“One Tale, One Telling”: Communal Legacy and Liminality in William Faulkner’s South

by

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“Trying to Say”: Associative Memory and Faulknerian Liminality

The majority of William Faulkner’s protagonists can be analyzed through their struggles with both communal and personal pasts, and how these histories infect their narratives of the present. Quentin Compson, up until the moment of his suicide, grapples with the familial shame of Caddy’s downfall and the despair over a vanquished South. Reverend Hightower, haunted by his vision of his grandfather’s death in the Civil War, bases his life trajectory on this inherited past. Isaac McCaslin tries to adopt the traditions of the Chickasaw tribe in order to repudiate his birthright.

However, there is one character who is too too carelessly dismissed as not a true Faulknerian protagonist: Benjy Compson. Although Benjy’s psychological condition clearly affects his ability to process memories and evoke meaning through the past—not to mention rendering him incapable of proper speech or human expression—most critics have allowed his disability to overly determine their analyses.

1 L. Moffitt Cecil, a widely-cited Faulknerian critic, provides an apt encapsulation of the scholarly consensus on Benjy: “[Benjy’s] senses are active and keen, but he has no power to form conscious judgments about his own person, his plight, or the fortunes of the people around him. His responses are purely instinctive, never rational” (43). Lawrence E. Bowling echoes Cecil’s assessment: “To Benjy, the world does not make sense but only sensation. He has strong faculties of perception and memory but no ability to reason....He is unable either to talk or to understand the speech of others” (467-68). I concur with Maria Truchan-Tataryn, who argues that such analyses of Benjy miss entirely the true importance of his narrative: “Faulknerian scholarship, regardless of its place in time or trend, persists in conflating the dehumanized images of Benjy with the lived experience of disability, thus perpetuating oppressive disability prejudice and limiting the richness of the character’s metaphoric potential” (159). Another commonly held belief is that Benjy, by virtue of his mental condition, is an objective reporter of the events of the novel. Merritt Moseley claims that Benjy is a “wonderfully reliable narrator...because he has no ego and is unaware of his own involvement in events” (302). James M. Mellard calls Benjy a “passive, machine-like recorder that can convey sensations without intellectual mediation” (234). Stacy Burton, while responding to Cecil, expresses particularly well the analytical failure produced from these assumptions: “Benjy ‘too is a character struggling to order and express his experience of the world. Both what he remembers and what he notices reveal what matters to him: his discourse, hardly objective, strongly evidences his consciousness” (215). But other scholars attribute to Benjy an inappropriate level of agency and self-awareness in order to counter the “ableist” majority. For example, Ted Roggenbuck, although serving, along with Burton, as a critical inspiration for my own reading of Benjy, does not adequately account for Benjy’s tendency to dissociate agent from action. Given this polarizing critical discourse, a “Goldilocks” approach will more effectively reveal Benjy’s importance for Faulknerian scholarship.
of Benjy. Scholars, rather than focusing on a nuanced approach to character, are too quick to accept the critical consensus on Benjy’s character—a hyperbolic portrait of a helpless, mentally-disabled vehicle for symbol and theme—or to resist the consensus, employing an equally extreme vision of Benjy as a fully-developed consciousness with exaggerated agency. Thus, a reconceptualization of Benjy’s narrative centered around the relationship between memory and narrative—rather than around the nature of Benjy’s disability—is necessary to accurately delineate his psychology.

Such a reading demonstrates that Benjy communicates not through words, but through memories, expressing the emotional truths of his perspective by molding into a meaningful narrative shape the connotative currents linking moments from his past. The logic driving Benjy’s consciousness, rather than being “disabled” or unreadable, mimics the common processes of human memory to convey an emotional narrative of Caddy’s loss.² Reading Benjy is therefore like “reading” ourselves, tracing how memory, often without conscious input, forms meaning and expresses emotion through the connotative links elicited by external stimuli. By investigating the various associations Benjy employs and evaluating Benjy’s degree of control over the progression and order of his narrative, I will demonstrate how Benjy serves as a prototype for the ways in which Faulkner’s protagonists, such as Quentin, Hightower,

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² Many scholars believe that Benjy does not remember Caddy; as Faulkner himself claims, “[Benjy] no longer had Caddy; being an idiot he was not even aware that Caddy was missing” (‘Heuvel” 241). However, no critic would deny that Caddy has an inordinate influence on Benjy. Burton provides a convincing argument for the importance of Caddy to the structuring of Benjy’s narrative: “Unable to order his entire section chronologically, Benjy nonetheless patterns it according to his central concerns: virtually every remembered episode consists of others’ conversations about him or of incidents in which his sister Caddy plays a prominent role” (216). Additionally, John T. Matthews argues that the fact that Damuddy’s funeral and Caddy’s wedding intertwine in Benjy’s mind indicates that he is motivated by a “logic of loss” (41). Matthews even dedicates a category of Benjy’s memories to Benjy’s effort to “restore Caddy to his world once she has gone” (43).
and Isaac, process their presents through the past.\(^3\) Like Benjy, Faulkner’s other characters express their central concerns not through speech, but through the ways in which the associative patterning of their memories betray their obsession with Southern legacy.

Benjy’s associations among various temporal moments take on a number of forms. The simplest, and most common, temporal transitions in Benjy’s narrative are linguistic—two different scenes are tied together by a particular word, which is either spoken or provided by the narration. On page 9 of The Sound and the Fury, Benjy shifts from the present into the past upon passing the carriage house: “We passed the carriage house, where the carriage was. It had a new wheel. ‘Git in, now, and set still until your maw come.’ Dilsey said. She shoved me into the carriage.” The italicized section represents the present, in which Benjy is walking with Luster, while the non-italicized lines refer to a moment in the past when Benjy rides with his mother to the graveyard. Both scenes are connected through the word “carriage,” which suggests that Benjy’s narrative is commenting on the present moment through a connotative linguistic link to the past. Although the nature of that commentary is unclear, it is possible that

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\(^3\) Most scholars have argued that Benjy cannot differentiate between past and present, which would disqualify Benjy from serving as a prototypical Faulknerian consciousness. Bowling claims that “Benjy’s attention shifts frequently back and forth between past and present without Benjy’s being aware that his mind is making a shift” (468). On the other side of the critical fence, Burton contends, “That Benjy cannot explicitly differentiate between past and present does not mean that he does not experience time or attempt to order it...” (210). I largely agree with Burton. Benjy’s associations, although patterned according to his emotional concerns, do not require Benjy’s conscious input because they are governed by the instinctual associative power of all human minds. Thus, Benjy himself need not be conscious of all of the associations he is making for his mind to serve as an able demonstration of how Faulkner’s characters communicate through memory.
Benjy, noticing the “new wheel” in the present, recalls his mother’s past fear that the carriage might break (“‘You’ll turn us over.’ Mother said” [11]).

Benjy also forms associations from particular lines of dialogue. A clear example of this technique occurs on page 29, when Roskus’s line, “‘Taint no luck on this place,’” serves as a bridge between two different scenes. However, the link need not be that direct—Benjy is capable of not only linking two temporal moments through dialogue without the lines being exactly the same, but also connecting two lines of dialogue if they express the same concept. One of the best examples of this ability occurs toward the beginning of the novel. On page 5, Caddy says, “Keep your hands in your pockets... Or they’ll get froze. You don’t want your hands froze on Christmas, do you.” The transitional link to the next scene is not revealed until page 6, when Versh tells Benjy, “‘You better keep them hands in your pockets.’”

Yet this is not the only link between the two scenes. On page 7, Caddy references Christmas, revealing that Benjy has made another connection between the two scenes using dialogue. Benjy has thus connected the two temporal moments partially through both a syntactic resemblance between two different lines of dialogue (“Keep your hands in your pockets” and “You better keep them hands in your pockets”) and the conceptual link of Christmas. In this example, the narration is likely

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4 Linguistic transitions can also occur between two scenes from the past. Take this example: “Ruskus was milking the cow in the barn door. The cows came jumping out of the barn” (20). Once again, the italicized and non-italicized portions—linked by the word “cow”—occur at entirely different years in Benjy’s life. However, both moments are located in the past: the first just after the children play in the branch, and the second during Caddy’s wedding. This transitional method can take on even more complicated forms. On page 38, the verbal root “start” serves as both a transition into a memory and a transition out of that same memory: “‘They haven’t started yet.’ Caddy said. They getting ready to start, T. P. said... ‘I skeered I going to holler.’ T. P. said. ‘Git on the box and see is they started.’ ‘They haven’t started because the band hasn’t come yet.’ Caddy said.” Though the second segment of the quotation does not employ italics to assist the reader, it is clear enough that Benjy switches back to remembering Damuddy’s funeral as soon as T. P. says “started,” linguistically linking T. P.’s quotation with Caddy’s.
communicating through connotative links Benjy’s desire for another person to try to understand him. The one intrusion of the present in this sequence is Luster incorrectly interpreting Benjy’s moaning: “What are you moaning about, Luster said. You can watch them again when we get to the branch” (6). This misinterpretation contrasts with Caddy’s attempts to understand why Benjy greets her at the gate (“Did you think it would be Christmas when I came home from school” [7]).

Benjy’s perspective is thus revealed to be more sophisticated than most critics believe it to be, capable of articulating meaning through connections as complex as those formed by any fully-functioning human memory. However, many of Benjy’s temporal transitions cannot be pinpointed to particular connotations; such transitions seem to occur through some random ordering principle distinct from human cognition, serving as exceptions to my theory for Benjy’s psychology. There is another way to account for these apparent anomalies, though. Events from the past often drift unprompted from our subconscious to our conscious minds, memories impossible to trace back to a particular external or internal stimulus. Similarly, the lack of clear association between some of Benjy’s memories merely mimics a common process of

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5 As Burton puts it, “[Benjy] still remembers his interaction with Caddy, whom he has not seen in many years, frequently and in great detail. Benjy does so, his narrative suggests, because while everyone else reads him on their own narrow terms, Caddy alone engages him dialogically...[B]ecause Caddy alone persistently offers her brother the hope of speech, her absence signals for Benjy the lost possibility of genuine dialogue” (218). Roggenbuck also discusses the ways in which Benjy yearns for a meaningful connection with Caddy and even structures his memories around that need: “Caddy more than anyone actively attempts to interpret Benjy’s cries, so in 1928...when trying to communicate becomes mostly pointless because nobody will pay enough attention to understand him, Benjy’s interest in his own voice and the voices of those around him deadens” (2). It is for this reason, Roggenbuck argues, that Benjy seeks “refuge in his past”—to lose himself in a time when Caddy did “pay enough attention,” when communication was not yet “mostly pointless” (3).

6 In fact, Benjy’s associations can be even more abstract. He occasionally associates two temporal moments through spatial location, such as when he recalls playing with his siblings while, in the present, he walks with Luster to the branch, or when he shifts into a new memory upon arriving at Versh’s house during a different recollection (Fury 17, 28). In another instance, Benjy links one memory to the next through the action of being carried—first by T. P. during Caddy’s wedding, and then by Versh during Damuddy funeral (22).
human memory, through which our brains form connections too opaque to be comprehended through rational reflection.\textsuperscript{7}

The variety of ways in which Benjy’s temporal associations indirectly generate meaning make it difficult to label Benjy a “blithering idiot,” as L. Moffitt Cecil does in his widely-cited, yet deeply flawed, analysis of Benjy’s narrative (Cecil 34). However, I have not yet explored how Benjy’s agency as a character factors into my psychological theory. Stacey Burton inadvertently provides us with a way into this discussion: “The local sequences that [Benjy] clings to represent his effort to order his life; the vividness of his memories suggests that he actively cultivates his recollections as a way of granting meaning and order to his world” (213). Though I have already proven this assessment to be true, Burton’s statement also implies that Benjy possesses agency over the culling of his memory—in other words, even if connotative memory itself is largely devoid of conscious input, Benjy himself does consciously shape the connotative framework of his narrative, guiding it toward a meaningful conclusion. By this logic, Benjy’s narrative is not just governed by his memory’s instinctual associations, but also reflects rational judgments on the temporal moments he links together. Therefore, it remains for us to resolve what appears to be a fundamental

\textsuperscript{7} In the same vein, Benjy’s visceral response to the word “caddie” can also be traced back to a common effect of connotative memory. At several points during the novel, Benjy begins to moan or cry when the golfers playing on the old Compson pasture call for their caddie, since “caddie,” as many scholars have pointed out, is phonetically identical to the name “Caddy.” Benjy’s response is considered by many of his caretakers as just one more sign of his mental disability, even by those who, unlike Luster, actually understand the connection Benjy is making. Many critics have been quick to cite this response, along with other evidence, as demonstrating Benjy’s cognitive limitations—the fact that he can remember Caddy solely through her absence. However, I find it more productive to read Benjy’s emotional response in terms of traditional patterns of human cognition. Though his emotional response to the word “caddie” is most certainly exaggerated—largely because of his inability to communicate with speech—Benjy is not alone in his associating emotions with particular words. The utterance of names, particular the names of loved ones who are absent or have passed away, frequently triggers sadness, even tears, in people with fully-developed brains. In fact, it is not a stretch to suggest that homonyms like “caddie” could trigger similar negative emotions even in a person who knows full well that the homonym is not equivalent to the object of their sorrow.
paradox of my theory: if the process of connotative memory is largely unconscious, then does Benjy truly have agency over the presentation of his memories, or do we as readers derive meaning from connotative patterns formed unconsciously?

Benjy does possess some agency over his narrative through his emphasis on particular emotional concerns. I have discussed how Benjy’s memories of Caddy fuel the subjectivity of his perspective—it is through this and other emotional concerns that Benjy directs, to some extent, the flow and content of his memories. Benjy’s attention to how others treat him gives shape to his story and allows him to center his narrative around that which is most important to him. In fact, without these emotional needs, Benjy would not “try to say” at all, and so his attempt to revisit and reexamine his memories is in itself a method of control over his environment separate from the mere mechanics of his narrative. For example, I would argue that the entire sequence of memories from pages 64 to 67 of *Fury* is willfully structured by Benjy in order to express Jason’s cruelty, both in the past and in the present.

However, the model I have employed to expand our understanding of Benjy’s perspective also provides the means for appropriately limiting the extent of his agency. While it is true that all of us possess indirect control over connotative memory by defining our emotional concerns, many of the connotations generated by our brains do not arise from conscious input; some of them, as discussed, are beyond our conscious understanding altogether. Thus, Benjy possesses only as much conscious agency as is permitted by the logic of human memory. To be sure, Benjy can occasionally resist sliding into a memory. Though Caddy asks Benjy, “Do you
remember when Mr Patterson sent you some candy last summer,” Benjy does not shift into a recollection of that moment simply because Caddy references it (Fury 13).

He can also decide when to submerge himself in the past—he frequently shifts into memory when faced with confrontation in the present, such as when Luster berates him for not acting “like folks.” But once within the current of memory, Benjy does not necessarily have control over the duration of each temporal event, nor the direction in which each association takes him. Perhaps more fundamentally, his lack of agency during his day-to-day existence forces him to cede control over the progression of events to other actors. In this sense, Benjy is forever limited by his inability to directly influence the environment he struggles so hard to order and understand.

Though this conclusion seemingly condemns Benjy to a subordinate position in relation to other characters, I would argue that it is this very quality—Benjy’s inability to influence the present—that positions him as the prototype for a Faulknerian consciousness. Cecil unwittingly demonstrates this connection: “Beny’s consciousness of the present is continually being invaded by his memories of the past, but he has no inklings of a future. He cannot predict or prophecy. He cannot anticipate” (41). It would be difficult to find a major character in Faulkner’s corpus who doesn’t find his present “continually being invaded by memories of the past,” who is actually capable of prophecy.8

Benjy is of course especially limited by his mental illness; but as I have demonstrated through close readings of Benjy’s narrative, this condition is more

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8 As we will see in Chapter 3, Isaac McCaslin does perceive future outcomes as a young child. However, as I will argue, much of this predictive ability is dependent upon the knowledge he receives from Sam Fathers about Chickasaw heritage; it is his preoccupation with Native American legacy that allows him to instinctually understand his fate. Additionally, his prophetic ability is also aided by retrospective adult narration, which is at times difficult to distinguish from Isaac’s reactions to past events as a child.
productively understood as not an illness at all, but as a way of observing the world and ordering experience by the logic of connotative memory. As he struggles to explain his present through the cognitive ordering of the past, Benjy is reenacting a process at once familiar—for it mimics the inner-workings of our own minds—and alien, a mode of cognition particular to the major characters of Yoknapatawpha County. Yet Benjy is representative of the Faulknerian protagonist in more ways than one. Benjy’s perpetual “child-like” state is a literal representation of the liminality plaguing the three characters I will be examining in this paper.

Liminality was first coined by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909 to refer to the “middle stage in ritual passages” (Thomassen 5). Since Victor Turner’s rediscovery of the theory in the mid-twentieth century, the applicability of liminality as an analytical tool has greatly expanded to encompass ritualistic passage in a broader sense. According to various theorists, liminality can be employed to analyze everything from a teenager in puberty to an entire civilization’s response to inter-generational conflict. However, my treatment of the theory is not a transliteration of anthropological discourse on liminality; rather, it is a metaphorical adaptation that borrows from anthropological definitions without becoming beholden to them.

Nonetheless, Bjørn Thomassen, in his article detailing the intellectual history and varied applicability of liminality, does provide useful hypotheses for the use of the theory in other academic discourses, discussions that provide a starting point for my own development of liminality as a tool for literary analysis. The majority of Faulkner’s protagonists inhabit a society in flux, continually reeling from the dismantling of antebellum social structures and uncertain of the path toward a
productive future. As Thomassen suggests, entire societies can experience liminality over large spans of time—as wars transition into prolonged periods of social instability, societies can experience the “[i]ncorporation and reproduction of liminality into ‘structures’” (17). I would argue that Faulkner’s South undergoes this process through the postbellum period and beyond, as the liminality permeating all levels of society takes on a self-destructive permanence.

Thomassen describes this phenomenon as the “permanentization of liminality,” in which liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases of ritual become “frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame” (22, 23). Thomassen’s gloss of anthropological definitions of communism in terms of permanent liminality sheds light on the ways in which liminality operates within Faulkner’s South: “Rather than healing the wounds and looking to the future, communist regimes sustained themselves by playing continuously on the sentiments of revenge, hatred, and suffering, ‘preventing the settling down of negative emotions’” (23). Residents of Yoknapatawpha County, rather than trying to move past the trauma of the Civil War, can do nothing but obsess over a history of defeat. This, in turn, allows “revenge, hatred, and suffering” to materialize into a societal mood that infects future generations, preventing them from distancing themselves from their pasts in order to save themselves and the South. As Faulkner might put it, the perpetuation of societal liminality transforms descendants into “back-looking ghosts” doomed to repeat the mistakes of their forefathers (*Absalom!* 7).

Faulkner’s major protagonists are those characters who become deeply invested in this fatalistic cycle, defining their identities and societal roles in relation to
a shared liminal heritage. This struggle to come to terms with Southern legacy results in the incorporation of societal liminality within their personal identities, as they feel an overwhelming disorientation, despondency, and lack of rootedness in response to the dissolution of concrete inheritance. Quentin Compson, Reverend Hightower, and Isaac McCaslin all develop similar coping mechanisms to manage the psychological repercussions of this “un-rootedness,” but ultimately to no avail. These failures to “escape” liminality, besides impacting the personal trajectories of these characters, also reflect back on the Faulknerian South itself, unearthing the manner through which its legacy inculcates self-defeating psychologies within its inheritors.

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In Chapter 1, I will examine how the shame Quentin feels toward his familial legacy compels him to dissociate himself from his own present. Much like Benjy, Quentin communicates this dissociative relationship with his own past primarily through the connotative web of his memories. The connotative links generated by Quentin’s mind, in their collective articulation of loss, strongly resemble those formed by Benjy’s cognitively-limited consciousness; however, Quentin’s more developed brain allows him to communicate through connotative memory with greater nuance. Quentin’s more complex associations intertwine personal loss with communal legacy, positioning the Compson family’s downfall as an allegorical representation of doomed
Southern inheritance. The instances of dissociation\(^9\) within Quentin’s narrative demonstrate his inability to come to terms with this fusion of communal and personal legacy, to accept his personal relationship to a Southern heritage defined by liminality. Once Quentin equates his own past with the collective shame of the South, his anxieties about Southern community dismantle any hope for personal salvation, leading to his suicide.

Using my discussion of Quentin’s dissociation as a guide, I will begin Chapter 2 by briefly accounting for Quentin’s narrating of the Sutpen history and highlighting the most apparent similarity between Quentin and Hightower: their replacement of their own histories with Civil War narratives “inherited” from ancestors. This comparison will reveal the interdependence of familial and war legacies in constructing Southern identity while laying the groundwork for a more expansive discussion of the psychologies of postbellum Faulknerian characters. Using Marianne Hirsch’s definition of postmemory\(^{10}\) as a guide, I will explore how Hightower replaces his own past with inherited Civil War postmemory in order to avoid confronting his own personal connection with the war’s fatalistic legacy. Unlike Quentin, Hightower

\(^9\)Although I do not adopt a strict psychological definition of dissociation, the evolution of critical thought on psychological dissociation provides insight into my strictly narratological use of the term. Within the psychological community, dissociation is characterized by the subject’s detachment from his immediate surroundings, commonly resulting in daydreaming or altered states of consciousness in response to environmental or emotional stimuli. In more serious cases, dissociation can result in the subject’s detachment from physical or emotional reality. Most scholars consider Pierre Janet the inventor of the term, but it wasn’t until Sigmund Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis that dissociation was considered a psychological coping mechanism, a means for evading trauma or conflict. Carl Jung pushed scholarship on dissociation even further, arguing that dissociation was an exaggerated instance of a normal cognitive tendency for human consciousness to explore alternative realities.

\(^{10}\)The theory, coined by Marianne Hirsch, “describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (Hirsch 5). I will provide a much more detailed explanation of the concept later in Chapter 2, when I use it to examine Quentin and Hightower’s “memories” of the war.
seems to survive his ultimate encounter with his personal failings. He does so by channeling, through his imaginative investment in his postmemory, the responses of the war’s “silent” survivors—children and war wives. However, in repeating the past, Hightower ultimately perpetuates a fatalistic cycle from which he never escapes.

Having introduced dissociation and postmemory as coping mechanisms for psychological liminality, Chapter 3 will explore a “what if?” scenario: a potential reality in which Southerners can escape the fatalism of communal legacy by adopting Native American, rather than Southern, postmemory. Sam Fathers, similarly to the postbellum Southerner, has been disinherited from his Native American heritage, experiencing it as a form of postmemory. Sam passes along this Chickasaw postmemory to Isaac McCaslin, who integrates Sam’s teachings into his hunting ritual in order to cultivate a spiritual communion with the forest and repudiate his own “doomed” birthright. Isaac attempts to immortalize this new Southern legacy by establishing a continual hunt, a “positive” liminality in which the bear stalked by his hunting party need never be killed. Yet as Isaac eventually discovers, every hunt must end; Big Ben’s inevitable death foreshadows the gradual destruction of the wilderness itself, along with any hope for escape from the liminality born from Southern communal legacy.
Chapter 1 - Quentin Compson

“There Should Be a Refund”: Dissociation and Familial Legacy

Upon beginning Quentin’s section of *Fury*, most readers are pleased to find that, in comparison to Benjy’s exhausting narrative, grammatical order and psychological reality seem to have been restored. Quentin’s first sentence is certainly promising: “When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch” (*Fury* 76). Clear subject-verb agreement, sensible clause constructions, anchoring within a specific time—so far, so good. Even when a memory interrupts description of the narrative present, the interjection is promptly and unambiguously attributed to Quentin’s father. Unfortunately, the refreshing lucidity of Quentin’s narration does not last for long. By the time italics reappear on the next facing page—that dreaded narrative device from *Fury*’s previous section—something has gone terribly awry.

Perplexed, the reader glances back to Quentin’s first sentence, wondering whether she hasn’t accidentally started Benjy’s section all over again.

Following this common reaction to Quentin’s section, this chapter begins with an examination of the striking similarities between Quentin and Benjy’s narratives—the most fundamental being their shared obsession with Caddy. Although scholars debate the nature of Benjy’s desire for Caddy, it is indisputable that Caddy’s absence is a crucial motivator for his retreat from the present to the comforting recesses of his

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11 Burton and Roggenbuck both argue that Benjy longs for Caddy because of her effort to understand him and respond to his needs (see Introduction, footnote 5, page 7). However, others claim that Benjy’s desire is largely, or at least partially, sexual. As Burton writes, “Benjy’s preoccupation with Caddy, unlike his attention to others’ talk about him, has intrigued critics who have read in it everything from Benjy’s need for a caring mother to his love of nature to his desire for sexual union” (218). Mellard, for example, claims that Benjy “does become something of a sexual threat to Caddy,” citing as evidence the very end of Benjy’s section of *Fury*, when Caddy lies down with Benjy and he notices that she hasn’t taken off her bathrobe (242). Finally, the Compsons overtly recognize the threat of Benjy’s sexuality when he tries to assault a girl passing by the property and they castrate him in response.
memory. As I argue in the Introduction, the associative patterns of Benjy’s consciousness are driven by his desperate need to escape from time and reconstruct a reality in which Caddy is present. It is this impulse that provides the possibility for Benjy to serve as representative for a failed Southern familial legacy. Though Benjy’s narrative logic ably serves as the prototype for a Faulknerian preoccupation with the past, the limitations of his cognitive ability blind Benjy to the societal implications of his engagement with personal loss. Benjy’s severance from the broader Southern community is symbolized by his castration, which prevents him from perpetuating the Compson inheritance and therefore participating in Southern communal identity.

Even if Benjy cannot fully process the biological and social forces driving his need for Caddy, he is nonetheless capable, without the use of language, to pattern his memories in order to articulate this absence. Quentin’s struggle with Caddy’s loss is much more complex, as is Quentin’s psychological processing of that loss. On the level of the personal, Quentin yearns for Caddy just as he yearns for the loss of his childhood, a time of innocence in which Quentin’s virginity does not connote emasculation and his position as male heir of the Compson legacy has not left him powerless with guilt. Quentin’s shame concerning Caddy’s promiscuity is thus intertwined with anxiety about his masculinity; Caddy’s sexual indiscretion has disgraced the Compson past, while Quentin’s virginity—lack of sexuality—dooms the

12 As Michael Millgate puts it, “[Quentin’s] search is for a means of arresting time at a moment of achieved perfect, a moment when he and Caddy could be eternally together in the simplicity of their childhood realtionship; his idea of announcing that he and Caddy had committed incest was, paradoxically, a scheme for regaining lost innocence...” (“Fury” 102). Quentin’s desire for childhood can also be equated with a longing to the return of antebellum values. Matthews, like many scholars, argues that “Caddy represents an ideal of purity and nurture that males in the New South thought they were about to lose forever” (43). Quentin thus wishes to “reclaim” Caddy’s virginity in order to return to a state of youthful innocence, both for him and the entire South. This desire also connects with the shame Quentin feels toward his family, for failing to uphold traditional values, and toward himself, for being unable to perpetuate Southern legacy as the principal heir within the Compson lineage.
On the level of the communal, Quentin’s inability to contain Caddy’s sexuality and possess it for himself is equivalent to castration in the face of the encroaching economic and social power of the North. Quentin, whose passage to Harvard was funded by the sale of Compson land, feels the shame of his failure to perpetuate an antebellum Southern legacy within a harsh postbellum reality. It is not just Quentin’s masculinity that is at stake, but the collective manhood of the South that is sacrificed by Quentin’s implicit betrayal of communal values.

Within this context, Quentin attempts to freeze time not just for himself and his family, but also for the entire South:

> It was Grandfather’s and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s. (Fury 76)

Quentin’s retelling of the moment in which he received the pocket watch—a symbolic object crucial to the progression and thematic unity of Quentin’s narrative—emphasizes the relationship between time and legacy, both personal and communal. Instead of beginning with his father, the bearer of the gift, Quentin starts his sentence with the watch’s original owner, General Compson, self-consciously inserting himself within a patrilineal succession extending from the Civil War into the narrative present.

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13 Bowling views Quentin’s virginity not as repressed sexual desire for Caddy, but as a symbol for his prevailing apathy toward life: “What is wrong with Quentin is not that he wishes to commit incest but that he is unwilling to commit any significant action at all. As his father points out, Quentin’s problem is the fact that he is...not only a virgin physically but a virgin psychologically” (470-71). Quentin is “so completely absorbed in abstractions—innocence, purity, virginity—that he considers the actual world unworthy of effort or consideration” (472). I would argue that Quentin, rather than finding the world “unworthy of effort,” is actually just incapable of assertive action, unable to embody traditional masculinity. His virginity reflects the fact that Quentin is not “man enough” to perpetuate Southern legacy, no matter how much he wishes to serve this role.
Mr. Compson, Quentin’s father, calls the timepiece “the mausoleum of all hope and desire,” a community-centric metaphor highlighting a crucial aspect of Faulknerian experience—the clock’s unceasing ticking reminds not of the future, but of the past, as the Faulknerian future is “worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels” (77). Mr. Quentin’s use of the word “mausoleum” also anticipates Faulkner’s famous description of Quentin as a “barracks” in *Absalom, Absalom!*. As a symbol for the loss of Southern “hope and desire,” the mausoleum becomes a memorial housing the tombs of Civil War soldiers; thus the barracks, though full of life, also foreshadows death. A “commonwealth” containing postbellum “back-looking ghosts,” Quentin continually lives within a present “still recovering” from past defeat: a “barracks-mausoleum” that unifies past and present into one experiential whole.

Finally, it is clear that Quentin will use the watch, as a symbol for (Faulknerian) time, to “gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience.” What is even more telling is Mr. Compson’s conclusion that such “reducto absurdum” would assist Quentin “not better than it fitted his or his father’s [needs],” which implies the ultimate failure of familial legacy to foster meaning for descendants. An increasingly modernizing world renders anachronistic a traditional Southern society dependent on landed inheritance, female purity, and male socioeconomic dominance. Since the Southern familial unit no longer perpetuates economic and social solidity, that

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14 “Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; his 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...” (*Absalom! 7*).

15 A perverted form of “reductio ad absurdum,” a form of logical argument in which a postulate is proven true by the absurd results of its opposite. Perhaps Faulkner warped the reference in order to emphasize the concept of reducing human experience to absurdity.
formerly impregnable building block of Southern community crumbles, rendering futile Quentin’s desperate attempts to derive solace from his memories. There exists no redemption in Quentin’s parallel, interpenetrating histories: a personal past of sexual and familial shame and a communal past of powerlessness and social rupture.

By engaging in close readings of moments of “frozen time”—sections of Quentin’s narrative in which he forms connotative links and succumbs to the seductive pull of the flashback—I hope to decipher what Quentin is “trying to say” through the associative patterning of his memories and the strategic interjection of flashbacks into an unbearable present. Comparing Quentin’s sophisticated associations to the logic of Benjy’s consciousness will highlight Quentin’s cognizance of the personal and social anxieties fueling his preoccupation with the past, as well as the ways in which he communicates this awareness using memory.\\footnote{Whereas Benjy does not communicate anything more complex than the pain of Caddy’s absence, Quentin’s fear over the decline of the Compson family is expressed through myriad concepts that each generate complex connotative associations between Quentin’s past and present, including Quentin’s lost masculinity, anxiety concerning virginity, guilt over Benjy and the loss of his pasture, fear of the implications surrounding his social ascendency through an elite, Northern education, and shame over Caddy’s sexual indiscretions. Together, these psychological factors provide insight into Quentin’s consciousness and help demonstrate how Quentin’s personal history becomes a microcosm for a communal Southern past.}

As I have explored in the Introduction, Benjy expresses his emotional concerns through an array of connotations that mirror those formed by any fully-functioning human memory. By shifting between past and present using linguistic, temporal, spatial, and kinetic associations, Benjy can communicate implicit meanings and truths about his condition without the use of spoken language. However, Benjy’s cognitive limitations constrain the potential complexity of his narrative. Just as human memory possesses no control in and of itself over the duration and progression of recalled
moments, so too is Benjy incapable of directly controlling his associations. Furthermore, given his stunted psychological development, Benjy cannot convey terribly complex ideas through the associations he forms, nor can he reflect on why he links particular temporal moments. Quentin’s more developed mind allows him to expand beyond these limitations. Due to his deeper self-awareness and advanced educational background, Quentin’s narrative often comments on the process of memory itself, not just the superficial meaning derived from pure association.

Quentin’s obsession with the psychological processing of memory deeply impacts the interworking of his mind and influences the presentation of the rich thematic content generated from the patterning of Quentin’s memory.

The distinction between Benjy and Quentin’s methods for connecting the past and present is most clearly demonstrated through a comparative analysis of the two brothers’ incorporation of linguistic connotations. Although Benjy manages to convey meaning by recognizing specific words from his memory, his brain’s developmental immaturity ultimately simplifies his associations and betrays his lack of certainty over the difference between past and present. Take this example from the Introduction:

“Roskus was milking the cow in the barn door. The cows came jumping out of the barn.”

Although the reader is aware that these sentences are derived from distinct temporal moments, there is no textual indication that Benjy himself is aware of the difference.

Quentin’s obsessive awareness of the passage of time, along with his sophisticated understanding of language, allows him to generate far more complex linguistic associations that structurally incorporate Quentin’s philosophical musings on the nature of memory. Given the complexity of his thoughts, Quentin’s temporal
jumps are not as readily traceable as Benjy’s.\textsuperscript{17} Per my analysis, Benjy can only shift among memories that contain specific linguistic referents, limiting his ability to form subtle, thematically driven associations. Quentin is not burdened with such restrictions. Frequently, Quentin replaces such referents with symbolic programs that introduce multiple themes through connotation (see footnote 17).

These thematic currents, while complicating his narrative by intermingling the personal with the communal, also allow Quentin to conceal his core emotional concerns within the density of his narrative. In this vein, Quentin’s declining to attend the boat race is a form of repression. Alongside his frequent class cutting, it can be read as a futile attempt to “refund” the time he actively wastes so that it can be claimed by a family member better equipped to perpetuate the Compson inheritance.

Though Quentin is thinking most directly of Jason, he is also wishing for an ideal world in which Benjy could claim his rightful inheritance. Quentin’s keen

\textsuperscript{17} Take this passage toward the beginning of Quentin’s section, which incorporates so much more than mere linguistic connotation:

Thinking it would be nice for them down at New London if the weather held up like this. Why shouldn’t it? The month of brides, the voice that breathed “She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses. Cunning and serene. If you attend Harvard one year, but don’t see the boat-race, there should be a refund. Let Jason have it. Give Jason a year at Harvard. (Fury 77) Quentin’s interweaving of various memories and thoughts exhibits an intricate symbolic order and coherent internal structure that are testaments to his intense philosophical study of memory. The stream of consciousness opens with Quentin staring outside of his Harvard dorm room while thinking about the upcoming annual regatta against Yale, which takes place in New London. A contemplation of weather prompts him to label it the “month of brides,” which in turn reminds him of Caddy and, by symbolic extension, roses. Quentin directly replaces Caddy with the rose as symbol in order to repress his anguish. Although the “month of brides” immediately reminds Quentin of the familial trauma of Caddy’s marriage, his mind obscures this connection by inserting the rose as an intermediary conveyor of symbolic meaning. When Quentin relays an excerpt from Caddy’s wedding invitation, the memory is interrupted by the word “Roses” before Caddy’s name can be uttered. Quentin ultimately returns to the boat race, using the event as yet another connotative springboard, driven by the word “refund,” into his guilt about being sent to Harvard at the expense of the Compson legacy. In this way, the upcoming regatta serves as a structuring device, opening and closing a deeper exploration of Quentin’s overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and failure.
awareness of his role as agent for both Jason and Benjy’s disinheritance\textsuperscript{18} results in his memory thematically conflating the two brothers, even as he simultaneously meditates on their distinct betrayals. In one of the more notable examples of this conflation, Quentin interrupts his recollection of Mrs. Compson’s one-sided conversation with Caddy’s lover, Herbert, with memories of Jason and Benjy:

\begin{quote}
Jason will make a splendid banker he is the only one of my children with any practical sense you can thank me for that he takes after my people the others are all Compson \textit{Jason furnished the flour. They made kites on the back porch and sold them for a nickel a piece, he and the Patterson boy. Jason was treasurer.} There was no nigger in this car, and the hats unbleached as yet flowing past under the window. Going to Harvard. We have sold Benjy’s \textit{He lay on the ground under the window, bellowing. We have sold Benjy’s pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard} a brother to you. Your little brother. (94)
\end{quote}

Quentin’s first italicized interruption is a sentimental snapshot of Jason’s childhood suggestive of the brothers’ differences: Jason had the “practical sense” to sell kites while Quentin splashed with Caddy in the branch. Through the romanticization of Jason’s industriousness, Quentin questions the justice of his superior inheritance. The specific content of Quentin’s memory of Jason is likely triggered by the connotative similarities between “\textit{treasurer}” and “banker.” But Quentin may also be responding to Mrs. Compson’s factionalizing of the Compson family. In claiming Jason as her own

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[18]{Jason, born too late, is “robbed” of his inheritance by missing the chance to be sent to Harvard. Quentin, as the first-born, receives the Compson legacy without actively desiring it. Benjy, through his castration, is literally severed from the Compson lineage. Yet Benjy is doubly disinherited, for his pasture is sold in order to pay for Quentin’s tuition. Even without the ability to see the future, Quentin is likely aware of the fact that the pasture’s sale also paved the way for the gradual curtailing of Benjy’s freedom, culminating in his castration and internment in a mental institution.}
\end{footnotes}
and distinguishing “the others” as “all Compson,” she is withdrawing Jason from patrilineal succession and positioning Quentin as the sole viable heir.\(^{19}\)

The passage rapidly devolves into a guilt-ridden lamentation concerning the loss of Benjy’s pasture, its sale metonymically representing the deconstruction of the entire Compson legacy for the sake of Quentin’s advancement.\(^{20}\) Quentin’s emotion is grammatically betrayed by his inability to contain the interruptive meditation within italics; divested of temporal specificity, the once and former pasture is elevated to the status of myth, as if it were a fated curse upon the Compson family.\(^{21}\) Placed amidst the refrain “We have sold Benjy’s,” Benjy’s “bellowing” is a keening, a grieving for lost inheritance. Quentin expresses his guilt through Benjy’s unintelligible voice, using the connotative power of his memory to grant Benjy the imagined role of Greek chorus to Quentin’s familial tragedy. Quentin’s reflection on Benjy is interrupted by the voice of Mrs. Compson. Within this connotative context, her words serve as a reminder of Quentin’s charge to care for his “little brother,” which most directly refers to Jason but could just as easily refer to the “man-child” Benjy.

\(^{19}\) Perhaps Quentin, ashamed of Jason’s emasculation and self-conscious of his own, emphasizes Jason’s worthiness, pitting Jason as responsible provider against Quentin’s financially parasitic career at Harvard. Jason does ultimately inherit the Compson legacy once Quentin commits suicide, but cares more about trading stocks than serving as familial representative. In the prologue Faulkner wrote for \textit{Fury}, Jason sells the Compson property, epitomizing the disregard for legacy Quentin so fears.

\(^{20}\) In a Southern society of landed gentry, sons inherited land from fathers to perpetuate familial legacy. From a historical perspective, the sale of even a portion of Compson land to someone outside the family is shameful to Quentin, even if it was done to enhance the family’s socioeconomic standing via Quentin’s higher education. In fact, it is doubly shameful in that Quentin knows he is fleeing the South, and therefore he stages his own morbid return.

\(^{21}\) In the Old Testament, Rachel died giving birth to her second son. Just before her death, she named him “Benoni,” which translates to “son of my pain” or “son of my sorrow.” His brother Joseph, perhaps in an effort to move past their mother’s death, ultimately rechristens him “Benjamin.” Within this context, Mrs. Compson’s decision to rename Maury “Benjamin” is quite telling, as is her insistence that he be addressed by no other name, not even “Benjy.” In this vein, perhaps Jason’s name is based loosely on the redemptive Joseph: “Jason he has never given me one moment’s sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed...” (103).
As we can now see, Quentin can use connotative memory not just to convey meaning directly, as Benjy does, but also to substitute the voices of the past for his own. In doing so, Quentin expands his own personal tragedy beyond the confines of his own mind, inscribing it within the Compson past so that it transforms his trauma from retrospective despair into predetermined fate. In other words, Quentin justifies his own emotional concerns by construing them as prophecy for the Compson family’s decline. This fusion of the personal and the communal universalizes Quentin’s fatalism, transforming his life trajectory into a symbol for the decline of Southern familial legacy. In order to demonstrate how this occurs, I will examine how Quentin’s effort to reaffirm his Southern heritage within a Northern environment provides the framework by which Quentin dissociates himself from his own life, further enabling the synthesis of the personal and communal.

Just after visiting the watchmaker and purchasing flat-irons, Quentin gets on a train heading out of Cambridge. With suicide and time’s inexorability on his mind, he reminisces on the contrast between Northern and Southern race relations during a train ride that proves to be a journey not into the future, but into the past. As the episode begins, Quentin references the pressure he feels to “act” like a Southerner:

The only vacant seat was beside a nigger. He wore a derby and shined shoes and he was holding a dead cigar stub. I used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of niggers. I thought that Northerners would expect him to. When I first came East I kept thinking You’ve got to remember to think of them as colored people not niggers, and if it hadn’t happened that I wasn’t thrown with many of them, I’d have wasted a lot of time and trouble before I learned that

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22 From the paragraph just before the train episode: “They felt heavy enough together, but I thought again how Father had said about the reducto absurdum of human experience, thinking how the only opportunity I seemed to have for the application of Harvard” (85-86).

25
the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone. (86)

Quentin views the empty seat as an implicit test for the Southerner: will he prove that he is “always conscious of niggers,” or that he can consider them “colored people”? Whether or not Quentin sits is irrelevant; in Quentin’s mind, it is his reaction to the situation for which the Northerners on the train will judge him. Quentin’s response will also have nothing to do with his personal engagement with race. He has to “remember to think of them as colored people” as if he were recalling his lines for a play, with his body operating separately from his mind. When Quentin is expected to “perform” Southernness, he implicitly questions his ability to represent communal attitudes through personal action and decides to do nothing: to acknowledge people “for what they think they are” and “leave them alone.”

But even as Quentin seems to “freeze” in the present, his thoughts race on, further emphasizing the disconnect between his actions and his mind:

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. But I thought at first that I ought to miss having a lot of them around me because I thought that Northerners thought I did, but I didn’t know that I really had missed Roskus and Dilsey and them until that morning in Virginia. (86)

In a world full of “form[s] of behavior” rather than people, Quentin never has to take action in response to physical bodies; he can recreate his own home, filled with “back-looking ghosts” who are beholden to a predictable past rather than an uncontrollable present. Since Quentin can “change” the past but feels increasingly dissociated from the present, he possesses more agency in a world defined by traditional Southern codes and behaviors. However, his paranoia thwarts even this effort at escape.
Quentin realizes that his feeling that he “ought to miss having a lot of them around me” is socially dictated rather than personally motivated; Northerners, through their (perhaps imagined) scrutiny of Quentin, strive to control not only his actions, but his thoughts as well.

If Quentin cannot escape by avoiding action or pretending that the world thinks like him, his only recourse is to evade the present through a consciously-induced flashback. Much as Benjy evades Roskus’s bullying by escaping into memory, so too does Quentin hide from a hostile world by forcing himself to recall “that morning in Virginia” when, free from what Northerners thought he should think, Quentin “really had missed Roskus and Dilsey.” In conjuring this memory, Quentin replaces the alien Massachusetts environment with a familiar Mississippi landscape, one in which he is not expected “to think of them as colored people” and can act according to his true feelings.

After setting the scene of his memory, Quentin introduces the man on a mule, the character who, unlike the African American he encounters on the train, is merely “a form of behavior” determined by Southern social code:

[T]here was a nigger on a mule in the middle of the stiff ruts, waiting for the train to move. How long he had been there I didn’t know, but he sat straddle of the mule, his head wrapped in a piece of blanket, as if they had been built there with the fence and the road, or with the hill carved out of the hill itself, like a sign put there saying You are home again. (86-87)

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23 As Quentin reflect later in the novel, “Somewhere I heard bells once. Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not. Massachusetts or Mississippi” (174).

24 In fact, the memory occurs when Quentin is on another train. This “alternative reality” replaces Quentin’s present uncomfortable experience on a train, with the memory serving as a form of wish fulfillment demonstrating how Quentin would like to act in the present.
The man is part of the Southern landscape; in fact, he is inseparable from it, “built there with the fence and the road” just as Southern society “built” him through social conditioning to act and talk with prescribed, expected mannerisms. Quentin finds comfort in this “obverse reflection,” for he knows exactly how to act toward the man and how he will respond. Quentin recounts the highly traditional dialect he so craves (“Sho coming, boss. You done caught me, aint you”; “Yes, suh”; “Thanky, young marster, thanky” [87]) and then discusses the train’s passage onward, emphasizing his desperate desire for the predictable stasis of the past:

I leaned out the window, into the cold air, looking back. He stood there beside the gaunt rabbit of a mule, the two of them shabby and motionless and unimpatient. The train swung around the curve, the engine puffing with short, heavy blasts, and they passed smoothly from sight that way, with that quality about them of shabby and timeless patience, of static serenity.... (87)

In comparison to the anxiety and alienation characteristic of Quentin’s present, the “timeless patience” and “static serenity” of memory is soothing; its “motionless” cedes control to Quentin and the associative logic of his memory. In fact, Quentin ultimately links the recollection of the train with a moment from his childhood, demonstrating his continual attempts to distance himself from an alien present.

This passage, by delineating with unusual clarity Quentin’s (fictionalized) role as representative of Southern customs, clarifies the impetus for Quentin’s dissociation. Given that Quentin does not frequently reflect on his “foreign” status as a Southerner, I see this passage as a pivotal moment for understanding the psychology of Quentin’s

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25 This passage is also reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous characterization of Faulkner’s conception of time: “Faulkner’s vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backward. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings, faint tremblings and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterward, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars” (89).
character. While not the first instance of Quentin’s dissociative episodes, the section’s intensity (flashbacks occupy more narrative space than depictions of the present) and duration (4 pages) acclimates the reader early on to the interworking of his mind. As Quentin’s alienation from the Massachusetts environment grows more severe, the mechanics of his dissociation become more complex and psychologically entrenched.

Just as Benjy’s need to escape from the present structures his narrative, guiding him through a series of associatively-linked temporal planes, so too does Quentin’s conflicted relationship with his Southern community—and his inability to adequately serve as representative of that community—trigger the dissociative patterning of his own narrative. Quentin’s dissociation plunges him into an alternative reality, a self-perpetuated fairy tale in which Quentin, in order to defend Southern customs, must battle against the encroachment of modernity. This fiction allows Quentin to repress his own personal anxieties; however, Quentin’s failure to fully “de-personalize” his narration sets the stage for the fusion of the personal and the communal within his narrative. Quentin’s dissociation molds his narrative into a metaphor for the postbellum dismantling of the traditional Southern family not by transforming him into an empty vessel for communal attitudes, but by blending Quentin’s own personal history with a collective Southern past in order to articulate the emotional realities of inheriting Southern familial legacy.

Quentin distances himself from the narrative present in part by dissociating himself from the language of his internal monologues. This frequently occurs when grammatical errors or illogical jumps indicate that he has ceded conscious control over the progression of his thoughts. Quentin’s narrative is saturated with examples of
the former; such dissociation is most commonly identified by a lack of punctuation within flashbacks. By unleashing his memories in a series of ungrammatical torrents, Quentin relinquishes control over his present to a predetermined fate inscribed within the past, becoming more like Benjy in the process. This is done most poignantly during Quentin’s conversation with Herbert, which extends from pages 107 to 111.26 Besides the manipulation of punctuation, Quentin activates his dissociation by stripping his sentences of meaning, removing logical links between ideas in order to render them alienated from any rational mind. These two refrains are excellent examples: “I wonder if even miners in the bowels of the earth. That’s why whistles...”; “Outside outside of them always but. Yellow Feet soles with walking like” (104, 128).

The most revealing instance of this form of dissociation occurs after a brief mediation on death: “The displacement of water is equal to the something of something. Reducto absurdum of all human experience, and two six-pound flat-irons weigh more than one tailor’s goose” (90). I could quite richly analyze this quotation for the thematic weight it generates through its evocation of larger themes;27 however, the passage’s abstract quality is more relevant for this section of my argument. The first line is a reference to a widely-known scientific principle: that the displacement of

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26 Here is one particularly relevant selection from that passage, for reference: “Thanks I’ve head [sic] a lot I guess your mother wont mind if I put the match behind the screen will she a lot about you Candace talked about you all the time up there at the Licks...” (107). This scene also bears a strong resemblance to the passage in which Mrs. Compson talks about Herbert: “[Y]our father wouldn’t like it if you were to injure one of them I’ll declare your father will simply have to get an auto now I’m almost sorry you brought it down Herbert I’ve enjoyed it so much...” (94). Notably, Quentin feels threatened in both of these scenes: in the former, by Caddy’s fiancé, and in the latter, by the encroachment of modernity and the destruction of Compson legacy as represented by the car and Herbert, its owner.

27 Linking the flat-irons to the “displacement of water” is a clear reference to Quentin’s desire to commit suicide, thereby associating it with his earlier thought about his shadow: “if I only had something to blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned.” Connecting all of this to “Reducto absurdum” emphasizes Quentin’s obsession with time and his desire to freeze its progression in the moments before death: “And then I’ll not be. The peacefullest words. Peacefullest words. Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum” (90, 174).
water is equal to the volume of that which displaces it. By abstracting the product of displacement to “something of something,” Quentin reduces his academic citation to meaningless prose poetry, equivalent to relating “flat-irons” to “one tailor’s goose.”

On a basic level, such abstraction represents Quentin’s dissociation from his own words, an evacuation of the personal relevance of his sentences so that the “something of something” could encompass anything, apply to anyone. Yet this evasion of the personal ultimately reflects back on Quentin. His choice to universalize, and thereby render meaningless, a scientific dictum is quite purposeful. It stems from Quentin’s general tendency to distance himself from his education: engaging in class-cutting, avoiding boat-races, and trying to “forget” the knowledge he has acquired in order to “disinherit” the legacy that he is, through his Harvard attendance, intended to perpetuate. By this logic, the unraveling of Quentin’s grammar throughout his narrative can be considered intentional. He relinquishes proper grammatical construction to enact a dissociation from his higher education, a disavowal of Harvard as a form of social ascendency for the Southerner.

Quentin also linguistically dissociates himself by substituting the singular personal pronoun with the plural, conflating his identity with an anonymous mass so as to “conceal” his personal involvement in events. The two most notable instances of this technique occur when Quentin follows the three boys, and during his second train ride toward the end of his section (and his life). While at first merely engaging the children in conversation, Quentin attempts to fuse his identity with that of the boys, displacing his own past in order to live successfully in the present:

‘Let’s go to the mill and go swimming,’ the third said. The cupola sank slowly beyond the trees, with the round face of the clock far enough
yet. We went on in the dappled shade. We came to an orchard, pink and white. It was full of bees; already we could hear them. (121-22; emphasis mine)

Unfortunately, this escapism proves futile. For Quentin, the inexorability of time is never quite “far enough,” for it can never truly be escaped. He can no longer play in the water with the boys like he once did with Caddy in the branch; a later episode in which the boys chase away Quentin and his Italian charge demonstrates as much.28

During a train scene later in the novel, Quentin’s struggle to activate the transformation from personal to communal becomes more explicit, as “we” and “I” form a grammatical dichotomy revealing Quentin’s inner turmoil:

The lights were on in the car, so while we ran between trees I couldn’t see anything except my own face and a woman across the aisle with a hat sitting right on top of her head, with a broken feather in it, but when we ran out of the trees I could see the twilight again, that quality of light as if time really had stopped for a while.... (169; emphasis mine)

The twilight hour allows Quentin to fleetingly consummate his wish to “freeze” time; but even within this ethereal temporal moment, in which he can imagine that all but his “own face” has vanished, Quentin fails to reconcile “I” with “we.” Though Quentin tries to collapse his consciousness within the communal perception of the train—a telling metonymic substitute for the group of passengers—he cannot help but “see” as an individual, even if what he does see is hardly “anything.” This nearly perfect moment of dissociation encapsulates the instability of Quentin’s psychology:

28 “Their heads drew into a clump, watching us, then they broke and rushed toward us, hurling water with their hands. We moved quick. ‘Look out, boys; she wont hurt you.’ ‘Go on away, Harvard!”’ (137). This encounter leads Quentin to conclude, “‘That’s not for us, is it’” (138). Tellingly, Quentin associates this desire to return to the past with his childhood sexual frustrations, as if to express his continual discomfort with the present. As a child, he looks forward, desiring sexual maturity; as an adult, he looks backward, longing for sexual immaturity.
his inability to peacefully internalize a fusion of personal and communal, to dare admit that his personal shame is a metaphor for Southern disgrace.

Quentin’s psychological instability is poignantly expressed by his dissociation from his own actions. Much like Benjy, Quentin often obscures the connection between grammatical subject and object, thereby refusing to claim personal agency over his actions. The classic instance of this narrative trend is a scene referenced often by critics, in which Quentin cuts his thumb on the broken glass of his watch.\textsuperscript{29} During the scene, Quentin dissociates himself from his own pain, ignoring his physical reality until forced by visual stimuli to respond to his wound. He then robotically delineates the actions he takes in response to the cut, admitting no room for self-reflection (or acceptance of agency) amidst the grammatical rigidity of his account:

\begin{quote}
The water made my finger smart a little, so I painted it again. I put on my new suit and put my watch on and packed the other suit and the accessories and my razor and brushes in my hand bag, and folded the trunk key into a sheet of paper and put it in an envelope and addressed it to Father, and wrote the two notes and sealed them. (81)
\end{quote}

The exhausting repetition of a strict “verb-object, verb-object” structure demonstrates Quentin’s desire to ignore the wound, thereby transcending his corporeal being and losing himself in the stream of his memories.

Though this early episode is crucial for establishing Quentin’s dissociative psychology, even more relevant for establishing his physical dissociation is the extended flashback passage leading into Quentin’s fight with Gerald. Though the abstract quality of the narration within this section indicates his attempts to repress

\textsuperscript{29} “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...There was a red smear on the dial. When I saw it my thumb began to smart” (80). Sartre’s response to this scene is typical of critics: “Thus, Quentin’s gesture of breaking his watch has a symbolic value; it gives us access to a time without clocks” (88).
traumatic memories, Quentin exhibits signs of physical dissociation only during his recollection of confronting Dalton Ames. Even the mere retelling of the encounter is shameful (and stressful) for Quentin, compelling him to retroactively mitigate his agency. Recalling his attempts to hit Ames, Quentin dissociates himself from the experience of fainting in order to conceal his shame: “I hit him I was still trying to hit him long after he was holding my wrists but I still tried then it was like I was looking at him through a piece of colored glass I could hear my blood and then I could see the sky again...” (161). Rather than Quentin himself temporarily losing his sight and falling on his back, the surrounding environment acts upon Quentin, rendering him the passive, innocent object rather than an active, shameful subject.

After Ames rides away, Quentin experiences a similar moment of disembodiment: “I moved a little further around the tree I heard the bird again and the water and then everything sort of rolled away and I didn’t feel anything at all...” (162). Much like the scene on the train, in which Quentin “couldn’t see anything,” Quentin once again articulates a desire to deaden sensual perception, to “freeze” time so that, for just one instant, he does not exist. Quentin’s “fight” with Ames is then associatively linked to a similar fight with Gerald; Quentin’s question to

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30 Quentin is loath to remember feeling emasculated by his encounters with Dalton Ames, both on the Compson property at night and during a confrontation in which Ames, by Quentin’s admission, pretends to hit Quentin “for her sake too.” Regardless of Quentin’s dismissal of the fact that he “passed out like a girl,” he clearly feels ashamed by his perceived lack of masculinity and sexual prowess (162). This insecurity drives Quentin to grab Caddy, exhibiting his greater physical strength in a childish attempt to prevent her from seeing (and in his mind, sleeping with) Ames.

31 It is not death Quentin desires so much as the moment before death, the stage that Quentin labels “I am not”; a narrative present within which time (and he himself) does not exist (174). Analyzing the passage in which Quentin returns to Cambridge, Millgate argues that “Quentin himself is at this moment not merely midway between sanity and madness but precisely poised between waking and sleeping, life and death” (“Fury” 95). Furthermore, Millgate claims that “this last day of Quentin’s [life] is a kind of suspended moment before death,” a representation of a drowning man’s final moments (102). Although this can be seen purely as Faulkner’s experimentation, I believe this structure to be motivated by character psychology, as well.
Shreve and Spoade—“‘Did I hurt him any?’”—indicates his dissociation from his own actions (164). Indeed, Quentin treats both fights as fictional duels in defense of Caddy’s virginity, going as far as to generate an imagined conflict with Gerald in order to perpetuate his dissociatively-generated myth.32

Thus, Quentin’s physical dissociation—much like its linguistic variant—demonstrates Quentin’s dichotomous discomfort: his desire to “de-personalize” his narrative, evacuating himself from his own life so that he can, through self-destruction, become a worthy successor within Compson “patri-lineage”; and, simultaneously, his knowledge that he cannot ever become a true representative of the South, that the “I” can never become “we.” The experiences of the personal and the communal must be fused in order to successfully perpetuate Southern familial legacy; an individual must comprehend and internalize the complexities of a collective Southern past in order to “carry the torch,” allowing Southern traditions to survive within a postbellum future. But Quentin rejects this fusion—he sees the decline of the Compson family as a perversity of the traditional principles of Southern society rather than representative of the pressures of a modernizing world. As hard as Quentin tries to transform his life into a depersonalized vessel for communal tradition, his anxieties about adequately inheriting this legacy thwart his efforts, continually reminding him of his weaknesses and fears.

Within this context, his suicide is not an act of unexpected desperation so much as it is the final step in Quentin’s premeditated, long-term project to dissociate

32 As Spoade explains: “‘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’” (Fury 166).
himself from his own life. His death is the culmination of a protracted process of narrative self-destruction designed to extinguish the possibility of the future disgrace of the Compson family due to Quentin’s inadequacies. But of course, Quentin’s suicide does disgrace the Compson family; when Quentin commits suicide, he also destroys the future viability of the Compson family while demonstrating the doomed fate of Southern familial legacy more generally. Quentin’s need to fictionalize a traditional inheritance he cannot feasibly receive to replace his modern, “emasculated” one disqualifies traditional Southern customs from progressing into a postbellum future.

Within the analytical framework erected by this chapter, Quentin’s decision in Absalom! to “replace” his own history with the Sutpen tale is yet another form of dissociation, an additional method for coping with his position as representative of Southern familial legacy. Just as he forces the ghosts from his memory to articulate—and thereby render pre-determining—his present anxieties, so too must Quentin re-write the Southern past, construing the South’s future decline as pre-determined by promoting the Sutpen story33 as a prototypical Southern past. In desperate search for a form of salvation from a “dis-inherited” present, Quentin latches onto the Civil War narrative as a means for absolving himself of his own guilt for failing to uphold traditional Southern inheritance. This dissociative escapism ultimately reflects back on the many “Quentins” of postbellum South. In the case of Reverend Hightower, the narrative glorification of the legacy of war only demonstrates the failures of inheritors to constructively progress beyond a collective traumatic past.

33 Quentin participates in the creation of the Sutpen history, amplifying the predetermined nature of the Sutpen decline through his own creative investment in the story.
Chapter 2 - Reverend Hightower
“Skipped a Generation”: Postmemory and the Legacy of War

All Southerners in Yoknapatawpha County are “children” of the war; even several generations removed from the conflict, many still viscerally experience its consequences. Widowed wives peer through the windows of decrepit manors, waiting for their husbands to return from the battlefield. Sons and grandsons struggle to come to terms with their ancestors’ defeat as they repair the damage from Union cannon-fire. Storytelling steeps residents deeper in despair, haunting them with visions of a past that together compose a Southern mythology of defeat—a communally inherited legacy that contextualizes the decline of Southern lineages.

Yet it is only by examining the Civil War through the perspectives of their grandfathers and fathers that Faulkner’s protagonists can fully process the societal impact of the war and the weight of their individual inheritances. The resulting revelation, though illuminating, typically leads to self-destruction. The guilt Quentin feels over the Compson’s lost honor compels him to “reject” his ancestry and connect to the war primarily through a fixation on the Sutpen family. When Quentin finally acknowledges his own personal war legacy in Fury, the traumatic realization that he is forever trapped within a familial “mausoleum” sparks the dissociative spiral that leads to his suicide. Quentin’s various dissociative techniques in Fury—ceding control over

34 In this chapter, I will mostly be discussing the Quentin of Absalom!. However, unlike some critics, I consider this Quentin the same as the Quentin from Fury. Thus, my analysis from the previous chapter also applies to the Quentin of Absalom!.

35 Ideally for Quentin, telling the Sutpen story should become a never-ending process of dissociation—its lack of historical definitiveness results in a perpetual lack of closure. While this may be true for Southerners, Shreve’s lack of investment in Southern legacy allows him the creative license to complete the story despite Quentin’s reluctance. The story’s culmination at the end of Absalom! forces Quentin to grapple with his own familial connection to the Civil War in Fury, during his meditation on his grandfather’s pocket watch (see Chapter 1, pages 18-20).
his thoughts, obscuring personal agency, distancing himself from emotion—are symptoms of a much greater “disease”: a lack of rootedness that Quentin fails to assuage through an obsession with historical war narrative.

Yet the Sutpen story is hardly historical; Jefferson’s residents, by continually retelling the narrative, transform it into a communal myth. The tale can be considered an extension of Jefferson’s communal self-consciousness, a story that they must believe in because it is them: a representation, in the form of a Civil War allegory, of the ways in which the trauma of war, and the doomed Southern future it portends, manifests itself on the familial level. It is not the war itself that haunts postbellum Jefferson, but rather the continual retelling of its consequence for individual families. Of course, Sutpen is hardly a representative member of Jefferson; the town fashions him into an “other” through rumormongering. But even Rosa, who calls Sutpen a demon, acknowledges that Sutpen is merely the symbol of a grander course on a South “primed for fatality and already cursed with it” (Absalom! 14).

By synthesizing Jefferson’s communal memory of the Sutpens with his own historical invention, Quentin reinforces the fatalism that haunts the Compsons and all postbellum Jefferson families. Quentin’s relationship to the Sutpen history—even while he is inventing portions of it—is quite passive. When he is not repeating the

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36 It is no coincidence that the demise of the Sutpen family is caused by Sutpen’s tireless struggle to enact a personal legacy. For Quentin, the Sutpen narrative serves as a metaphor for his own fatalism, which he himself brings into being by “losing himself” in the task of narrating it. His role as narrator is defined by repression and negation, encapsulated within the oft-repeated phrase “not listening.” Of course, Quentin does not need to listen; he grew up hearing the Sutpen story and has therefore memorized much of its content (“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 and do...” [Absalom! 172]). But even more crucially, Quentin never truly listens because he is too busy filling his tortured mind with ghosts in order to forget the shame he feels for the living. For Quentin to pause and consider his personal connection to the Sutpen narrative would require him to accept his own doom, as he does in Fury once he is finished retelling the story.
narrative as if it were a religious incantation—staring down at his father’s letter, shoulders hunched in the face of the story’s fateful power—Quentin frequently cedes narrative control to other characters: most notably Shreve, whose non-Southern roots should disqualify him from expanding upon a communal past only Southerners would understand.\(^\text{37}\) Of course, Quentin first had to relay the facts of the story given that Shreve was not raised on the Sutpen tale; but when it comes time to invent character motivations and missing plot points, Quentin allows Shreve to lead, only occasionally offering monosyllabic responses (“yes” or “no”) and brief interjections (“It was a girl”).

I would argue that Quentin’s narratorial passivity stems from repressed feelings of dissociation.\(^\text{38}\) Quentin has not just internalized the plot of the Sutpen narrative, but also its fatalism—to the point where it has become part of his Southern identity just as it has already defined Jefferson’s. It is this fatalism that Quentin does not wish to hear or narrate any longer, even as he implicitly reinforces its legacy through reluctant co-narration. This duel fascination with and aversion to the Sutpen narrative mirrors his dissociative relationship with familial legacy. Just as Quentin is obsessed with Sutpen, the archetypical representation of the corrupting power of legacy and the decay of war, so too does Quentin unceasingly agonize over Caddy, whose downfall parallels the disintegration of the Southern familial unit. Quentin’s

\(^{37}\) “‘Gettysburg,’” Quentin said. ‘You cant understand it. You would have to be born there’” (289).

\(^{38}\) There could be other explanations as well. Perhaps Quentin does not feel comfortable countering the authority of the communally-created “text,” and his passivity conveys resentment toward Shreve’s incursions. It is also possible that Quentin is fixated on his father’s letter so completely that he cannot focus on Shreve’s narrating; he would rather reside within the confines of his mind than in his Harvard dorm room. While both of these interpretations are likely true, neither get at the crux of Quentin’s anguish over the communal fatalism with which he must by necessity align himself.
attempt to distance himself from his own family history through an obsession with the Sutpen war narrative proves untenable. As soon as Quentin and Shreve finish retelling Sutpen’s story, Quentin’s mind, which was previously occupied by ghosts from the war, becomes overwhelmed by regret and self-loathing over the gradual dismantling of the Compson legacy. Try as he might, Quentin cannot obscure his familial guilt by aligning himself with a universal, de-personalized legacy.

Through Quentin’s experience, Faulkner demonstrates that the legacy of the Civil War—in its full traumatic glory—is processed by inheritors only through the lens of the personal sphere. But trying to evade this fate by decoupling familial lineage from war legacy will perpetuate the liminality plaguing Quentin and all of Faulkner’s protagonists. Indeed, Quentin’s inability to shuck the burden of familial legacy by escaping into communal war legacy, and the self-destruction that accompanies this failure, parallels Reverend Hightower’s own obsession with war narrative.

Hightower’s survival into old age seems to suggest that he is more successful than Quentin at processing his personal link to the communal tragedy of the war.

39 The vast majority of scholarship on *Light in August* has focused on Joe Christmas or Lena Grove, while providing scant critical attention to Hightower. According to Alfred Kazin, Hightower is a poorly defined character and one of the less important elements of *August*: “Hightower, by general consent, is one of the failures of the book: he is too vague, too drooping, too formless, in a word too much the creature of defeat and of obsession, to compel our interest or our belief.” Kazin concludes that Hightower’s most important function is as an object of authorial parody, “a kind of scapegoat on whom Faulkner can discharge his exasperation with Southern nostalgia” (155). Millgate also cites scholars’ general belief that Hightower destabilizes the novel: “[Hightower] has seemed to many critics a shadowy and indeterminate figure, lacking a sufficiently substantial stake in the plot or an adequately defined role in the moral or symbolic patterns of the book as whole.” Though Millgate claims that this conclusion may arise from an unfair focus on “Faulkner’s deliberate characterization of him as a non-participator,” he spends little critical energy attempting to remedy this oversight (“*August*” 76). Olga W. Vickery and Cleanth Brooks are similarly dismissive. Vickery includes Hightower not as a singular point of study, but as one of many proofs for her insights into *August*, while Brooks merely labels Hightower a pariah and compares him to Joanna Burden. In an unusual gesture, Richard Chase claims Hightower to be “one of Faulkner’s best characters,” but does little to convince us of this notion (21). This chapter will attempt to rescue Hightower from this critical negligence, presenting him not just as a character worthy of deeper study, but also as a critical figure for investigating Faulkner’s definition of Southern legacy.
Unlike Quentin, who attempts to obscure his lineage, Hightower has always been enraptured with not just any war story, but his grandfather’s in particular. Yet this conclusion does not hold up to deeper scrutiny. Although Hightower from the very beginning of his life filters communal memory of the war through a familial lens, his psychological link to his present interpersonal relationships—with his parents, wife, and community—is tenuous at best. Just as Quentin dissociates himself from his actions in *Fury*, so too does Hightower have difficulty connecting with those around him, lost as he is amidst visions of his grandfather’s regiment.\(^\text{40}\)

Hightower’s relationship to his grandfather’s story also shares much in common with Quentin’s own obsession. The grandfather’s and Sutpen’s histories are both partially fabricated, escapist narratives of archetypical “Southernhood”: fatalism in Sutpen’s case, and masculine battle glory in the case of the elder Hightower. Both also prove to be equally overwhelming legacies. Hightower’s survival beyond Quentin’s years is dependent not on greater resiliency but on protracted self-delusion, for his psychological unraveling comes shortly after his recognition of the full impact of his obsession with war narrative.\(^\text{41}\) By tracing how the legacy of Hightower’s

\(^\text{40}\) Hightower’s preoccupation with his grandfather blinds him to the deterioration of his marriage and his lack of affiliation with the Jefferson community. The community claims that Hightower, even upon just arriving in Jefferson, spoke about the town “[a]s if he did not care about the people, the living people, about whether they wanted him here or not” (*August* 61). During the dissolution of his marriage, the community would “wonder if he even knew that she was not there” in the church while he was preaching (62). Upon her suicide and toward the end of his preaching career, “he was not watching his congregation leaving; he was not looking at anything” (68). Once he has no ties to the community, Hightower hardly perceives his immediate surroundings while waiting for the ghosts of his grandfather’s regiment to appear: “He no longer even looks at [the sign], as he does not actually see the trees beneath and through which he watches the street, waiting for nightfall, the moment of night” (60).

\(^\text{41}\) Critics view the chapter containing flashbacks to Hightower’s childhood as his death scene. Most likely assume that Hightower, already an old man at this point in narrative time, is dying from an improperly treated head wound—a fitting enough end for a man enthralled by war. As Brooks points out, however, Faulkner told University of Virginia students that Hightower does not die at the end of the novel (67). Regardless, I would argue that the emotional trauma of Hightower’s self-realization hastens his end; he can no longer live with the knowledge that he is guilty for his wife’s suicide and therefore has never possessed the heroism of his grandfather (and father).
grandfather—and of the war itself—dictates Hightower’s life, I will arrive at a deeper understanding of the impact of the Civil War on the individual psyches of Faulkner’s protagonists while simultaneously building on my study of the interdependence of familial and war legacies.

Though Quentin may have grown up with “garrulous outraged baffled ghosts,” Hightower’s relationship with a Civil War past is more personal: he “grew to manhood among phantoms, and side by side with a ghost” (*Absalom!* 4; *August* 474). His mother was frequently bedridden for poor health, his father was always absent due to an occupation he acquired as a soldier, and his grandfather’s former slave served as a conduit for war narratives—all three are to some degree removed from reality, forever changed by the war.

Yet they are also “phantoms” because they are foreign to Hightower, who has “skipped a generation” because of his obsession with his grandfather’s life:

“So it’s no wonder,’ he thinks, ‘that I skipped a generation. It’s no wonder that I had no father and that I had already died one night twenty years before I saw light. And that my only salvation must be to return to the place to die where my life had already ceased before it began.’ (*August* 477-78)

Hightower is so repulsed by the grim postbellum reality represented by his phantasmal father, so desirous of the nostalgic glory evoked by his grandfather’s “heroic, simple, warm” ghost, that he claims to have no father at all (477). Instead, Hightower consciously chooses one inheritance by renouncing the other, “killing” himself to be reborn as a phantom of Civil War-era Jefferson. His grandfather’s glorified war narrative provides “salvation”: the means by which Hightower can
assuage his fear of his own father and emancipate himself from a family haunted by death.

This dissociative choice to follow his grandfather’s path closely resembles the escapist function of the Sutpen narrative; but whereas Quentin wishes to obscure his connection with the doomed Jefferson (a fatalism toward which Quentin is inexorably drawn), Hightower perceives that his “salvation” will be found in Jefferson, where his grandfather died. Hightower sets out to find the very visions from which Quentin wishes to flee, hoping that Jefferson’s residents will share his obsession with war legacy.

But unlike Quentin, Hightower is an outsider to the Jefferson community; instead of sympathizing with his shared heritage, the community sees him as an overzealous minister who mixes together religion and war on the pulpit:

But they could not tell whether he himself believed or not what he told them, if he cared or not, with his religion and his grandfather being shot from the galloping horse all mixed up, as though the seed which his grandfather had transmitted to him had been on the horse too that night and had been killed too and time has stopped there and then for the seed and nothing had happened in time since, not even him. (64)

Even as the community distances itself from Hightower, it nonetheless conveys an understanding of his plight. Only a town inundated with “garrulous outraged baffled ghosts” could have thought to use the symbol of “the seed” to describe a Southerner frozen in time. Jefferson would understand the challenges of living beneath the shadow of a war legacy so all consuming that “nothing had happened in time since,” including the inglorious lives of second-generation survivors like Hightower.

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42 I define second- and third-generation Southerners as the sons and grandsons, respectively, of adults living during the Civil War.
But a preoccupation with war legacy is communally acceptable only if it is ensconced within a familial narrative—ideally, one that is recognizable to the Jefferson community. Though the primary intrigue of the Sutpen story is Sutpen’s mysterious roots, his name becomes a touchstone from which to discuss Jefferson’s postbellum decline. That certain war narratives become Jefferson legends has less to do with their plot than their actors. Emphasizing the exploits of the Sartoris, McCaslin, and Compson ancestors reinforces Jefferson’s continuity and cohesion for future generations. Hightower’s outsider status therefore prevents him from connecting with the Jefferson community on the basis of war legacy; it is not enough that Hightower’s grandfather may or may not have died in Jefferson.

By becoming a preacher in Jefferson, Hightower hopes to circumvent the suspicions of an insular community. Had his career not been destined to fail, serving as a preacher would have allowed him to become a divinely-protected communal leader, granting him license to achieve undisturbed communion with his grandfather’s past. Although Hightower never references the desire to be a leader, his choice to join the ministry has less to do with aspirations for influence than his being “called” to Jefferson. As I have already noted, Hightower uses the word “salvation” to describe his journey to Jefferson, positioning his grandfather’s war narrative as a message from the divine meant to guide him toward spiritual fulfillment. Hightower’s conflation of divine calling and war legacy accounts for the peculiarity of his sermons, his getting religion and his grandfather “all mixed up.” Even more significantly, though, his indicates that Hightower does care deeply about his preaching (despite the suspicions
of the communal narrator) and would like the community to share in his embrace of 
war legacy as redemptive prophecy.

Ultimately, the impropriety of Hightower’s preaching prevents him from 
communing fully with Jefferson’s past. But even if Hightower were accepted by the 
community, his choice to “skip a generation” precludes him from fusing personal and 
communal legacies of the war into a holistic identity. More crucially, Hightower’s 
fervent need to believe in his grandfather’s story blinds him to the truth: that the tale is 
not only fabricated, but also unrepresentative of a communal understanding of war 
legacy.

During Hightower’s recounting of the story to his wife, he rationalizes key 
facts that undermine the framing of his grandfather’s history as a traditional war 
narrative. Hightower grants his grandfather a more noble death than Cinthy’s story 
dictates—whereas Cinthy claims he was shot while stealing chickens, Hightower 
preaches that he was shot off of his horse, as if he were in the midst of a legitimate 
battle. Quentin and Shreve wield creative license in their retelling of the Sutpen story 
so as to grant it the closure and drama necessary to make it archetypical. But Sutpen 
was a colonel; Hightower’s grandfather was merely a common, theiving soldier, 
rendering Hightower’s visions of his grandfather’s “squadron” rather farcical despite 
the ponderous solemnity with which they are framed.

43 In fact, such an opportunity appears in the form of Hightower’s assistance with the birth of Lena’s 
child. Just as Hightower’s father emerged from the war as a medical practitioner, so too could 
Hightower have broken free from his obsession with war narrative by re-inventing himself as a pseudo-
midwife. Synthesizing both his grandfather’s and his father’s distinct experiences into his perspective 
could have afforded Hightower the ability to move past his failure to represent communal war legacy. 
But his utter rejection of his father and alienation from the community prevent him achieving rebirth.
Even his grandfather’s exploits, which the community might have considered somewhat honorable given the grandfather’s participation in the destruction of Grant’s Jefferson stores, were likely invented by Cinthy. Hightower not only illogically dismisses this possibility, but even asserts the irrelevancy of fact for the construction of his grandfather’s war narrative:

‘Now this is what Cinthy told me. And I believe. I know. It’s too fine to doubt. It’s too fine, too simple, ever to have been invented by white thinking. A negro might have invented it. And if Cinthy did, I still believe. Because even fact cannot stand with it.’ (484)

Of course the story could be true; but rather than debate the story’s veracity, it is more fruitful to note the extent to which Hightower will justify his blind belief in order to establish the semblance of a concrete war legacy. As a child, Hightower would have liked nothing more than to hear his father’s war stories. Hightower would travel up to his family’s attic and study the coat his father wore in the war with “horrified triumph and sick joy and wonder if his father had killed the man from whose blue coat the patch came, wondering with still more horror yet at the depth and strength of his desire and dread to know” (470). But his father’s silence concerning his past forces Hightower to construct a concrete legacy from another source, even convincing himself to believe in a fantastical glorification of his grandfather’s ignoble death.

Hightower’s experience speaks to a deeper truth about the construction of Southern war legacy: its arbitrary relationship to fact and continual dependence on the inventiveness of individual storytellers. Although Hightower’s particular war legacy is unrepresentative, his attitudes toward his grandfather’s story evoke the desperate need for subsequent generations to come to terms with the war’s devastation by infusing ancestral narratives with embellishments of glory, courage,
and honor. For Quentin and Hightower, stories of the war will always appear more glorious than their own lives, and this perception is revealed through their presentation of these “inherited” memories. As evidenced by Quentin’s co-narration of the Sutpen history and Hightower’s rejection of the primacy of fact, war narratives are received not as infallible historical accounts, but as participatory mediums through which second- and third-generation Southerners incorporate ancestors’ pasts into their own lived experiences.

It is this very fact about war legacy—its status as an imaginative construct intended primarily to console, not inform—that correlates with Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory. Although I offered a brief excerpt of Hirsch’s definition of the concept in the Introduction, I will include her entire explanation here so as to provide a stable reference point for my appropriation of the term for Faulkner’s protagonists:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. (5)

Although Hirsch originally employs the term to account for the cultural impact of photographs and graphic media, and then as a means to examine the experiences of second-generation survivors of the Holocaust, postmemory is remarkably applicable to the investigation of Southern war legacy.
I have already discussed the Civil War as both an individual and communal “cultural trauma” so impactful that it has implanted “inherited memories” in the minds of the “generation after.” As we have seen, these war narratives do displace and evacuate the life stories of descendants because they have also displaced and evacuated succeeding generations of communal life. In Faulkner’s South, there is no concrete progression beyond the war’s trauma, but rather a continual recapitulation of the stories of disintegrating families and desecrated lands—a process by which the living are haunted by the dead and dying. Descendants cultivate what little agency they can over their own legacies, employing “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” in order to establish personal relationships to inherited memories.

Quentin’s life is ultimately destroyed by two different postmemories: the Sutpen narrative and a “familial postmemory,” both of which present romantic visions of a lost antebellum South. Hightower more literally embodies Hirsch’s conception of “life stories displaced” given his wish to distance himself from his phantasmic immediate family. Instead of choosing an ex-familial narrative, Hightower adopts the postmemory of his grandfather to expatriate himself from a house of phantoms and achieve communal acceptance in Jefferson. Applying the concept of postmemory to this previously discussed moment of Hightower’s life provides even more insight into the complexities involved in inheriting Southern postmemory:

44 Despite reservations concerning its crushing fatalism, Quentin embraces the Sutpen narrative as a means to mitigate familial shame, thus replacing actual memory with a form of postmemory to which he, albeit reluctantly, contributes creative energy. Although Quentin hopes that the Sutpen history will evacuate his own life story, leaving behind a narrative of communal glory whose fatalism is dispersed rather than individually concentrated, Shreve forces Quentin to come to terms with his personal relationship to war legacy. In the resulting psychological fallout, Quentin attempts to dissociate himself from his own past without the aid of postmemory’s evacuative power, and his failure results in suicide. In addition, Quentin’s dissociation in Fury is partially motivated by his failure to uphold a nostalgic conception of traditional familial legacy—a “familial postmemory” that tortures Quentin and other postbellum Southerners with its unattainable vision of female purity and patrilineal inheritance.
‘So it’s no wonder,’ he thinks, ‘that I skipped a generation. It’s no wonder that I had no father and that I had already died one night twenty years before I saw light. And that my only salvation must be to return to the place to die where my life had already ceased before it began.’

If we read the fact that Hightower “skipped a generation” as a conscious choice to adopt his grandfather’s postmemory, then we must also acknowledge the legacy of Hightower’s father, who was both the son of a soldier and a soldier himself. This in turn would make Hightower a child of the war in more ways than one, granting him the option to select from two distinct Civil War postmemories.

That Hightower ultimately chooses the more idealistic, “honorable” postmemory of his grandfather speaks to the desperation with which Faulkner’s characters struggle to uphold the standards of communal Southern legacy. For Quentin, that desperation translates into suicide. Hightower, conversely, enacts a more symbolic death, choosing a life that “had already ceased before it begun” and insisting upon residing in the very town in which this death supposedly occurred. By the time Jefferson rejects Hightower and his false prophecy, his grandfather’s narrative has already displaced Hightower’s own life. Hightower’s psychological absence in turn leads to his wife’s suicide, his retirement from the ministry, and his transformation into the very thing from which he once fled: a phantom, left to perpetuate a solitary communion with the ghosts of his grandfather’s cavalry.

For Faulkner’s protagonists, then, postmemory serves as a double-edged sword: a means for a character to dissociate himself from a downtrodden postbellum present by subsuming within his identity the very fatalism from which he intended to escape. Quentin’s passive narration in *Absalom!* indicates his awareness of this paradoxical
relationship, but he nonetheless persists in obsessing over the details of the Sutpen narrative because narration is the only agency he has over his doomed fate. Similarly, Hightower’s chooses to follow his grandfather to Jefferson and “preach” his grandfather’s narrative in order to actively channel a familial war legacy and distinguish himself from his passive, moribund father.

But unlike Quentin, Hightower survives his moment of disillusionment, remaining in his Jefferson home even after he is banished from participating in communal legacy. Even after his wife’s suicide and the loss of the profession he spent years fighting to attain, Hightower’s fixation on the phantoms of his grandfather’s company sustain him through decades of self-imposed isolation. Hightower ends his narrative arc when he recognizes the destruction war legacy has wrought upon his personal life and acknowledges the guilt he feels concerning his wife’s death. Peeling away the fabricated communal regality coating his grandfather’s past could have been too much for Hightower to bear, as his survival up until that point depended on a postmemory invested with so much of his own creative energy.

Throughout my analysis of the self-destructive seed latent in Southern legacy, I have not yet accounted for the potential for postmemory to sustain the dissolute lives of its postbellum inheritors. Having witnessed the long-term repercussions of the war’s aftermath, (male) inheritors of postmemory are ill-equipped to process the legacy of war as a redemptive force. It is much easier to focus on the drama of historical families (Quentin) or on the glory of military sacrifice (Hightower) in the hopes that such revisionist postmemories will help assuage the emasculation of devastated lands and broken families. But if this dissociative relationship to legacy, as
we have seen, ultimately culminates in self-destruction, then what explains

Hightower’s perseverance in a world that has forsaken him?

Hightower unwittingly channels the resiliency and adaptability of the war’s “silent” survivors: the children and war wives of Jefferson forced to reconstruct a social world shot through with bullet-holes and filled with downtrodden veterans. This era is most vividly depicted in *The Unvanquished*, from which I will draw pivotal passages in order to demonstrate Hightower’s dual embodiment, within his postmemory of the Civil War, of the child’s imagination and the war wife’s patience.

Bayard Sartoris’ recounting of the trains colliding, besides containing helpful encapsulations of the meaning of war inheritance, bears striking similarities to Hightower’s fanciful retellings of his grandfather’s death. Though Hightower’s obfuscation of fact and constant shifting of the story’s details infuriated his congregation, Bayard presents a more sympathetic take on the narration of war narrative that emphasizes imagination over truth:

But that was it: men had lost arms and legs in sawmills; old men had been telling young men and boys about wars and fighting before they discovered how to write it down: and what petty precisian to quibble about locations in space or in chronology, who to care or insist *Now come, old man, tell the truth: did you see this? were you really there?* Because wars are wars: the same exploding powder when there was powder, the same thrust and parry of iron where there was not—one tale, one telling, the same as the next of the one before. (*Unvanquished* 94)

What does it matter whether Hightower’s grandfather was shot from a horse or while stealing chickens if it evokes the “one tale, one telling” of the war inherited as communal postmemory? Personal experience of “locations in space or in chronology” is irrelevant when everyone is connected to the war through legacy. By this logic, Hightower’s frequent qualifications become the tricks of an inspired storyteller
inscribing memories of the war into the hearts and minds of postbellum Southerners struggling to comprehend its consequences.

Although Bayard is not present at the event, he can imagine the train track not as it currently is—“becoming one and indistinguishable with the jungle growth which had now accepted it”—but “still pristine and straight and narrow as the path to glory itself, as it ran for all of them who were there” (96). Bayard’s imagined track becomes a fitting metaphor for how war narrative can obscure unpleasant realities, as Bayard “reforges” a history that has been corroded and mangled from recent trauma.

Hightower employs similar rhetoric when describing the road his grandfather might have used: “we can look out the window and see the street, maybe even the hoofmarks or their shapes in the air, because the same air will be there even if the dust, the mud, is gone...” (August 483). Hightower not only invents a postmemory of his grandfather’s entering Jefferson, but also “writes in” the circumstances by which he can instantly reenact this postmemory through literal sight.

By fusing reality and fantasy in this way, Hightower, like the child Bayard, uses postmemory to be present at a war that he could never have seen first-hand.

Hightower then attempts to communalize his experience, using the pulpit to “preach” his postmemory as if to prophetically evoke the enduring power of communal war legacy. We are given a taste of how these sermons likely sounded when he talks to his wife: “I tell you, they were not men after spoils and glory; they were boys riding the sheer tremendous tidal wave of desperate living. Boys. Because this. This is beautiful. Listen. Try to see it” (483). Bayard similarly employs the first-person plural to implicitly include all of the South in his description of the excitement surrounding the
colliding trains: “we were of them—the old men, the children, the women—gathered to watch, drawn and warned by that grapevine of the oppressed, deprived of everything now save the will and the ability to deceive...” (Unvanquished 97). Both Hightower and Bayard transform stories of desperate individuals into “sermons” on communal fatalism and the power derived from fully embracing, as Bayard puts it, “the finality of death and the vanity of all endeavor” (98).

Yet Hightower evolves during his time at Jefferson. Just as in the war’s aftermath the feverish fantasies of the soldiers’ children give way to the disillusioned practicality of their wives, so too does the death of his wife transform Hightower’s processing of the war. In the eyes of Jefferson, Hightower does not react rationally to her death; rather than leaving Jefferson, he continues to preach. Once he is locked out of the church and forced to resign, Hightower remains in his house near Jefferson’s main street for the rest of his life, despite vicious rumors and physical assault. While Jefferson transforms around him, Hightower stubbornly remains where he is, staring out his window every day at dusk.

This behavior, though eccentric in the context of his contemporary moment, is in keeping with the behavior of war wives during Reconstruction and beyond. There are countless examples throughout Faulkner’s fiction of old widows staring out of windows, waiting for their husbands to return home. Such women are usually portrayed as if they are outside of time, survivors of traumatic pasts that render them incapable of living in the present. Hightower certainly channels this form of

45 Here is one typical instance from Intruder in the Dust: “[T]he old big decaying wooden houses of Jefferson’s long-ago foundation...whose very names most people under fifty no longer knew and which even when children lived in them seemed to be spellbound by the shades of women, old women still spinsters and widows waiting even seventy-five years later for the slow telegraph to bring them news of Tennessee and Virginia and Pennsylvania battles...” (117).
widowhood—Faulkner writes that “[h]e lives dissociated from mechanical time,” following a schedule catered not around the living but around ghosts (August 366).

However, Hightower’s actions also suggest another form entirely: the defiant stance of the war wives of Unvanquished, who “had never surrendered”\(^\text{46}\) despite the men living “like so many steers, emasculate and empty of all save an identical experience which they cannot forget and dare not” (Unvanquished 188, 299).

No one would call Hightower rebellious. Besides window-watching, the closest Hightower comes to true living is delivering newborns faster than the local doctor. But Hightower’s efforts to preserve a communal legacy forsaken by its very inheritors is a similar, albeit misguided, form of the war wife’s refusal to surrender. Once his wife commits suicide, Hightower takes on the more passive stance of the old widow archetype. Just like the ghostly widows inhabiting Faulkner’s novels—like Miss Rosa, one of the “baffled ghosts” haunting Quentin—Hightower becomes increasingly dissociated from life until he can recall only “the few crystallizations of stated instances by which his dead life in the actual world had been governed and ordered once” (August 366). With nothing left to anchor him in the present, he becomes, several generations too late, “the bride-widow of a lost cause,”\(^\text{47}\) waiting for his grandfather to ride past his window.

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\(^{46}\) Yet Unvanquished’s war wives, despite Bayard’s portrayal, are never all that rebellious. They ultimately pressure Drusilla into marriage, defeating her attempts at an alternative vision of the war wife as an active soldier rather than a passive mourner. Drusilla’s refusal to follow the societally accepted path—“Cant you understand that I am tired of burying husbands in this war? that I am riding in Cousin John’s troop not to find a man but to hurt Yankees?”—has the potential to pave the way for the truly defiant war wife, more willing to construct legacy than to become molded by it (191). But her eventual transformation into the stereotypical “hysterical woman” upon Colonel Sartoris’s death evokes the inescapability of war legacy and its indelible influence on those who inherit it.

\(^{47}\) “[W]hen Gavin Breckbridge was killed at Shiloh before he and Drusilla had had time to marry, there had been reserved for Drusilla the highest destiny of a Southern woman—to be the bride-widow of a lost cause” (Unvanquished 191).
Yet the most productive insight gleaned from comparing Hightower to Faulkner’s war wives goes beyond behavior and physical description. The war wife, as a liminal figure herself, concretizes the relationship between war legacy and liminality and bolsters the false promise of postmemory as a salve for the oppression of war legacy. Whereas Quentin and Hightower’s liminality is more figurative, war wives are quite literally located in a liminal life stage. During the war, they are “the women who would not know for months yet if they were widows or childless or not”; in the war’s aftermath, they are expected to serve as the bridge between life and death, family and war, the personal and the communal (96-97). While bearing the burden of their husband’s deaths and the rupture of social continuity, they must also “give birth” to new lives and new communities. The war wives “don’t ever surrender” because they cannot afford to—they must instead resew Jefferson’s communal fabric (208).

Just as Hightower alleviates his lack of rootedness through an obsession with his grandfather’s war narrative, so too do war wives assuage the liminality within themselves by drawing sustenance from a fatalistic past. They derive the motivation to carry on through the continual rehashing of a history of defeat: the loss of loved ones, the disappearance of once formidable families and plantations, the dismantling of Southern cultural norms. Each woman selects a distinct antagonist to concretize their despair over social rupture—Miss Rosa demonizes Sutpen, Rosie Millard steals mules from Northern soldiers—but in every case, this communal obsession with a “paradise lost” poisons the familial sphere, leaving descendants with stories of fatalistic battle-glory rather than Southern redemption.
Hightower is thus rehashing a cycle of fatalism set in motion by war wives struggling to reconstruct social continuity. In order to cope with the present, he chooses to fixate on his grandfather’s past rather than his family’s future, symbolically paralleling a communal preoccupation with war legacy that encourages perpetual liminality rather than concrete progress. This self-destructive destiny is located within postmemory, an inheritance co-created by ancestors and descendants as a source for false rootedness in a liminal society. War wives and veterans bequeath tales of defeat to children and grandchildren as a means for cathartic release from their own pasts. Hightower, in response, allows his life to be dominated by fatalistic myth, mirroring the self-destructive reaction of his ancestors to communal trauma.

From generation to generation, postmemory is taken up as a means to cope with disinheritance despite the fact that it is a carrier of the liminality—the inability to progress from trauma—from which descendants wish to escape. Hightower is just one character in a long line of Southerners who take up as salvation legacies that merely perpetuate disillusionment and self-destruction. Amidst this panoply of defeatist characters, Isaac McCaslin appears as a redemptive figure, a Southerner who provides a method for establishing true rootedness and breaking the cycle of liminality plaguing Faulkner’s South. Yet Isaac’s immemorial wilderness, though promising as a vehicle for concrete legacy, is doomed to be destroyed by capitalist enterprise. As Isaac’s story will prove, Southerners, rather than ignoring their destinies using dissociation and postmemory, must come to terms with irrevocable progress in order to preserve any semblance of their legacy for future descendants.
Chapter 3 - Isaac McCaslin

“Shadow on the Earth”: Searching for Rootedness in the Wilderness

As Faulknerian legend would have it, the Chickasaw tribe settled in Jefferson many generations before the arrival of white colonists. The Native Americans established peaceful communion with the forest by learning to respect its eternal laws: sustainable hunting, responsible development, and limited destruction. Everyone shared the forest’s bounty and shelter, with no one owning any particular section or resource. This arrangement cultivated communal harmony and stability for centuries.

The Chickasaw tribe’s egalitarian treatment of property, besides being a product of America’s mythologized treatment of Native American life, is suggested by Isaac McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* within his discussion of personal repudiation:

‘Because it was never Ikkemotubbe’s fathers’ fathers’ to bequeath Ikkemotubbe to sell to Grandfather or any man because on the instance when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realised, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing.’ (243)

By Isaac’s account, Ikkemotubbe was the last Jefferson Chickasaw chief to view the land as a communal resource unable to be purchased or sold. Ikkemotubbe never had the right to sell the land because it was never bequeathed to him, never his to own. It was the white settlers who brought the institution of inheritance, and Ikkemotubbe’s inevitable choice that ended generations of communal co-habitation with the wilderness. Those whom receive the land “bought nothing” because the true legacy of

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48 Although true for the purposes of my reading of *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner also recounts the tales of the Choctaw tribe in other short stories. Lewis M. Dabney, in his book *The Indians of Yoknapatawpha*, provides a comprehensive account of Faulkner’s portrayal of Native Americans in his fiction. Included in Dabney’s work, which focuses on “Lo!,” “A Courtship,” “A Justice,” “Red Leaves,” and *Go Down, Moses*, are precise descriptions of the frequent confluences of Chickasaw and Choctaw traditions in Faulkner’s fiction, including in the characterization of Sam Fathers. Though it is not within the purview of this paper to detail this useful analytical work, it will suffice to state that Faulkner’s depiction of Native American life was in no way meant to be historically accurate, but merely evocative in a literary context.
the forest, cultivated by the Chickasaw tribe for generations, cannot be purchased, sold, or inherited. That legacy must be earned by living with the land as Native Americans once did—when Ikkemotubbe refuted his heritage and bought into a “white” system of inheritance, the forest “ceased ever to have been his forever.”

It is this Native American legacy that Isaac adopts in order to counteract his “doomed” birthright. His tutelage under Sam Fathers, combined with his mastery of the hunter’s code, provides Isaac with the means to mitigate, or even potentially escape, the liminality plaguing Faulkner’s Southerners. For Isaac, the forest serves as a potential site for establishing rootedness, a more productive alternative to Quentin and Hightower’s dependence on dissociation and postmemory. Though Isaac’s adherence to Native American principles is also a form of postmemory, it is an adopted legacy that, unlike war narrative, promotes a redemptive cycle: memories founded upon sustainability rather than fatality, regeneration instead of self destruction. In order to explore the mechanics underpinning Isaac’s relationship to the wilderness, it is first necessary to turn to Sam Fathers, analyzing Isaac’s mentor using the analytic techniques I have developed thus far in order to contextualize Sam within my overall discourse on Southern disinheritance.

In fact, Sam is in many ways an archetype for the developmental impact of disinheritance, a model for Isaac himself as he begins to repudiate his McCaslin heritage. Sam, who as the bastard son of the last Chickasaw chief grew up as a black slave, sought to reforge a severed connection to his own people by living in the forest, aiding the hunting party while imparting the postmemory of his Chickasaw heritage to Isaac. Sam is also a marginal figure within Jefferson society with no definite social
role—no one in Jefferson treats him as wholly black, white, or Native American. However, Sam also suffers from the liminality present in the white protagonists we have examined thus far; he lives with the pressure to resurrect a communal history vanquished by time and dismantled through disinheritance.

Despite the fact that McCaslin, Isaac’s cousin, discusses Sam’s societal position within a racial context, his use of military discourse grants Sam the regality conferred upon the white disinherited members of society:

‘He was the direct son not only of a warrior but of a chief. Then he grew up and began to learn things, and all of a sudden one day he found out that he had been betrayed, the blood of the warriors and chiefs had been betrayed....Not betrayed by the black blood and not willfully betrayed by his mother, but betrayed by her all the same, who had bequeathed him not only the blood of slaves but even a little of the very blood which had enslaved it; himself his own battleground, the scene of his own vanquishment and the mausoleum of his defeat.’ (159-60)

Setting aside the many references to “blood,” which distinguishes this account as the history of a non-white person, Sam is subtly equated with the white male descendants of Civil War soldiers who, by attempting to perpetuate the legacies of their fathers and grandfathers, ultimately become “the scene of [their] own vanquishment,” “betrayed” by a disinheritance that they were born too late to defeat. Just as Hightower “remembers” the Civil War through his grandfather’s story, so too is Sam Fathers, though theoretical heir to the Chickasaw chiefdom, denied his birthright and forced to experience his heritage as a form of postmemory. On an even deeper level,

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49 His inability to assimilate within Jefferson has much to do with the fact that he does not fit neatly within any one socio-racial designation: “White man’s work, when Sam did work. Because he did nothing else: farmed no allotted acres of his own, as the other ex-slaves of old Carothers McCaslin did, performed no field-work for daily wages as the younger and newer negroes did....For, although Sam lived among the negroes, in a cabin among the other cabins in the quarters, and consorted with negroes...and dressed like them and talked like them and even went with them to the negro church now and then, he was still the son of that Chickasaw chief and the negroes knew it” (161).
Doom’s choice to sell Sam parallels the sale of the land itself, positioning Sam as the carrier not just of Chickasaw tradition but of its eventual demise via disinheritance.

Notably, McCaslin’s depiction of Sam as “the mausoleum of his defeat” is strikingly similar to Mr. Compson’s description of Quentin’s pocket watch as “the mausoleum of all hope and desire.” Whether or not Faulkner consciously intended this parallel, the exalted word “mausoleum” elevates Sam’s history to the plane of white Civil War narrative. Quentin, Hightower, and Sam (as well as Isaac) are all united by their status as representatives of a legacy from which they are disinherited. Just as Quentin and Hightower are obsessed with Civil War ghosts, so too is Sam haunted by the eradication of his ancestors and the gradual erosion of their culture.

Yet Sam is doubly cursed by his father selling him into slavery, a betrayal that prevents him from fully communing with his legacy: “He had no children, no people, none of his blood anywhere above earth that he would ever meet again. And even if he were to, he could not have touched it, spoken to it, because for seventy years now he had had to be a negro” (203). Because he experiences his heritage as postmemory, Sam cannot even speak the language of his people, but merely a variant invented by him and a fellow disinherited Native American. But just as Quentin and Hightower try and fail to personally represent a communal legacy, so too is Sam forced to be the last true representative of Chickasaw

50 Here is the entire passage, for convenience: “It was Grandfather’s and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s” (Fury 76). My close reading of the passage, for those who wish to refer back to it, can be found in Chapter 1, pages 18-20.
heritage even though he was disinherited from his rightful legacy. Because Sam was not raised as a Native American and thus receives Chickasaw tradition second-hand, he experiences life in a liminal state, unable to fully reconcile his diminutive life station with the glorious promise of his heritage. Sam is a literal personification of the transformation of Chickasaw legacy from a living culture into an ethereal ideal, a lifestyle that outsiders adopt only in a diminished, inauthentic form.

Isaac believes that he can counteract the dilution, and eventual disappearance, of Chickasaw heritage by immortalizing Sam through their tutelary link. As Sam’s pupil, Isaac feels that he is uniquely suited to serve as the carrier of Sam’s legacy, a hunter capable of not just approximating Chickasaw tradition, but actually comming with the forest as the Native Americans once did:

[Isaac] realised suddenly...that Sam Fathers had marked him indeed, not as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people. He stopped breathing then...and in the following silence the wilderness ceased to breathe also, leaning, stopping overhead with its breath held, tremendous and impartial and waiting. (173)

This realization takes on a higher importance than his mere initiation as a hunter; Isaac becomes a more promising hunter than any within his hunting party because he acquires a purer connection to the forest through Sam and his “vanished and forgotten people.” When Isaac holds his breath, “the wilderness [ceases] to breathe also,” as if the force of nature were integrated within his very spirit.

Although Boon Hogganbeck, who is of Native American heritage as well, outlives Sam, Boon is presented as an inferior carrier for Chickasaw legacy: “Boon Hogganbeck’s grandmother had been a Chickasaw woman too, and although the blood had run white since and Boon was a white man, it was not chief’s blood. To the boy at least, the difference was apparent immediately you saw Boon and Sam together...” (161).
Indeed, Isaac thinks of the wilderness as a nurturing, parental force for both Sam and himself, as if he were inheriting the heritage of the forest itself:

> Summer, and fall, and snow, and wet and sapri¢e spring in their ordered immortal sequence, the deathless and immemorial phases of the mother who had shaped him if any had toward the man he almost was, mother and father both to the old man born of a Negro slave and a Chickasaw chief who had been his spirit’s father if any had.... (310)

Sam and his Chickasaw legacy transcend oblivion through integration with the “ordered immortal sequence” of nature, the “immemorial phases” that parallel the generational roots of the Native Americans themselves. That to Isaac the forest is “mother and father both” to Sam suggests the invention of a redemptive history, one in which Sam is not disinherit ed from the Chickasaw chiefdom via miscegenation but is rather a pure child of the wilderness. Even more powerful is the implication that Sam’s parentage is irrelevant, as is his apparent severance from Chickasaw tradition. Sam is instead the rightful inheritor of Native American legacy, the true representative of the wilderness who can share his connection to the land with Isaac.

Sam is also immortalized through oral storytelling. Isaac’s extended account of this process highlights the impetus behind his spiritual investment in the wilderness and Chickasaw culture:

> And as [Sam] talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy’s present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. (162-63)

Isaac inherits Sam’s legacy as postmemory just as Sam did before him, undergoing the same process that Quentin and Hightower did: allowing this inheritance to dominate
Isaac’s present. But unlike Quentin and Hightower, Isaac’s “ghosts” are “casting an actual shadow on the earth.” The ghostly regiment of Hightower’s grandfather is a fleeting apparition from the past; Quentin transforms living ancestors into “back-looking ghosts.”

By contrast, the sheer reality of Isaac’s “vanished men” suggests the deeper capacity for rootedness Isaac’s postmemory possesses:

And more: as if some of them had not happened yet but would occur tomorrow, until at last it would seem to the boy that he himself had not come into existence yet, that none of his race nor the other subject race which his people had brought with them into the land had come here yet.... (163)

The Chickasaw postmemory of peaceful cohabitation with the wilderness not only supplants Isaac’s present, but also generates a new future for Isaac and his Southern contemporaries. At first glance this future seems bleak, since neither Isaac, the white colonists, nor “the other subject race” have a place within it. But I would argue that this “evacuation” is metaphorical rather than literal, an erasure not of the white colonists themselves but of their immoral, destructive influences. Isaac envisions a future that is regenerative, not polluted by the fatalism inherent in Southern legacy. Isaac, through his adoption of Sam’s teachings, thus creates a “new” legacy, a possible chance for redemption for all Southerners through a repudiation of slavery and a form of communal “ownership” of the forest.

This sustainable relationship with nature also bypasses individual inheritance of arbitrary plots of land, a theory of ownership that inhibits a spiritual connection with the wilderness central to Isaac’s redemptive prophecy:

...that although [the land] had been his grandfather’s and then his father’s and uncle’s and was now his cousin’s and someday would be
his own land which he and Sam hunted over, their hold upon it actually was as trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book in Jefferson which allocated it to them and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Fathers’ voice the mouthpiece of the host. (163)

Isaac’s dismissal of the authority of the “chancery book” reveals his need to distance himself from traditional Southern legacy through a preoccupation with Chickasaw postmemory. The McCaslin’s ownership of the land through the generations is “trivial and without reality” because the wilderness cannot ever be “owned.” Sam is the rightful inheritor of the forest because, unlike his father, he recognizes that his ancestral roots make him not the owner but merely “the mouthpiece of the host.” Isaac is a worthy inheritor of Sam’s teachings because he knows he is a “guest” rather than a proprietor, and could never hold dominion over the wilderness.

By inheriting the forest from Sam as a form of spiritual legacy rather than as patrilineal entitlement, Isaac believes that he can break the cycle of fatality gripping the South and escape the “curse” of his Southern lineage. Yet in Isaac’s view, it is not through his own choice that he can reject his Southern heritage; he cannot repudiate the land because “it was never old Ikkemotubbe’s to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation” (243). Rather, he needs Sam to release Isaac from the bondage of fatalistic Southern inheritance so that he may relinquish his birthright.

52 Isaac makes two references to the fatalism inherent in his lineage while discussing his attempts to locate Carothers McCaslin’s descendants. Upon finding Fonsiba and her husband, Isaac declares, “Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land...” (265). And later, in reference to Lucas: “only Lucas was left, the baby, the last save himself of old Carothers’ doomed and fatal blood which in the male derivation seemed to destroy all it touched, and even he was repudiating and at least hoping to escape it...” (279).

53 “[A]nd McCaslin ‘No. Not even you. Because mark. You said how on that instant when Ikkemotubbe realised that he could sell the land to Grandfather, it ceased forever to have been his. All right; go on: Then it belonged to Sam Fathers, old Ikkemotubbe’s son. And who inherited it from Sam Fathers, if not you?...’ and [Isaac] ‘Yes. Sam Fathers set me free’” (285).
Only by receiving the spiritual mark of the wilderness from Sam can Isaac break the curse of patrilineal legacy and work toward a model by which Southerners, rather than basing their identities on a history of shameful defeat, can establish rootedness through a communal co-habitation with forest.

Of course, his personal lineage has fashioned Isaac just as much as the wilderness. As Isaac stares at the McCaslin ledgers, he recognizes that “the yellowed pages in their fading and implacable succession were as much a part of his consciousness and would remain so forever, as the fact of his nativity” (258). But by rejecting his pre-ordained legacy and hearkening back to a time of deeper communion with the land, Isaac believes himself to be a harbinger for Southern salvation, a modern biblical Isaac evading divine sacrifice:

‘If He could see Father and Uncle Buddy in Grandfather He must have seen me too. –an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham’s and repudiating immolation: fatherless and therefore safe declining the altar because maybe this time the exasperated Hand might not supply the kid....’ (269)

Although borrowing his rebellious spirit from his literal father who, with his uncle, gradually freed their inherited slaves, Isaac is “fatherless” in a more metaphorical sense: by disrupting patrilineal succession and taking the wilderness as his mother. Rather than suffering “immolation” in the face of Southern inheritance, Isaac forges a different path. Whereas Quentin and Hightower have nothing with which to support themselves without fatalistic Southern legacy, Isaac’s communion with the wilderness cultivates sustainability rather than self-destruction; the “immemorial” forest provides concrete roots to the past that assuage the trauma of postbellum liminality plaguing Faulkner’s protagonists.
Yet Isaac is not the only character in *Moses* who uses the wilderness to heal the wounds of societal disinheritance. The hunting ritual in which Isaac takes part had begun long before he was born, serving as a fleeting replacement for the shame of defeat with the pride of the hunt, the soldier’s hallow bravado with the hunter’s humble resiliency:

For six years now [Isaac] had heard the best of all talking. It was of the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document....It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive...ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter.... (181-2)

During the hunting season, the wilderness, “bigger and older than any recorded document,” eclipses the war in significance and influence, while the hunt’s “ancient and immitigable rules” supersede the shame of a disinherited postbellum society by “[voiding] all regrets.” Within the forest, the hunter emerges as the mythic autonomous male capable of setting aside the racial strife endemic in the Southern condition, 54 transcending the pathetic defeat in “the last darkening days of ’64 and ’65” (224). For two weeks, the hunters can set aside the fatalistic burden of Southern legacy and lose themselves in an “ancient and unremitting contest” of sustainable, disciplined hunting, a welcome alternative to the war’s violent chaos.

This escapist fantasy becomes all the more poignant through the introduction of Big Ben, whose power and endurance inspire the hunters to form a ritual centered around the bear:

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54 It would be incorrect to suggest that the hunt obliterates racial difference. On the contrary, the hunting season instills in many of its participants the sense of time running backwards to an antebellum era when they were not scrutinized over race relations. The notable exception, of course, is Isaac, who sees the hunt as a means to further solidify his spiritual connection with Sam.
[Isaac] knew only that for the first time he realised that the bear which had run in his listening and loomed in his dreams since before he could remember and which therefore must have existed in the listening and the dreams of his cousin and Major de Spain and even old General Compson before they began to remember in their turn, was a mortal animal and that they had departed for the camp each November with no actual intention of slaying it...because so far they had no actual hope of being able to. (190)

At the end of the hunt each year, they chase and attempt to kill Big Ben, knowing full well that he will escape and likely kill one of their dogs. But the hunters accept, perhaps even yearn for, this ritualistic sacrifice—unlike the invading Northern army, the bear is a destructive force bound to the “immitigable rules”\(^{55}\) of the hunt, a monumental natural force rendered palatable for the disciplined hunter. Big Ben even takes on the form of postmemory for the members of Isaac’s hunting party, an indication of the wilderness’s powerful hold on their imaginations as a permanent, unalterable space within a society in flux. Just as Big Ben can seemingly never be slain, so too does their fantasy seem incapable of terminating; the bear will always be there for them to hunt next year, on and on into eternity.

Big Ben thereby inspires a “positive” liminality that stands in opposition to the psychological liminality born out of the Southern condition, a continual hunt that encourages bravery and fortitude as opposed to fatalism and emasculation. Rather than despairing in the face of a shameful Southern legacy, the ritualistic hunt of Big Ben serves as an inspirational legacy for the hunting party, a means of cultivating the “humility and skill to survive” denied them within an unstable society. To hunt Big

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\(^{55}\) Perhaps this is why Major de Spain is concerned when Big Ben seems to have ignored the “rules” by killing a colt: “I’m disappointed in him. He has broken the rules. I didn’t think he would have done that. He has killed mine an [sic] McCaslin’s dogs, but that was all right. We gambled the dogs against him; we gave each other warning. But now he has come into my house and destroyed my property, out of season too. He broke the rules. It was Old Ben, Sam’’ (202).
Ben is to enter a (super)natural world isolated from the anxieties of a postbellum South, governed by the code of the hunters rather than the laws of a conquered land.

For Isaac in particular, this constructive “limbo” is what draws him to Big Ben in the first place:

Because there would be a next time, after and after. He was only ten. It seemed to him that he could see them, the two of them, shadowy in the limbo from which time emerged and became time: the old bear absolved of mortality and himself who shared a little of it. Because he recognised now what he had smelled in the huddled dogs and tasted in his own saliva, recognised fear as a boy, a youth, recognises the existence of love and passion and experience which is his heritage but not yet his patrimony....So I will have to see him, he thought, without dread or even hope. I will have to look at him. (193)

Just as Isaac immortalizes Sam by linking him with the legacy of the wilderness, so too does he grant Big Ben the timeless quality of the woods itself and recognize their hunting the bear as an eternal process. Isaac also reiterates the notion that Big Ben is “his heritage,” a postmemory that is “not yet his patrimony.” Big Ben thus serves as a stand-in for the wilderness itself, a physical manifestation of the forest’s ancient permanence and imaginative resonance. Yet Big Ben is not the only figure rendered immortal by this legacy. Isaac sees both him and the bear “shadowy in the limbo from which time emerged,” as if Isaac and the other hunters acquire a taste of immortality by merely being involved in hunting the bear.56 The hunt becomes a means for attaining the Southern equivalent of eternal life—a rooted, sustainable legacy—rather than the promise of self-destruction facing Quentin and Hightower.

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56 This notion is implied rather subtly through the passage’s grammar, as well. The “it” in the phrase “himself who shared a little of it” most likely means “mortality”; however, “it” is an ambiguous pronoun that could also be referring to the absolution of mortality. Although what Faulkner actually intended is irrelevant, I don’t find it too far-fetched to suggest that the grammatical ambiguity was intentional, hinting at the ways in which storytelling, the most literal form of human legacy, can transform the forgotten into legends, the mortal into the immortal.
However, this redemptive prophecy ultimately does not come to pass. Isaac, even as a young boy, dimly perceives this doomed fate because his Chickasaw postmemory confers upon him a wisdom beyond his years, a deep knowledge of the wilderness that extends beyond the collective experience of the hunting party. As General Compson puts it,

“[T]his boy was already an old man long before you damned Sartorises and Edmondses invented farms and banks to keep yourselves from having to find out what this boy was born knowing and fearing too maybe but without being afraid, that could go ten miles on a compass because he wanted to look at a bear none of us had ever got near enough to put a bullet in....” (237)

By suggesting that Isaac’s wisdom predates the development of antebellum Southern civilization, General Compson implicitly equates Isaac’s knowledge with a Native American heritage foreign to “damned Sartorises and Edmondses.” Isaac “was born knowing” the wilderness itself, a deeper connection that grants him the courage to search for a bear that none of the other hunters “got near enough to put a bullet in.” Indeed, Isaac meets Big Ben only once “all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted [have] been abrogated,” when Isaac allows himself to be guided solely by his Native American teaching and leaves his rifle, compass, and watch behind (196).

The crucial tools upon which other hunters depend merely obscure Isaac’s connection with the wilderness. With only his Chickasaw postmemory to guide him, Isaac’s spiritual connection to the forest allows him to intuitively understand the hunting ritual’s inherent fatalism, even if his young mind cannot yet consciously process the profundity of this knowledge:

So he should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something...was beginning; had already begun....[H]e didn’t know
what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too. (214)

Even as a child, Isaac understands on some level that Big Ben must eventually die, and that the “positive liminality” provided by the bear hunt would ultimately collapse, leaving nothing to constructively mediate the hunters’ shame toward their Southern legacy. Of course, every hunt results in “fatality”; the dance between predator and prey is designed to be a sustainable cycle. But what Isaac unconsciously recognizes is that Big Ben’s death will terminate that cycle rather than repeating the “ancient and immitigable rules.” Sam, too, divines this fate. On the morning when the camp finds the colt Lion has slain, Sam recognizes the impending end to his life: “It had been foreknowledge in Sam’s face that morning...It was almost over now and he was glad” (203).

That Isaac and Sam both intuit this fatalism suggests the prophetic power of their shared Chickasaw postmemory. But even more crucially, it reveals Big Ben’s true significance as a carrier of Native American tradition, a symbol for a way of life that will soon be lost in humanity’s endless quest toward rationality and the fearful destruction of that which they do not understand:

It was as if the boy had already divined what his senses and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness...and through which ran not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life.... (183)

Even on the very first day Isaac is brought to the wilderness, he unconsciously predicts the destruction of the forest itself by men “who feared it because it was wilderness,” and because they do not possess the Native American postmemory necessary to
navigate that fear. Although Isaac is in a unique position to prevent the forest’s
decimation, he is powerless to halt the march of progress. Isaac is as much a product
of an “old dead time” as is Big Ben, “phantom epitome and apotheosis” of
Chickasaw heritage—its best representative but also its harbinger of doom, an
“anachronism” destined to be slain by the same men who will dismantle Native
American memory with “plows and axes.”

Intuitively understanding his powerlessness, Isaac responds by refusing to
shoot Big Ben. Despite his prowess as a hunter and multiple encounters with the bear,
Isaac lets it escape or allows others to attack in his stead. By doing so, Isaac is
attempting to actualize the promise of “positive liminality.” Even when Sam confronts
Isaac with the truth that Big Ben will eventually die, Isaac insists upon an agency over
the future neither of them possess: “‘I know it,’ the boy said. ‘That’s why it must be
one of us. So it won’t be until the last day. When even he don’t want it to last any
longer’” (201). Isaac assumes that his and Sam’s deeper knowledge of Big Ben will
allow them to, if not change the future, then at least control the timing of its
unfolding. But Isaac knows that he could never shoot Big Ben, not even when the bear
doesn’t “want it to last any longer.” Killing Big Ben would be equivalent to destroying
the wilderness itself, so Isaac tries to passively uphold the forest’s “deathless
immortal phases,” refusing to kill so that the hunt (and the forest) lives forever.

The forest’s powerful immortality, though revered and preserved by Isaac’s
Native American predecessors, is a source of fear for his contemporaries, who wish

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57 Faulkner explicitly conveys Big Ben’s connection to Native American heritage during the last hunt. When Big Ben is slain, Sam collapses and dies soon after, ushering in the literal disappearance of Chickasaw culture within Yoknapatawpha County (except as it persists within Isaac).
only to reduce the natural cycle of the wilderness to the rhythm of their rational, cathartic hunt. Although Isaac recognizes the fatality awaiting the hunting ritual, and is therefore willing to restrict his actions as a hunter in response, the larger hunting party has no such reservations. Without the prophetic vision granted by Chickasaw postmemory, the other hunters see killing the bear as a means for ensuring greater agency and control over their environment, the original (latent) purpose of the hunting ritual itself. Whereas Isaac feels that he “should have hated and feared Lion,” the other hunters only wish to know if Lion can be tamed to pin down Big Ben; upon recognizing Lion’s utility, their concerns vanish.

It is Major de Spain himself who ultimately dismantles the hunting tradition. Soon after the hunt leading to the death of Big Ben (and Sam), he sells the timber-rights for their section of the forest to a logging company. By doing so, he justifies Isaac’s fear of generational inheritance, forfeiting the opportunity for communal co-habitation with nature by converting his “false” ownership into cash, the most illusory of legacies. Major de Spain betrays his guilt by refusing to return to the camp after Sam’s death; in fact, he doesn’t even tell the hunting party of the sale himself (301).

Yet Isaac knows that no one, not even Major de Spain, is responsible for this doomed fate; the disinheritance of the Chickasaw tribe, the cessation of the hunt, the deforestation of the wilderness—all of this must come to pass. Isaac’s only distinction from the rest of the hunters is his preternatural awareness of the end. In fact, Isaac views himself (and the rest of the hunting party) as an unwitting carrier for this fate, a final chapter in the ever unfolding narrative of “progress”:

[I]t was as though the train (and not only the train but himself, not only his vision which had seen it and his memory which remembered it
but his clothes too, as garments carry back into the clean edgeless blowing of air the lingering effluvium of a sick-room or of death) had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill not even finished yet and the rails and ties which were not even laid.... (305-06)

The metaphor of the “sick-room” aptly expresses the inchoate fatalism of the hunting ritual, its encapsulation of the oft-quoted principle from quantum mechanics: the observed is changed by the mere act of observation, injected with the “lingering effluvium” of mortality. Even Isaac’s memory of the forest is a form of contamination, as if remembrance, much like an ancestral photograph damaged by the oily fingertips of eager descendants, destroys the nostalgic subject.

Within this philosophical context, Isaac’s thoughts during his final journey through the woods are equal parts requiem and fantasy: a reflection on what the rapidly diminishing wilderness once represented and a yearning for the communal rootedness, the preservation of ethereal memory, that once seemed within reach:

[H]e had only paused, quitting the knoll which was no abode of the dead because there was no death, not Lion and not Sam: not held fast in earth but free in earth and not in earth but of earth, myriad yet undiffused of every myriad part, leaf and twig and particle, air and sun and rain and dew and night, acorn oak and leaf and acorn again, dark and dawn and dark and dawn again in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one: and Old Ben too, Old Ben too; they would give him his paw back even, certainly they would given him his paw back: then the long challenge and the long chase, no heart to be driven and outraged, no flesh to be mauled and bled.... (312-13)

Isaac envisions a reality in which the forest survives, continually cycling between “dark and dawn” and imparting the immorality within that cycle onto those who live and die within its domain. Not only do Lion and Sam live on within the forest’s teeming biodiversity, but Big Ben survives death safe from future harm, with “no flesh to be mauled and bled.” Under Sam’s care, the “long challenge and the long chase” need
never cease, with the hunt becoming merely one of the forest’s natural processes. The eternal balance of the wilderness, once established, cultivates the harmonious liminality necessary to heal past wounds, establishing a self-sustaining communal legacy for disinherited Southerners. Just as the forest’s myriad parts cohere into a seamless whole, so too is Southern society tied together by the ageless wilderness.

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As the decades pass, Isaac’s dream vanishes with the communal memory of the Chickasaw tribe. The wilderness, once 30 miles from Jefferson, is cut down by logging companies to make way for housing developments and highways. A much older Isaac watches the wilderness “not being conquered, destroyed, so much as retreating since its purpose was served now and it time an outmoded time” (326). He travels with the “sons and even grandsons of the men” in his hunting party, their names virtually lost to history; “all that [remains] of that old time [are] the Indian names on the little towns” where panther and bear had once roamed free (320, 325). The untamed land that inspired Isaac as a boy is restricted to an island 200 miles from Jefferson. The wilderness as it once was lives on merely within Isaac’s fantasy: that his life will run “not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space” with “the faces of the old men he had known and loved and for a little while outlived, moving again among the shades of tall unaxed trees” (337).

But in the end, Isaac’s aspirations, much like Quentin’s and Hightower’s before him, do run “toward oblivion.” Rather than evading the fatalistic pitfalls of dissociation and postmemory, Isaac’s vision of a redemptive wilderness reveals itself to
be yet another coping mechanism for the psychological effects of liminality.

Chickasaw postmemory, much like the Southern postmemory Isaac wishes to repudiate, merely replaces an undesirable present with a romanticized past. Just as Quentin and Hightower drown their guilt in a deluge of antebellum myth, so too does Isaac blunt his despair over the vanishing wilderness by losing himself in Chickasaw folklore and tales of the hunt. Even toward the end of his life, Isaac continues to seek a “dimension free of both time and space,” a Southern society no longer haunted by ignoble defeat and diminished inheritance. But as Quentin, Hightower, and Isaac all demonstrate, there is no escape from this legacy, nor the liminality born from it.

Familial dissociation, Civil War postmemory, the hunting ritual—all of these strategies designed to isolate Faulkner’s characters from the anxieties of a postbellum South give way to a “modern” liminality, born from the disinheritance engendered by capitalism.

Throughout this paper, I have conveyed liminality as a particularly Southern phenomenon. But as the story of Sam Fathers demonstrates, it is a universal result of disinheritance, a means for coping with inevitable ruptures in the continua of communal memories. This better explains the inevitability of Quentin, Hightower, and Isaac’s failures to decouple themselves from Southern legacy. Dissociation and postmemory merely delay an inevitable engagement with the liminality that is their birthright, as it is for any descendants of societies in flux. No matter what Faulkner’s protagonists do to assuage their guilt over a failure to embody past legacies, they will always be “re-immersed” in the liminality from which they wished to escape in the first place. An all-consuming obsession with lost pasts must be relinquished in order to productively survive within a shifting society. For Quentin, that means coming to
terms with the shame he feels toward his familial legacy and progressing beyond it, starting a new legacy in the process. For Hightower, this would require parsing out his complex inheritance of war legacy instead of depending merely on his grandfather’s mythic postmemory. Isaac would have to relinquish his fantastical conception of a liminality born from the wilderness in order to reintegrate with society and change it from within.

The process of reconnection with Southern communal inheritance need not be entirely self-destructive. By presenting the variety of ways in which Southerners with distinct backgrounds fail to evade their own fates, Faulkner suggests the futility in resisting the liminality latent in the Southern condition. Through Quentin, Hightower, and Isaac’s stories, Faulkner constructs a counter-narrative for coping with the pain of deflated Southern legacy. Rather than depending on dissociation and postmemory to mediate the loss of societal continuity, postbellum Southerners should directly confront their liminality, embracing its place within their personal identities instead of engaging in doomed attempts to repudiate it. If liminality is an essential facet of human existence, then Southerners must look within themselves for the way forward; otherwise, Southern culture, much like the Chickasaw tribe, may gradually vanish from communal memory.
Conclusion - Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison

“Rootless Ephemeral Cities”: Legacy in a Contemporary South

The year is 1948. World War II has ended. Few signs of Civil War-era destruction remain. Automobiles and refrigerators have spread across Jefferson. But if Gavin Stevens could have his way, none of these symbols of industrial progress would dominate the landscape of Yoknapatawpha County. Indeed, if the reader were to focus merely on the plot of *Intruder in the Dust*—the imminent threat of Lucas Beauchamp’s lynching—then the year need not be 1948 at all. The timeless, deeply historical context of the “race problem” affords the opportunity for *Intruder’s* characters to reflect on Southern legacy, but from a decidedly contemporary viewpoint, inflecting the novel’s meditations on Southern identity with a retroactive quality rarely seen in Faulkner’s postbellum novels.

While attempting to prove Lucas’ innocence, Chick Mallison, Gavin’s nephew and self-proclaimed “swaddled unwitting infant in the long tradition of his native land,” is forced to investigate his own personal relationship to Southern heritage (94). Yet unlike Quentin, Hightower, and Isaac, Chick’s distance from the Civil War allows him to tackle his legacy directly, without using dissociation and postmemory as intermediary mechanisms. The liminality plaguing Southerners of the postbellum era has evolved into a historical artifact, a significant aspect of Southern identity that can be examined with logical distance rather than emotional urgency. The impassioned conversations between Quentin and Mr. Compson, Hightower and Cinthy, and Isaac

58 1948 is the original publish date for *Intruder in the Dust*. For the purposes of this paper, I assume that this is approximately the year of the novel’s narrative world as well, a claim that I do not find to be terribly far-fetched. If according to *Moses* Isaac is 16 in 1878, then he would be almost 90 in 1948, which is Chick Mallison’s approximation of Isaac’s age (*Moses* 194; *Intruder* 91).
and McCaslin held deep dramatic consequences for each character’s relationship to communal legacy. By comparison, Chick and Gavin’s discussion of historical race relations is engaged yet clinical, impactful on an intellectual rather than a personal level.

Nonetheless, Chick identifies strongly with a heritage that is “still shaping him” into a Southerner:

[A]nd now he seemed to see his whole native land, his home—the dirt, the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man...[with] the specific passions and hopes and convictions and ways of thinking and acting of a specific kind and even race.... (147-48)

Despite his contemporary context, Chick recognizes his particular roots as a Southerner, a heritage that instills within him specific “convictions and ways of thinking” differentiating him from other Americans. Yet Southern identity has shifted over the course of six generations—rather than being a carrier of fatalism, it now serves as a construct for social cohesion and defensive traditionalism in response to increasing modernization. To be of a “specific kind” is no longer a prophecy of doom, but a form of regional pride.59

Gavin reinforces this notion in his response to Chick, a monologue sparked by a telepathic awareness, from Southerner to Southerner, of Chick’s thoughts:

We are not defending actually our policies or beliefs or even our way of life, but simply our homogeneity from a federal government to which in simple desperation the rest of this country has had to surrender

59 Chick acknowledges that Southern identity has some unsavory aspects that are unwittingly defended through this prideful stance—most notably, the racism of the mob: “[B]ecause it seemed to [Chick] now that he was responsible for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it...” (135). Chick’s defense of Lucas is partially a repudiation of this facet of his culture, even though he himself on occasion calls Lucas an “impudent Negro” and bears some instinctual shame for his relationship with him.
voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty....Only a few of us know that only from homogeneity comes anything of a people or for a people of durable and lasting value.... (150)

Instead of serving as a force of self-destruction, as it does for Faulkner’s postbellum characters, Southerners’ “homogeneity” is a condition that instills “durable and lasting value.” That Gavin believes this homogeneity worth defending from the rest of the United States is of course historically rooted. However, as Chick puts it, the North is now merely an “emotional idea,” a concept prompting defiance rather than fear or hatred (149). Gavin’s evocation of “personal and private liberty” as a crucial right speaks to the South’s need for self-determination nearly 100 years after the end of the Civil War, long after the North is an actual antagonist. 60

And yet, Chick still dreams of the very same escapist fantasy for which Quentin, Hightower, and Isaac yearn: “the whole vast scope of their own rich teeming never-ravaged land of glittering undefiled cities and unburned towns and unwasted farms” surviving into the present (149). Despite the many intervening generations, Chick inherits as postmemory not just visions of the war, but also the fervent desire for the perpetuation of a romanticized antebellum society “undefiled” by outsiders. As Gavin puts it, “For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it’s still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon in 1863...[and] there is still time for it not to begin...” (190). Even if Chick is not as personally invested in this fantasy as Quentin or Hightower, he nonetheless embodies the hallmark of Southern identity: an instinctual hope for a

60 What Gavin desires is for the South to be free to handle its “race problem” by itself, without outside interference: “That’s what we are really defending; the privilege of setting him free ourselves; which we will have to do for the reason that nobody else can...” (151). Freeing Lucas (and other African Americans) from societal racism will in turn liberate Southerners themselves, but they must possess the “personal and private liberty” to do so in the first place.
reality devoid of postbellum anxieties, in which rootedness is guaranteed rather than contested.

But even Chick is dimly aware that his contemporary context threatens to destabilize this communal legacy. Much like Isaac’s hunting ritual, Southern homogeneity is doomed to dissipate in a modernizing American society:

[T]here looked down upon him and his countless row on row of faces which resembled his face and spoke the same language he spoke...yet between whom and him and his there was no longer any real kinship and soon after that even this would be gone because they would be too far asunder even to hear one another... (149)

Isaac’s extension of the antebellum fantasy signals the collapse of communal identification, the loss of “real kinship” among Southerners despite their physical and linguistic commonalities. Technology is the proverbial nail in the coffin, alienating previously close-knit communities. Automobiles and telephones make people “too far asunder even to hear one another,” and so the communal fabric disintegrates, dismantling Southern legacy in the process.

Indeed, the Jefferson of Intruder has already begun displacing the traditional symbols of Southern heritage. The “old big decaying houses of Jefferson’s long-ago foundation” no longer dominate the townscape; isolated from the street, they “[peer] at it over the day-after-tomorrow shoulders of the neat small new one-storey houses designed in Florida and California” with “neat plots of clipped grass and tedious flowerbeds” (117). The “prosperous young married couples” residing in these homes epitomize the excesses of burgeoning consumerism: “shopping bags in the chain groceries and drug stores,” “bright trig tomorrow’s clothes from the mailorder houses,” “patented electric gadgets for cooking and freezing and cleaning” (117).
While visiting Jefferson on a Sunday, Chick cannot “see the Square at all; only the dense impenetrable mass of tops and hoods,” an “interlocked mosaic so infinitesimal of motion” that Chick imagines riding on top of the cars “on a horse” (233). Gavin, once again responding to Chick’s unarticulated reflections, sees the automobile as “our national sex symbol,” an imaginative construct destroying traditional conceptions of sexuality and marriage (234).

Upon compiling these disparate observations, it becomes abundantly clear that Faulkner is speaking through Chick and Gavin, expressing his disdain toward a modernizing society’s casual disregard for the past. Faulkner likely felt that his “prosperous young married couples” care more for their “memberships in the country club and the bridge clubs” than their connection to Southern heritage (117). In an ever-changing world struggling to keep pace with technological and social change, the past is quickly forgotten in the race toward future prosperity.

However, this is not the whole story. Far removed from the anxieties of a postbellum South, the contemporary moment also allows for new generations of Southerners like Chick to productively re-engage with a liminality that was once crippling for their ancestors. If, as Arpad Szakolczaï writes, modernity is itself a “permanent liminality,” then a postwar South is vastly better equipped at processing a liminal Southern heritage than Quentin, Hightower, and Isaac (qtd. in Thomassen 19). Although many of the problems associated with Southern legacy remain in the present—race, rootlessness, stereotypical assignations of backwardness—Chick proves that Southern history still bears meaning for modern inheritors, and that this personal investment just might transform a fatalistic heritage into a redemptive future.
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