how agency and self-expression are still possible even after an individual has died, see my discussion in chapter 4, particularly in reference to Sharon Patricia Holland's *Raising the Dead*.

IV

Poised on an embankment ready to leap in front of the next train to pass by, Paul—the title character of Willa Cather's story “Paul's Case”—finds himself willing to destroy his body so painfully because he cannot bear the prospect of the future looming before him. Having embezzled from his employers and fled to New York City to live the high life about which he has dreamed—and the living of which he has often lied about to school friends and co-workers—Paul now finds his money depleted and his father close to catching up with him and taking him home to Pittsburgh for a life of what Paul perceives as stagnant normalcy in the middle-class abode that he finds so stifling. Though Paul briefly contemplates dying by a self-inflicted gunshot wound, he instead decides to flee to Newark and jump in front of a train.

At first glance, the willingness to have one's body voluntarily crushed so cruelly and grotesquely by such a large locomotive seems a severe overreaction to the likely future that Paul faces upon his return to Pittsburgh. Such a facile interpretation does not, however, note the extent to which Paul has believed that the life of the wealthy is the only suitable life for him. Having lied to others about his connections to the socioeconomic upper crust for years, he has fabricated for himself a false past in which he believes so thoroughly and strenuously that, when the likelihood of keeping that idealized past alive seems unlikely if not outright impossible, he gives himself no option other than to destroy himself because he cannot face the truth. A life cut short yet lived, however briefly, in the lap of luxury is for Paul much more preferable than a lengthy lifetime mired in the

mundane world of the middle class, utterly separated from the world of his dreams that has become so startlingly and appealingly real for Paul.

Whereas Hurstwood and Quentin commit suicide because they can no longer attain an idealized past that approximates what they actually experienced,[12] Paul commits suicide once he can no longer access not his actual past but rather the completely fabricated past that he strongly desires. "Paul's Case," first published in Cather's 1905 collection *The Troll Garden* and then revised for her 1920 compilation *Youth and the Bright Medusa,* tells of Paul, a ne'er-do-well teenager constantly in trouble at school. He works at a theater, fabricating fanciful tales for anyone willing to listen about his past. Dreaming of a life in the lap of luxury, Paul embellishes and prevaricates about his travels and escapades among the elite. Though he loses his job at the theater after shirking his studies, Paul seems to begin believing his tales about living a life of privilege and pleasure, as he embezzles money from his employer and flees to New York City to create for himself the past he has never enjoyed in his humble circumstances but that he now wishes to have. As his funds begin to dwindle and he finds out that his crime has been discovered, as a result of which his father and others are looking for him, he recognizes that some form of reckoning must soon happen. He will be caught, or he will commit suicide. Once his money completely runs out, he jumps in front of a train and kills himself.

12 For Quentin, the idealized past consists of his childhood interactions with Caddy; for Hurstwood, his idealized past consists of his interactions with the wealthy at the club (though not his relationships with his wife and children).

This story illustrates nostalgia in its most extreme manifestation. The past for which nostalgic individuals yearn is often distorted by time and nostalgic individuals' mistaken, romanticized, or hazily recalled understandings of previous events. Paul does not desire his own past; he desires the fiction that he has created for himself and bragged about to his unbelieving listeners either at school or at the theater. He cannot maintain the illusion of living the high life once his embezzled funds dissipate. Rather than return to the middle-class life so reprehensible to him, he instead decides he would rather have no future at all. He would prefer to destroy himself rather than imagine a life of living humbly without relief. In her book *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva notes how nostalgic people are "nailed down" to their past and cannot perceive any future for themselves. Whether Paul sincerely believes his past due to mental illness, delusion, or simply an overactive imagination is irrelevant; he is determined to end his life once his desire can no longer be realized. Though living the high life might fulfill him briefly, the harsh intrusion of his real economic circumstances impinges upon that illusory happiness.

The comforting recesses of the imagination prove all the more inviting and enticing for Paul because of the drab and mundane middle-class existence in which he is firmly and seemingly inescapably ensconced before the embezzlement. Paul perceives his present circumstances as confining and not adequately representative of the upper-crust life he wishes to lead:

> It was a highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom went to Sabbath-school and learned the shorter catechism, and were interested in arithmetic; all of whom were as exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which

> they lived. Paul never went up Cordelia Street without a shudder of loathing. (175)

Paul associates his home neighborhood with monotony; nobody can enjoy their individuality or the possibility of a luxurious lifestyle in such circumstances. He also sees the routines enforced in churches and schools as emblematic of constraints that prohibit the joyous freedom he earnestly seeks. The respectable, button-down life does not thrill Paul in the same way that the adventurous, risky life of his fabricated, imagined past does. His loathing of this drab existence becomes so intense that ultimately, compared to the wonderful swanky lifestyle he hopes to live, the more mundane world becomes less desirable to Paul than death when his nostalgic illusions are brutally shattered.

The harsh reality of the natural, everyday experience in which Paul is so deeply steeped contrasts sharply with what he perceives as the beauty of the constructed, fabricated, and embellished. Paul believes that artificiality constitutes a critical component of anything that can be regarded as beautiful and desirable: "Perhaps it was because, in Paul's world, the natural nearly always wore the guise of ugliness, that a certain element of artificiality seemed to him necessary in beauty." (179) Something cannot possess beauty if it occurs naturally, as Paul would have it. It must have some element that has been created, fabricated, or constructed, much like the embellishments and bald-faced lies he tells others in a futile attempt to persuade them that he lives a much grander life than he really does. Completely made up though it is, Paul's nostalgic yearning for a past that he has never lived becomes all the more beautiful for him precisely because of its fictionalized nature. Reality cannot comfort or please without

alterations to make it more exciting; the past cannot satisfy, according to Paul, unless the imagination and the vagaries of memory transform it.

Paul finds a means of ameliorating his malaise by telling these outrageously lavish stories to his classmates about the theater at which he works. Even when his lies seem utterly preposterous and are exposed as such, he remains unabashed in perpetuating his fantasy past and present:

> He could not bear to have the other pupils think, for a moment, that he took these people [i.e., his teachers] seriously; he must convey to them that he considered it all trivial, and was there only by way of a joke, anyway. He had autograph pictures of all the members of the stock company which he showed his class-mates, telling them the most incredible stories of his familiarity with these people, of his acquaintance with the soloists who came to Carnegie Hall, his suppers with them and the flowers he sent them. When these stories lost their effect, and his audience grew listless, he would bid all the boys good-bye, announcing that he was going to travel for awhile; going to Naples, to California, to Egypt. Then, next Monday, he would slip back, conscious and nervously smiling; his sister was ill, and he would have to defer his voyage until spring. (180)

The bravado and bluster with which Paul tells his stories is rivaled only by the absurd prevarications upon which he must rely to cover up his stories about travels around the world to come. Considering such everyday concerns as getting an education trivial, Paul instead prefers to present evidence that ostensibly confirms his grandiose claims of hobnobbing with the cultural elite. Claiming that he will depart for imminent global travel, he instead finds himself unashamedly masking the fact of his remaining in the same situation, having traveled to none of the exotic locations about which he so frequently boasts. At this point, Paul still has some connection to the glitzy world through

his job as an usher; because that link still remains, he can at least survive his existence on Cordelia Street, even if he would prefer never to have to live in such circumstances.

Once Paul loses his job at the theater after his father and teachers complain that his employment is contributing to his poor performance at school, his nostalgic desire to recapture this imagined idealized past does not diminish; instead, it intensifies to the point that he can consider no other viable option than the most drastic measures to make his yearned-for dream a reality:

> It had been wonderfully simple; when they had shut him out of the theatre and concert hall, when they had taken away his bone, the whole thing was virtually determined. The rest was a mere matter of opportunity. The only thing that at all surprised him was his own courage—for he realized well enough that he had always been tormented by fear, a sort of apprehensive dread that, of late years, as the meshes of the lies he had told closed about him, had been pulling the muscles of his body tighter and tighter. Until now, he could not remember a time when he had not been dreading something. Even when he was a little boy, it was always there—behind him, or before, or on either side. There had always been the shadowed corner, the dark place into which he dared not look, but from which something seemed always to be watching him—and Paul had done things that were not pretty to watch, he knew. (183)

When he no longer possesses access to the theater and the concert hall—the sources of entertainment that allow him to live in a world for which he longs—he feels compelled to take measures to perpetuate this dream world. He is willing to do whatever it takes to make this world of fantasy a reality. He cannot act of his own free will; Paul instead acts in accordance with his nostalgic desires and yearnings, which determine for him the dangerous and ultimately fatal course of events to follow. Paul recognizes that, much like the meshes in a net, his lies have constrained him. The prevarications he has so freely shared with classmates and co-workers begin tugging at and confining his body. If he

undertakes the path of embezzlement that will enable him to briefly enjoy the ritzy life, though he will find temporary freedom, such independence will ultimately prove illusory. The lies that Paul tells are usually easy to detect at lies, although his embezzlement and subsequent fleeing to New York takes a little longer to discovery than the lies he tells about his travels and his life in the theater. The lies he tells enable the brief realization of his fantasies, yet once they are exposed as falsehoods perpetuated by his nostalgia for a past that doesn't exist will close about him, those deceptions confine his body to the meager and boring existence which he finds so utterly repellant. He does not yet consider death a viable option because he can still access the money that would finance his living the swanky lifestyle for which he yearns. Note how Paul states the decision to embezzle becomes "wonderfully simple" and "virtually determined" once he loses his access to the world of the theatre. As Timothy W. Bintrim and Mark J. Madigan observe, Paul initially is terrified of being constrained in his circumstances, but once his father, teachers, and employers intervene, his path becomes simplified: "The Paul of the opening pages is terrified of dying on Cordelia Street; the Paul of the closing pages has seen his fate and embraces it . . ." (120) He sees—and, quite frankly, welcomes—no other choice than stealing money from his employer to keep the dream so utterly incongruous with his everyday circumstances alive.

As he takes the money and brings to fruition via his fraud the dream for which he has yearned, Paul recalls his humble origins. The mundane doings on his home street now seem utterly distant from the glamorous lifestyle he can briefly enjoy until he depletes all his funds: "Cordelia Street—Ah, that belonged to another time and country! Had he not

always been thus, had he not sat here night after night, from as far back as he could remember, looking pensively over just such shimmering textures, and slowly twirling the stem of a glass like this one between his thumb and middle finger? He rather thought he had." (185) Cordelia Street—the real location of his past—becomes something alien and foreign to him, as the world of his invention instead takes on new and increasingly elaborate and realistic dimensions as he continues to pursue this dream and further mold it into a tenable reality. He deludes himself into believing that he has always lived in the lap of luxury—a lifestyle that affords the opportunity to swirl the stem of a delicate wine glass. He experiences no nostalgia for his real past; Paul instead seems grateful to have divested himself of such unpleasant and confining surroundings.

As Paul's funds dwindle to the point at which he finds himself penniless, he still refuses to acknowledge the true world from which he came, instead clinging desperately to his nostalgia for a past which he fabricated and hopes to inhabit to the bitter end. Rather than willingly going back to Cordelia Street with his father, Paul instead prefers to violently bring about his own end on his own terms: "He would show himself that he was game [i.e., willing to kill himself once his funds run out], he would finish the thing splendidly.[13] He doubted, more than ever, the existence of Cordelia Street, and for the first time he drank his wine recklessly." (187) As the money runs out and his misdeeds and disappearance are published in the Pittsburgh newspapers, Paul becomes determined to finish splendidly rather than allow himself to be dragged back into the mire of his

13 In this moment, we see a parallel between Quentin in Faulkner's text and Paul. Quentin attempts to sublimate the folly of promiscuity with the horror of incest, whereas Paul attempts to replace the folly of embezzlement with the horror of suicide.

reality. He refuses to acknowledge his true origins on Cordelia Street, doubting its existence even as the fraudulence of the reality he has constructed for himself becomes increasingly and painfully evident. Like Hurstwood, Paul seeks to live among the wealthy; however, Paul differs from Hurstwood in that whereas Paul realizes the necessity of money in keeping that dream alive, Hurstwood simply wants to find himself in the company of the wealthy. As a manager at the club, he earns a respectable wage, though not nearly enough to find himself possessing the same economic status of the elite with whom he rubbed elbows and enjoyed such camaraderie. In Cather's story, poverty destroys Paul's ability to realize his nostalgia, whereas wealth is essential to fulfilling his desire; in Dreiser's novel, wealth is not as essential a component to living among the wealthy—an individual such as Hurstwood seeks the company of the wealthy and the sense of belonging more than the specific possessions and material goods associated with the life of the wealthy. That being said, Paul himself also prefers to be a spectator rather than a participant, even when he briefly has the money to live a life comparable to theirs; he has no problem with being in the presence of people who have legitimately earned their money rather than being someone who consistently enjoys such affluence: “He had no especial desire to meet or to know any of these people; all he demanded was the right to look on and conjecture, to watch the pageant. The mere stage properties were all he contended for.” (185) Given his love of the theatrical, Paul seems more interested in observing the scenery of the wealthy life, sitting back and taking pleasure in watching the scene rather than actively participating in it.

Paul comes to recognize that when plentiful, money can enable his dreamed-for past to continue in the present; when in short supply, those funds stifle his opportunity to live as he wishes:

> He had not a hundred dollars left; and he knew now, more than ever, that money was everything, the wall that stood between all he loathed and all he wanted. The thing was winding itself up; he had thought of that one his first glorious day in New York, and had even provided a way to snap the thread. It lay on his dressing-table now; he had got it out last night when he came blindly up from dinner—but the shiny metal hurt his eyes, and he disliked the look of it, anyway. (188)

With Paul destined for a return to the mundane—though, thankfully, he will avoid prosecution for stealing the money, as his father has repaid the stolen funds to Paul's employer, who forgives the crime and will not press charges—he sees another option that will allow him to preserve the "glorious" initial impressions he has upon arriving in New York. A means by which Paul can escape from the harsh reality to which he seemingly must inevitably return presents itself; he espies a gun he could use to "snap the thread" since the end seems all but certain. However, the look of it stops him from doing the deed and violently ending his life; though he finds his future prospects utterly unbearable, he does not yet possess a nostalgia for his imagined past strong enough to hasten his destruction.

Rather than imagining more optimistically a future in which he could improve his station, much like one sees in the Horatio Alger stories of individuals who become self-made successes, Paul sees the end of his escapade in New York as the final termination of his access to the world of his dreamed-up past. He has enjoyed what opportunities he had, though he recognizes now that for him to live on his own terms rather than those of

others, he must destroy himself and any prospects for his future: “He saw everything clearly now. He had a feeling that he had made the best of it, that he had lived the sort of life he was meant to live, and for half an hour he sat staring at the revolver. But he told himself that was not the way, so he went downstairs and took a cab to the ferry.” (188) Paul would prefer to commit suicide—though not by using the firearm—since he has “made the best” of the life he wishes to have and believes “he was meant to live.” Paul realizes that he was happy when his desire was fulfilled, as Eve Sedgwick notes in her analysis of the story in “Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others”: “How common is it, in a fictional tradition ruled by *le mensonge romantique* [i.e., the romantic lie], for a powerfully desiring character to get the thing that he desires, and to learn immediately that he was right—that what he wanted really is the thing that would make him happy?” (64) The frustration of Paul's desire results not from being unable to access the world in which he chooses to immerse himself; it instead is caused by his inability to maintain his presence in this world throughout his life. He can no longer maintain the romantic lies that have enabled him to enjoy this brief stay among the rich. Unfortunately, he cannot fulfill his dream for long, as a result of which he perceives no choice but suicide, since he does not want to participate in a future in which he cannot enjoy access to the lap of luxury. Now that such a possibility no longer remains for him, he believes he has no choice but to kill himself. The gun does not give him the way through which he wishes to terminate his life, so he instead seeks another method. A self-inflicted gunshot wound in a hotel room is a private method of suicide, whereas jumping in front of a train is a more public method of suicide, in which others could potentially

see him, including the engineer or passersby. Though he refrains from shooting himself in this moment, he plunges off an embankment in front a speeding train, in that last fleeting moment wishing he could have lived longer, if only to enjoy the opulence of his imagined and desired past all the more—a prospect no longer possible for him.

Paul decides to plunge off an embankment and drop in front of the path of a speeding train, which will strike him before it can stop. In midair, Paul realizes that he should not have been so hasty, as he could have experienced other pleasures about which he imagined yet never enjoyed firsthand: "As he fell, the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness, the vastness of what he had left undone. There flashed through his brain, clearer than ever before, the blue of Adriatic water, the yellow of Algerian sands." (Cather 189) In the heat of the moment, he had considered all these sensory experiences inaccessible because of the likely harsh return to the reality of his situation. Yet Paul does not consider the extent to which he might have been able to enjoy at least some of these sensations and keep alive in some part the imagined past for which he yearns. Rather than his past life flashing before him with death imminent, which is so often considered what occurs in the last moments as life ends, Paul instead thinks about what could have been in the future relative to his fabricated past. Paul's vision of the future is obstructed to the point that he cannot imagine enjoying any vestiges of the dreamed-for past he must ostensibly leave behind entirely; he instead sees the drudgery of everyday life from which he presumably cannot escape. As death rapidly approaches, he realizes that the possibility still could remain of enjoying more of the experiences which he associates with the life of the rich.

Once the train strikes him, Paul no longer can see these visions of what could have been, had he possessed the means to continue fulfilling his dreams: “Then, because the picture making mechanism was crushed [recalling not just the theater but also the emergent technology of the cinema manifested in crude technologies such as the kinetoscope and vitagraph], the disturbing vision was crushed, the disturbing visions flashed into black, and Paul dropped back into the immense design of things.” (189) The disturbing vision—which consists of the great experiences Paul will never enjoy because of his imminent death—disappears when the train strikes the young man, who in the moment of impact can no longer see these visions of what he has missed. Whereas Paul had attempted to design his own life before committing suicide, he now finds himself forced back into a larger design, one beyond his ability to control or manipulate. Immediately prior to his death, Paul does not have the experience so frequently repeated in death scenes in a variety of media, in which a character's life flashes before her or his eyes. Instead, he focuses upon a part of his life that he would have liked to experience, though the opportunity never presented itself: traveling abroad and seeing luxurious and grand sites around the globe. Even as death rapidly approaches, Paul does not lament his disinterest in school, or the distance he maintains from the family members. The fantasy imagined by Paul in the waning moments of his life is a dubious one, like that carefully maintained by Gatsby in Fitzgerald's novel. Paul has to involve himself in criminal activity to get to New York, and barring an unforeseen change in his work ethic, he most likely would have to rely upon such scurrilous conduct to fund his travels abroad.

During his life, Paul wants to be able to see beautiful objects up close, particularly at the theater, while he is a spectator. In death, however, Paul will remain distant from the world of art so utterly fascinating to him, as Wendy K. Perriman notes: “He dies, instead, in a swirl of movement that returns him 'back' to where he came from; he will rejoin the cosmic dance but will remain outside the kingdom of art.” (59) Paul is also freed from the scrutiny of others watching him, as Judith Butler notes in her discussion of the story in *Bodies That Matter*: “Released from prohibitive scrutiny, the body frees itself only through its own dissolution.” (166) By telling such fantastic and obviously untrue stories to others, Paul receives others' attention. They are watching and scrutinizing him; he even makes a sensation in the Pittsburgh press when he steals the money. Death frees him from that scrutiny but also renders any connection to the world of art he loves utterly impossible. Like Hurstwood and Quentin, Paul finds the real world untenable and inaccessible in a way pleasing to him; in such circumstances, such nostalgic individuals cannot imagine a meaningful future, as a result of which they deny themselves any future at all.

Chapter 4: “The Dead Look Alive and the Living Look Dead”: Nostalgic Destruction Directed Outward

I

The previous chapter of this dissertation explored nostalgic individuals' self-destructive tendencies, which resulted from their frustration with an inability to change their circumstances to conform more closely to their sought-after ideal situation. We will now examine how nostalgic desire can cause such individuals to direct violence outside the self toward others to create that yearned-for change. The complex relationship between the desire to change others—even destroying them, if need be—and the attempt to preserve the circumstances of a desirable or pleasant situation manifests itself in Renato Rosaldo's chapter “Imperialist Nostalgia” from his book *Culture and Truth*. Writing about individuals such as missionaries, anthropologists, and other emissaries of Western culture who seek to promulgate and disseminate the changes of Western culture in societies largely or entirely untouched by those influences, Rosaldo argues that even the most well-intentioned individuals ultimately contribute to the power asymmetries implicit in the attempt to dominate and change cultures and tribes because such representatives of the West “are no more likely to avoid a certain complicity with domination than they are to avoid having strong feelings toward the people they study.” (69) Regardless of whether these cultures react to the outsiders' presence with enthusiasm, indifference, or hostility, those societies being observed feel the pressure exerted by the nostalgic West to conform to both Western ideals and a nostalgic image of the better, quainter, and putatively more civilized past. Seeking to alter inexorably the

structures of the society they observe and with which they interact, these representatives of Western culture look back to the society prior to Western incursions as an ideal that they seek to preserve at the same time that their putatively reformatory actions seek to create change. Rosaldo notes this paradox inherent in the Westerners' "long[ing] for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed. Therefore, my concern resides with a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing what they themselves have transformed." (69) Though Rosaldo's discussion of nostalgia focuses upon its manifestation in imperialist and colonialist projects, I want to extend the notion of imperialist nostalgia as a yearning for what someone has destroyed as such a desire appears in the early twentieth-century United States, during which time whites attempt to exert control and gain power over racially "othered" individuals. On the one hand, people seek to preserve situations as they were—the idealized past becomes something worthy of keeping free from taint. However, conversely, the romanticized past becomes equally distant and inaccessible despite the attempts of individuals to change society, whether through violence or through less blatantly forceful or threatening methods of persuasion.

In the preceding chapter of this dissertation, I examined literary works in which characters committed suicide because the present can never adequately resemble the past for which they nostalgically yearn. As I noted in a quote from Kushner's *American Suicide* early in the previous chapter, individuals can direct their violence one of two ways when they are dissatisfied with the present: either inwardly in the form of suicide, or outwardly in violence against others, which will constitute the focus of this chapter.

The direction assumed by such violence depends upon to whom responsibility is ascribed for the widening gap between the undesirable present and the sought-after past; if individuals perceive the fault as their own, they will direct the violence toward themselves, whereas people ascribing the fault to others will act outwardly violent. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which southern white characters act violently toward black characters in both Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* and William Faulkner's *Light in August* as an attempt to restore an idealized antebellum past in which whites hold largely if not completely unquestioned power over blacks. The damaged and wounded bodies of blacks, upon which whites focus their violence and aggression, remind of the dangers of defying whites' wishes for unquestioned control. The impact of that violence remains firmly carved in the community's memory. While whites attempt to preserve those memories and put them to their own politically expedient needs, some pockets of resistance remain, and the violence can also spur blacks to continue the fight for progress. In this chapter, nostalgia functions primarily as a violent reactionary response on the part of whites that manifests itself in vehement opposition to the advances blacks seek to make, buoyed by emancipation while also frustrated by Jim Crow laws, the reversal of gains made during Reconstruction, and other discriminatory measures. White males see violence motivated by nostalgia as a means of preserving the politically expedient image of an ostensibly silenced and compliant black race, even if the reality of black resistance complicates or contradicts such an image.

Much of this dissertation has focused upon the effects caused by violence, both discursive and physical. Taken to its extreme, violence—whether enacted in the cause of

nostalgia or for other purposes—can ostensibly silence those who die as a result of the corporeal damage inflicted upon them. The logic seems intuitive: when a person dies, they presumably lack the ability to give voice to their thoughts and ideas. Even in death, however, pockets of resistance through expression remain possible. In *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*, Sharon Patricia Holland notes that the narratives of individuals who experience violent and fatal attacks need not be relegated to silence: "Embracing the subjectivity of death allows marginalized peoples to speak about the unspoken–to name the places *within* and *without* their cultural milieu where . . . they have slipped between the cracks of language." (4-5; Holland's emphasis) Characters that die in narratives need not necessarily lose their agency or voice. Even in death, they can still speak and express the ways in which their lives and deaths contravene and subvert prevailing restrictive social attitudes, changes to which individuals resist through nostalgic yearning. The violence experienced both collectively by blacks and individually by characters such as Joe Christmas in *Light in August* or Josh Green in *The Marrow of Tradition* can remind those who remain alive to struggle against those whites in power who continue to maintain such inequities through such nostalgia-inflected violence and intimidation.

Though the violence enacted against individuals can be quite brutal, its outward public manifestations can often be quite the opposite; as Rosaldo notes, the perception of nostalgia can often seem much more benevolent, assuming "a pose of 'innocent yearning' both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination." (70) Despite the often saccharine and lachrymose representation of

nostalgia as a benevolent impulse, the manifestation of that nostalgia can cause much more damage: “[M]uch of imperialist nostalgia's force resides in its association with (indeed, its disguise as) more genuinely innocent tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life.” (70) This quote harkens back to the most common popular cultural conception of nostalgia—a putatively harmless, sweet, and well-intended recollection of all the happy yesterdays that no longer exist, yet which would be clearly preferable to the inferior present. Rosaldo notes that such sweetness constitutes a disguise rather than the reality of imperialist nostalgia, the violence of which results in a paradox noted by Rosaldo: “Imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: A person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention.” (70) For those who direct their aggressive and murderous impulses outward as a means of preserving an idealized past, the violence serves an immediate function—ostensibly neutralizing or effacing a threat to stability and the status quo. At the same time, a person can regret that the violence does not fulfill the desire, and yearn for the past that still remains inaccessible.

When Western individuals become invested in the lives that they seek to change, even if violently and reprehensibly, they take personally the ways in which the societies they impact are irreversibly changed:

> “We” (who believe in progress) valorize innovation, then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Such forms of longing thus appear closely related to secular notions of progress. When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses. (70)

On the one hand, individuals seek progress and yearn for change to the extent that they impose their ideas upon others. By the same token, they seek to keep in place the past that seems more innocent. Though nostalgic individuals often resist change, they fight it largely to the extent that it negatively impacts their own lives; they will happily exert such changing influences upon the lives of others. As we will see below, the economic progress enjoyed by the residents of Wilmington in Chesnutt's novel benefits both white and black residents of the town, much to the chagrin of white supremacists. When progress occurs and the ways of the past become outmoded, the effects of such change cannot be entirely controlled. For those who would prefer to maintain circumstances as they currently are and have been in the past, such change becomes a source of displeasure to be resisted at all costs—even through the expedient of violence if necessary.

We must exercise great care and caution in recognizing that nostalgia, both generally and as experienced and manifested within both of these novels, is not a phenomenon occurring consistently and identically in a wide range of historical and geographical context. Rosaldo notes that—contrary to the belief in societies such as that in the United States, in which nostalgia often manifests itself forcefully and palpably—the notion of nostalgia does not exist as a transhistorical concept that applies across all cultures in all places: "[E]ven the history of the concept in Western Europe reveals the historical and cultural specificity of our notion of nostalgia." (71) In the introduction to this dissertation, I noted the history of the term "nostalgia" as a socially constructed idea that has evolved over time from a threat to one's physical health to a mental affliction. The nostalgia that serves as a means of legitimating and propagating violence against

others—much as we see in the violence directed against blacks seeking to make gains in the early twentieth century after progress stalls and, to an extent, regresses post-Reconstruction—does not exist as an idea that has been defined and applied consistently across time. Instead, nostalgia exists as the product of the time, the place, and the socioeconomic context within which its arbiters exist. For example, in the Southern worlds of Chesnutt's and Faulkner's novels, the nostalgia experienced by white residents does not neatly overlap with the nostalgia experienced in different historical and geographical contexts; indeed, in some societies and cultures, the very idea of nostalgia is something utterly incomprehensible and resides nowhere in the cultural consciousness. As I have noted earlier in this dissertation, the definition of nostalgia has changed over time; Rosaldo notes that such change suggests the ways in which we cannot regard nostalgia as endemic to all human experiences: "The changing meanings of 'nostalgia' in Western Europe (not to mention that many cultures have no such concept at all) indicate that 'our' feelings of tender yearning are neither as natural nor as panhuman, and therefore not necessarily as innocent, as one might imagine." (71) Not all cultures even possess or revere the notion of nostalgia; one can understand, quite justifiably, that blacks who have suffered terrible injustices and indignities as a result of the existence of slavery in the United States look to perpetuate resistance, progress and change rather than imagining a better past. Though some whites attempt to circulate ideas such as the happy plantation myth, such ideas do not accurately represent the desires of at the very least many blacks who suffered at the hands of slavery and possess no desire whatsoever to have such policies ever reoccur—whether officially or through unofficial restrictive discriminatory

policies that seek to restore whites to places of dominant power while minimizing or negating black political and socioeconomic gains brought about in part by the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction. The black community's attempts at progress motivate white nostalgia and the subsequent violence attending it.

The changes occurring in American society at the turn of the twentieth century suggest, no matter what nostalgic individuals believe, that a return to the idealized past is never quite fully possible, even though violence apparently still becomes a means of trying to bring back those putatively better times: "Mourning the passing of traditional society and imperialist nostalgia cannot neatly be separated from one another. Both attempt to use a mask of innocence to cover their involvement with processes of domination." (86) Innocence and naïveté do not adequately mask the destruction of individuals who attempt to create a society that, in the example of many white Americans resisting the gains of Reconstruction, acts violently against others. The sweetness of the view of the past does not cover up the damage wrought against others: "Nostalgia at play with domination . . . uses compelling tenderness to draw attention away from the relation's fundamental inequality. In my view, ideological discourses work more through selective attention than outright suppression." (87) The ideology of nostalgia tries to cover over the power asymmetry inherent in the situation. For examples, some whites may attempt to create a situation in which they exert power over others in ways that do not blatantly expose the mechanics of domination and disempowerment.

Imperialist nostalgia seeks to keep alive the very things it seeks to destroy; in American culture of the early twentieth century, such nostalgia might attempt to keep

alive the stereotypes implicit in the power asymmetry between whites and racial minorities that many supremacists attempt to enforce. In her discussion of the 1922 silent documentary *Nanook of the North*, Fatimah Tobing Rony notes that filmmaker Robert Flaherty employs what Rony refers to as a romantic ethnographic taxidermy that "seeks to make that which is dead look as if it were still living." (304) Rony speaks of how Flaherty constructs and films scenes that reassert stereotypes of the Inuit people; we can also consider the notion of taxidermy as the attempt of predominantly white power structures in early twentieth-century American society to preserve a certain politically advantageous (for whites, at least) perception of the relation between white and other racial minorities—predominantly, though not exclusively, African-Americans. Though taxidermy often refers in common parlance to the preservation of animals, I am not in any way suggesting that the notion of taxidermy as I here employ it implies that any of the people either using or being described by this politically expedient romanticizing taxidermy inherently possess animalistic and presumably subhuman or nonhuman tendencies. The notion of taxidermy shows how those in power attempt to freeze and silence individuals in the past and strip them of their humanity, reducing them to stereotypes and trying to make them neatly conform to the taxidermists' nostalgic vision of an idealized past. This freezing occurs to the extent that those in power attempt to exert control over the stories told about disenfranchised and disempowered groups of people, just as the white-controlled press in Wilmington attempts to control the narrative of the black-white struggle in Chesnutt's novel, and as the white townspeople in Faulkner's novel create their own stories, both collectively and individually, to attempt to cope with

Joe Christmas' unexpected and ambiguous racial identity once they become aware of the truth of it. Individuals are reduced to narrative and stories over which they often have little or no control. As Elaine Scarry notes in *The Body in Pain*, "Political power . . . entails the power of self-description." (279) I would extend Scarry's argument even further by noting that political power entails the power not only to describe oneself and the community or communities with which one associates or identifies or both, but also to describe others who do not neatly conform to the expectations of those who currently wield power.

When a taxidermist preserves an animal in a certain position—for example, a lion looking ferocious, with open jaws, bared teeth, and an aggressive stance—that individual creates a narrative in the destruction and reanimation of a once-alive being who has since died. The taxidermist makes choices about the ways in which that individual is represented, speaking for them rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. On the one hand, taxidermy seeks to reanimate a dead life form; on the other hand, it purports to arrange, position, narrativize, and represent that once-living being in ways politically expedient and advantageous to the hunter and the one with enough power to maintain the edge in the power asymmetry: "[A]s the restoration of the life like, taxidermy is itself postulated as a response to a sense of loss. In other words, the Utopia of life-like reproduction depends upon, and reacts to, the fact of death. It is a strenuous attempt to recover, by means which must exceed those of convention, a state which is (and must be) recognized as lost." (Rony 304) Individuals can yearn after something once they realize that they can no longer reclaim it, as occurs in the case of nostalgia. Once they destroy

something as a means of exerting power over it, the power asymmetry continues beyond death as individuals attempt to create a utopian vision of the world that shows the world as it should be—the world that the destroyer can and ostensibly does dominate. In the South described in these novels, whites attempt—with a limited degree of success—to exert control over the narratives told by black bodies as a means of attempting without success to satisfy white nostalgia for antebellum times.

The images of dominated people do not line up nicely and neatly with the much more complex and heterogeneous realities that taxidermy ignores. Rony notes how Flaherty relies upon stereotypes—a notion that inheres in the work of all those who try to disempower others as a means of legitimating nostalgia: “Since indigenous peoples were assumed to be already dying if not dead, the ethnographic 'taxidermist' turned to artifice, seeking an image more true to the posited original.” (304) The image becomes a simulacrum—a copy of the stereotype that might have some basis in cultural practice, yet which has also been so grossly distorted into caricature to the extent that no such original could possibly exist: “When Flaherty stated, 'One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit,' he was not just referring to his own artistry, but to the preconditions for the effective, 'true' representation of so-called vanishing culture.” (304) Flaherty notes that in attempting to represent others—in trying to preserve a representation of them for posterity's sake—some measure of distortion becomes necessary to represent what he refers to as the “true spirit” of the people being represented emblematically by the individual. In attempting to restore the dead for politically advantageous purposes, “the dead look alive and the living look dead.” (322) In other words, those living individuals

who do not neatly fit the ideal promulgated by the hunters attempting to wield their taxidermic authority are consigned to discursive oblivion and even risk physical imperilment and corporeal damage, while those individuals manipulated to conform to the stereotype seem more real because their image more neatly aligns with those perceptions promulgated and perpetuated in the service of white nostalgia.

Nostalgia, destruction, and taxidermic preservation can occur not just in the dynamic medium of film discussed by Rony but also in a range of representational modes, including the literary works discussed in this dissertation or the static paintings of Frederic Remington discussed by Jane Tompkins, who describes Remington's paintings as participating in a form of nostalgia that she argues attempts to keep alive what has died—or, more specifically, has been killed. Though Remington's paintings are imperialist and racist, "Remington plays the part of the preserver, as if by catching the figures in color and line he could save their lives and absorb some of that life into himself." (183) The individual who represents a scene—whether in speech or, as in Remington's paintings, through the visual medium—controls the ability to preserve or destroy the subject of that depiction. As a result, the animals in Remington's paintings are preserved in the form that Remington sees fit in which to preserve them. Nostalgia functions similarly in terms of how power asymmetries work. Individuals exercising their power over others possess the ability to preserve the representation of individuals (and, to return to Slotkin's discussion as cited in chapter 2, the myths and stories about given cultures or groups of cultures) can invoke outmoded forms of representation to serve their purposes and nostalgic desires.

However violently such nostalgia manifests itself, the preservation of the past seems innocuous, effortless, and well-intended, and (whether in film, painting, or literature) it is conveyed with immediacy, almost as if we are there as events unfold. Donna Haraway notes the centrality of realism and the veracity of these nostalgic displays of preservation in her essay "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936":

> Taxidermy became the art most suited to the epistemological and aesthetic stance of realism. The power of this stance is in its magical effects: what is so painfully constructed appears effortlessly, spontaneously found, discovered, simply there if one will only look. Realism does not appear to be a point of view, but appears as a "peephole into the jungle" where peace may be witnessed. (254)

Those in power—whether hunters in the displays discussed by Haraway or whites seeking to assert their power in Faulkner's and Chesnutt's novels—construct a narrative in which they assert control over those upon whom the violence and destruction have been focused. The narratives constructed by those in power about those being disempowered must have the veneer of realism, as if such inequities of power have seemingly always existed and seem utterly justified in the present and future. The realism of nostalgic displays of the past—whether museum displays or stories about specific groups of people, whether it be the Inuit in Flaherty's film, the Native-Americans in the Buffalo Bill Museum, or the blacks in the stories told by individuals in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century southern United States—gives the audience a sense of presumably being there, even though that perspective is politically charged and motivated.

For blacks in the world of Chesnutt's and Faulkner's novels, the desire for progress in the future sharply contrasts with and strains against whites' insistence upon a return to a presumably better past of sharply unequal distributions of power and few, if any, opportunities for advancement. When the southerners' nostalgic vision is compromised or threatened (much as occurs with Joe Christmas' troubling of ostensibly clearly distinguishable racial identities), violence against such racially othered individuals becomes a means of attempting to reassert dominance; such measures can be met by blacks with more violence since they do not harbor the same nostalgia as whites do. Whites wishing to restore an idealized past that they have preserved use violence against blacks, who in turn act violently as a means of resisting white nostalgia. In both *Light in August* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, white characters cling desperately to antiquated stereotypical and hierarchical notions of racial identity; when the blacks upon whom such limiting characterizations are foisted attempt to resist, be seen in all their humanity, and achieve some semblance of progress, the jarring change in the collective white cultural perception causes sufficient anger to evoke the violence manifest in both of these novels, whether in the unrest of Wilmington, North Carolina, or in the brutal murder and mutilation of Joe Christmas.

II

The focal moment of violence in Chesnutt's novel occurs when, after much antagonism and contention between the black and white racial enclaves in Wilmington,

racially-motivated violence and uprising occurs.[1] Such widespread violence seems utterly necessary, and a number of innocent victims are claimed by the uprising, including the light-skinned black Dr. Miller's infant son, who becomes a part of "the wholly superfluous slaughter of a harmless people, whom a show of force would have been quite sufficient to overawe." (290) With whites randomly shooting or harming blacks, no resident of the town seems safe; some of the blacks decide to resist the whites, and one of the resistors says: "'A gun is mo' dangerous ter de man in front of it dan ter de man behin' it. Dey 're gwine ter kill us anyhow; an we 're tired,--we read de newspapers,--an ' we 're tired er bein' shot down like dogs, widout jedge er jury. We 'd ruther die fightin' dan be stuck like pigs in a pen!'" (295) The blacks recognize that whites will behave violently toward blacks and treat them like animals no matter what, as long as whites desire to restore the power inequities so prevalent in antebellum times. Satisfied only by obedience, white males consider the meek acceptance of blacks the only acceptable response to their demands. Any form of resistance on the black community's part will likely further enrage and antagonize the whites, as Dr. Miller notes: "[T]he mere

1 I choose to employ the word "uprising" to define the events taking place in the novel, instead of the word "riot" often used to describe the violence. Though often categorized as a widespread riot, the events occurring in Wilmington in 1898 and the subsequent fictionalized retelling in Chesnutt's 1901 novel are represented as such that, although much wanton violence does indeed occur, its basis is clearly premeditated by the whites planning the violence as the culmination of their bilious media campaign to foment animosity against the blacks, who themselves are not unaware of the forthcoming hostilities. In an article on the epistemology of racial violence in Chesnutt's fiction, Bryan Wagner notes that the violence taking place in the novel lacks unexpectedness: "Chesnutt portrays the riot not as a spontaneous eruption of mob violence but, rather, as a carefully planned police action designed to exert direct control over the sidewalks and streets of Wilmington." (328) I use "uprising" in place of "riot" to the extent that the idea of a riot often suggests an uncontrollable or unexpected element to the violence being wrought on the participants in the violence. While I do not deny that such wantonness is entirely lacking in either the historical account of Wilmington or Chesnutt's subsequent fictional representation of it, I choose to use "uprising" instead insofar as it indicates a core element of the struggle and violence manifested in this moment: a struggle planned by whites and anticipated by blacks over the power, whether economic or social, in the community, and the attempt to maintain some progress within that same community.

knowledge that some of the negroes contemplated resistance would only further inflame the infuriated whites." (295) Unwilling to see beyond the limiting types that divest members of a racial group of their individual humanity—much like the Inuit people discussed by Fatimah Tobing Rony who are reduced to ridiculously oversimplified stereotypes by ethnographers and anthropologists who insist on asserting control over the collective cultural narrative—white men in the community prefer to fall back upon the simplified versions of racial types that they believe establish an historical precedent. According to the story told by whites in this community, blacks should remain subservient to whites on the basis of their presumed inferiority. Consequently, the success achieved in the novel by characters such as Dr. Miller, who opens a successful and thriving hospital serving blacks in the community, becomes a point of contention insofar as it sharply contradicts the whites' past perception of blacks as not only subservient but also pliable to the will of white owners and overseers. This malleability of will stems in part from the violence that slave owners so readily endorse and overseers so mercilessly dole out; this history of violence remains potent insofar as some whites in the community regard bodily harm as the only means by which blacks can be taught to behave. Whites view the pain inflicted upon black bodies as a necessary expedient to maintain order, ensure discipline, and perpetuate white dominance in the region. What such assumptions fail to realize, however, is that the same violence that ostensibly keeps blacks in line also serves as a salient reminder to the black community of the injustices they have suffered and against which they must assiduously fight whenever their hard-fought progress is

frustrated, much as happened in the wake of white resentment and reactionary politics following Reconstruction.

Rather than having such opportunities be available to blacks, the leading white males of the Wilmington community instead believe that those chances should be made available to the upcoming and future generations of whites who will presumably continue to illustrate the inherent superiority of whites to blacks, upon which basis such white supremacists justify their vile screed. If the children and young adults constitute the future of the Wilmington community, the white supremacists in leadership believe that both their own rights and those of generations to come should not be jeopardized by the gains being made by blacks in the community.

The two characters most perceived by whites in the novel as a source of pride for the future—the shiftless ne'er do well and murderer Tom Delamere, and General Carteret's sickly son Theodore (Dodie)--offer little promise for a robust, healthy white masculinity that can readily seize control of the community and instill pride in its members. Held up by other characters in the novel as the ideal of white masculinity in the upcoming generation, Delamere instead proves to be a shiftless, cowardly murderer and inveterate gambler. As Warren Hedges notes, Chesnutt uses the example of Delamere to show the absurdity in assuming that whites exhibit better behavior, ostensibly manifested in their lineages and bloodlines: "[S]ince Delamere has no African ancestry, Chesnutt can use him as a clear example of the hypocrisy underlying white supremacy's equation between 'pure' blood and 'civilization.'" (236) According to Hedges, the assumptions about blood-based inappropriate behavior are undermined by the behavior of white men

such as Tom: “If the new generation of African Americans are reputedly 'degenerate,' then what future for white Anglo men does Tom represent?” (237)

Whereas Delamere's behavior suggests a less-than-promising future for white males of the South, Dodie Carteret seems to offer little future at all, given his weakness and proclivity for illness and physical infirmity; nonetheless, the little one becomes the white supremacists' focus of hope for a future in white power can become fully entrenched and established once again, as Jae H. Roe notes: “[T]he child Miller is about to save is, from the beginning of the novel, identified as the embodiment of a Southern feudal tradition based on colonial racism; in effect, the text is framed by the passion and urgency of Whites' desire to perpetuate the traditional sociopolitical structure of the South, thus serving to illuminate the marrow of that tradition.” (238) When Dr. Miller is called on to save Dodie at the novel's conclusion, Miller is saving the child who simultaneously represents both the past to be preserved and passed on, and the future to be protected and bestowed upon Dodie and others of successive generations. White supremacists would justify their violence toward blacks by arguing that Dodie and Delamere are among whites who have a natural, blood-born right to wield power over those who are supposedly their inferiors due to their racial identities. Chesnutt here seeks to trouble and undermine blood-based accounts of racial identity—which posit a biologically based and presumably transhistorically unchangeable hierarchy of identity—do not follow logically, given the loathsome behavior (in Delamere's case) or lack of physical hardiness (in Dodie's case) so manifest in the community's prominent examples of promising white masculinity of the future. The examples of Dodie and Delamere cut

through to the marrow of tradition, exposing historically grounded arguments of racial superiority as artificial, prejudicial, and utterly irrational. The collective white male nostalgia for the antebellum past is predicated in part on the promulgation and perpetuation of such utterly inaccurate stereotypes and accounts of race.

Protecting the interests of individuals such as Dodie and Delamere, however questionable or sickly these individuals seem, becomes the focus of nostalgic and violent white supremacist rhetoric within Wilmington. When the seemingly natural right of these white individuals to what is presumably deservedly theirs is questioned and challenged by the progress of blacks improving their station, then whites consider violence an appropriate and effective reaction to restore the idealized power disparities of the past. That being said, some of the white characters believe they have demonstrated benevolence toward black characters, though they at the same time refuse to be subjected to the will of blacks in the community. In conversation, Carteret rebuts criticism from others that he does not have at heart the best interest of the blacks in the community and his attempts to restore the past are purely meant to benefit the whites in the town: "'You are mistaken, sir, in imagining me hostile to the negro,' explained Carteret. 'On the contrary, I am friendly to his best interests. I give him employment; I pay taxes for schools to educate him, and for court-houses and jails to keep him in order. I merely object to being governed by an inferior and servile race.'" (25) Carteret notes his willingness to support blacks indirectly through the paying of taxes that help fund education. Carteret gives employment as well, although at what wages and with what degree of humane treatment compared to white employees remains questionable. He also

states that his taxes pay for “court-houses and jails to keep him in order.” Note that Carteret refers to the black race as embodied in an individual gendered as male. Carteret emphasizes and inadvertently points to the anxieties some white males, particularly those in the southern United States of America, have about black males. He feels that blacks must be controlled and not allowed to have too much power; as a result, he welcomes the creation, maintenance, and enforcement of the formal juridical and legal apparatuses that (in combination with more informal, though no less violent or threatening, punitive measures such as lynch mobs) dole out punishment and imprisonment as needed to maintain control over the black populace—especially the black male populace. Such a need for control suggests the anxiety eroding white males' nostalgic vision of blacks who happily subjugate themselves to the will of whites, as sometimes manifests itself in ideas such as the happy plantation myth. Carteret finds especially problematic the inclusion of blacks in the government to the extent that he and other whites must relinquish the control they find so essential to maintaining the power asymmetry to which they so strongly cling and upon which their nostalgia for a past of power and control is predicated. Such an attempt to maintain control with blacks quiescently and timidly accepting their disempowerment does not happen so easily, however; the black community is much less willing to conform to the stereotypes of servility, however ostensibly benevolent, of whites such as Carteret.

The success and improvement of blacks within the community does not thrill the white residents of Wilmington, even if the community as a whole can benefit from such prosperity. Gerald Ianovici discusses burgeoning black success and prosperity, and the

rigid enforcement of constructed racial hierarchies by whites: “The irrelevancy of personal success to the construction of southern black identity demonstrates how the color line maintains strict racial hierarchy, contrary to claims that it functioned neutrally in keeping the races 'separate but equal.'” (Ianovici 41) Even when blacks succeed—presumably overcoming the blood-based inferiority that whites believe blacks cannot surmount—such success constitutes a source of anxiety for whites, who discard and overlook such prosperity as something of which blacks are unworthy and of which whites are presumably much more deserving by putatively biologically transmitted right. Such an assertion of the difference between blacks and whites is certainly not naturalized, given the fact that whites must constantly and anxiously reinforce and reassert these ideas, contrary to all the evidence surrounding them that blacks are indeed capable of great success in a variety of fields.

Much of the white anxiety stems from the ascendancy of blacks into positions of social, political, and economic power following Reconstruction, as noted by Bryan Wagner: “In these moments of deep racial anxiety, the sight of African Americans in places of economic power disrupts the racial truths that orient Southern whites in place and time. . . . At the novel's close, local whites respond to this crisis by taking it to the streets, rifles in hand, in a hysterical attempt to make the African American middle class disappear.” (Wagner 312) With their understanding of how racial identities supposedly operate in a hierarchy upset by black progress and gains, whites in Chesnutt's novel

decide to violently efface the community that has gained an apparently disproportionately large share of the progress that has followed the Civil War's end.[2]

Wagner discusses an important and significant moment in the novel illustrating that although much of the nostalgia perpetuated by whites is voiced by men frustrated by the progress and inroads made by blacks in the community, sometimes women can participate in the perpetuation of that nostalgia for presumably happier times as well. He quotes Chesnutt's depiction of Polly Ochiltree's horror at noticing that the former mansion of a white community member has been rebuilt as the colored hospital: "'The new colored hospital, indeed, and the colored doctor! Before the war the negroes were all healthy, and when they got sick we took care of them ourselves! Hugh Poindexter has sold the graves of his ancestors to a negro,--I should have starved first!'" (Chesnutt 127) Progress has manifested itself in a number of ways, one of which is the increased visibility of not just African Americans in the community, but also the buildings in which they live and work. Polly is not opposed to progress *per se*, but she believes that those changes will benefit and perpetuate the white supremacist ideology that she has unquestioningly accepted throughout her long life: "She knows that modern brick buildings will inevitably replace antebellum mansions, but she believes changes will only strengthen the city's racial hierarchy." (Wagner 315) Polly does not resist all progress; her

2 Several critics have written about white anxiety over blacks' economic gains in the novel. For example, Stephen P. Knadler argues that the novel "depicts racial nationalism as ideologically linked with the development of market culture in the New South." (441) Furthermore, Angelo Rich Robinson notes that "[t]he whites in *The Marrow of Tradition* want to return to the days of absolute white power when whites had undeniable social and economic advantage." (103) Bryan Wagner asserts that white supremacists in Chesnutt's novel "try to buttress the supposedly self-evident truths of white supremacy of enforcing protocols of racial visibility that designate African Americans as their city's permanent underclass." (312)

nostalgia results from opposition to the gains that enable the blacks in the community to enjoy heightened visibility in a number of ways, including in the construction of a number of new edifices. Polly's ideas complicate our understanding of nostalgia insofar as they suggest that not all nostalgic people are necessarily opposed to all progress in and of itself.

Making the community fit for subsequent generations becomes a pressing concern, particularly since the white race perceives a threat to its power that needs to be not just neutralized but eradicated. Captain McBane's description of the changes in blacks' position in society and behavior toward whites suggest the anger brimming over in the white community about the putative outrages performed by blacks in seemingly flagrant defiance of the unbalanced hierarchy in which whites have wielded power over blacks:

> "And now that you have a son, major," remarked the gentleman first described, as he lit one of the major's cigars, "you 'll be all the more interested in doing something to make this town fit to live in, which is what we came up to talk about. Things are in an awful condition! A negro justice of the peace has opened an office on Market Street, and only yesterday summoned a white man to appear before him. Negro lawyers get most of the business in the criminal court. Last evening a group of young white ladies, going quietly along the street arm-in-arm, were forced off the sidewalk by a crowd of negro girls. Coming down the street just now, I saw a spectacle of social equality and negro domination that made my blood boil with indignation,—a white and a black convict, chained together, crossing the city in charge of a negro officer! We cannot stand that sort of thing, Carteret,—it is the last straw! Something must be done, and that quickly!" (Chesnutt 33)

As the new generation matures, the need for preserving the social stratification of the antebellum south becomes even more necessary. The increasing power of blacks, coupled with the presumed outrages against whites detailed in the above description, infuriate

these individuals who believe so strongly in the supremacy of the white race. The outrages range from ostensibly unacceptable advances—a "negro justice of the peace," for example—to perceived blatant insults such as white women "forced off the sidewalk" by black women passing by. McBane saves his greatest disgust and most bilious display of anger for the shackling of black and white prisoners alongside one another, accompanied by a black officer. As mentioned above, Carteret considers these formal entities of jurisprudence beneficial, yet McBane seems them as potentially dangerous and contributing to the subversion of white rule. McBane's anger results from the blacks' participation in and enforcement of the judicial apparatus, which presumably should function to legitimate and perpetuate the power of whites within the community and remind blacks that they must remain under control rather than be allowed too much leeway. According to the historical precedents nostalgically yearned after by men such as McBane, the juridical and reformatory systems should be keeping whites in power over blacks, rather than allowing blacks to gain equal footing of any measure with whites.

To restore the putatively proper power positions of whites and blacks as they were in the idealized and nostalgically sought-after antebellum past, Major Carteret, publisher of a prominent local paper, schemes with several of his colleagues–including General Belmont and the especially nefarious Captain McBane, a former overseer who has few reservations about harshly mistreating blacks–to assume power over the blacks in the community and show them their putative proper place. White supremacists such as Belmont, Carteret, and McBane hope to reverse the gains achieved by blacks through juridical and democratic means; though the supremacists plan to begin their attack

through a calumnious newspaper campaign, they are willing to resort to violence if necessary to maintain the white power for which they nostalgically yearn:

> The laws by which it had been sought to put the negroes on a level with the whites must be swept away in theory, as they had failed in fact. If it were impossible, without a further education of public opinion, to secure the repeal of the fifteenth amendment, it was at least the solemn duty of the state to endeavor, through its own constitution, to . . . confine the negro to that inferior condition for which nature had evidently designed him. (79)

The white supremacists in the novel begin a campaign to foment racial violence so that what they perceive as the superior past in which whites hold power over blacks can presumably be restored. They believe that nature dictates the inferiority of blacks; presumably, the racial stratification advocated by the white supremacists represents an ideal putatively worth resuscitating and implementing in the community's daily life, even if whites must take to the streets with rifles to enforce that ideal, as occurs in the novel's latter stages. This tension between the historical precedent of white-black relations and the status in the contemporary moment of blacks causes understandable tension and ultimately violence within the community. Carnage ensues, with casualties and widespread violence occurring, and racial tensions and animosities remaining uneasy at best and unresolved at worst. In instances such as occurs in Chesnutt’s novel, nostalgia destroys the lives of those who, by dint of their belonging to a race that seeks a progress that generates such anxiety among whites, inconvenience, irritate, and antagonize people in power who wish to restore an ostensibly better past.

Part of the means by which whites attempt to stir up animosity toward blacks consists of manipulation and perpetuation of inflammatory rhetoric through the media

outlets that reach such a large portion of white population in the town and, as such, exert a tremendous influence on attitudes among the literate white populace. In other words, these white supremacists control the stories being told to the white community at large about blacks. Incensed by an editorial published in a local newspaper for blacks, Carteret, McBane, and General Belmont respond to what they perceive as incendiary content by engendering further racial antipathy in the community:

> "Let Barber have all the rope he wants," resumed the general, "and he'll be sure to hang himself. In the mean time we will continue to work up public opinion,—we can use this letter privately for that purpose,—and when the state campaign opens we 'll print the editorial, with suitable comment, scatter it broadcast throughout the state, fire the Southern heart, organize the white people on the color line, have a little demonstration with red shirts and shotguns, scare the negroes into fits, win the state for white supremacy, and teach our colored fellow citizens that we are tired of negro domination and have put an end to it forever. The Afro-American Banner will doubtless die about the same time." (89)

The general looks to generate racial antipathy and hatred, fanning the flames of fury through his manipulation and orchestration of the media. The stories that people tell one another about the unpleasant present and the presumably better past that deserves to be restored find a home not just in the homes of individuals but also through media outlets, which help perpetuate the preservation and desire for the restoration of the antebellum past—and do nothing to discourage using violent means to restore the community to its sought-after state of years gone by.

Major Carteret notes the dangers inherent in allowing blacks to govern, as a result of which he believes the community will further distance itself from the past ideal perpetually being sought. Harmonious relations between blacks and whites are

presumably not possible; as a result, the best solution consists of taking a page from past historical instances of the whites' violent enforcement of power asymmetries:

> Taking for this theme the unfitness of the negro to participate in government,—an unfitness due to his limited education, his lack of experience, his criminal tendencies, and more especially to his hopeless mental and physical inferiority to the white race,—the major had demonstrated, it seemed to him clearly enough, that the ballot in the hands of the negro was a menace to the commonwealth. He had argued, with entire conviction, that the white and black races could never attain social and political harmony by commingling their blood; he had proved by several historical parallels that no two unassimilable races could ever live together except in the relation of superior and inferior; and he was just dipping his gold into the ink to indite his conclusion from the premises thus established, when Jerry, the porter, announced two visitors. (31)

As the major would have it, the presumed deficiency of blacks in comparison with whites cannot be gainsaid. The black body—especially the black man's body—constitutes a threat to the community, and by extension, the blacks' right to vote presents an even greater threat to the extent that it attempts to wrest power from the hands of whites who regard such imbalances in power as their blood-based right. The idea of blood and lineages becomes particularly important in this moment, given that the major perceives the threat in part on the basis of the presumed dangers resulting from the mixture of white and black bloodlines. Such unease and disgust seems particularly surprising given the lengthy history in the United States, both during and after the slave trade's existence, of sexual violation of black women by white men, resulting in the miscegenation so seemingly vile and repellant to the white community. We need not necessarily limit ourselves to a literal mixing of blood here; the major can also simply speak of the working of whites and blacks together in concert on any front, whether social, political, cultural, or otherwise. The major makes his point by drawing “several historical

parallels," noting the ways in which attempts to provide a more egalitarian relation between whites and blacks have presumably failed miserably. By contrast, however implicitly, past arrangements in which whites have held superior power over blacks appear more desirable than the present situation in which the power of blacks exceeds the comfort and satisfaction of many whites in the South, who look to historical precedents for the ideals against which they compare the unsatisfactory present.

Pushed to the breaking point, some members of the black community would willingly rather die and resort to violent means than have to continue living with the oppression and repression foisted upon them by whites seeking to recapture the supposed glories of the antebellum past. Josh Green voices such an attitude in the following quote:

> "All right, suh! Ef I don' live ter do it, I 'll know it'll be 'tended ter right. Now we're gwine out ter de cotton compress, an' git a lot er colored men tergether, an 'ef de w'ite folks 'sturbs me, I should n't be s'prise' ef dere 'd be a mix-up;--an' ef dere is, me an *one* w'ite man 'll stan' befo' de jedgment th'one er God dis day; an' it won't be me w'at 'll be 'feared er de judgment. Come along, boys! Dese gentlemen may have somethin' ter live fer; but ez fer my pa't, I'd ruther be a dead nigger any day dan a live dog!" (284; Chesnutt's emphasis)

This passage represents the other side of the white males' nostalgia-motivated violence. Whereas nostalgic whites seek to reclaim power they consider usurped by undeserving others, some blacks respond in turn with violence when feeling threatened and cornered because they wish to maintain the path of progress rather than conceding any hard-fought gains made by the race. Articulating the thoughts of others in the community frustrated by the relentless harassment and violence of whites, Josh Green would rather be dead and preserve his humanity than be treated cruelly, as if he were an animal, and still live under

the preserving and oppressive power of white nostalgia. In such circumstances, death and destruction are preferable to the continuation of the status quo.

Ianovici notes how Chesnutt discusses white anxiety about and violence toward the bodies of black characters that are too successful. First, the original passage from Chesnutt to which Ianovici refers: "It was a veritable bed of Procrustes, this standard which the whites had set for the negroes. Those who grew above it must have their heads cut off, figuratively speaking,--must be forced back to the level assigned to their race; those who fell beneath the standard set had their necks stretched, literally enough, as the ghastly record in the daily papers gave conclusive evidence." (Chesnutt 61) For white supremacists who vehemently oppose progress and seek to perpetuate power asymmetries of the past, an attempt to reverse these gains manifests itself in violence directed outward in acts such as lynching: "[T]he white supremacist denial of black success effects a symbolic decapitation, or, more properly, psychological mutilation. . . . As represented here, success for a black person yields the psychological equivalent of lynching." (Ianovici 42-43) Success results in psychological mutilation, which can then be further manifested as a literal and physical destruction or decimation. Rather than even entertaining the notion that blacks have achieved their deserved and hard-fought gains, white supremacists still believe that these characters cannot help but revert to the ostensibly savage behavior upon which nostalgic white stereotypes of blacks have been predicated: "White southerners asked themselves what else could be expected of the black male who had never felt the civilizing effects of slavery but the reversion back to his native savagery?" (47) Given what whites perceive as the blacks' presumed penchant

for savagery, whites believe that they have no choice but to use violence as a means of exerting a control upon the historical narrative and returning control and power where they believe it belongs—in their hands and those of successive generations of white youth.

Such enforcement of a power differential between the races relies in part upon clear and readily definable and identifiable distinctions between different races. In other words, what becomes particularly important is what the novel refers to at one point as the "'visible admixture' of African blood" that makes much more easy clear racial identifications. (49) Chesnutt himself could readily pass as white, as could many others whose lineage suggested an association with the black race. The ability for such individuals to pass complicates and undermines the assertion and desperate desire on the white community's behalf to make racial identity clearly and easily definable and distinguishable.

Such attitudes about blacks on the basis of behavior and appearance have no natural basis; as Hedges notes, they instead exist as social constructions anxiously and violently reiterated by whites: "In Chesnutt's account, the 'inevitable' decline of the black race is a farce maintained by violence, a murderous projection of white Anglo anxiety about race suicide and cultural decline onto imperiled bodies of African Americans." (237) Hypothetically speaking, if white supremacists are right that all whites possess some inborn and biologically manifest superiority to all blacks, then the need for vehemently, insistently, and almost obsessively repeating such ideas seems utterly

unnecessary.[3] In his discussion of the novel, Stephen P. Knadler notes the thematic prominence in the text of whiteness as fiction and performance rather than as an unquestioned *a priori* given: "Whiteness is not only a 'cultural fiction' but also a performance that is always in the process of (but never quite successful at) imitating and approximating itself." (428) Such an idea is particularly important in relation to Chesnutt's novel to the extent that white characters are constantly, anxiously, and even violently reasserting the putatively natural superiority of whites to blacks. Even when whites attempt to legitimate their racist screed through the language of science and other academic disciplines, those legitimizing narratives remain the product of a specific cultural and historical context: "Chesnutt reminds his white audience that their objectivity is only an American, not a transhistorical or cross-cultural, outlook." (Knadler 432) Such an observation recalls Rosaldo's assertion that imperialist nostalgia is contextually bound and not ahistorical; similarity, the objectivity of American audiences—or of the whites within the diegesis of Chesnutt's novel—is just as much shaped and forged by historical forces and tensions.[4] The past constantly shapes the present and lingers in the mind of those who look toward the future.

Dr. Miller notes the ways in which elements of time—past, present, and future—meld together complexly, which is also manifested in whites looking to the past, both for examples of problematic interactions between blacks and whites, as well as in their

3 Although her analysis speaks more of gender than of race, Judith Butler notes in her famed article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" that the forceful reiteration of identities simply underscores their artificiality as constructions.

4 For more on how Chesnutt attempts to write a fictionalized historical account as counter-memory to the widespread white perceptions of the massacre, see the chapter on *The Marrow of Tradition* in Matthew Wilson's *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

yearning for a restoration in the present and future of a past that reestablishes the power that they believe has been threatened, compromised, and undermined:

> He realized, too, for a moment, the continuity of life, how inseparably the present is woven with the past, how certainly the future will be but the outcome of the present. He had supposed this old wound healed. The negroes were not a vindictive people. If, swayed by passion or emotion, they sometimes gave way to gusts of rage, these were of brief duration. Absorbed in the contemplation of their doubtful present and their uncertain future, they gave little thought to the past,—it was a dark story, which they would willingly forget. He knew the timeworn explanation that the Ku Klux movement, in the main, was merely an ebullition of boyish spirits, begun to amuse young white men by playing upon the fears and superstitions of ignorant negroes. Here, however, was its tragic side—the old wound still bleeding, the fruit of one tragedy, the seed of another. (112)

Blacks are seemingly not nostalgic or are at least not as nostalgic as many whites in the community. Such a lack of looking to the past is understandable, given the legacy of slavery from which the community struggles to emerge a little more than three decades later and the mistreatment of blacks throughout the history of the United States, regardless of the race's status as slaves or as emancipated individuals. This quote also illustrates the ideas of Richard Slotkin discussed in chapter 2 to the extent that the past remains inextricably linked to the present via the promulgation and perpetuation of stories and myths. For the whites, such a link to the past consists of nostalgia; for blacks in the community, that link to the past reminds them of a painful, abhorrent history not to be repeated at all costs—instead, progress constitutes the ideal goal, which requires changing the present and future as much as possible so they do not resemble the dreaded past. The passage also invokes the corporeal in noting that "the old wound [is] still bleeding." Such language is not purely figurative; Chesnutt here invokes the extensive

history of white violence against blacks as a means of attempting to suppress them politically and socially. The passage also notes the cyclical nature of this cycle of violence, referring to "the fruit of one tragedy, the seed of another." The anger caused by one uprising or attempt to exert power by members of either race sows the seed of discontent that continues to manifest itself so palpably. Those seeds bear fruit in violence and racial tensions, which in turn sows the seeds of discontent, resentment, and anger for future generations, resulting in a potentially *ad infinitum* continuation of the cycle. When the goals for each race differ so markedly, tension and violence seem inevitable, and they repeat themselves consistently and apparently endlessly.

Much of Chesnutt's novel focuses upon such violence being perpetrated upon blacks by whites, though whenever crime of any nature occurs, the white community immediately focuses upon blacks as the likely suspects and perpetrators:

> Suspicion was at once directed toward the negroes, as it always is when an unexplained crime is committed in a Southern community. The suspicion was not entirely an illogical one. Having been, for generations, trained up to thriftlessness, theft, and immorality, against which only thirty years of very limited opportunity can be offset, during which brief period they have been denied in large measure the healthful social stimulus and sympathy which holds most men in the path of rectitude, colored people might reasonably be expected to commit at least a share of crime proportionate to their numbers. (178-79)

In such a Southern community, the knee-jerk reaction consists of automatically assuming a black person responsible for any reported crime, the culprit of which is unknown. Given their immersion in an environment in which white supremacists believe blacks to be presumably exposed to improper behavior and ostensibly encouraged to follow suit, then

they are indeed likely responsible for at least some of the crimes, according to this passage.

Such notions of racial identity make it easier for whites to identify the individuals who they attempt to suppress as a means of the sought-after antebellum past and the power asymmmetries that come with it. Conversely, men such as Dr. Miller perceive the progress made by blacks in places such as Wilmington as a hopeful sign for the race on the national scale: "'We shall come up,' declared Miller; 'slowly and painfully, perhaps, but we shall win our way. If our race had made as much progress everywhere as they have made in Wellington, the problem would be well on the way toward solution.'" (51) Miller recognizes the difficulties inherent in such a process of political gains; Chesnutt knows the painful steps forward and large steps backward experienced as a result of various discriminatory measures instituted by whites acting upon the doctrine of "separate but equal" legitimated by the Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Miller sees progress as the means of bettering the situation, while white supremacists staunchly resist such ventures every step of the way.

One such white supremacist is Captain McBane, who represents the most unabashedly vile and racist sentiments in the novel. McBane makes no attempt to disguise his desire to wreak violence upon the members of the black community, instead of trying justify and rationalize such aggressive measures, much as other characters attempt to do in an attempt not to seem so bloodthirsty and amoral: "'I don't see the use,' he interrupted, 'of so much beating about the bush. We may as well be honest about this thing. We are going to put the niggers down because we want to, and think we can; so

why waste our time in mere pretense? I'm no hypocrite myself,—if I want a thing I take it, provided I'm strong enough." (81) Making no attempt to prettify or disguise his hatred, McBane expresses a desire to act violently, though he does not explicitly refer to past historical precedents and nostalgia for better times; he seems more interested in simply acting cruelly toward blacks as an ostensibly enjoyable activity in and of itself. Race-based antagonism is hardly an anomaly in a state or nation predicated upon the vehement insistence upon rigidly defined racial identities; indeed, "[v]iolence is a trademark of the racial state, perpetrated in order to preserve white supremacy, at all cost." (Robinson 105) Such vituperation and unabashed grasping for power also suggests the ways in which the violence is perpetuated in the interest of maintaining power asymmetries. Even if innocent women and children are hurt or killed as a result—such as occurs during the uprising and unrest that takes place in the latter stages of Chesnutt's novel—the perpetuation of white power is a sufficiently worthy goal to require such a painful and costly sacrifice. McBane's venomous screed is motivated by what Wagner refers to as "the reciprocal relationship between disturbed white perception and racial violence." (312)

White supremacists such as McBane imagine a much better world—one that more closely resembles the sought-after past—in which the presence and power of blacks is diminished. As Wagner notes, the violence against and silencing of blacks creates an idealized space in which white supremacists, acting through methods such as the aforementioned newspaper campaign, can act out their nostalgic fantasies of power: "Once the African American middle class is swept from view, these white writers can

confidently re-describe the city of Wilmington in accordance with the codes of white pastoral fantasy." (331) To perpetuate this nostalgia, whites must destroy the community that they simultaneously seek to preserve in what whites hope will be a silenced, restrained, and meek form. Shortly before himself being cut down by a bullet, Josh Green states that he will not consign himself to silence to appease whites; he would rather fight to the last, knowing the violence to be wrought against the black community: "'Well, suh, maybe we is [rushing on to certain death, in response to Dr. Miller's statement]; but we 're gwine ter die fightin'. Dey say de w'ite folks is gwine ter bu'n all de cullud schools an' chu'ches, an' kill all de niggers dey kin ketch. Dey 're gwine ter bu'n yo' new hospittle, ef somebody don' stop 'em.'" (294-295) Like others in the community, Josh knows the kinds of violence soon to manifest themselves in the community; though he will not fight until provoked, he will not stand idly by and allow whites to attempt to exert control. Josh participates in a cycle of violence that has endured throughout the history of racial tensions in the United States; those in power use violence ostensibly to suppress and oppress the disempowered, who in turn continue to resist violently, which only further infuriates those in power the point of additional violence. The idealized space of peaceful race relations seems an impossibly unattainable dream given the apparently unending violence resulting from the tension between white nostalgia and black progress.

III

In William Faulkner's *Light in August*, racial tensions do not seem as overt nor as widespread among white Southerners as they are in Chesnutt's novel; however, given the

opportunity to express their anxieties and fears about blackness, the white townspeople still find themselves capable of the same anger and violence so thoroughly manifest in antebellum times—the same times to which the white residents of the southern community nostalgically yearn to return. The concluding grim finale of *Light in August* finds Percy Grimm not only shooting but also castrating Joe Christmas; such a violent act is situated within the context of deeply historically entrenched attitudes and stereotypes about rapacious black men that fuel white fears and desires for a simpler past:

> But the Player was not done yet. When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body. When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. Again from the town, deadened a little by the walls, the scream of the siren mounted toward its unbelievable crescendo, passing out the realm of hearing. (464-465)

Even those who see Christmas' body, accustomed though they might be to the sight of dead or mutilated bodies, still find themselves repulsed by the sight of Christmas' castrated corpse. The grotesqueness and barbarity of Grimm's mutilation of Joe's body

further emphasizes the white townspeople's intense degree of anger against Christmas for his defiance and troubling of boundaries of racial identity. Grimm's castration of Joe's body also invokes white male anxiety about the threat of rape posed to white women by black (or, in Christmas' case, ambiguously racially othered) men. In this climactic moment, white men such as Grimm exert control over the bodies of black men and preserve their memories in ways specific to their politically expedient ends, acting like the taxidermists described by Rony who attempt to exert control over the narratives they tell about the people who they are responsible for violently destroying. Though it seems particularly grotesque and barbaric when considered in addition to the shooting, Grimm's castration of Christmas also attempts to pay back not just Joe but all racially othered men who have seemingly transgressed both the boundary of sexual propriety between the races, given the sexual relationship between Christmas and Joanna Burden, as well as the boundaries between easily distinguishable and identifiable racial designations. Joe poses a danger to the community insofar as he troubles the borders ferociously protected by white southerners that ostensibly clearly separate these identities from one another. Christmas' memory in the community as a transgressor is now "not fading and not particularly threatful." In other words, the memory of Christmas reminds southerners to remain vigilant in patrolling the identity of those who are ostensibly foreign and of putatively impure bloodlines; at the same time, it serves as a forceful and lasting reminder of the corporeal peril anyone faces who threatens or unsettles the clearly distinct boundaries of racial identities upon which so many Southern white males insist. The southerners are willing to resort to violence as a means of satisfying their nostalgic

desire for a present in which racial identities are readily identifiable and enforceable; Christmas' brutal death demonstrates the danger faced by those who trouble such confining conceptions of racial identity and who resist a taxidermic preservation and narrativization.

The dual nature of the reminder provided by Joe Christmas' death constantly reminds the townspeople how they were fooled by what they knew to be a foreign identity, yet could not properly read as a black racial identity. The residents who wonder about the mysterious Christmas' racial identity yearn for simplistic and sharply defined racial identities that easily differentiate white from black and more easily facilitate a racial hierarchy in which whites can wield power over blacks. Joe Christmas threatens the stability of racial boundaries because he appears white, though the revelation of his blackness and subsequent murder by Percy Grimm reconfirms the townspeople's ability to identify individuals' racial identities. Christmas permanently etches himself into the memories of the townspeople who were deceived into thinking he was white. Once the racially ambiguous Christmas is violently eradicated from the narrative, the nostalgia of the community for simplistic racial identities remains intact.

Such oversimplified accounts of racial identities are predicated in large part upon extremely confining and limiting stereotypes. The southerners express outrage because of Christmas' unwillingness to conform to a number of the stereotypes foisted upon black members of the community. Joe refuses to act in ways more neatly consistent with their expectations of how a black person should ostensibly behave:

> He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad.

> For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (350)

Not only does Christmas' racial ambiguity upset the whites in the community, but they also are infuriated by his refusal to conform to their expectations of how a black criminal should behave. Rather than evincing characteristics associated with one of the two binarized terms of racial identity, each of which contains its particular expectations and stereotypes regarding appearance and conduct, Christmas conforms to neither one, either in appearance or in behavior, instead existing in a liminal third space. Rather than hide guiltily, he walks about proudly and unashamedly, further enraging the whites in the community who would expect someone who committed such a crime to hide himself. The white Southerners' anger about both Christmas' murder of Joanna Burden and his racial ambiguity is all the more unusual given the disdain with which members of the community have perceived Joanna throughout her time living in the South; however, once she dies, her membership in the white race and the outrage of her being murdered by a black man suffice to allow members of the community to overlook such details of her life. The community members could have easily regarded the murder without particular concern given Joanna's involvement in abolitionist causes, yet the fact that Christmas—a man who violently unsettles the Southerners' static conceptions of race—being the culprit only intensifies their anger desire to find and punish him, regardless of the murder victim's identity.

Early in the murder investigation, Christmas' colleague, the shiftless and lazy Lucas Burch (also known as Joe Brown), is first accused of the crime, but he skillfully

deflects attention away from himself by exposing the flaws in the townspeople's understanding of Christmas' racial identity. Tweaking their nostalgic assertion that racial identity is always easy to identify, he ridicules the people who were oblivious to Christmas' blackness. Burch knows his audience and effectively exploits their anxieties about racial identity:

> It's like he knew he had them then. Like nothing they could believe he had done would be as bad as what he could tell that somebody else had done. "You're so smart," he says. "The folks in this town is so smart. Fooled for three years. Calling him a foreigner for three years, when soon as I watched him three days I knew he wasn't no more a foreigner than I am. I knew before he even told me himself." And then watching him now, and looking now and then at one another. (98)

The Southerners apparently know something is different about Christmas, but they are unable to pinpoint the nature of that difference, for which ostensible obtuseness Burch ridicules and upbraids them. The speaker intensifies the insult by noting that he supposedly knew Christmas' racial identity at first sight, long before anyone else ever began to suspect the specific nature of his racial difference. He knew that Christmas was not foreign in the sense that the Southerners meant it, believing him to be from another country, though they certainly recognized him as not belonging to their conception of what a white Southerner should look like. Christmas' body itself proves confusing to members of the community because of the inability to associate that body with a readily identifiable and legible racial category, as Michael Cobb notes: "His [i.e., Joe Christmas'] flesh is confusing because we do not know the 'history' of his body's racial status, and so we cannot place him into a racially historical, and thus culturally recognizable, symbolic." (145) The very illegibility of Christmas' body makes him unsuited to fit neatly

into the race-based stereotypes of the community; he instead exists as a human being rather than as a one-dimensional social construction steeped in stereotypes.[5]

Even in death, Christmas remains alive in the memory of community members in the novel as well as readers only if he is forced into a specific confining racial identity, as Avak Hasratian notes: “Christmas' life ends only if we are willing to force him into an identity as the novel's white male community would do.” (73) We as readers enact a certain violence upon character by forcing him to fit into an easily pigeonholed identity, much as the white male community members try to force such an identity upon Christmas, preserving Christmas' memory taxidermically, arranging the details of his life to meet their politically expedient needs. These community members are complicit in the death and destruction of the man whose memory they seek to keep alive as a warning to other blacks of the risks inherent in transgressing putatively assiduously policed parameters of identity. Even though Percy Grimm has killed Christmas, the memory of Christmas remains alive, to be to put to the use of reminding blacks of the danger of transgressing unspoken rules of race-based behavior, but also as a subversive reminder that remains alive, showing how the existing codes of racial identity and behavior are flawed and constricting: “The novel shows there is no society that can so scapegoat Christmas, because it is Christmas who keeps out all of those who try to hail them into their categories. Since he cannot be so forced, the white men's attempt to kill him produces not a categorical overkill but an excess of life . . . ” (Hasratian 74) Such a

5 For more on the tension between Christmas as complex human being and Christmas as simplified social construction, see Abdul-Razzak Al-Barhow, “Focusing on the Margins: *Light in August* and Social Change,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 42 (2010): 52-72.

moment harkens back to Holland's discussion of death not resulting in the end of a body's ability to speak, narrativize, and tell stories.[6] Even in death, Christmas' body can communicate powerfully, just as the murdered and violated bodies in the South of Chesnutt's novels remain a reminder both to blacks of the atrocities committed in the past that can no longer be tolerated, and to whites of the putative successful assertions of white power over blacks in the past in conformity with the nostalgic vision of the past.

Christmas' very existence does violence to the ostensibly neat and tidy categories of racial identity, and the white community must then respond with even greater violence to repress any potential subversion: "The climate of fantasy that cancels out what is visible, what is 'white,' makes the sacrifice of Joe Christmas all the more necessary and haunting—necessary because the blasphemous visibility of violent social disorder must be met with greater violence in order to totalize its repression; haunting because the narrative that contains the tragedy of Christmas at a constant, precarious edge does so by merging its own fictions with his . . ." (Sundquist 70) Christmas' violent disruption and dissolution of the southerners' nostalgically inflected conceptions of raced individuals is met with a physical violence against himself once a proper opportunity presents itself—Joe's murder of Joanna Burden. Just as in Chesnutt's novel, violence must be met with greater violence. In *The Marrow of Tradition,* the orchestrated and calculated violence of the whites is met by the blacks with resistance; in Faulkner's novel, we see a similar dynamic at work. The townspeople endorse violence, whether administered through

6 Hasratian's observation also echoes a similar observation made by Michael Cobb: "Although he has been lynched into a racial logic of intelligibility—he was lynched for his criminal behaviors, his racial miscegenation—his body's ambiguity will not die; the nagging 'what-ifs' of his race keep ticking away at the ostensibly [*sic*] definitiveness some call the cultural logic of lynching." (167)

official channels or unofficial means, to punish Christmas both for the physical violence of Joanna Burden's murder and the identity-based violence resulting from Joe's subversion of neat, tidy, and consistently reliable identity classifications.

The community so utterly hostile toward Christmas and so supportive of Grimm's gruesome murder of him is able to articulate its collective voice, expressing its worries about and disdain of the stranger who so thoroughly troubles their static conceptions of racial identity. In one segment of the novel, Faulkner includes dialogue meant to represent the talk going on by the men of the town about Christmas' situation. Such dialogue represents the widespread anxiety evinced by Christmas' difficult-to-read racial identity and anger at Christmas for his contravention of the expectations for violent behavior for blacks, consistent with the influence that their black blood supposedly has upon them. Christmas' resemblance to the white members of the community belies the blood in him that presumably made him act as he did in killing the woman: “He dont look any more like a nigger than I do. But it must have been the nigger blood in him. . . . And they would not have suspected him then if it hadn't been for a fellow named Brown, that the nigger used to sell whiskey while he was pretending to be a white man and tried to lay the whiskey and the killing both on Brown and Brown told the truth.” (349) The collective speaker acknowledges that to look at Christmas, one would not know of his true racial identity; nonetheless, the instincts and impulsive behavior presumably inherent in black blood manifest themselves. Despite his confusing or misleading appearance, Christmas' blood manifests the violent behavior presumably manifest in it and waiting to be expressed. Because a discrepancy exists between the preconceived notions of the

white community members and the actual behavior manifested in blacks, then such ideas perpetuated by the whites prove to be artificial rather than natural. Though they may attempt to control the story and to preserve the memory of blacks in such a way that whites can remain firmly in control, their failure to recognize Christmas' identity shows the inefficacy and absurdity of their efforts.

Such failure ostensibly intensifies the need for Christmas to be violently put in his place. The person to do that is Percy Grimm, who is acting into his official capacity as a member of the National Guard. As Chuck Jackson notes, Grimm is a member of the National Guard—presumably an entity meant to protect citizens, maintain order, and uphold the law—yet as manifested in the person of Percy Grimm, none of these tasks are accomplished (206). Indeed, Grimm leads the charge in directing violence outward toward Joe Christmas, encouraging the lynch mob mentality rather than suppressing it: "Thus Percy Grimm, a National Guard of one (for he is the only member of the National Guard in the book), not only transforms this local Southern region into a site of national pride . . . but also enacts a Gothic collapse of the difference between the supposedly peacekeeping National Guard and the terroristic violence of the Southern white lynch mob." (205) As embodied in the person of Percy Grimm, the National Guard behaves in ways no better than members of the most irrational, prejudiced, and bloodthirsty mob, as manifested in what Jackson observes as "the novel's simultaneous articulation of and collapse between the National Guard and the Southern lynch mob, a representation of whiteness as a racialized force of history and terror." (194) Unofficial methods of doling out punishment such as lynch mobs rely upon terror and do not require legal justification

since they lean upon notions of racial superiority that buttress their claim to harm blacks in the community, including Christmas, who endanger the status quo to be nostalgically preserved at all costs as an approximation of the yearned-for idealized past.

The violence shown toward Christmas is certainly not unique; instead, it constitutes one of a number of instances of violence toward blacks in southern society throughout the history of the region. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber notes how "[s]uch Southern identity is tied to repetition of the past and relies on rituals that reinforce white supremacy to sustain itself. Remnants of the institution of slavery, which fostered racial separation and white privilege, pervade black/white relations and such repeated rituals as discrimination, lynching, and mob rule." (72) Even though slavery may have been abolished several decades prior to the novel's narrative present, its legacy remains immovable. Remnants of the past remain manifest, both in terms of the psychic remnants haunting collective Southern memory and of the tangible remnants manifested in the violence toward blacks such as Christmas. Joe's death provides a brutal reminder, a remnant much like those written about by Tompkins. Those remnants haunt individuals' memories—which themselves are hazy, inaccurately, and constantly reshaped—reminding Southerners of the carnage that allows white power to be maintained and the black resistance that continues the cycle of violence and the seemingly endless struggle.

An intriguing yet complicated quote in the text notes the way in which memory distorts individuals' perceptions—including the white southerners in the novel—before people can even have a chance to recollect the precise details of a particular event: "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer

than knowing even wonders." (119) Individuals' minds possess a certain belief about how events transpired before we can even remember them accurately. The mind casts a certain impression, which is forged through our perception, allowing us to have a specific recollection of an event that might not necessarily be consistent with events as they really occurred. The southerners in *Light in August* are willing to rush to judgment, accepting Joanna Burden into the fraternity of whites once she becomes a murder victim so the community can justify the violent retribution they seek against Joe Christmas. Individuals gain an impression of an event before they can even begin to parse out the facts; Southerners quickly have their perception of Christmas revised by Burch's upbraiding and ridicule, and they are determined to violently suppress and silence the man who brings to the fore their inability to read racial identities accurately. Memory believes before knowing remembers because the white male Southerners in the community can refer to what they perceive as a history of justified violence toward blacks who have needed to be violently suppressed because of their ostensible savagery.

The violence that Southern white males wreak upon blacks results at least in large part from fears of contamination steeped in white anxiety over miscegenation and the commingling of black blood and white blood. I have quoted below a lengthy yet important passage that illustrates the battle between white blood and black blood, envisioning them as two competing and antagonistic forces fighting for control of Joe Christmas' body, spurring him to act in odd and contradictory ways when he enters Hightower's residence shortly before Grimm shoots and castrates Joe. Christmas sometimes even acts in ways that seem irrational, but his blood must speak, must express

itself—no matter what the consequences. Such a blood-based model of identity harkens back to white Southerners' nostalgic perceptions of black blood as a threat to the purity of ostensibly uncontaminated and undiluted white blood to be protected at all costs:

> But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand. (449)

According to the passage, black blood apparently can give Christmas the courage to commit violent acts, yet the intervention of the white blood ultimately causes his failure. The battle of bloodlines inside of Christmas cannot be resolved through the aid or intervention of another person. As so often happens in novels of the early twentieth century in which individuals with black lineages pass as white, death becomes a strong possibility, if not an outright inevitability. The events in the passage quoted above are narrated by Gavin Stevens, a white District Attorney. As an emissary of the official juridical apparatus, he articulates the anxieties about the battle between black blood and white blood white trying to understand why Christmas fled into Hightower's house at the

end of the chase, only to be slaughtered and castrated by Percy Grimm. Rather than relying upon facts and hard evidence, Stevens instead narrates events as he envisions them taking place through the pseudoscience of the influence exerted upon Christmas' blood by his mixed heritage. He exerts control over the narrative, attempting to preserve Christmas' memory in ways that suggest the struggle between the two components of Joe's racial identity, which is difficult to define based on what one can see.

In both Chesnutt's and Faulkner's novels, white males attempt to exert control over both the bodies of blacks in the community (particularly black males) as well as the narratives told by and about those bodies. By attempting to destroy the power held by blacks in the community—and, if sufficient resistance is provided by blacks to the whites' reassertion of control, by attempting to destroy the bodies of blacks as well—whites destroy the very thing allowing them to maintain their nostalgic vision of having power over the people that they are destroying and harming. The remnants of that violent control—both the memories lingering in collective consciousness and the physical reminders of that damage—remind the white males in the community of their ability to control while also generating anxiety insofar as that control must be constantly and nervously reasserted.

Conclusion

In concluding this dissertation, I will note how some of the prominent characteristics and aspects of nostalgia considered in this dissertation could potentially manifest themselves in literary texts, particularly those of modernist and postmodernist authors, of the 1950s and 1960s—a time period beyond the province of this particular dissertation. With the United States triumphant in World War II and the economic hardships occasioned by the Great Depression now a thing of the past, happier days seemed imminent in the mid-twentieth century United States. The idealized home lives being fabricated and performed in many predominantly white American communities seem the ideal, yet they also reflect "the way we never were," to employ the title of Stephanie Coontz's book. In other words, the suburbanized, modernized, and routinized family structure and daily existence reflects not a widely shared collective cultural American experience harkening back to the happy days of yesteryear prior to the Second World War but rather a cultural construction of the ideal life instead of an historical precedent to which white suburban America has returned. The ostensibly happy, prosperous, and materialistic middle-class and upper-class existence enjoyed by many white Americans in 1950s and 1960s America belies the continuing tempestuousness and violence still firmly in place in many enclaves and communities, yet ostensibly trying to be silenced by the narrative of putative domestic tranquility and ease so readily on display in many suburban white households. Though the promise of prosperity and happiness appears to have been fulfilled, nostalgia as resistance to progress remains firmly entrenched and ready to manifest itself at the slightest hint of protest.

The last images of Joe Christmas in Faulkner's *Light in August*—his bullet-penetrated corpse, the stain of dark blood spreading due to his castration at the hands of Percy Grimm—exemplify a particular damaging manifestation of the destructive, desiring, and depressive nostalgia on which my discussion has focused, though such images seem to sharply contrast with the tranquil suburban ideal so extensively upon display in the 1950s and early 1960s. Joe Christmas embodies one of many instances noted in this dissertation of threats to the perpetuation of white males continuing to maintain their advantage in power asymmetries. The tensions over advancement by blacks has hardly dissipated but intensified, as the vehement resistance to school desegregation in the Southern United States following the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* suggests. Christmas' ambiguous racial identity unsettles the white southerners' insistence on firm and readily distinguished categories of racial identity; blood should tell, easily and unmistakably providing a clear correspondence between appearance and racial identity indicative of presumably pure racial bloodlines, yet it fails to do so. Southerners or other white males seeking to maintain or regain their stranglehold on power desire a simpler, happier past that elides on at least some level the pain experienced by blacks both during and after slavery in the United States. Under the veneer of putatively Elysian suburban bliss rages vituperative, contentious battles over the rights of—for lack of better terms—marginalized, disenfranchised, and disempowered groups such as blacks to gain the foothold still on at least some level denied to them by whites, predominantly male, seeking to perpetuate power asymmetries.

We must clarify, however, that all nostalgia need not be so immediately or obviously violent, even if it manifests the profound depression and desire also characteristic of the nostalgia theorized in this dissertation. Violence can be focused inward, much as occurs with Cather's Paul or Dreiser's Hurstwood, neither of whom can tolerate the discrepancy between desired ideal and existing reality. Violence of emotion can also result in a lifetime of suffering in which no physical pain or corporeal damage immediately results, much as occurs for James Weldon Johnson's ex-colored man, who decides to pass as white for the rest of his life to protect his children from the truth about their racial identities—and from the potential physical harm likely resulting not only from their racial identity but also from their unwitting deceit. The narrator of Johnson's novel looks longingly at the yellowing pages of his music manuscripts, which he will never use again and which remind him of the potential to contribute to the black race that he declined.

Many of the texts discussed in this dissertation have explored the tension between nostalgia as experienced individually and collectively. Whether experienced personally or *en masse*, nostalgia poses dangers and threats to those whose lives sharply contradict the attempt to preserve a certain image of the past desired so strongly because of the nostalgic individual's depression and unhappiness with the present. For example, we can consider Quentin Compson being haunted by the past foisted upon him by the Southern society nostalgic for a return to antebellum ways in *Absalom, Absalom!* We can also recall the vogue in remembering Tom Outland as a wunderkind scientist in Cather's *The Professor House* as contrasted with the individual nostalgia Godfrey St. Peter experiences

for both his past interactions with Outland and the places of Tom's own past. These comprise just two of a range of examples showing how individuals become preoccupied with a past to which others around them constantly refer.

We also see in this dissertation the tension between nostalgia's ability to consume and destroy as opposed to its ability to preserve. On the one hand, nostalgia for a better past destroys Hurstwood, and the yearning for a past that never existed annihilates both Jay Gatsby and Cather's Paul. On the other hand, violence directed outwardly can result in the preservation of others' memories in death, ostensibly as a warning to those who dare transgress the presumably precise, though actually at least somewhat fluid and incredibly contentious, boundaries of racial identity inherent in the nostalgic anxiety over the purity of bloodlines, such as occurs with Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. Such violence directed outward remains a source of tension as suggested by the resistance among predominantly white males to change regarding the rights of a variety of groups in the 1950s and 1960s, whether on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, tribal identity, or the like.

Nostalgia also possesses a tension between the material and corporeal as opposed to the intangible. Nostalgia is often rooted in objects—the Native-American antiquities prized by Tom Outland in *The Professor's House*, the yellowing sheets of music valued by the unnamed narrator as a symbol of the past of valued musical experimentation and scholarship scuttled away forever in Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, and even the trappings of the luxurious lifestyle so nostalgically yearned for and thoroughly enjoyed by the title character of Cather's “Paul's Case.” Conversely, nostalgia

can also seek after the intangible—the link to a past that remains strangely ghostly and incorporeal, much as occurs in Quentin Compson's obsession with the Sutpen family. Such memories of the past remain potent in communities remembering the indignities foisted upon them by the destruction of the antebellum past at the conclusion of the Civil War, during Reconstruction, or more recently, during the protests for civil rights for African-Americans.

While these historical events occur, literary experimentation and daring continues unabated. The literary movements that have been or currently are gaining attention during the middle of the twentieth century in the United States also bear a relation to nostalgia. While certainly not representative of the entirety of significant literary work produced during the 1950s and 1960s, modernism and postmodernism attempt to undercut the traditional representative methods of highbrow literature; one means by which modernist works achieve their disorienting and defamiliarizing effects is through the employment of a nonlinear temporality. As we see in some of the modernist Faulkner narratives discussed in this dissertation that use disjunctive temporality—*The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* particularly come to mind here—the shifting treatment of time suggests that some past exists to be reassembled, yet the story will always be incomplete, riddled with gaps and incongruities. We can reassemble the story to some degree, but the full story will never quite be attainable to us. Readers must either rely upon our imagination to some degree—filling in the gaps and transforming the story in the process, much like nostalgic people themselves do—or grudgingly accept the incompleteness of the account set before us, knowing that we will never have all the pieces to allow us to

assemble a comprehensive story. Like the nostalgic individual, we can yearn for the ideal past in which everything is clearly and readily available and understandable to us, yet like the nostalgic person, we can never experience the wholeness and plenitude of recapturing that ideal past.

Postmodernism attempts to break even further from the past in its divergence from the tradition which high modernist authors nonetheless invoke; as Fredric Jameson notes in his famed discussion, postmodernism sometimes relies upon the kitschy relics of the past such as B-movies and page-turning "airport paperback[s]" rather than the vaunted and rarefied cultural traditions so often employed by literature, even those works that attempts to undertake daring formal changes as seen in high modernist works (2). Though Jameson argues in his essay for a "weakening of historicity," the specter of the past and the history dragged along behind it into the present still looms large (6). Even if the materials used as a point of reference for these works are not as highly esteemed among appreciators of fine art, they nonetheless remain a relic of the past with specific connections to that history. Granted, no literary work is created in a vacuum independent of the influences of the past, yet in their very invocation of these specific nonliterary or anti-literary forms, these postmodernist works nonetheless call upon their readers to be familiar with that historical tradition to fully enjoy and appreciate the ways in which postmodernist works play with those aesthetic sensibilities and formal conventions. Jameson also rightly notes the role of violence in the role of postmodernism's rise globally: "[T]his whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic

domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror." (5) As the United States historically and aesthetically intermingles with various national entities to create a range of global and transnational identities, it does so through the exercise of power and the implementation of violence. Though we can here refer to the specter of physical violence, again we need not always be so literal. Modernism and postmodernism, then, are not necessarily inherently nostalgic art forms; their ruptures, disjunctions, and insistence upon textual play instead suggest the ways in which the nostalgic person's ardent and obsessive search for an ideal past will ultimately remain unfruitful and thoroughly disappointed or even destroyed in the most extreme circumstances. These literary movements engage with nostalgia and refer to it, though they do not uncritically endorse it.

The 1950s and 1960s exist as a time of continuing tension in the United States over any kind of difference, most notably the continued fight for the civil rights of African-Americans, promulgated in part by the rise to national attention of figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, and the violence demonstrated by some whites—almost always male—as a response to bus boycotts, lunch counter sit-ins, and other nonviolent methods of demonstration. The rise of the second-wave feminist movement, agitation for gay rights after Stonewall, and protests within various tribal communities about the treatment of Native-Americans remain flashpoints of contention. Further, destruction looms large on the mind of Americans anxious about the growing tensions of the Cold War. With the potential for global nuclear annihilation becoming increasingly real, the possibility of any future at all becomes increasingly bleak, much as

it does for those nostalgic individuals unable to imagine a future. The world leaders ready to have somebody push the button that would hasten a global nuclear holocaust have a specific vision of the world, whether rooted in the past or present, to which they expect circumstances to conform. The dissonance between the idealized vision and the progress sought by the other side leaves the finger perilously hovering over the button. The desire for progress pushes against a white desire to maintain a sugarcoated and whitewashed ideal of a simulacrum past that simultaneously silences and even at times violently effaces difference.

As long as people are different and that difference, whatever form it may assume, becomes a point of contention that causes individuals unhappiness and makes them wish to exercise power over others, then nostalgia as resistance to progress and as a desire to restore happier times compared to the depression of the present, even if through violent and destructive means, will continue to occur. The process of being recognized as an individual subject is a complex and fraught one, as noted by Michel Foucault in his discussion of the polyvalent term "subject": "There are two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (781) In being subject to the nostalgic yearning for control and power of white males, individuals much like the characters described in this dissertation try to establish some sense of self and subjectivity, though in so doing they face opposition. Such resistance to change inheres a certain nostalgia; like that of Joe Christmas, the bodies of those impacted by nostalgia and violently injured or killed—

bullet-riddled, beaten, slashed, trampled, strangled, hanged, burned, stomped, crushed, and subjected to any other imaginable or unimaginable agony with bone-shattering, blood-spattering malignant force—will continue to represent the power that white males exercise to harm others in an attempt to maintain the plasticized and idealized world of disproportionate power asymmetries they hope to continue perpetuating. Again, the violence wrought upon individuals seeking progress and standing in the way of nostalgic taxidermic resuscitation of the past need not necessarily be so literal; the violence can also occur psychically. Yet the bodies and minds of those who have suffered because of nostalgia, even when subjected to taxidermy, by their very presence also remind us of the outrages perpetrated on communities simply seeking equality, opportunity, and progress. These bodies—living or dead, intact or destroyed, preserved or decayed—continue speaking to us forcefully and insistently of the need to continue fighting against oppression to create a better, fairer, and more equal world in the future. Not only a specific group should benefit; so should everybody and every body.

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