Deed done in the light will eventually come to the dark: racial and sexual fear in Faulkner's Light in August and The Sound and The Fury

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ABSTRACT
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DEEDS DONE IN THE LIGHT WILL EVENTUALLY COME TO THE DARK: RACIAL AND SEXUAL FEAR IN FAULKNER’S LIGHT IN AUGUST AND THE SOUND AND THE FURY

Advisor: Charles Duncan, Ph.D.
Thesis dated December, 1998

The purpose of this study of William Faulkner is to identify and examine the importance of the presence of a racial and sexual “other” (an increasingly central term in post-modernist criticism) and how its impact dictated the direction and thematic scheme of Faulkner’s literature. In particular, through this mode of analysis, we see how racial and sexual constructs, stemming from preconceived mores, taboos, and images, could infiltrate even one of the most innovative and creative fictive imaginations of the 20th century.

The thesis focuses upon two of Faulkner’s novels—Light in August and The Sound and the Fury. Both of these works, abounding in themes generated by blackness and femininity, present complex social issues of race relations and sexuality in a manner that redirects the literary focus from the non-white and/or non-masculine victim to the white oppressor’s fear. Even though Faulkner seeks, in part, to dismantle stereotypes and discuss racial relationships openly, he, too, was inevitably affected by his own personal racial environment. Light in August and The Sound and the Fury were utilized in seeking the answers to the following hypothesis: Could Faulkner be influenced by his Southern atmosphere and personal fear so much that he has incorporated white patriarchal constructs into his writings, thus, fostering and perpetuating the process of marginalizing and oppressing those who are non-white and/or non-masculine?

The conclusions drawn from the research suggest that although William Faulkner shows sympathy for the plight of African Americans and females, he is, nonetheless, constrained by the Africanist and feminist presence which pervades his imagination and, thus, is reflected in the works emanating from his white Southern background.
DEEDS DONE IN THE LIGHT WILL EVENTUALLY COME TO THE DARK: RACIAL AND SEXUAL FEAR IN FAULKNER’S LIGHT IN AUGUST AND THE SOUND AND THE FURY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS

BY

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner's writings involve racial and sexual relations. Topics once considered unmentionable in the Southern literary world, he brought to the forefront. Such topics include, variously throughout his novels, the white male oppressor's fear (fear of diminished power and control); non-white and/or non-masculine “others” (those marginalized and ostracized by white patriarchal constructs); and, preconceived environmental mores, taboos, and images. These components combined create and perpetuate ultimate victimage and oppression for both African Americans and women. Faulkner theorizes, circumscribes a story, and assigns personalities to this Southern milieu of oppression.

Several Faulkner critics, including Malcolm Cowley and Maurice Coindreau, have a tendency to focus on his literary techniques such as stream of consciousness, personal narration, and the notorious lack of punctuation. Cowley explains the objective of Faulkner's work, “There in Oxford, Faulkner performed a labor of imagination that has not been equaled in our time, and a double labor: first, to invent a Mississippi county that was like a mythical kingdom, but was complete and living in all its details; second, to make his story of Yoknapatawpha County stand as a parable or legend of all the Deep South” (Cowley viii). While Faulkner's literary works sustain these pertinent
considerations, other, more recent critics, especially Toni Morrison, have delved into
more profound issues—psychological, racial, and sexual. "The principal reason these
matters loom large for me is that I do not have quite the same access to these traditionally
useful constructs of blackness. I am a black writer struggling with and through a
language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority,
cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of a people" (Morrison x). It is common for
critics and scholars to point out the aspects of these deeper issues and how "Faulkner—
the writer" exemplifies these particulars in his literary creations, but they offer little
criticism of "Faulkner—the man" and his depictions of these issues according to his
personal thoughts and beliefs.

William Faulkner's *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury* present complex
social issues of race relations and sexuality in a manner that redirects the literary focus
from the non-white and/or non-masculine victim to the white oppressor's fear of an
"other." Faulkner particularly focuses on the stereotypes fostered and produced from
misaligned racial and sexual relationships, specifically relationships imbalanced in terms
of power, respect, and economics. *Light in August*, an account of the life of protagonist
Joe Christmas, a man torn between his biracial heritage and the townspeople's reaction to
his identity, is an illustration of these relationships. Likewise, *The Sound and the Fury*
supplies components of racial and sexual fear through two particular characters—Jason
Compson IV and Quentin Compson. Both of these novels contain themes of blackness,
presented both abstractly and realistically through the use of shadows and language, and
femininity, denoted by sexuality constraints and chastity, that resonate throughout every
section, supporting Faulkner’s premise to establish the discrepancies of Southern relationships and the anxieties arising from them.

In order to establish a conceptual framework, we should focus on the central paradigm of Southern relationships, including the categories of the white woman, the black woman, the white man and the black man. The role that each of these plays in late 19th and early 20th century Southern life determines the type of taboos and mores that exist. In the early 1930s, white women (WW) are seen as perfect, pristine, and forbidden; they are placed upon a pedestal to be admired for their beauty and femininity. On the other hand, black women (BW) are regarded in terms of subservient functions—“mammy,” cook, servant, sex object, scapegoat; their essential femininity is often ignored. White men (WM) are regarded as ideally the epitome of strength; the sources of approval and punishment; the protectors of land, property, family, and country; and, overall, embodiments of positive masculinity. Conversely, black men (BM) are the most feared human beings because they pose a major threat to those who hold the power and constitute a simultaneously feared and marginalized embodiment of negative masculinity.

When the dynamics of one of these personas are connected with another persona, the formation of Southern mores begins. Corresponding to the mores of Southern living, the acceptable relationships between these four entities is as follows: BW/WW—mammy to mistress; cook to woman of the house; unrefined to refined. WW/WM—wife to husband; protected to protector. WM/BM—master to servant; oppressor to oppressed. BM/BW—husband to wife; survivor to survivor. The dynamics of these relationships become problematic, or more appropriately taboo, when an unsanctioned intersection occurs. When WM and BW interact, not only do they exist as master to servant but also
as violator to sex object, and often times, father to mother. Contrarily, when BM and WW interconnect, the most ultimate taboo materializes. Black men are forbidden to come near white women; and, the multitude of lynchings and castrations are proof of the unacceptability of this practice. For a black man to be sexually involved with a white woman is a far greater crime than the act of murder.

Faulkner was born into this cultural matrix and was influenced by its dynamics. Although he attempts to expose and explore the underside of Southern mores, he still exhibits their dynamics throughout his works, particularly through the lives of his characters. However, Faulkner goes beyond the stereotypical mistreated Negro who is only a background character to center his writing on the fear of blacks among whites that typified the earlier twentieth century. Faulkner's concept of racial and sexual fear incorporates two components: that of blackness overwhelming whiteness, and that of femininity overpowering white masculinity. Similar to the misaligned racial relationships, the gender relationships in the aforementioned novels incorporate a male obsession of not becoming victim of female control.

Moreover, Faulkner's perceptions of these two related sets of fears contain an implied subtext of "otherness" or "othering." The act of "othering" is placing any person outside of "self" who is not encompassed within the realm of power, be it self-power, community-power, or literary-power. Toni Morrison has developed extensively the subject of "othering" like other significant post-modernist critics, particularly Jacques Lacan. Lacan, a French psychologist, stressed that "if psycho-analysis is to be constituted as the science of the unconscious, one must set out from the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language." Lacan continues, "...in relation to the entrance of the
unconscious, the two fields of the subject and the Other. The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject—it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear” (Lacan 203).

In Morrison’s particular terminology, a process of “dismissive othering” is embedded in writing that marginalizes African Americans and African American readers. The act of “othering” dismisses and marginalizes those who do not fit into the mainstream of society, meaning people of a non-white and/or non-masculine identity. In American literature, a great deal of implied othering occurs, through the use of negative definitions and by treating non-white and non-masculine characters as mere background personalities. Careful examination of Morrison’s concept of “othering” can serve as a critical window through which to examine Faulkner’s Light in August and The Sound and the Fury.

In Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison rereads the American literary canon through an analysis of whiteness to propose ways that African Americans were used to establish definitions of American identity. Critic Linda Krumholz describes, in her opinion, the contents of this criticism:

Morrison turns her critical attention to figurations of ‘whiteness’ as the conceptual basis of an American identity constructed in opposition to ‘American Africanness,’ the Eurocentric imaginative construction of the black population in America. Morrison attempts to overturn pervasive critical agendas that ignore racial representations in white texts and thus impoverish literary studies
by erasing the interdependent constructions of whiteness and
Africanness. (Krumholz 244)

Additionally, Morrison examines the impact of African Americans on the imagination of White-American male writers. Morrison highlights the various motifs that create what she terms the "Africanist presence" or non-white persona and investigates the means, "Africanism," through which this Africanist persona has been constructed.

"Africanism" involves the constraining of African-American people, and it produces constrictive effects upon White-American male writers, who consequently evade uncomfortable racial subjects which are realistic in nature. She uses the term to represent both the denotative and connotative "blackness" that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people (Morrison 6). Very eloquently, Toni Morrison continues describing how this phenomenon works:

As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability. Through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to
historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of
contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a
mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom. (7)

The egotistically, privileged attitude, although many times presented surreptitiously,
permeates the fabric of White-American literature. In order to maintain control and
dominion over the racial other, White-American writers use the power of language to
suppress any efforts made by the racial other to unleash himself from the oppressor’s
grasp, literary or otherwise. This situation then places the racial other in a position of
having to regain control over his/her own speech and own self-definition. From the
position of secondariness, the racial other attempts to wrest language away from his/her
oppressors and to reverse the terms of the dialectic; to assume primacy at least within the
realm of discourse (Nielsen 2).

In addition to serving as camouflage and placing the racial other in a defensive
posture, Africanism creates and sustains a cultural hierarchy which perpetuates
misaligned racial relationships, specifically those relationships imbalanced in terms of
power, respect, and economics. This cultural hierarchy thrives on disguise and evasion.
Once either or both of these tools are eliminated, the White-American oppressor must
face the ugly details of his fear and of the misaligned relationship. Toni Morrison
discusses in Playing in the Dark her take on why Africanism flourishes in modern-day
American society:

One likely reason for the paucity of critical material on this large
and compelling subject is that, in matters of race, silence and
evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. Evasion has fostered another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate. The situation is aggravated by the tremor that breaks into discourse on race. It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture.

To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body.

(Morrison 9)

Critic Aldon Lynn Nielsen parallels Morrison's research of the "Africanist presence" in his critical study of racial presence within literature entitled Reading Race. According to Nielsen, reading race within American literature entails the development of a cultural hegemony that is the result of particular acts of language. He goes on to say that language is, in effect, the institutionalizing force, that which constructs representations and conveys them from one structure to another. And because language inhabits all its speakers, its representations come to seem universal laws (Nielsen 4). Within every cultural community, power relationships exist through the language; and, the White-American community has institutionalized a relationship which exercises power over the black community, leaving those marginalized community members helpless and voiceless. Thus, a cultural hegemony has been developed through such acts of language (Nielsen 4). The manner in which language is constructed may be used to define and redefine those associated with this cultural hierarchy.
Specific language and racial stereotypes of the late 19th century and early 20th century embody prejudice and are adopted as actualities, facts that Faulkner embraces and repudiates simultaneously. In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, George M. Frederickson synopsizes a series of statements about African Americans out of which the metaphorical veil of racial evasion has been constructed:

1. Blacks are physically, intellectually, and temperamentally different from whites. 2. Blacks are also inferior to whites in at least some of the fundamental qualities wherein the races differ, especially in intelligence and in the temperamental basis of enterprise or initiative. 3. Such differences and differentials are either permanent or subject to change only by a very slow process of development or evolution. 4. Because of these permanent or deep-seated differences, miscegenation, especially in the form of intermarriage, is to be discouraged (to put it as mildly as possible), because the crossing of such diverse types leads either to a short-lived and unprolific breed or to a type that even if permanent is inferior to the whites in those innate qualities giving Caucasian civilization its progressive and creative characteristics. 5. Racial prejudice or antipathy is a natural and inevitable white response to blacks when the latter are free from legalized subordination and aspiring to equal status. 6. It follows from the above propositions that a biracial equalitarian (or ‘integrated’) society is either completely impossible, now and forever, or can only be achieved in some remote and almost inconceivable future. For all practical purposes the destiny of blacks in America is either continued subordination—
slavery or some form of caste discrimination—or their elimination as an element of the population. (Frederickson 321)

These statements form the foundation of White-American discourse, language, and writing on the subject of race, and provide the medium in which stereotypes perpetuate themselves.

Both Nielsen and Morrison speak of this American literary construct as becoming canonized and universally accepted. That is, because this White-American discourse and thought is deemed so “natural,” its writers and speakers have deeply embedded within their imaginations and psyches a plethora of cultural and social stereotypes, which are merely symptoms of a larger problem—fear.

Although William Faulkner shows sympathy for the plight of African Americans and females, he still falls victim to the Africanist and feministic presence which inevitably pervades his imagination as the result of cultural context, and is thus reflective in his works of his white Southern background. Africanism, whose calling cards are disguise and cultural hierarchy, has transferred from social issue to the literary realm, infiltrating the minds and imaginations of White-American male writers. As a result, White-American male writers have devised a self-serving discourse and language. Within this discourse lies a conflict between actual depiction of African-Americans versus a stereotypical imaging of them by White-American male writers. Many times, without any substantial evidence or facts, the White-American male writer creates an image internally and then projects it onto those who are marginalized, rendering them powerless to construct their own images. Even those deemed as literary giants, such as Poe and Hemingway, are guilty of this type of biassing. Instead of facing racial issues directly,
these White-American male writers choose to avoid these topics, rely on stereotypes, and allow themselves to fall prey to their environment. Faulkner, for all his liberation, reflects this tendency as well.

Faulkner came from a distinguished Mississippi family. He was born in 1897 in New Albany, Mississippi, but his family soon moved to Oxford, Mississippi (Roberts 5). Because he was born into and spent most of his life in Southern society, Faulkner could not easily dissociate his uncertainties and inquiries from the milieu of Southern culture and Southern history. In the South, the patriarchal parentage typified extensively the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed and, basically, supplied the model for social and political hierarchy. Andre’ Bleikasten provides an excellent view of this aspect of Southern life:

Father and master in one, the slave-holding planter of the prewar South was the source and locus of power: as paterfamilias, he claimed full authority over wife and children; as ‘massa,’ he felt entitled to demand filial subservience from his slaves. He thus presided over an extended family, white and black. ...this sense of extended family came to inform the whole network of race and class relations. (Bloom 48)

The influence of the South on Faulkner becomes apparent through careful scrutinizing of his treatment of African-American and women characters, his handling of blackness as a motif, and his use of language. Faulkner eliminates and subdues the “voice” from women and African Americans if they pose a threat to white masculinity. Few women and African Americans are speaking presences in Faulkner; rather, he delegates the
majority of verbal expression to white males. Characters, such as Caddy and Joanna, who are integral parts to the development of each novel, are treated as background personas. Even though Dilsey is a racial and sexual "other," Faulkner grants her subdued vocal expression, markedly more expression than the white women of the novel. It is apparent that Faulkner values their positions in respect to the creation of the text and plot, but within this character realm, they are not valued as people. Thus, Faulkner handles the idea of blackness within his texts abstractly and realistically. Abstractly, Faulkner creates shadows and shadowing as both a comfort and solace, as well as a compelling force which follows certain characters, forcing them to reckon with and recognize the impact race has on their lives. Realistically, blackness is portrayed as a threatening force, perhaps as a threat to white identity. Faulkner’s use of language unintentionally but inevitably perpetuates Southern stereotypes and enforces cultural and sexual boundaries. He allows his white male characters to use negative definitions, particularly the words “nigger” and “bitch,” to address his African Americans and women, respectively. By enforcing cultural and sexual boundaries, Faulkner provides comfort to white males’ power and control. Concerning Faulkner, this Southern influence serves as the source of marginalization that gives allowance to the act of “othering.”

Because of his literary stature and uniqueness, Faulkner is considered as, perhaps, the most innovative and gifted writer of his time. Critic Harold Bloom attests to this sentiment concerning William Faulkner:

By universal consent of critics and common readers, Faulkner now is recognized as the strongest American novelist of this
century, clearly surpassing Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and standing as an equal in the sequence that includes Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain, and Henry James. (Bloom 1)

In the opinion of Toni Morrison, Faulkner was "the only [white] writer who took black people seriously. Which is not to say he was, or was not, a bigot." Morrison defends Faulkner's literary integrity, though she leaves open to question his personal and political integrity (Dahill-Baue 464). Her opinion of Faulkner seems to give praise and delegate criticism simultaneously. Other critics are not so favorable of Faulkner's work as Bloom and Morrison are:

[James] Baldwin is not so forgiving; he finds Faulkner's personal, political, and literary integrity lacking in true conviction for substantial change in the political, social, and material situation of blacks in the American South before the Civil Rights movement. Baldwin here summarily dismisses Faulkner's fiction as 'something very closely resembling a high and noble tragedy.' (Dahill-Baue 464)

Critics, including several of those aforementioned, place more emphasis on Faulkner the writer versus Faulkner the man. In doing this, these critics many times overlook the source of his genius, only to be lured in by his talent and not by his humanity.

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the importance of the "other's" presence and how its impact dictates the direction and thematic scheme of Faulkner's literature. My interest here is in how racial constructs could infiltrate even one of the most innovative and creative fictive imaginations of the 20th century. Even though
Faulkner seeks, in part, to dismantle stereotypes and discuss racial relationships openly, he, too, was inevitably affected by his own personal racial environment.

In focusing my interest in Faulkner, I have selected *Light in August* for the dominating themes of blackness and femininity that resonate throughout every section and, also, as a guide for revealing Faulkner’s culturally-determined racial and sexual anxieties. The question of racial determination serves as the impetus for the irrational reactions from several characters in the novel, including Joe Christmas himself. Faulkner shows both sides of the “racial coin”; and, then, he tosses it into the air in order to gauge the amalgamation of prejudices and preconceptions just before it hits the ground. Coupling the question of blackness is the dispute concerning the position of femininity. Faulkner illustrates that once femininity diffuses beyond its prescribed boundaries, women are victimized, both socially and criminally. Likewise, *The Sound and the Fury* supplies components of the white male oppressor’s fear but in a more concise fashion, through two particular characters--Jason Compson IV and Quentin Compson. These brothers suffer from a phobia of blackness overwhelming whiteness and of femininity overpowering masculinity, resulting in Quentin’s obsession and Jason’s rage. The connection these male characters share with the “others” of the novel demonstrates and typifies the misaligned racial and sexual relationships that Faulkner wished to explore and expose. In addition to this kinship exposure, Faulkner reveals the severity and impact that presumptuous taboos and mores have on an archetypal Southern household.

In the development of this thesis, Chapter Two: The Victim And The Perpetrators, examples the white oppressor’s fear of blackness through black retribution, merging, and loss of whiteness, both socially and genetically, as well as, his fear of femininity.
Femininity, in this chapter, is treated like a malignant tumor; it poses no threat until it is realized. Then, almost automatically, it is dissolved and removed by white masculinity. Specifically, Joanna Burden’s femininity is particularly treated in this manner; whereas, the dietician’s femininity is feared because of her personality traits. Additionally, the dynamics of Southern personas are exemplified by Joe Christmas to Joanna Burden (BM/WW) and Doc Hines to the dietician (WM/WW). The Southern taboos and mores become more apparent by examining the interaction between these personas.

In Chapter Three: The Silent And The Subdued, I propose to demonstrate the paradigm of cultural and sexual hegemony constructed in order to sustain the metaphorical veil over misaligned racial and sexual relationships. Also, I will point out the importance of language and how its use serves as partial foundation to the racial and sexual constructs of Southern white patriarchy, specifically racial slurs and gender denigrations. The dynamics of Southern culture are examined in this chapter in order to help illustrate the role that Faulkner plays in his inward fear of blackness and femininity, namely Jason and Dilsey (WM/BW) and Quentin and Dilsey (WW/BW). Chapter Three also contains examples of how Faulkner eliminates and subdues the voice from his primary female characters and, in turn, gives it to the male characters of the novel. The subservient positions in which Faulkner places his African American and female characters contribute to the revelation of the oppressive platform from which he operates.
CHAPTER TWO
The Victim And The Perpetrators

Light in August, published in 1932, is considered one of Faulkner’s most complex novels. His portrayal of racial relations and blackness is sometimes abstract in nature. Faulkner’s abstract presentation entails covert language and dialogue, as witnessed in the “blood battle” Gavin Stevens depicts; dichotomous actions which vacillate between oppressive behavior and the guilty feelings associated with this behavior (i.e. Joanna Burden and the dietician’s actions); and, the interplay between light and dark, created from nightly figures, upon Joe Christmas’s body. Critic Donald M. Kartiganer explains the significance of the title:

This is one of the several meanings of the novel’s enigmatic title; for the light of August is a ‘savage summer sunlight,’ a ‘shameless savageness.’ Every figure in the novel must live his moment in this August light when an inner savageness, like the fury of a god long quelled, temporarily destroys the existing orders. And, the source of this eruption, in every case, is Joe Christmas who, like the hero of Greek tragedy, brings to everyone the knowledge that annihilation looms, that the inevitable wreckage of design must disclose the destructive self. (Bloom 30)
In *Light in August*, the concept of otherness explains the many fears: such fears are personified variously through the characters of Joe “Doc” Hines, Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas, the dietician, and the mob. More specifically, in order to further develop the theme of otherness, Faulkner incorporates various examples of the white oppressor’s fear. These examples, which equate “whiteness” with purity and righteousness—black retribution, merging, and loss of whiteness, both genetically and socially—are centered around the life of Joe Christmas.

The main character of *Light in August*, Joe Christmas, is a man eventually destroyed by the absolutist notion by which he lives. His life-long anguish is that he must but cannot identify himself as either black or white, although the Southern atmosphere in which he lives forces him to choose. Because Christmas cannot choose or cope effectively with the situation at hand, he paves a road of self-crucifixion for himself. Joe Christmas’ name is, of course, an ironic derivation of the Christ story. Like Christ, Christmas has no fixed home and belongs to the world; his birth causes surprise; he arrives in Jefferson on a Friday; and, is thirty-three years old, the same age as Christ when He was crucified. As critic Andre’ Bleikasten says,

Christmas is son and father through his name as well as
through his sacrificial role, and in this respect, too, he is not unlike Christ, the divine Son partaking of the omnipotence of his heavenly Father. Yet the Christ he is associated with is the secularized, humanized Christ of the Transcendentalist tradition rather than the Messiah and Redeemer of orthodox
Christianity, the humiliated and tortured son rather than
Christ in his power and glory. . . (Bloom 53)
The responsibility of Joe Christmas' self-crucifixion does not lie entirely on his shoulders alone. The dysfunctional influence on his childhood life characterizes the beginning of his predestined demise.

Christmas' grandfather, Joe "Doc" Hines, symbolizes a blend of religious and racial fanaticism. His daughter, Milly, engages in a sexual adventure with a supposedly black circus man, and of this union is born Joe Christmas. Hines, who is already a bigot, uses Milly's sexual adventure as an outlet for his prejudices, and he feels he must defend the Lord's principles and salvage the white race. To show how serious he is about his personal crusade, Hines, under the assumption that all blacks are docile, interrupts services in a black church to preach philosophies of white supremacy:

That this white man who very nearly depended on the bounty and charity of negroes for sustenance was going singlehanded into remote negro churches and interrupting the service to enter the pulpit and in his harsh, dead voice and at times with violent obscenity, preach to them humility before all skins lighter than theirs, preaching the superiority of the white race, himself his own exhibit A, in fanatic and unconscious paradox. (325)

Not excluding anyone from his personal crusade, Doc Hines directs his anger and fanaticism towards his own daughter. To further demonstrate his supremacist theory, Hines kills his daughter as a symbol of terminating "bitchery and abomination" (350). Although Hines refuses to accept Joe Christmas as his grandchild, he becomes obsessed
with his life. In his own warped way, Hines feels he is doing the Lord’s work, even at the cost of becoming submerged in poverty.

Faulkner’s characterization of Hines effectively demonstrates the extreme depth of white male fear. Not only does Doc Hines exemplify the fear of racial merging but also the fear of black retribution. Hines appears to be threatened by the presence of Joe Christmas even though he is only a child of five years. It seems as if he fears Christmas finding out the truth about his mother and his “blackness,” both of which are threatening. Instead of facing his own fears, Hines stalks his grandchild, always keeping the “enemy” in plain view. The dietician confronts Hines about his fixation with this child:

You never sit here except when the children are outdoors. But as soon as they come out, you bring this chair here to the door and sit in it where you can watch them. Watching him and hearing the other children calling him Nigger. That’s what you are doing. I know. You came here just to do that, to watch him and hate him.

(119)

Doc Hines’ behavior is paralleled by the dietician at the orphanage. The dynamics of their relationship (WM/WW) exemplifies the mores of Southern living; Doc Hines egotistically feels that he is solely aware of the situation with Joe Christmas and must “protect” the dietician from the truth concerning Joe Christmas’ racial identity. She, too, intervenes, much to Hines’ dismay, and contributes to the foundation of Christmas’ fate. Upon discovering that the 5-year old Christmas has seen her making love secretly, the dietician expresses her shame at being caught through vicious name calling. Instead of reprimanding Joe Christmas for being sneaky, she allows herself to become a participant
in the presumed racial and sexual constructs of the South and calls him a “nigger bastard” (117). After this incident, the dietician, like Doc Hines, becomes obsessed with Christmas’ racial identity so she can categorically accept or deny him. Her main concern above all else is to what orphanage this little boy should be sent—the colored orphanage or the white orphanage. When Hines cannot provide her with answers, she becomes agitated:

She began to beat her hands lightly together. ‘But dont you see? This may be the Lord’s way. For you to tell me. Because you know. Maybe it’s His way for you to tell me and me to tell the madam.’ Her mad eyes were quite calm, her mad voice patient and calm: it was only her light unceasing hands. (120)

In order for Joe Christmas to cope with the racial fanaticism surrounding him, he himself becomes fanatical. While on the road, a recurring symbol of Christmas’ wandering spirit, he uses promiscuity and shocking confessions as emotional bandages to stop the bleeding of his torn spirit. Christmas seems to seek refuge in other people’s negative comments so that the responsibility of racial determination will lie on them instead of himself. The more he isolates himself, the more obsessive he becomes. For example, when he walks through the Negro quarters of Jefferson, he begins panting and sweating feeling as though he “had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female.” To escape this feeling, he runs wildly into the “cold hard air of white people” (107). This frightening episode demonstrates how Faulkner portrays blackness both abstractly and realistically. Realistically, Joe Christmas’ responsibility to determine his
racial identity causes him serious psychological problems; while, abstractly, he imagines himself returning to the womb. In both cases, Joe Christmas feels consumed by blackness, thus, perpetuating his fear of blackness and of blackness absorbing whiteness. Ironically, Joe Christmas seeks out and then denies his black heritage.

Christmas further torments himself by living with a dark-skinned woman and nearly killing a white prostitute who offers herself to blacks as well as whites. The black woman’s skin intrigues and reminds Christmas of the inevitable decision he must make about his racial identification while the idea of a white woman giving herself sexually to a black man also shocks and revolts him:

He did not see her for two weeks, though he knew that she was waiting for him. Then one night he was at the corner when she appeared. He struck her without warning, feeling her flesh. He knew then what even yet he had not believed. . .He cried, cursing her, striking her. Then she was holding him. Even the reason for striking her was gone then. (186)

Although Christmas’ character seems to rapidly disappear in the abyss of confusion, the other characters who comprise the lynch mob are convinced that he is black. As soon as the townspeople perceive Christmas as a black man, all their perceptions become stereotypical and fetishistic. Toni Morrison discusses the fetishization that occurs when the issue of blood is considered a determinant of cultural savagery or civility:

Fetishization. This is especially useful in evoking erotic fears or desires and establishing fixed and major difference where difference
does not exist or is minimal. Blood, for example, is a pervasive fetish: black blood, white blood, the purity of blood; the purity of white female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex. Fetishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery. (Morrison 68)

Those who are individuals are transformed into a Pavlovian lynch mob: as soon as the emotional bell rings, they become salivating, hungry “dogs,” executing an innate urge to destroy. Even the most educated of Faulkner’s people, Gavin Stevens, accepts without question both Christmas’ negritude and the rightness of his lynching. In fact, Stevens “logically” explains to the lynch mob Christmas’ torn behavior as an internal struggle between both his black and white blood:

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 in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. (424)

Although Stevens is considered a highly intelligent man, he dismisses all intelligence and allows his fear to dictate the manner in which he assesses this “bloody” situation; he refuses to recognize his fear of blackness overshadowing his whiteness. Rather than face
his fear of blackness, Stevens chooses to wallow in the realm of denial. By using a blood battle to describe Christmas’ situation, Stevens disregards the racial construct that initially placed Christmas in this predicament and removes himself from blame. Furthermore, it is necessary for Stevens to separate the terms, black blood and white blood, because he fears the black blood will “rise” up and overpower the white blood, or worse—merge.

In his book, The Black Image in the White Mind, George M. Frederickson lists a series of stereotypes of which racial evasion has been constructed, and one of which is interbreeding or racial merging:

Because of these permanent or deep-seated differences, miscegenation, especially in the form of intermarriage, is to be discouraged (to put it as mildly as possible), because the crossing of such diverse types leads either to a short-lived and unprolific breed or to a type that even if permanent is inferior to the whites in those innate qualities giving Caucasian civilization its progressive and creative characteristics. (Frederickson 321)

According to Faulkner’s ideologies, the white oppressor’s fear of blackness manifests itself in several forms: black retaliation; racial merging with an inevitable identity-loss; and, blackness absorbing whiteness, both socially and genetically. Doc Hines and the dietician are corroborative characters who initiate the stereotypical fears from which Joe Christmas suffers, and Joe Christmas becomes a wandering soul in search of racial boundaries. Upon realizing that he may never be able to define himself as either black or white, Christmas allows himself to become submerged in a life of destruction filled with
promiscuity and violence. Because the other characters do not accept black people,
except through strategies of marginalization, Joe Christmas never learns to accept himself
which slowly destroys his spirit and, eventually, his life.

Although the issue of race relations is a dominant theme in *Light in August*, the fears
of whites contain a second component: that of femininity overpowering white
masculinity. The male characters who seek to dismantle femininity attempt to place
constraints upon sexuality and sexual activities; concomitantly, the women characters
become the objects of their sexual fear. The two characters who serve as centers of this
aspect of white male fear are Joanna Burden and the dietician.

Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas' mistress, functions both as a silent threat and a
scapegoat to not only Christmas himself but also to the townspeople. That is, because she
is an advocate for Negro rights and dons an unabashed badge of femininity, she, like her
name, becomes the town's invisible burden. It would seem that her mission would create
a hostile or threatening atmosphere in the town of Jefferson, but Joanna Burden presents
no threat because she is rendered powerless. The people of Jefferson are more concerned
with the ultimate Southern taboo of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden (BM/WW)
cohabiting and copulating than they are of her post-slavery "abolitionism." Her
femininity, in Faulkner's depiction of it, is something that residents of Jefferson have a
need to control. Initially, this need is evident when the reader is introduced to Joe Hines
and his theory of women—bitchery and abomination. Further in the novel, the reader
experiences Joe Christmas' obsession with not becoming a victim of female control.

Christmas is unaware of how he, too, is affected by this facet of the paradigmatic
fears of racial and sexual "others" that circumscribe white masculinity. In fact, before
Christmas' supposed racial identity is revealed to Joanna Burden, she is a sexually-demure character accustomed to maintaining her prescribed sexual role. Immediately after Christmas' racial identity is revealed, she begins to behave like an animal in heat:

Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania, her body gleaming in the slow shifting from one to another of such formally erotic attitudes and gestures as a Beardsley of the time of Petronius might have drawn. She would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: "Negro! Negro! Negro!" (245)

Christmas is not only disturbed by her behavior but also threatened. The more she becomes sexually uninhibited, the more he becomes enraged. She is no longer the "chaste" woman with whom he fantasizes. This rage, stemming from his fear of femininity, escalates, resulting in Joanna Burden's murder.

Similar to both Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, the dietician is both an oppressor and a victim of the fear of negritude. Although she plays a small part in *Light in August*, the dietician is an important character as a focus of Christmas' sexual and racial fear because Joe's encounter with her affects his entire outlook on women. She exhibits masculine qualities—aggressiveness, control, and cruelty—that teach Christmas to fear femininity at an early age. Maurice Coindreau sees Joe Christmas' crucial first encounter with the dietician as charged with sexual disgust:
In *Light in August* the sexual act is equated to vomiting. And Faulkner prepares the demonstration of this idea with an astonishing psychological sureness by letting Joe Christmas as a child swallow too much toothpaste so that his nausea coincides with his discovery of the act of love. (Coindreau 34)

The sickness that Joe Christmas experiences as a child initiates his fear of femininity. His image of chastity and purity is tarnished when he discovers the dietician, who to a 5-year old boy epitomizes an authoritative, motherly figure, making love. Because this event triggers his fear of femininity, all subsequent womanly figures are disrespected and dismissed. As a result of his fear, no woman—whether it be an adoptive mother, a lover, or a prostitute—can reach Joe Christmas emotionally, psychologically, or sexually.

In *Light in August*, the two components of the white oppressor’s fear—that of blackness overwhelming whiteness and femininity overpowering masculinity—are relatively submerged until they are brought by events to the forefront of consciousness. If the residents of Jefferson are not fully aware of the impact these two aspects have on themselves, neither perhaps is Faulkner of its presence in his writing. After all, Faulkner is a product of that same type Southern environment—an atmosphere which believes that the most horrendous crime known to man is a Negro sleeping with a white woman (Roberts 18). In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison points out that although American writers attempt to write an Africanist-free text, they usually fail because the presence of the marginalized other, racial or sexual, is so overwhelming:

Explicit or implicit, the Africanist presence informs in compelling
and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. It is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and an invisible mediating force. Even, and especially, when American texts are not 'about' Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation. It is no accident and no mistake that immigrant populations (and much immigrant literature) understood their ‘Americanness’ as an opposition to the resident black population. Race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and class-informed racisms whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering. (Morrison 47)

Faulkner, too, writes under this shadow that hovers in his consciousness. Unlike other American writers, such as Poe or Hemingway, Faulkner’s novels do center around the theme of African presence, but the presence is treated as a backdrop rather than a focus. That is, the black characters in Light in August are not given any major roles; it is only the threat of their shadows that becomes the issue. The matter that Morrison is highlighting is that although Faulkner intended to shift the focus from the mistreated Negro to the racial and sexual anxieties of whites, he still is being controlled by the Africanist persona he creates. Pertaining to Faulkner and many other American writers, Toni Morrison asserts, “As for the culture, the imaginative and historical terrain upon which early American writers journeyed is in large measure shaped by the presence of the racial other” (46). Moreover, while Faulkner is pointing his literary finger at the
construct and stereotypes of race relations and sexuality, he does not recognize the fingers pointing back at him. This is evidenced by his use of the word “nigger” both within and without the text. Of course as a literary artist, Faulkner can excuse his use of the racial slur as merely an “expression” of his characterizations; but, outside the text, in his personal life, Faulkner’s use of this word only makes him look like a Southern bigot. For instance, in an introductory piece, Faulkner talks about the construction of the plot and the significance of the first section in which Caddy muddies her drawers in *The Sound and the Fury*:

> I saw that they had been sent to the pasture to spend the afternoon to get them away from the house during the grandmother’s funeral in order that the three brothers and the nigger children could look up at the muddy seat of Caddy’s drawers as she climbed the tree to look in the window at the funeral... (Bleikasten 13)

Instead of Faulkner describing the African American children as what they are, he chooses language and a perspective reflective of a stereotypical Southern white male prejudice and anxiety, both racial and sexual, further establishing the impact his upbringing has on his perceptions and the ways they construct the text.

Faulkner presents several examples of the white oppressor’s fear; and, inadvertently, in the process forms an Africanist persona while revealing its impact on his literary imagination. For example, when Joe Christmas removes his clothing and is walking naked through tall wet grass, he seems to be engaging in a type of cleansing ritual. He reveals his nakedness to a passing car; and, at this point, Faulkner creates an interplay of light and darkness on his body suggesting the conflict, metaphorically, of white and
Negro blood in his body. Indeed, Faulkner shows the internal dissension plaguing Christmas, but the reader must question Faulkner’s mindset for positing the situation in terms that equate blackness with evil and death.

Once again, the implied “othering” in Faulkner’s literary construction is seen when he describes Joe Christmas’ journey through both the white and black neighborhoods. Faulkner assumes that Christmas will be forced into isolation rather than accepted when he crosses racial boundaries. If Faulkner had recognized the African presence and treated it as more than a backdrop existence, then perhaps he would have allowed Christmas to fit into his genetically-constructed niche. Instead, Faulkner permits his personal situation, a white Southern writer in the 1930’s, to dictate his central character’s fate.

Even Faulkner’s choice of words to describe Christmas’ experience while walking through the black neighborhood is suggestive. He describes Joe Christmas as panting and sweating feeling as though he “had returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female” (107), suggesting a complex set of fears involving loss of masculinity, loss of racial identity, and a loss of selfhood. Joe Christmas’ fear of blackness and femininity are intertwined in that he refuses to allow either aspect to become uncontrollable or overwhelming. To embrace either blackness or femininity is to have Joe Christmas confront the psychological issues he has with both. Once he confronts these fears, Joe Christmas will have to examine their sources, revealing painful reminders of his true identity. For Joe Christmas, it is simply more beneficial to treat the symptoms of his racial and sexual infirmities than to disclose the derivation of his personal turmoil.

Although William Faulkner redirects the literary focus of his novel, Light in August, from the mistreated Negro to the white oppressor’s fear, he and his imagination still fall
victim to the Africanist and feministic presence he creates and to the white Southern atmosphere in which he operates. Toni Morrison's concept of othering helps to point out the "other's" presence and how its influence dictates the direction and thematic scheme of American literature. The concept of othering can be applied to this literary creation because Faulkner's work, despite its literary greatness, reflects the pervasive presence of the stereotypical.
CHAPTER THREE

The Silent And The Subdued

Of all his achievements, The Sound and the Fury is considered one of Faulkner's greatest novels. Its title is derived from Macbeth's famous speech when he hears of the death of his wife:

Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (5. 5. 14)

These lines and the resulting title can be taken as a clue to the meaning and the structure of the novel. In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner recounts the tragic lives of the Compson family. The Compson family consists of a neurotic mother, an indifferent father, a promiscuous sister, and three brothers who are individually depressed, incensed, and retarded. Dysfunctional familial interaction serves as the basis of their personal destruction. When telling the story of the Compsons, Faulkner, as in almost all of his novels, penetrates deeply into the psychological motivations for man's actions, and investigates man's dilemma in the modern world (Roberts 6). While delving into the
psyche of the male Compson family members, particularly Jason and Quentin, Faulkner uncovers the motivations behind their fears.

As we have seen in the case of *Light in August*, the concept of othering can be used to describe the kinds of complex racial and sexual attitudes that drive the action in *The Sound and the Fury*. More specifically, the development of otherness can be examined through the associations of Jason Compson IV and Quentin Compson to Caddy Compson, and Dilsey Gibson. Both Jason Compson and Quentin Compson suffer from the two linked facets of racial and sexual apprehensions: that of blackness overwhelming whiteness, and that of femininity overpowering white masculinity.

Jason Compson IV, the last of the Compsons, is the most amoral, materialistic, and evil person in the novel, a man who delights in acts of perversity. Jason exists solely for himself and believes the entire world should conform to his neurotic, authoritarian expectations. He denies any allegiance to or love for anyone except himself. His success in life, if it can be so called, is due to the fact that he feels no love for anyone, neither his family nor Dilsey who is his caregiver. When Dilsey and Jason interact, their relationship touches upon a primary Southern taboo (BW/WM). They exist as master to servant, but also as pseudo-familial figures, that is, Dilsey assumes the motherly role of the Compson household and Jason seizes the fatherly role. According to Southern mores, Dilsey should not possess this much power and decision-making as a “mammy” in a white household, and Jason should have the final say concerning all domestic matters. When the dynamics of their interchange deviates from the Southern norm, Jason becomes more incensed and vengeful towards Dilsey and other African Americans. For instance, just
for the fun of it, Jason takes delight in burning two free passes to a show simply to
 torment Dilsey’s grandson, Luster, who more than anything wants to attend the show:

‘Whyn’t you hush up?’ Dilsey says. ‘He jes teasin you. He fixin
to use dem tickets hisself. Go on, Jason, and let him lone.’

‘I dont want them,’ I says. I came back to the stove. ‘I came in
here to burn them up. But if you want to buy one for a nickel?’
I says, looking at him and opening the stove lid. ‘I aint got dat
much,’ he says. ‘All right,’ I says. I dropped one of them in the
stove. ‘You, Jason,’ Dilsey says. ‘Aint you shamed?’ (255)

Of course Jason has no shame for the mean-spirited acts he commits against other people.
Throughout his entire section, Jason never speaks a kind word to any person; and, he
displays a sadistic streak that is equally directed toward his sister Caddy, Dilsey, and
black people in general. But Jason’s egotistical attitude and misogyny are, properly
contextualized, merely symptoms of his unconscious fears of the “other.”

It is of the utmost importance for Jason to maintain control and dominion over the
African Americans surrounding him, not only the African Americans who coexist within
his familial structure but also the black people with whom he is unfamiliar. Jason spends
much of his time thinking of how much control black people “seem” to have and how
they manipulate “the system” to get what they want, common characteristics of Southern
bigotry. “What this country needs is white labor. Let these dam trifling niggers starve for
a couple of years, then they’d see what a soft thing they have” (190). Further illustrating
his stereotypical fear masked by hostility, Jason continues with his negative thoughts
while waiting on the retrieval of his car:
I found a nigger and sent him for my car and stood on the corner and waited... After about a week he got back with it. 'Where the hell have you been?' I says. 'Riding around where the wenches could see you?' 'I come straight as I could,' he says. 'I had to drive clean around the square, wid all dem wagons.' I never found a nigger yet that didn’t have an airtight alibi for whatever he did.

But just turn one loose in a car and he’s bound to show off. (218)

Even those African Americans with whom he resides present a threat to Jason’s command. Jason resents the fact that his mother has embraced the “hired help” as part of the family. To him, Dilsey’s family is just one more entity that he feels compelled to control. These African Americans who share his food, his habitat, and his life are nothing more than insignificant burdens his family insists on retaining. In reality, Jason is afraid that Dilsey’s family will overthrow his “reign” and take over the Compson family—that is, the threat of the “other,” both racial and sexual:

We had to take her up to bed then, and after things got quieted down a little I put the fear of God into Dilsey. As much as you can into a nigger, that is. That’s the trouble with nigger servants, when they’ve been with you for a long time they get so full of self importance that they’re not worth a dam.

Think they run the whole family. (207)

The language and labels that Jason uses to describe African Americans reduces them to subhuman status and animalistic images. He vehemently refuses to refer to any African American as a black person or, for that matter, a human being. Every definition
Jason uses is derogatory and degrading, an important rhetorical strategy in his maintenance of cultural superiority. Jason must dehumanize in order to sustain his control. The most frequent example of this degradation is Jason’s use of the word “nigger.” Critic Aldon Nielsen offers this view on this kind of racial demotion:

Racist terms, summarized by the epithet ‘nigger,’ survive as frozen metaphors within American speech; thus whites who have never had any contact with blacks in their lives may still exhibit an essentially racist mode of thought, one which privileges them while demoting an invisible other to a secondary status. (Nielsen 3)

Jason is incapable of referring to any African American in a respectful manner; every referral is demeaning. “‘Yes,’ I says. ‘I feed a whole dam kitchen full of niggers to follow around after him, but if I want an automobile tire changed, I have to do it myself’” (186). Jason continues, “‘You ought to be working for me,’ I says. ‘Every other no-count nigger in town eats in my kitchen’” (189). Dilsey is Jason’s primary caregiver; and, he shows no more respect for her than he does any other African American. Their relationship cannot even be surmised as a “love/hate” situation, but more so as a “hate/berate” relationship. Jason fears and demeans Dilsey simultaneously because she holds the key to order and tranquillity within his household. On the other hand, when Jason attempts to control and discipline his niece, Quentin, Dilsey shows no fear when confronting him:


‘Dont you worry, honey.’ She held to my arm. Then the belt came
out and I jerked loose and flung her away. . . She came hobbling
between us, trying to hold me again. ‘Hit me, den,’ she says,
‘ef nothin else but hittin somebody wont do you. Hit me,’ she
says. (185)

Dilsey deems her bond with Quentin (BW/WW) as crucial in maintaining the harmony
and peace within the household. Quentin, by default, has assumed the “woman of the
house” role; and, in keeping with Southern traditions, Dilsey remains the faithful servant,
“mammy,” and cook who places her employer’s needs above her own. Naturally, Jason
dismisses Dilsey’s attempt to establish humanity and respect in order to declare his
superiority and affirm her otherness.

Unlike Jason Compson, Quentin Compson’s fear is less explicit. Quentin’s fear
dwells more in the differentiation between light and dark; his fear lurks in the
“shadows.” In his section, Quentin is “followed” by shadows which suggest to an
extended metaphor for his fear of blackness:

I looked back. The entrance to the lane was empty. I slowed
still more, my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through
the weeds that hid the fence. . . I climbed the gate into a woodlot
and crossed it and came to another wall and followed that one,
my shadow behind me now. (133)

But looking back to the Shakespearean source of the title, we may see the particular
significance here: Faulkner plays with the idea that life is nothing but a shadow; indeed,
the word “shadow” recurs frequently throughout Quentin’s section, as well as throughout
the rest of the novel:
The implication that life is a shadow is used by Faulkner to suggest that the actions performed by modern man are only shadows when compared with the greater actions performed by men of the past—that modern man is only a shadow of a being, imperfectly formed and inadequate to cope with the problems of modern life.

(Roberts 7)

In keeping with Faulkner's concept of the shadow, at the time of Quentin's suicide, he sees his shadow rise up from the water beneath him, signifying that his life has actually ended:

you are still blind to what is in yourself to that part of general truth
the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every
mans brow even benjys you are not thinking of finitude you are
contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind
will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself
and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead. . .

(177)

Toni Morrison's thoughts on the tropes of darkness contrast with Faulkner's concept of them. Morrison equates shadows with the image of blackness. These shadows are more than a signifier marking the end of one's life journey; they are symbols of darkness that define and represent facets of the inner self:

If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil
and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable—all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable. (Morrison 59)

Morrison’s definition of the shadow seems more befitting to Quentin’s state of mind at the time of his suicide—confused, rebellious, and desiring. Quentin was confused about the concept of time and how it coincided with his life; he became rebellious against his family’s values and his society’s, wanting to commit incest and suicide; and, finally, he desired to be released from his world of chaos—the neurotic mother, the idiot brother, the fatalistic father, and the sinful sister. The shadow, which began as an entity to be feared, became paradoxically (and neurotically) a saving grace for Quentin.

Although Quentin and Jason’s fears of blackness differ, they do share one extremely significant aspect, namely, their use of the word “nigger.” Quentin’s intentions are not evil in nature as Jason’s actions; but, the fact that he uses the word indicates his acceptance of the cultural hierarchy. Not only does the use of the word “nigger” support this hierarchy but also reinforces the act of othering. Even though he is a perpetuator in this cultural hierarchy, Quentin does seem to have a change of heart as he moves closer to ending his life:

The only vacant seat was beside a nigger... I used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of niggers... When I first came East I kept thinking You’ve got to remember to think of them as colored people not niggers... I learned that the best
way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone. That was when I realised that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among. (86)

Because Quentin faces his fear, of the shadows and of black people, he finally embraces the darkness. Although Quentin is a tragic character, his suicide enables him to take his fear of darkness and convert it into a tool of escapism. At the time of his death, Quentin, even in his sadness, no longer fears the blackness overwhelming his whiteness—he confronts and accepts it.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the expression “sexual hegemony” is interchangeable with cultural hegemony. Both expressions, components of otherness, are equally tyrannical and constrictive. The premise of this hierarchy is of the same source—white male oppression. Sexual hegemony, like cultural hegemony, involves the oppressor institutionalizing a relationship which exercises power and control over women, while simultaneously reinforcing their otherness. These relationships are also misaligned in terms of power, respect, and economics. Of course, disguise and evasion are the tools used to maintain this hierarchy. In *The Sound and the Fury*, sexual hegemony is manifested in the association between Caddy and her brothers, Quentin and Jason.

The second component of the white male’s fear, femininity overpowering white masculinity, transcends the interaction between these siblings. For Quentin and Jason, Caddy symbolizes femininity in both its alluring and threatening sense. This representation is exactly the message Faulkner wishes to convey to his audience. In a
1933 article, entitled “An Introduction to The Sound and the Fury,” Faulkner talks about his creation of Caddy:

I did not realise then that I was trying to manufacture the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose, though the former might have been apparent from the fact that Caddy had three brothers almost before I wrote her name on paper. . . . To me she was the beautiful one, she was my heart’s darling. That’s what I wrote the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of Caddy.

(Gwynn 2)

Quentin and Jason obsess over Caddy’s femininity. Their obsession in trying to control her sexuality stems from their basic assumption that every woman, no matter what her age or background or social position, conceals within her a lustful sexual animal. As long as the “animal” remains hidden, this is acceptable to the male psyche. The male needs only to act upon his knowledge of this secret in order to unleash the animal; but, if the secret is released before he consents, the basis of his masculine role is destroyed. Therefore, Caddy must appear as an “other,” a complex projection of their fantasies and fears of women.

In attempting to preserve his image of her, Quentin becomes obsessed with Caddy’s virginity. His fixation with Caddy’s virginity is symbolic of his desire to find something pure. When Caddy fails Quentin, he wonders if his father, who believes that “purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature,” is right (143). Then, Quentin attempts to unravel the causes which led her to violate her chastity; and, he begins to follow her
wherever she goes in hopes of catching her transgressing his projected idealized image of her. In the following passage, we can note again the significant use of the term “shadows” in this context:

we reached the fence she crawled through I crawled through when
I rose from stooping he was coming out of the trees into the gray
toward us coming toward us tall and flat and still even moving
like he was still she went to him. . .their shadows one shadow her
head rose it was above his on the sky higher their two heads. (154)

When Quentin fails to control Caddy’s promiscuity, he sees no point in living—all value and honor has been lost—and commits suicide. He can no longer protect her chastity; provide her with guidance; or, serve as a “husbandly” figure to her, evidenced by his incestuous urges to control.

Jason, too, is paranoically apprehensive of Caddy’s sexuality becoming uncontrollable for her (and thus for him); but in contrast to Quentin, it does not drive him to suicide but to unbridled rage. He hates her femininity and to his rage applies his father’s misogynistic principles: “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say” (180). Critic Douglas B. Hill further explains Jason’s conception of women:

Jason’s attitudes towards Caddy, and towards women in general, are in many respects no more than unpleasant versions of his father’s, but where Mr. Compson seems to be all words, a disembodied speaker of epigrams, Jason, both because of his function as a narrator and because of the comic vitality of the character
Faulkner gives to him, is a distinct presence. His father is nihilistic and cynical, Jason is sardonic and brutal: his father expresses disillusion, a sort of amused world-weariness; Jason expresses nastiness. (Bloom 92)

When Caddy is driven to nymphomania, gets pregnant, marries, divorces, and gives birth, Jason sees this series of events as an opportunity to issue relentless punishment, thereby gaining control over her femininity. He forbids Caddy to see her child, and she is never to enter the house again. Jason, whose normal practice is deception and cruelty, tricks his sister into trusting that he will permit her to spend a small amount of time with her child, only if she pays him one hundred dollars. In actuality, he only allows her to view the baby momentarily:

Then I took the raincoat off of her and held her to the window and Caddy saw her and sort of jumped forward. ‘Hit ‘em, Mink!’ I says, and Mink gave them a cut and we went past her like a fire engine.

‘Now get on that train like you promised,’ I says. I could see her running after us through the back window. (205)

Jason basks in the glow of his own evility knowing that he has controlled yet another episode of femininity gone wild; his father would be so proud.

William Faulkner explicitly bases his themes on Quentin’s and Jason’s fears in The Sound and the Fury; however, there is subtextual evidence that he submits to the same kind of fear in his writing. The manner in which Faulkner relates to Caddy and Dilsey as characters uncovers his own substratum of Southern neuroses. That is, Faulkner contributes to the “othering” of Dilsey and Caddy by silencing and subduing them. Both
of these women are central characters but are not given an opportunity to narrate their own lives. Caddy represents his love of femininity while Dilsey possesses such qualities of love, duty, honor, and faith; but true to his white Southern background, Faulkner conforms to its notions by eliminating and subduing the voices of these women.

Dilsey encompasses all the positive qualities Faulkner wishes to convey in this novel and yet, he chooses to narrate section four, which should have been Dilsey’s chance to express herself. In order for Faulkner to give Dilsey a more expressive voice, he would be relinquishing the literary and social power he possesses, thus destroying the construct of cultural and sexual hegemony. Faulkner inadvertently fears Dilsey’s blackness so much himself that he is willing to allow Benjy, an idiot, a voice and a chance to express himself, even if only through sensation, before he permits Dilsey to speak. To add insult to injury, when Faulkner narrates Dilsey’s expression, he chooses language that empowers stereotypes and not her personhood, selecting “black” dialect to provide Dilsey with “sound,” but more importantly, articulating her actions in “standard” English. “‘All right,’ Dilsey said. ‘All right, here I is. I’ll fill hit soon ez I git some hot water.’ She gathered up her skirts and mounted the stairs, wholly blotting the gray light. ‘Put hit down dar en g’awn back to bed’ ” (267).

Faulkner commits a similar verbal injustice against Caddy. She, too, is a primary figure of the novel, yet she, too, is denied textual access to her own thoughts. Only the white males are privy to her representation. This is not coincidental. When asked in a 1957 interview why he did not have a section with Caddy giving her views or impressions, Faulkner replies:
That’s a good question. . . It began with the picture of the little girl’s muddy drawers. . . And I tried first to tell it with one brother, and that wasn’t enough. That was section One. I tried with another brother, and that wasn’t enough. That was section Two. I tried the third brother, because Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on. (Bleikasten 21)

Actually, her femininity is not an object of adoration on the part of Faulkner but a reminder of his phobia of women asserting control over their own sexuality. Faulkner uses his literary prowess disguised as concern and adoration to justify his reasoning for silencing the female voice and, eventually, leading to the omission of the feminine spirit. The protective metaphorical veil under which Faulkner shields himself adds insult to injury. He dismisses Caddy’s sexuality, assertiveness, and humanity and replaces these qualities with an explanation of beauty, reducing her personhood to a mere superficial objectification. Objectifying helps Faulkner to rationalize his need to control all aspects of femininity.

William Faulkner marginalizes these women as an author, as well as through characterizations within the text. He bestows power upon the male characters, such as Jason and Quentin, thereby “othering” Dilsey and Caddy. By Faulkner’s not allowing the two main female characters to represent themselves, he gives the men an opportunity to judge, categorize, form, label, and control their images. That is, Faulkner lets these white males maintain their cultural and sexual hegemony, their metaphorical veil, and their denial in order to overlook complex social issues that remind both he and his characters of their fears.
CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSION

Although Faulkner desires to dismantle the stereotypes that cripple the images of both African Americans and women, he is inevitably affected by his own personal racial and sexual environment. In an attempt to modify traditional Southern notions of race and sexuality, Faulkner redirects the literary focus of his novels—Light in August and The Sound and the Fury—from the non-white and/or non-masculine victim to the white oppressor’s fear. Furthermore, he takes a particular interest in the preconceptions that emerge from misaligned racial and sexual relationships, specifically relationships imbalanced in terms of power, respect, and economics. Both Light in August and The Sound and the Fury are generated out of the intertwined issues of race and sexuality. The themes are constructed both abstractly and realistically through the tropes of shadows and the use of language, strategies that resonate throughout every section of each novel. They embrace Faulkner’s goal to verbally encode the discrepancies of Southern relationships and the anxieties arising from them. But subtextually, they also encode a deeper substratum of sexual and racial hegemony that, despite his liberal motives, is an inevitable aspect of Faulkner’s cultural inheritance.

These particular Southern relationships include the categories of the white woman (WW), the black woman (BW), the white man (WM), and the black man (BM). The role
that each of these plays in late 19th and 20th century Southern life determines the type of taboos and mores that exist. In the texts, *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury*, the dynamics of these personas are connected with other personas, as shown with Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, as well as with Dilsey and Jason. According to the mores of Southern living, these two particular relationships signify the most ultimate taboos. Moreover, these dynamics exemplify the preconceptions that serve as partial foundation to the sexual and racial constructs formed by the white Southern patriarchal system. Faulkner was born into this cultural matrix and was influenced by its dynamics. However, Faulkner goes beyond the stereotypical mistreated Negro who is merely a background character to center his writing on the fear of blacks among whites that typified the earlier twentieth century.

Faulkner’s concept of characteristic racial and sexual Southern anxieties incorporates two components: the fear of whites that “blackness” will overwhelm their whiteness; and the fear that femininity will overpower the dominance of white masculinity. Moreover, Faulkner’s perceptions of these two related sets of fears contain an implied subtext of “otherness” or “othering.” The theme of “othering” is now a current critical concept, which Toni Morrison in particular, in *Playing in the Dark*, has developed extensively.

In Morrison’s particular terminology, a process of “dismissive othering” is embedded in writing that marginalizes African Americans and African American readers. In American literature, a great deal of implied othering occurs, through the use of negative definitions and by treating non-white and/or non-masculine characters as mere background personalities. Additionally, Morrison examines the impact of African
Americans on the imagination of White-American writers. Morrison highlights the various motifs that create what she terms the “Africanist presence” or non-white persona and investigates the means, “Africanism,” through which this Africanist persona has been constructed. “Africanism” involves the constraining of African-American people, and it produces constrictive effects upon White-American male writers, who consequently evade uncomfortable racial subjects which are realistic in nature. In order to maintain control and dominion over the racial other, White-American writers, such as Poe and Hemingway, use the power of language to suppress any efforts made by the racial other to unleash himself from the oppressor’s grasp, literary or otherwise.

In addition to serving as a camouflage and placing the racial other in a defensive circumstance, Africanism creates and sustains a cultural hierarchy which perpetuates misaligned racial relationships. This cultural hierarchy thrives on disguise and evasion. In accordance with Morrison’s concept, critic Aldon Lynn Nielsen parallels Morrison’s research of the Africanist presence with his critical study of the racial presence within literature entitled Reading Race. According to Nielsen, reading race within American literature entails the development of a cultural hegemony that is the result of particular acts of language. He goes on to say that language is, in effect, the institutionalizing force, that which constructs representations and conveys them from one structure to another. Within every cultural community, power relationships exist through the language. Although this is an accepted premise, the White-American community has institutionalized a relationship which exercises power over the black community, leaving it in a sense voiceless.
Because women, like African Americans, have been rendered marginalized and voiceless within the white patriarchal system, they, too, are victims of a hierarchy, that is, a sexual hierarchy. Women, because of their femininity and because of the white male oppressor’s fear, suffer from similar misaligned relationships. Although they are assumed and accepted in Southern circles, prescribed sexual roles are not the positions that women voluntarily adopt. In fact, when women discover their power, as many racial “others” have, they disregard any constrictive hierarchies or patriarchal constructs that threaten to annihilate or mute their personhoods. Once the discovery of power is made, women, then, seek to redefine their femininity and command their own images, thoughts, and decisions. The conflict therein lies between the enforcers of the Southern patriarchal structure, who operate under fear and placate African Americans and women with silent leads and shallow compliments, and the “others” who wish to apportion the power, thus, eliminating all aspects of sexual hegemony and domination.

*Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury*, driven as they are by the enmeshed themes of blackness and femininity, serve as guides revealing the white male oppressor’s fear, as well as, illustrating the influence these components of fear have on Faulkner and his writing. Furthermore, these two novels reveal the impact that presumptuous taboos and mores have on typical Southern townships and households. In *Light in August*, the aspects of the white oppressor’s fear are shown through the life of Joe Christmas. He is torn between his biracial heritage and the townpeople’s reaction to his identity. Through Joe Christmas and the townspeople, Faulkner shows the white oppressor’s fear of blackness by examples of black retribution, racial merging, and the loss of whiteness,
both socially and genetically. Femininity, like blackness, poses a threat to the residents of Jefferson, but not until it is realized; then, quickly, it is squelched by white masculinity.

Similarly, The Sound and the Fury supplies components of the white oppressor’s fear but in a more schematic fashion, through two particular characters—Jason Compson IV and Quentin Compson. These brothers suffer from a phobia of blackness overwhelming whiteness and of femininity overpowering masculinity, resulting in obsession and rage. The connection these male characters share with the “others” of the novel demonstrates and typifies the misaligned racial and sexual relationships that Faulkner wished to explore and expose.

The conclusions to be drawn from the research suggest that although William Faulkner shows sympathy for the plight of African Americans and females, he still falls victim to an Africanist and feministic presence which pervades his imagination and is thus reflective in his works of his white Southern background. The influence of the South on Faulkner becomes apparent through careful scrutinizing of his upbringing, his treatment of African-American and women characters and his use of language. Because Faulkner was born into the aforementioned cultural matrix and spent most of his life in Southern society, he could not easily dissociate his uncertainties and inquiries from the milieu of Southern culture and Southern history. In the South, the white patriarchal parentage typified extensively the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed and, basically, supplied the model for racial and sexual hierarchy. It is this paradigm by which Faulkner has formed his thoughts, opinions, and mores and infused them into his writings.
Although critics and scholars have critically acclaimed Faulkner's style, the image of Faulkner as the "liberal voice of the South" becomes tarnished when the subtext of "othering" and the cultural context in which he functions are examined. The more thoroughly Faulkner's modes of expression and uses of language are investigated, the more prototypal he becomes. Faulkner is no longer considered the "literary liberalist" who revealed the unmentionable racial and sexual relations of the South; but, he now appears as a more typical white Southerner who possesses phenomenal talent and skill to disguise his own personal apprehensions.

Faulkner begins his descent into conventional Southernhood when he treats women and African Americans as subordinates and adopts demeaning language that restricts and inhibits their empowerment. That is, Faulkner's novelistic strategy virtually eliminates the "voice" from women and African Americans. Few women and African Americans are speaking presences in Faulkner; rather, he delegates the majority of verbal expression to white males. Characters, such as Dilsey, Caddy, and Joanna who are integral parts to the development of each novel, are treated as background personas. Apparently, Faulkner values their positions in respect to the creation of the text and plot, but within this character realm, they are not valued as people and their humanity is ignored.

Faulkner's submission to the white Southern patriarchal structure becomes apparent through his use of constrictive language. The fact that Faulkner permits demoralizing phraseology to flow so explicitly, both artistically and personally, demonstrates how primary bigotry is to his makeup. He uses and allows his white male characters to use negative definitions, particularly the words "nigger" and "bitch," to address his African Americans and women, respectively. By reinforcing cultural and sexual boundaries,
Faulkner (although perhaps unintentionally) provides comfort to his and white males’ power and control, which, in turn, serves as the source of marginalization and oppression that gives allowance to the act of “othering.”

While Faulkner has been critically esteemed as perhaps the most innovative and gifted American novelist of the 20th century, and deemed by Toni Morrison as “the only white writer who took black people seriously,” he was, nonetheless, not entirely free of the kinds of internal and foreboding fears that inform this archetypal Southern portraiture. Unfortunately, against his will, the prejudices instilled in Faulkner by his Southern environment show through the text and further lure him into the shadows.
WORKS CITED


