

Chapter 2

Regional Faulkner: Faulkner and the South

2.1 (Re)Reading Race in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Fiction

Dealing with the roots of Yoknapatawpha, the preceding chapter opened, among other things, a discursive space on the issues Faulkner's fictional as well as the actual South was struggling with—race and gender subordination resting on the stereotypical and biased interpretation. This chapter attempts to further the insights touched upon in the previous chapter by exploring regional, i.e., Southern, gender, and race concepts and issues Yoknapatawpha was “burdened” with: the idea of white Southern womanhood and the various aspects of Southern “whiteness” as a property ideology. Faulkner made an enormous effort to understand the vicissitudes of Southern race issues in two of his masterpieces—*Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August*, both discussing the idea of “whiteness” as a property ideology as the interaction between race and property that establishes “a form of property contingent on race” (Harris 1993, 1716).

The appearance of “whiteness” as a property ideology in the South can be traced back to its colonial beginnings when the South, with its entire economic and social structure founded on the institution of slavery, had to set up the system of race segregation to support it. The original idea justifying the institution of slavery in the South was founded on the Christian notion of believers and heathens, i.e., civilized men and savages. It was not long before the second half of the seventeenth century that this criterion was replaced by the color of one's skin—white, black, red, or mixed—as the main race marker. This system, however, proved to be useless in the long term because the legalized sexual abuse of African American women resulted in a vast number of light-skinned African Americans. As their very existence questioned the viability of the skin color as the stable race marker, the new distinctive category had to be introduced—blood. There was “a development . . . from relying on the body as a text of visible difference to reading the unseen in that body's genealogy or ‘blood kin’ that ‘verified’ fractional quantities of blackness” (Zackodnik 2001, 433). Quite specifically, after 1785, when every person whose

parents or grandparents were black was proclaimed black, the quarter or less of black blood was enough to define a person as an African American, i.e., as a slave. The segregation was not present because of the existence of two races: the South created two races and used the regional legal system to establish racial discrimination that deprived African Americans of their rights.

The Civil War and Reconstruction were one more opportunity to exercise the importance of the white race in the South as they justified “whiteness” as a property ideology upon at least four premises. First, the war reinforced the sense of white unity and cooperation which symbolically erased class distinctions that had divided free Southerners during the colonial and antebellum period. Second, the postbellum period reinforced the white male bonding along race, class, and gender lines as the defeat of the Confederacy provoked doubts in white Southern manhood. Third, the Reconstruction-caused industrialization, urbanization, and centralization as well as the unclear social, economic, and political status of ex-slaves contributed to a new distribution of power leading to the redefinition and rewriting of Southern race identity. Fourth, having lost the means of pressure used in the period of slavery, white Southerners had to find new ways to “put African Americans in their place” and to reestablish the decentralized race balance—they took to violence, mostly in the form of lynching, intimidation, and prescribed codes of behavior, to achieve their goals. Furthermore, the supporters of “whiteness” as a property ideology needed a set of instruments and mechanisms that would ensure strict application of their ideology. They found them in (1) the concept of white supremacy, (2) the concept of “white nigger,” (3) the rigid system of gender roles, and (4) the myth of the black rapist.

As one of the instruments/mechanisms of “whiteness” as a property ideology, the doctrine of white supremacy¹ was introduced by the first colonists who, by connecting the privileged superiority of their identity (white + free) with the racial inferiority of African Americans and Native Americans (non-white + non-free), paved the way for race segregation and the institution of slavery in the South. The ideological basis for racial, social, and economic subordination was created in the interaction with the concepts of race and property and assumed the existence of skin colors that would justify it. Whereas the color white always symbolized freedom and operated as an attribute, a characteristic, and a property guaranteeing protection from racial discrimination and harassment, the color black had the connotative value of undesired and unstable property signaling inferiority, humiliation, and dehumanization. In this way, white colonists rationalized their concept

¹ Adopting the definition of white supremacy developed by Frances L. Ansley in her article *Stirring the Askes: Race, Class, and the Future of Civil Right Scholarship*, Cheryl I. Harris defines white supremacy as both “the self-conscious racism of the white supremacist hate groups” (1993, 1714) and a

political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (1993, 1714)

of race and property, imposed it not only by (ab)using African Americans as free and disposable labor but by taking the land from Native Americans, and passed it as a law.

The abolition of slavery in the South meant neither the disappearance of racial hierarchy nor the erasure of racial privileges. Southern whites insisted even more on their privileged isolation as they were afraid of losing their superior, almost divine, status. The segregation worsened because

inherent in the concept of "being white" was the right to own or hold whiteness to the exclusion and subordination of Blacks. Because (i)identity is . . . continuously being constituted through social interactions, the assigned political, economic, and social inferiority of Blacks necessarily shaped white identity. (Harris 1993, 1737)

This mode of thinking is visible in Faulkner's *Light in August* when Jefferson's white community is confronted with Joe Christmas' alleged blackness and his role in Joanna Burden's murder. In this specific fictional instance, Christmas, who is stigmatized as black by the collective power of suggestion even though there is no real evidence of his African American origin throughout the novel, becomes "a code, a manifestation of an anonymous but ever-threatening mass" (Robinson 2003, 122) which "has to be put in its place." When Sheriff Watt says: "Get me a nigger" (LA² 218), he, in four words, "encapsulates a mode of thinking that characterizes Yoknapatawpha's system of racial codes" (Robinson 2003, 122). In much the same way, the murder of Joanna Burden, who was during her life marginalized and ostracized because of her civil rights activism, establishes a clear path of connection between the concepts of white superiority and black subordination and thus operates as a means by which "the dominant white population of Jefferson will confirm its fears and justify its oppression of blacks and the associated 'dangers' of miscegenation and passing" (Robinson 2003, 122).

If Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden are the objects in the process of reinforcing white supremacy, Percy Grimm and Doc Hines are then the instruments of its reinforcement. Both Grimm and Hines are poor whites, who, lacking the privileges of Southern upper classes obtained by wealth and money, identify power with race and gender violence. Yet, their ideas of the white power differ. Percy Grimm, who literally has blood on his hands for he took part in Christmas' murder and mutilation, symbolizes the malignant and ever-present shadow of the Ku Klux Klan in the South. As an extremist and a fanatic consumed by "a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races" (LA 339), Percy Grimm "do[es] the community's dirty work and act[s] as the unofficial agent . . . of collective violence" (Bleikasten 1986, 82).

Whereas Grimm's role in reinforcing white supremacy is merely restricted to a physical act of pursuing and punishment and is, therefore, reciprocal to the length of his one-chapter appearance in the novel, Doc Hines, Christmas' grandfather, appears as a recurring figure in the chapters of the novel dedicated to Joe Christmas. Hines' role in Christmas' fate is extremely important as he with his fanatic faith in

² Subsequent page references for *Light in August* will be given as LA in parentheses in the text.

the divinely ordered superiority of the white race determines Christmas' entire life. In perceiving himself as the God-chosen "instrument of his Will" (LA 286) and in seeing African Americans as the damned and "the Lord God's abomination" (LA 286), Doc Hines "very clearly links damnation to race" (Hays 1995, 67). He demonstrates it by not only killing his daughter's lover, whom he considers of mixed race, and letting her die while giving birth to his grandson Joe but by "urg[ing] his grandson's execution" (Hays 1995, 67). Hines' fanatical insistence on the inferiority and damnation of the black race is rooted in his own insecurity as he does not possess anything except his race. If race becomes an arbitrary and uncontrolled possession, Hines' safety and superiority in this particular fictional instance as well as

the safety and superiority accorded whites [in general] by virtue of their skin can always be jeopardized or undone. That possibility is the most unsettling impossibility that permeates *Light in August* because with it the now, the immediate, and the visible all become suspect and suddenly incomplete as markers of identity. (Friday 2000/2001, 51)

The similar pattern of behavior is also employed in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* when Henry Sutpen is confronted with Charles Bon's non-alleged blackness and his role in their sister Judith's engagement. In this specific fictional instance, Bon, who is stigmatized as black by the word of the father, embodies the threat of race pollution which has to be annulled, erased, extinguished. . . . When Thomas Sutpen says: "He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro" (AA³ 283), he expresses a mode of thinking and behaving that determines Southern antebellum and postbellum racial codes. In much the same way, Bon's engagement with Judith Sutpen, who was during her life pedestalized as a Southern belle and as such represented an empty vessel predetermined for the production of pure, white, upper-class heirs, connects the ideas of white superiority and black subordination and thus serves as the instrument of expressing whites' fears concerning passing and miscegenation.

If Charles Bon and Judith Sutpen are to be considered the objects in the process of reinforcing white supremacy, Thomas and Henry Sutpen then operate as the instruments of its reinforcement. Whereas Thomas Sutpen provides the mental impetus for Charles Bon's murder because Bon, although Sutpen's flesh and blood, endangers his design—the infiltration into Southern upper-class society—Henry Sutpen has literally blood on his hands for he was the one who pulled the trigger. As a weakling consumed by the overpowering influence of his father, Henry Sutpen does his father's dirty work and acts as his avenger: he avenges his father's racial "innocence" taken for granted by Eulalia Bon's father in Haiti. In contrast to Henry Sutpen who is an ever-present figure in Bon's life and thus appears in almost every chapter in the novel which relates Bon's story, Thomas Sutpen, Charles' and Henry's father, appears only twice in Bon's vicinity: first, during Bon's visit to Sutpen's Hundred on Christmas before the Civil War and, second, on the

³ Subsequent page references for *Absalom, Absalom!* will be given as AA in parentheses in the text.

Confederate battle front. On both occasions, Thomas Sutpen “sent . . . [Charles Bon] no word . . . That was all he had to do, now, today; four years ago or at any time during the four years. That was all” (AA 285). Yet, the deliberate denial of family ties and the indirect coercion to murder make Thomas Sutpen’s hands as bloody as Henry’s.

The fear of miscegenation in the South brought up one more issue. Most white Southerners became afraid of *white niggers*. Whereas this term, first and foremost, referred to light-skinned African Americans who were trying to escape the absurd laws of the racially determined and controlled Southern society by “passing” as whites, it, too, proposed different readings of white identity. When applied to whites, this concept “was used as a justification for effectively controlling those whites whose commitment to white Southern economic, political, and social interests was questionable” (Zackodnik 2001, 440). In containing the words such as “escape,” “control,” and “questionable,” these two various yet essentially similar readings of the term “white nigger” show that the categories of whiteness and blackness in the South were determined in terms of inner morality and exterior conduct. In other words, one’s behavior and reputation became the criteria of race identity for not only African Americans but also progressive white Southerners.

As an issue of control over Southern whites and blacks who did not believe that the skin color should be a personal value marker, the motifs of “passing” and “white nigger” occur repeatedly in *Absalom, Absalom!* as well. This novel depicts two characters that “pass”: Eulalia and Charles Bon. Whereas Charles’ “passing” makes him ideal for the role of the black rapist, which I will later pay attention to, Eulalia presents Faulkner’s musings on both “passing” and the role of the Latin New World in it. The exploration of the Latin New World in Faulkner’s work starts out in Rincon,⁴ a Latin seaport where a dying poet of “Carcassonne” discusses with his skeleton his failure to write something magnificent, perhaps a poem on the Crusaders as they made their way through the medieval French town of Carcassonne. It continues in the second Rincon story “Black Music” in which the narrator wants to learn the history of the poet from “Carcassonne,” the two interrelated short stories both entitled “Once Aboard the Lugger” depicting adventures of bootleggers out of New Orleans, *Mosquitoes*, which “clearly envisions New Orleans as the Deep South’s Caribbean port” (Matthews 2004, 247), and the screenplay for *Slave Ship*.

Faulkner’s recognition of the position of the Latin New World in both passing and the commerce in human flesh reaches its peak in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Its protagonist Thomas Sutpen centers his design of acquiring “money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife” (AA 263) in a little something he learned in a few months of his schooling: that there is “a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich” (AA 212). Later in the narrative Sutpen’s image of the West Indies changes and Haiti becomes

a little island . . . , which was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization; halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black

⁴ Spanish for “corner.”

blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires, was ravished by violence, and the cold known land to which it was doomed, the civilized land and people. (AA 202)

As many readers and critics of *Absalom, Absalom!* have noticed, Sutpen's Haiti, although authentic in geographical location, lacks the historical and political accuracy. Specifically, in 1804, more than 20 years before Sutpen arrived there, Haiti had overturned French rule, confiscated the plantations of French colonists, abolished slavery, and become the first free black republic in the New World. Prior to Sutpen's arrival and following the mulatto class rebellion resulting in Emperor Dessalines' assassination, President Jean-Pierre Boyer introduced the notorious Rural Code that led to the "restoration of slavery, minus the whip" (Williams 1973, 334) legitimizing again color distinctions in Haiti. "The yellow aristocracy" replaced white French planters imposing clear-cut divisions between black and mulatto people. This resulted in a series of bloody rebellions by blacks in Haiti, the bloodiest in 1848.

When Sutpen arrived there in 1827, no white French sugar planters were to be found in Haiti and slaves had been freed. Yet, it is highly possible that Sutpen, misreading "the yellow aristocracy" for white French planters, worked as their overseer in suppressing one of the black rebellions in Haiti. Sutpen's "ability" to oversee Haiti overlooking the real centers in, to use Quentin's quote of his grandfather's words, Sutpen's, or generally speaking Southern, "innocence" (AA 203). Sutpen's/Southern "innocence"—the lack of interest and knowledge—transformed Haiti into "a dumping ground for all Southern white anxiety" (Stanchich 1996, 607). In American discourses, Haiti became at its best "a repository for emancipated Africans from the US; at its worst . . . a racial nightmare, embodying fears of rape and rebellion, signaling the seriousness of all debate about slavery" (Guterl 2006, 451).

The "othering" of Haiti in Sutpen's narrative mirrors something else as well: the denied yet powerfully present sense of the shared history, including slavery, nation formation, passing, struggles against imperial powers, and of themselves as the locus of the culture—the planter aristocracy. It testifies to Faulkner's conviction that

the plantation South derives its design from new world models, owes a founding debt to West Indian slave-based agriculture, extracted labor and profit from African-Caribbean slave trade, and practiced forms of racial and sexual control common to other hemispheric colonial regimes. (Matthews 2004, 239)

Another way to point up this idea is to examine the role of subaltern voices: women, blacks, and mulattos in the construction of Faulkner's and the real Caribbean—Eulalia Bon's, in particular. As a woman and a mulatta, Eulalia Bon epitomizes, to paraphrase Antonio Gramsci, subordination in terms of race, class, caste, gender, culture, and language emphasizing the centrality of dominant/dominated in history. Her racial identity, which is so essential for Sutpen's design, proves to be the unstable and corruptible property since she, as one of the yellow aristocracy, a Spanish Creole, is subordinate to Southern race laws according to

which she is black. Although a free mulatto woman in Haiti, Eulalia does not have any legal rights in the antebellum South and “would have to prove her ‘free’ status, and without proof would be designated a slave” (Godden 1994, 704). Blinded by his “innocence,” Sutpen fathers a design into her French, Spanish, and African body to satisfy his need for wealth and status, but, learning of her “drop of black blood,” gives up the inscription echoing one of Otto Weininger's ideas that a woman, and in this context black/mulatto people as well, is nothingness. Similarly, Eulalia's class identity in Haiti defines her as a French aristocrat's daughter who is so much above Thomas Sutpen, a poor white-trash overseer on her father's plantation, that he “did not know the girl's Christian name” (AA 203). Yet, as race is the proxy for class in the time space context of *Absalom, Absalom!* unless passing, the reversal of class roles is what Eulalia experiences when Sutpen repudiates her because she endangers his design to win eminence and move from the social status of a poor white to a wealthy member of the Mississippi landed gentry.

Eulalia's voicelessness also centers in her gender subordination to the patriarchal, Haitian and Southern, domestic metaphor. In being a belle and later a plantation mistress, the stereotype characteristic for the New World plantation cultures, Eulalia “didn't need to want or hope or expect anything” (AA 243). Silenced throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* not only by filtering her words, thoughts, and feelings through the discourses of Thomas Sutpen, General Jason Compson II, Quentin, and Shreve but by being referred to as “the woman, the girl, just that shadow which could load a musket” (AA 200), “that wife” (AA 202), “mad female millionaire” (AA 241), and “the old Sabine” (AA 243), she unmasks the process of gender and sex objectification in Haitian and Southern phallogocentric economy which commodifies women and values them according to their usefulness or their exchangeability in patriarchy. And whereas Eulalia's virginity is exchanged for Sutpen's services in defending her father's plantation during the slave rebellion, her motherhood is rejected as useless because she failed to produce an heir whose racial purity is unquestionable. The silencing of Eulalia Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!* is ended by her literal voicelessness in English linguistic space. In being unable to read “the writing in English” (AA 244) and choosing to live in New Orleans where her French origin tainted by a drop of black blood of the planter's “Spaniard” (AA203) wife can pass unnoticed, in being Sutpen's, General Compson's, Quentin's, and Shreve's “most elaborate fiction” (Matthews 2004, 255), Eulalia Bon once again confirms her status of a passing voiceless subaltern dominated by the laws of race, class, gender, and language subordination.

Unlike *Absalom, Absalom!* where emphasis is mostly put on the mulatto passing, *Light in August* explores white “white niggers.” It is a little wonder that the right to the privilege of doubt, and the corresponding title of “white nigger,” Faulkner “deeds” to the central *Light in August* woman character—Joanna Burden. As her name indicates, she is forced to carry the “burden” of family tradition—the “burden” of civil rights activism. And in being given the name after Juana, her father's first Mexican wife who symbolizes the obsession of the male Burdens with dark-skinned women and miscegenation, Joanna is somehow also forced to “repeat the pattern in reverse in becoming the mistress of a man whom she believes to be a

mulatto and who may remind her—incestuously?—of her half-brother, shot at the age of 20 ‘over a question of negro voting’ (235)” (Bleikasten 1986, 86).

Joanna’s life is strongly influenced by the vision of African Americans who she did

not [see] as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which, we lived, all white people, all other people. [She] thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And [she] seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. (LA 190)

Joanna’s vision of the black cross testifies to her ability “to reconcile the literal and figurative” (Clarke 1994, 99): the reconciliation stressed by “her life as a practical expiation for the sins of racism” (Clarke 1994, 99). She expiates the sins of racism by sending “advice, business, financial and religious, to the presidents and faculties and trustees, and advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnae, of a dozen negro schools and colleges through the south” (LA 175) and visiting “the schools in person and talk[ing] to the teachers and the students” (LA 176). This, however, places Joanna in a kind of social limbo because as a “lover of negroes” (LA 37) she claims the most unbelievable thing: “that niggers are the same as white folks” (LA 42). In revenge for being a “white nigger,” in revenge for questioning and defying the prescribed ways of thinking and acting in the white supremacist South, and in revenge for escaping the control of Southern racialized discourses, Joanna Burden is raped, silenced, and, finally, decapitated.

The next mechanism reinforcing “whiteness” as a property ideology in the South was the strict system of gender roles. The South idealized patriarchal values more than any other part of the USA, imposed them as the model of proper behavior and defined class, race, and gender roles according to them. For example, African Americans should have been satisfied with their subordinate status because it was divinely ordered. Women, too, were expected to contribute to the patriarchy by fulfilling two roles: the first was ornamental if a woman belonged to upper classes or food-providing if a woman belonged to lower classes; the second was reproductive. In this context, the body of a woman and the body of an African American, who consequently represented the racially and sexually unprivileged segments of Southern society, operated not only analogously but also inseparably. She, the woman, and she/he, the African American, were always defined as a white man’s “other”—his projection of her/him/them.

In the postwar South and further into the twentieth century, white Southerners kept inventing ways of restricting and rewriting woman’s identity to fit their race and gender projections. Initiated by the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War, these “new” ways of restricting and rewriting woman’s identity centered in the idea of protection of innocence and chastity of white Southern womanhood as white Southern womanhood was believed to represent innocence and chastity of the white South itself. Furthermore, as the Southern military defeat was equaled with the sexual inadequacy of Southerners as men, they had to erase the memory of the lost war as an act of emasculation. In order to regain both their masculinity and the regional honor symbolically contained in the bodies of their wives, sisters, and

daughters, white Southerners had to protect the purity of white Southern womanhood. To achieve this, they once again confined their wives, sisters, and daughters to Southern women stereotypes where they had been held before the war.

The stereotypical construction of Southern gender roles and a few, if any, challenges to it is what makes "whiteness" as a property ideology work in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* as well. Announced by Ellen Sutpen who "had . . . served her purpose" as a wife and a mother and then "vanished" (AA 61), the system of Southern gender roles in the narrative space of the novel is further brought into being by Miss Rosa Coldfield, Clytie, and Judith Sutpen. Whereas Miss Rosa, "the spinster doomed for life at sixteen" (AA 59), and Clytie, Sutpen's mulatta daughter, simultaneously affirm and subvert the notions of white Southern womanhood impressed upon them, Judith Sutpen accepts the role of a Southern belle without much protest letting in this way her family confine her to their conceptions of a proper female role.

What was that role and what were the traits of the Southern belle, a young woman of the South's antebellum upper class?⁵ She had to be lively, a bit vain, self-conscious, rather naïve, and "had few tasks other than to be obedient, to ride, to sew, and perhaps to learn reading and writing" (Seidel 1985, 6). Her energies and skills were mainly directed toward finding and marrying a real Southern gentleman and "if she was pretty and charming and thus could participate in the process of husband-getting, so much the better" (Seidel 1985, 6). The act of marriage transformed the belle into a "hardworking matron who was a supervisor of the plantation, nurse, and mother" (Seidel 1985, 6).⁶

The reasons for the invention of the Southern belle stereotype were manifold: The first is to be looked for in Southern antebellum chivalry and masculinity codes which attempted to preserve English moral standards, including that of a woman as the angel in the house, in the South. These codes imposed the image of a fragile, passive, submissive, devoted, and innocent upper-class young woman who was desperately in need of chivalric protection from the unfriendly and violent "real world." The protector was always a chivalric Southern gentleman, which "set the stage for . . . [his, and generally Southern,] heroism" (Tracy 1995, 76). Second, this stereotype was a compensation for gender devaluation that began practically with the upper-class girl's birth, when she was usually abandoned by her asexual,

⁵ Kentuckian Sallie Ward of Louisville was the most noted belle in the South, and her portrait, which hangs in the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, is often referred to as "The Southern Belle."

⁶ The Southern belle stereotype has been present in (popular) literature and culture for decades, if not centuries. She makes her appearance in works such as Nathaniel Beverley Tucker's *George Balcombe* (1836) and *Gertrude* (1844–1845); William Gilmore Simms' *Border Beagles* (1840) and *Eutaw* (1856); Thomas Nelson Page's "Meh Lady" (1886); James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*, *A Comedy of Justice* (1919); Ellen Glasgow's *Virginia* (1913) and *Life and Gabriella: The Story of a Woman's Courage* (1916); F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925); Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* (1932); Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936); Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955); *Steel Magnolias* (1989); *North and South* (1985); and many others.

childish, and distanced mother and “handed over” to a mammy. The same devaluation continued during the belle’s childhood and youth when she was treated as a family ornament, a doll, a valuable exchange object in the marriage market.

Third, the belle stereotype was utilized in reinforcing white supremacy in the South as it glorified the white upper-class woman as a person legitimately preserving white superiority. Her racial “purity” and upper-class status made her inaccessible to inferior races and classes of men making her “literally responsible for reproducing existing class and race relationships in the South, and thus paradoxically . . . responsible for reproducing a system that held her in a kind of bondage” (Tracy 1995, 51). Sugarcoated in terms of the almost divine inaccessibility, the belle’s bondage was soon recognized as a useful tool in political and cultural discourses of the time, prompting the analogy between the body of the land and the body of the woman: the attacks on the South were represented as the attacks on honor and integrity of its greatest ornament—the white Southern upper-class woman, the Southern belle.

Lastly, the bellehood was perceived as both a valuable cultural capital and a prestigious cultural discourse reserved only for a chosen minority. Its exclusivity, which placed the belle at the “focal point of . . . [Southern] myths about itself” (Entzminger 2002, 10), gave her a “great power as a cultural icon” (Entzminger 2002, 10) but, at the same time, silenced her by denying her “individual desire or agency” (Entzminger 2002, 10). The loss of the belle’s individual desire and agency contained in her acceptance of a seemingly divine but actually oppressive and denigrating pedestal was additionally compensated by (limited) access to the public sphere her position allowed her. That was one of the reasons why Southern upper-class women, even though they had many reasons to advocate the abolition of slavery (sexual transgressions of their fiancées, husbands, fathers, and brothers; isolation on plantations; problems in managing slaves and servants; dealing with slave insurrections and agricultural production in the absence of their husbands, fathers, or brothers; etc.) and were attributed chastity, gentleness, compassion—the virtues that corresponded to the abolitionist rather than the proslavery movement—did not rebel, did not subvert or transgress the prescribed codes of behavior. They remained loyal to the institution of slavery and Southern patriarchy and, as a consequence, “earned” the pedestal they were put on.

Challenges to this viewpoint began to appear during the Civil War. The war called into question many of the assumptions Southerners had had about the roles of men and women, heralded “an era of greater independence for women in both the public and private arenas” (Entzminger 2002, 75), and, as a consequence, put emphasis on the belle’s determinacy, strength, and inventiveness. During and after Reconstruction, “the terror of losing jurisdiction over women’s bodies created discourses of nostalgia and *threat*” (Roberts 1994, 104) and transformed the belle’s suffering into that of the South’s. She became an “even weightier symbol of the southern way of life” (Entzminger 2002, 77), soothing in this way her man’s wounded pride resulting from the Confederate military defeat.

Owing to a changed economic, political, and social situation which allowed women, even in the South, to vote, work, get educated, and enjoy greater financial

and personal independence, in the 1920s a new discursive space on the Southern belle myth was opened. It rested on criticism and judgment rather than eulogies as the belle stereotype was now used to demythologize Southern myths. The virtues she should have been the embodiment of—beauty, passivity, submissiveness, virginity, and asexuality—became the unstable and destructive property. Quite specifically, it was asserted that

society's emphasis on the beauty of the belle can produce a selfishness and narcissism that cause her to ignore the development of positive aspects of her personality. Taught to see herself as a beautiful object, the belle accentuates only her appearance and is not concerned with any talents that do not contribute to the goal her society has chosen for her: winning a man. . . . The sheltering of the belle leads to a harmful innocence: she cannot adequately interpret the behavior of men who do not believe in the code of southern chivalry that respects the purity of women. Moreover, . . . the repression required by the "ethic of purity" which leads to a variety of physical and mental disorders, including frigidity and exaggerated subservience [has also been questioned]. (Seidel 1985, 32)

My point in citing Kathryn Lee Seidel at length here is not simply to draw attention to a changing role of the belle in Southern society and culture, the role which now parodied Southern conceptions of women, but to emphasize the fact that these changes, no matter how progressive and subversive had been, did not automatically inaugurate a "New Woman" or a Southern anti-belle. The transformation into the "New Woman" was a slow, long, and painful process because deeply rooted prejudices concerning woman's behavior were still part of Southern culture. Just as Southern women "might be no longer queens and saints, they were [also] not allowed to be 'flesh and blood' humans either" (Roberts 1994, 109). Failure to obey the prescribed codes of behavior usually implied a severe punishment—hysteria, madness, rape, the loss of social privileges, or death.

Being mostly set in the antebellum South, *Absalom, Absalom!* centers its exploration of the proper female role in the antebellum belle's features, traits, and characteristics as reflected in the character of Judith Sutpen. As the only daughter of a distinguished Southern planter, Judith is the most beautiful and the most sheltered ornament of her father's plantation garden, the impression of which is emphasized by her passivity, submissiveness, and purity. Judith is the construct of texts written by other authors: Mr. Compson, Rosa Coldfield, Quentin Compson, Shreve, and Faulkner himself. As their most elaborate fiction, she is mostly voiceless; when she speaks, she is not heard. Reciprocal to Judith's voicelessness is her physical presence in the text of the novel: Judith is barely visible because her body is asexual and unobtrusive—as a virgin she is "just the blank shape, the empty vessel" (AA 95) detached from everything essentially erotic or motherly. Verbally and physically absent, Judith is "dreaming, not living, in her complete detachment and imperviousness to actuality almost like physical deafness" (AA 55). As such, she is simultaneously the product and the idea of the culture that created her.

Judith's inscription into the stereotypical female role of a white upper-class Southern woman continues through her support of race and class prejudices of her time. Transmitted to Judith by her father, those prejudices are rooted in "the ruthless Sutpen code of taking what is wanted provided it were strong enough" (AA 95). Judith follows in her father's prejudiced footsteps when she treats Charles Etienne,

Bon's son, as her father treats Clytie, her mulatta half sister. Judith takes him into her house, yet she never acknowledges him as her equal. Judith's inability to engage in a prejudice-free relationship is, too, present in her refusal to touch Charles Etienne: instead of touch, she uses language demonstrating in this way her unwillingness to accept him as a nephew—"she not daring to put out the hand with which she could have actually touched it but instead just speaking to it, her voice soft and swooning" (AA 169, emphasis Faulkner's). Judith's refusal to treat Charles Etienne as her equal and a member of the family is further shown in the sleeping arrangements she administered:

Yes, sleeping in the trundle bed beside Judith's, beside that of the woman who looked upon him and treated him with a cold unbending detached gentleness more discouraging than the fierce ruthless constant guardianship of the negress who, with a sort of invincible spurious humility slept on a pallet on the floor, the child lying there between them unsleep in some hiatus of passive and hopeless despair aware of this, aware of the woman on the bed whose every look and action toward him, whose every touch of the capable hands seemed at the moment of touching his body to lose all warmth and become imbued with cold implacable antipathy. (AA 160)

Judith's behavior to Charles Etienne is nothing more than a manifestation of the *noblesse oblige* code: Judith graciously bestows her protection upon her African American "family" who, as the "inferior" race, had the right to be "protected." This frame of mind is, too, evident in Judith's letting Charles Etienne call her "Aunt" (AA 169, emphasis Faulkner's) and her suggestion that Charles Etienne should go north where he could "pass" as white. This "lack of acceptance for Etienne links Judith decisively with Rosa and Ellen, and the entire structure of Jefferson society, which compels people to turn other human beings into soulless objects, to classify men according to blood and background rather than personal achievement" (Kartiganer 1965, 299–300).

Despite stereotypical traits, features, and characteristics attributed to her, Judith Sutpen does participate in a few acts of subversion of Southern gender, class, and race roles in the novel. This occurs because of the multitude of "the narrative contradictions and crises that represent her" (Roberts 1994, 34). Judith is occasionally presented as "a portrait by various hands: Her creators often have such different intentions and fixations that instead of a picture with more or less a sense of 'classical' unity, what we get resembles a cubist composition" (Roberts 1994, 34). The "cubist" nuances in Judith's portrait are mostly found in descriptions of her childhood and youth: Judith's first appearance in the novel is thus of a wild, hysterical, screaming, kicking, little girl who has to be carried into the house. Judith's "improper" behavior is caused by her mother's choice of transportation: instead of "the carriage waiting, it was Ellen's phaeton with the old gentle mare which she drove and the stableboy that he had bought instead of the wild negro" (AA 17). The change of the carriage is brought about by Judith's previous behavior: she, as Miss Rosa reminds us, is the one "who had instigated and authorized that negro to make the team run away. Not Henry, mind; not the boy, which would have been outrageous enough; but Judith, the girl" (AA 18). The phaeton with the old gentle mare symbolizes the ladylike behavior Ellen tries to impress upon Judith, which Judith wants and tries to reject. The next instance where Judith comes out of

her gender role is the episode in which her father, Thomas Sutpen, fights his slave in the loft. Unlike Henry, who was “screaming and vomiting” (AA 21), crying and clinging to their mother, Judith, together with her mulatta half sister Clytemnestra, watched excitedly the fight “through the square entrance to the loft” (AA 22). Judith is once again portrayed as “the hoyden who could—and did—outrun and outclimb, and ride and fight both with and beside her brother” (AA 52) in the part of the novel describing her youth.

All these instances in which Judith enjoys violence and shocks her mother testify to Judith's questioning and subverting the gender role she would be later forced into. Even though forced or rather made to be the Southern belle, Confederate woman, and spinster—the Southern women stereotypes—Judith is not exclusively represented by “the statue on the pedestal at which men look up. She is also a master, a mother, a lover, a sister, a daughter, and an outlaw. She interrupts the stories and . . . subverts the expectations her father, mother, and brother have for her” (Roberts 1994, 28). And Judith does this in a number of ways: she memorizes the downfall of her family by not giving birth to Sutpen's heirs; she celebrates Sutpen's illegitimate offspring by erecting their tombs; and she rejects Sutpen's legacy through her seemingly insignificant little acts of rebellion. . .

Faulkner's *Light in August*, too, offers an insight into the (de)construction of Southern gender roles, for at its center are Lena Grove, Mrs. McEachern, Mrs. Hines, and Joanna Burden. Whereas the analysis of Lena Grove, Mrs. McEachern, or Mrs. Hines relies upon the comparison with the stereotype of Southern mother or, to use Diane Roberts' term, Dixie Madonna, Joanna Burden appears to be quite detached from the realms accorded and assigned to them. This placelessness Joanna immerses herself in is present as a continuous thread woven into the fabric of *Light in August* and is tied to her race and gender appearance in the subversive disclosure of white Southern womanhood in the novel. Joanna's challenges to the sexualized and racialized inscription of masculine and feminine in the South thus crystallize around her refusal to be confined within the proper gender role demonstrating the instability of feminine and masculine, black and white, forbidden and allowed, reactionary and stereotypical in the Southern domestic metaphor.

Joanna's point of departure from what she is expected to be takes place within the boundaries of the gender role she is supposed to perform. She is female, single, alone, unprotected; she has well passed the marriageable age; she has never been perceived as a mother but always as an aunt. . . Although different in meaning and morphology, these words always connote the same when placed in the sexualized context of the patriarchal matrix—a spinster. Unlike wives and mothers who were “both *utilitarian objects and bearers of value*” (Gan 2003, 202, emphasis Gan's), spinsters were seen as valueless in the marriage market because they did not participate in “natural” functions of wife and mother and could not contribute to the survival and preservation of humankind. Although presented as the binary opposite of wife and mother, spinsters were, nevertheless, occasionally recognized for their dedication and effort and allowed as nurses or teachers to come nearer to what was considered to be the woman's center in patriarchal society. With their gender role modified, compared to that of wife and mother, and adapted to the context of the extended family, spinsters became respected “mothers” to their

family and community and ceased, through the recognition of their emotional energy, to be a threat to patriarchy. As caretakers, spinsters proved their loyalty and usefulness to society by engaging in natural, inborn, female duties.

On the other hand, in describing someone who spins, the word spinster announced the possibility of redefinition of the woman's role through her work and her participation in the market economy. It acknowledged the woman's right to refuse the heterosexual union as a woman's "natural" and "only" option as well. Unlike marriage that has always suggested a kind of financial and sexual agreement between a man and a woman, spinsterhood had the connotations of a lifestyle that allowed women to preserve their identity, protest against sexual exploitation, engage in public activities, gain greater access to higher education, and be financially independent.

In the narrative space of Faulkner's *Light in August*, Joanna performs the role of the spinster stereotype on two occasions only: before Joe Christmas' arrival and after her horrible death by his hand. Before Christmas' arrival, Joanna was a peculiar but stereotypical spinster: she was "calm, cold-faced, almost manlike, almost middle-aged woman who had lived for twenty years alone, without any feminine fears at all, in a lonely house" (LA 194). The house and its owner alike were marginalized, dark, isolated, and abandoned. Joanna was engaged in intellectual and domestic activities and helped, in the manner of a good aunt, her African American protégés. This very definition was readopted after her death when she, as a part of the myth of the black rapist who lurks the white woman's body, regained the social status of a helpless and idealized white Southern lady. As a protagonist in one of the most used racist myths—the myth of the black rapist—Joanna Burden inspires "chivalry" of her townspeople who lynch Joe Christmas to demonstrate their loyalty to the concept of white Southern womanhood. For "*murdering a white woman*" (LA 219, emphasis Faulkner's), regardless of her marginality, unpopularity, and origin, calls for revenge and posthumous protection. On the other hand, such an act can also be read as the community's "triumph over her, for her death erases the good works she has performed for the local African Americans and instead confirms the white community's racist view of the world" (Clarke 1994, 101). In Southern cultural and social discourses, Joanna thus unmask the process of gender and sex objectification which commodifies women and values them according to their usefulness or exchangeability in patriarchy bearing "the weight of another pejorative feminine identity imposed on women by a heterosexual economy that views women through a utilitarian lens only" (Gan 2003, 203).

The rigid system of prescribed gender roles in the South eventually initiated the appearance of the black rapist myth. The black rapist myth was the result of Southern whites' fears about racial intermixture, which escalated after the abolition of slavery and reflected the South's obsession with protecting white womanhood and ensuring the purity of the white race.⁷ Whites perpetuated this myth in order to

⁷ It should be noted that some scholars have debated whether the development of the black rapist myth was an exclusive product of the post-emancipation period. For example, Peter Bardaglio's

retain racial control, as they assumed that the act of rape represented the desire of black men to overthrow white supremacy in the South. The rape myth was “a public and ritualized manifestation of growing white panic about a shifting social order in the South that promised blacks education, property, political participation, and social inclusion” (Richardson 2007, 59) and was therefore constructed to “justify withholding citizenship from African Americans by representing black men as ‘moral monsters’” (Lott 1999, 39). The black rapist myth was, furthermore, used to cushion the increasing social divisions between lower-class and upper-class whites in the South, to reinforce white solidarity. The patriarchal ideology of upper-class whites designated white womanhood as the “property” of all white men, so that even those with little or no material wealth could make a claim to ownership; they could now claim to possess property in the form of the bodies of their wives, daughters, and sisters. Along with this ideology of “sex as property” was the white man’s “right” to protect his women using whatever means necessary, including lethal violence. Consequently, throughout most of the South lynching occurred as a ritualized disciplinary practice of racial, class, and gender control. As a response to “the theoretical effect of emancipation, which was the definition of black men as socially the same as white males,” lynching was used to re-create a “disturbed” or “threatened” social order by demonstrating black men’s and women’s “vulnerability and debasement,” white women’s racial purity and dependence upon white men, and white men’s “intention to occupy the loftiest position in the racial and gender hierarchy of the South” (Tucker 2007, 54).

The myth of the black rapist also mirrored white Southerners’ “anxieties and obsessions with respect to sex” (Finkenstaedt 1994, 160). Driven by the impetus to forbid and punish any thought or desire (conscious or unconscious) to violate the taboo of miscegenation, the black rapist myth “sanctified” two of the most sacred Southern stereotypes: “that black men are rampagingly sexual and that white women are immutably chaste” (Roberts 1994, 170). Behind this also lurked white Southern men’s fear that they could have been characterized as sexually inadequate and that potent black males could have replaced them in their wives’ beds. This highly improbable yet widely cherished assumption was justified upon several premises, the origins of which can be found in both Southern men’s ideas of acceptable sexual behavior for men and women and in their insistence on chivalric manhood and asexual and sanctified womanhood. With white women elevated so high on the pedestal and emancipation denying them as much access to black women, white Southern men balanced between their “women angelic above . . . [them and] the black male (fully supported by black women) below” (Williamson

study of antebellum law testimony concluded that white antebellum Southerners “widely shared the belief that black men were obsessed with the desire to rape white women” (1994, 752). However, others, such as Martha Hodes and Diane Miller Sommerville, argue that there was no significant white antebellum apprehension regarding black sexuality. See Peter W. Bardaglio’s *Rape and the Law in the Old South: “Calculated to Excite Indignation in Every Heart”* in *Journal of Southern History*; Martha Hodes’ *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South*; and Diane Miller Sommerville’s *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth Century South*.

1986, 188). Caught in, to use Freud's terminology, white male penis envy, white men had to project their own forbidden sexual urges onto black men, to portray them as sexually pathological and perverse and to hyperbolize their phallic power in order to redeem their own sinfulness. Out of jealousy and fear, they put black men "in their place"—in the myth of the black rapist.⁸ The sexual contextualization of the black rapist myth climaxed in the castration of black men. The very act of castration had a double function: not only did it signify "the mob's denial of both the physical sign of the masculine and the symbolic marker of patriarchal authority" (Tucker 2007, 54), but it also showed that "these white sons of the South control the most important symbol of male power: the penis" (Leak 2005, 42). In being, to use Bakhtin's terminology, a chronotropic phenomenon, that is, a phenomenon that occurred in a specific time and space—the post-emancipation South—the myth of the black rapist operated as a perverse reversal of Southern racial history: newly free black men were regarded as taking up the role of white men, who had raped black slave women, and therefore they were raping white women.

Faulkner's *Light in August* is, at first glance, a perfect example of this scenario, for it is set in the post-emancipation South when white anxiety about preserving racial purity was at its peak. The character of Joe Christmas appears to fit "perfectly" the role of the black rapist. The imagery of Faulkner's black rapist myth is, however, at odds with the culturally and socially perpetuated concept of the black rapist myth in the South. Faulkner challenges the myth by utilizing an implicit dichotomy between assumption and proof and thus creates a way in which it can be both criticized and subverted. To explore this subversion, I will look at the two underlying aspects of Faulkner's critique of the black rapist myth. First, I will examine the markers of Joe Christmas' racial identity, how he becomes "black," rather than "white," to explain why he is an "ideal" person for the perpetuation (and therefore subversion) of the black rapist myth, and second, I will explore the ways in which Joe Christmas enacts the black rapist myth himself.

Even though his father "was a Mexican" (LA 281) and he "never acted like either a nigger or a white man" (LA 263), Joe Christmas' "blackness" still put him into the context of the black rapist myth. Racial markers—which operate throughout the novel as the means of justifying the description of Joe Christmas' behavior

⁸The sexual aspect of the black rapist myth also disclosed something else—the issue of black women's rape. Guttman explains that

the emphasis on protecting white womanhood concealed the sexual victimization of black women. The invisibility of black women's rape was a product of those stereotypes that, in part, supported the myth of the black rapist. While the white woman was cast as the desirable and inaccessible symbol of white power and culture, the black woman occupied the place of her opposite, the easily accessible symbol of the uncivilized, animalistic black masses. (2001, 171)

It is also interesting to note that rarely, if never, a rapist of any race has been sentenced to death for raping a black woman which, as N. Jeremi Duru notes, sends "an unmistakable signal that rapes of white women have historically been deemed more tragic in America than rapes of black women" (2008, 366).

as the black rapist—are founded on a coded, stereotyped discourse that legitimizes and authorizes the interpretation of both the visible (Joe's origin, his inclination to violence, and his sexuality) and the invisible (other people's observations and perceptions, his social position, his social performance, and word of mouth). These invisible racial markers are rooted in the nonexistence of events or people that could guarantee Joe Christmas' racial inheritance; there is only "an anxious presupposition of such an inheritance" (Friday 2000/2001, 48) imposed through the acts of observation and perception that are the result of the misinterpretation of his social performance.

For example, the dietitian "sees" Joe as black because she observes Joe's grandfather observing other children calling Joe "nigger." Joe, in turn, perceives himself as black because his grandfather "*is watching . . . [him] all the time*" (LA 105, emphasis Faulkner's) which, therefore, makes him "*different from the others*" (LA 105, emphasis Faulkner's) and causes "the other children . . . [to call] him Nigger" (LA 102). Joe Christmas' racial identity is thus produced through a performance, to quote Lisa K. Nelson, "*through the body*, in its very actions" (2004, 56, emphasis Nelson's), and is furthered by his social position, because, according to myth, "a black does certain jobs" (Snead 1987, 157) and lives in a certain way. Joe Christmas does a "negro job at the mill," he shovels the sawdust pile, and lives "in a tumble down negro cabin on Miss Burden's place" (LA 27). Finally, Joe Christmas' "blackness" is created by the collective power of suggestion, the word of mouth, rumor, and gossip that circulate around the white members of the Jefferson community: from Joe Brown's "Go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that's trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free. Accuse the white and let the nigger run" (LA 75) to Sheriff Watt's "Get me a nigger" (LA 218).

The visible markers of Joe Christmas' "blackness" are tied to the behavioral patterns stereotypically attributed to black people in the South. The most striking of these visible markers is Joe Christmas' "susceptibility" to "violence generally reserved for black people . . . a so-called inability to fend off or control primal urges" (Abdur-Rahman 2006/2007, 178–179). For example, Joe Christmas "tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; . . . he [also] fought the negro who called him white" (LA 170). His "ability" to provoke violence is, throughout most of the novel, present in two forms: He is either engaged in a violent assault on someone or is being violently assaulted by someone. Specifically, Joe Christmas victimizes at least seven different people:

1. Joe Brown: he "raised Brown's head and began to strike him with his flat hand, short, vicious, and hard, . . . shutting his jaw with his left hand while with the right he struck Brown again with those hard, slow, measured blows, as if he were meting them out by count" (LA 79).
2. The black girl in the shed: "He kicked her hard, kicking into and through a choked wail of surprise and fear. She began to scream, he jerking her up, clutching her by the arm, hitting at her with wide, wild blows, striking at the voice perhaps, feeling her flesh anyway" (LA 119).

3. Other boys in the shed: "Joe struck at them as soon as he was free, but they were already clear" (LA 120).
4. His girlfriend Bobbie Allen: "The arm which she held jerked free. She did not believe that he had intended to strike her" (LA 143), and "He struck her, without warning, feeling her flesh . . . He struck her again . . . He cried, cursing her, striking her" (LA 150).
5. His foster father McEachern: "he walked . . . into the descending chair which Joe swung at his head" (LA 154);
6. A nameless Northern prostitute: "It took two policemen to subdue him. At first they thought that the woman was dead" (LA 169).
7. Joanna Burden: he rapes her, beats her, and decapitates her.

Joe Christmas is, on the other hand, victimized by an even larger number of people:

1. the dietitian: "When hands dragged him violently out of his vomit he did not resist. He hung from the hands, limp, looking with slack-jawed and glassy idiocy into a face no longer smooth pink-and-white" (LA 93).
2. Other boys in the shed: "On the part of the other four it had been purely automatic and reflex: that spontaneous compulsion of the male to fight with or because of or over the partner with which he has recently or is about to copulate" (LA 120).
3. His foster father McEachern: "When the strap fell he [Joe Christmas] did not flinch, no quiver passed over his face. He was looking straight ahead with a rapt, calm expression like a monk in a picture. McEachern began to strike methodically, with slow and deliberate force, still without heat or anger. He struck ten times, then he stopped . . . He [again] struck ten times" (LA 114), "Joe took the first two blows; perhaps from habit, perhaps from surprise. But he took them, feeling twice the man's hard fist crash into his face" (LA 164), and "Perhaps they were not even his hands which struck at the face of the youth whom he had nurtured and sheltered and clothed from a child" (LA 154).
4. Two strangers from Memphis in Max and Mame's house: "Perhaps he did not feel either blow, though the stranger struck him twice in the face before he reached the floor . . . Lying peaceful and still Joe watched the stranger lean down and lift his head from the floor and strike him again in the face, this time with a short slashing blow" (LA 164–165).
5. Nameless patrons: "now and then he was beaten unconscious by other patrons, to waken later in the street or in the jail" (LA 169).
6. Joanna Burden: "She struck him, at once, with her flat hand, the rest of her body not moving at all" (LA 208) and apparently attempted to kill him.
7. Halliday: "he had already hit the nigger a couple of times in the face, and the nigger acting like a nigger for the first time and taking it, not saying anything; just bleeding sullen and quiet" (LA 263).
8. Doc Hines: he had "come up and begun to hit the nigger with his walking stick until at last two men had to hold" (LA 264) him.

9. Percy Grimm: he “emptied the automatic’s magazine” (LA 349) into Joe and castrated him.

These acts of violence, whether inflicted by or upon Joe Christmas, are closely related to his aggressive sexual behavior. This aspect of Joe Christmas’ “blackness” in the novel relies upon a belief in the myth of the black rapist; in the belief that black males are not only “inexhaustible sex-machine[s] with oversized genitals” but also aggressive, unrestrained, and incompetent lovers—“hurried, inattentive, . . . animalistic sexual brutes” (Finkentaedt 1994, 159) just looking for a white woman’s body to rape. The construction of Joe Christmas’ profile as a “black” man emphasizes the inextricable connection between race and (violent) sex since the record of his intimate history demonstrates his “obsession” with white women and his revulsion for black women. Whereas his African American partners—the black girl and a woman “who resembled an ebony carving” (LA 170)—suffocate him by their smell and make “his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial” (LA 170), his white partners—Bobbie Allen, nameless prostitutes, and Joanna Burden—feed his male ego and allow him to enact repeatedly his own fantasy of a “nigger” in a white woman’s bed.

In terms of racial markers, though, Joe Christmas’ origin is the most invisibly “visible” marker of his “blackness.” Joe Christmas’ racial identity is created through rumor but never actually confirmed or explicitly stated, and yet his race is a presupposition necessary for the development of the narrative of *Light in August*. Faulkner, therefore, depicts Joe Christmas as unsure about his race; he “think[s] . . . [he] got some nigger blood” (LA 148) in him and he assumes that “blackness, with all its pejorative, shadowy attributes, constitutes an intrinsic part of his being” (Singal 1997, 169), so not only does he behave accordingly, but his community shares this presupposition and enacts it violently. His racial genealogy is untraceable since there are no parents who can confirm his racial inheritance, and the only “evidence” of Joe Christmas’ paternity comes from the racist speculations of his racially and religiously fanatic grandfather, Doc Hines.

Although Joe Christmas’ racial identity is constructed by people who initially see him as white (despite him openly confessing his “blackness”), “it takes a wronged white woman for him to be perceived as black” (Nelson 2004, 59). At first glance, only Joanna Burden fits the role. She is, however, only the last in Joe Christmas’ intimate history who helps to construct the myth of the black rapist. The sequence of “wronged” white women engaged in sexual encounters with Joe Christmas starts with his first girlfriend, waitress and prostitute Bobbie Allen. She is a poor white and as such she is forced to meet men’s sexual needs for financial profit. Yet, unlike black women who cannot count on protection from black men because they fear lynching, Bobbie is racially privileged and has the opportunity to choose her clients and be protected by another man—her pimp. In addition, “her reputation is protected by the pedestal’s shadow: she can use the image of white Southern womanhood to cloak her activities” (Widmaier 2000/2001, 25). Bobbie’s conduct also reveals the instability of the system of race segregation in the South: on the one hand, she intentionally takes part in the construction of the myth of the

black rapist and discloses Joe Christmas' identity when her reputation comes into question; on the other, she actively participates in the most dreaded Southern white male anxiety, in which white woman lusts for a black man's body. The same pattern is repeated in Joe Christmas' relationships with other white prostitutes: he avoids payment by disclosing his alleged racial otherness, by, as Nelson explains, knowing that he,

as a black man, . . . is prohibited from engaging the sexual services of a white prostitute; thus, his disclosure reconstitutes the agreement to exchange itself as a theft. It is not that punishment because he can't pay, but because he is black. The disclosure recasts the entire encounter as an interracial sexual act without consent or comprehension—a rape. (2004, 60)

With this experience of using sex to violate Southern racial codes, Joe Christmas once again engages in the myth of the black rapist and chooses his next "victim"—Joanna Burden. His choice is, however, overwrought with many possible implications since it creates ambiguity in the roles of man and woman, white and black, and even, at particular moments, rapist and victim. From the very outset of Joe Christmas' arrival at Joanna's house, there are signs that this performance of the myth of the black rapist will be somehow different. Joanna Burden is not afraid of him; she really treats him as a "nigger"—leaves the back door open for him, leaves the food for him in the kitchen, rarely talks with him in public, and wants to send him to "a nigger school" (LA 208) to become "a nigger lawyer" (LA 208). Unlike Joe Christmas' previous victims, she is not as feminine and race-conscious as he expects; her control and stoicism are "decidedly masculine, not the hysteria or fear required from the lone white woman in the narrative of the black rapist" (Nelson 2004, 62). Even the very act of rape—despite its vivid brutality and dehumanizing character—represents another blow for Joe Christmas' male ego since he perceives it as a physical struggle "with another man for an object of no actual value to either" (LA 177).

As such, the rape introduces the possibility of a rather different gender performance. When Joe Christmas states: "it was like I was the woman and she was the man" (LA 177), he announces his own uncertainty about Joanna Burden's willingness to take part in the stereotypical feminine performance. It becomes obvious that the act of rape has failed to achieve what it should have accomplished: the prescribed race and gender balance of the role of white and feminine for Joanna and the role of black and masculine for Joe Christmas. Thus, in playing out the story of rape repeatedly, and in participating in the courtship codes and the jealous lover's tale with her rapist, Joanna Burden subverts the very myth of the black rapist. As the generator and the protagonist of her own rape narrative, she turns upside down the prescribed notions of race, class, and gender and sets out new rules for both of them. In this way Joanna Burden achieves a provisional mastery over Joe Christmas, but this cannot be maintained, and eventually she has to submit to him, even if this means her death by decapitation.

In enacting the black rapist myth, Joe Christmas "cements on him in the eyes of the community the identity of 'nigger rapist-murderer'" (Singal 1997, 179) who has to be lynched and castrated as a reminder of a simple truth: "touch whiteness, and

whiteness will touch you" (Smith 2006, 59). This is what occurs at the end of *Light in August* although the Mottstown sheriff and the Jefferson sheriff "both promised that the nigger would get a quick and fair trial" (LA 267). Whiteness in the character of Percy Grimm kills and castrates Joe Christmas. Lynching thus becomes a reversal of the black rapist myth, as the white community, by torturing and castrating a black man, publicly rapes him, and, in this way, inscribes onto his body its own sexual desires.

Faulkner once again reaches for the myth of the black rapist in his 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. In contrast to Joe Christmas, a "homegrown black" and *Light in August*'s darkest figure whose presence evokes an image of a haunted and victimized body that in its "extravagant" suffering screams for pity, Charles Bon, another "black rapist" figure in Yoknapatawpha County, keeps enchanting the readers and the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* from his very first appearance in the novel to the moment of his death by Henry Sutpen's hand. This differentiation is further emphasized by the fact that Joe Christmas' "blackness" is confirmed by other African Americans—the black girl, his mulatta mistress, and other nameless black people he encounters during his life. Charles Bon's appeal, or at least the air of amiability that leads the readers and the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* to like him, is, on the other hand, created by his "exotic" otherness and the exotic people he is surrounded by, such as his mother Eulalia Bon, his octoroon mistress, and his son Charles Etienne de Saint-Valery Bon. This exoticism, as demonstrated by Faulkner's description of Charles Bon as "a hero out of . . . Arabian Nights, . . . enclosed and surrounded by a sort of Scythian glitter" (AA 76, 74), comes from his cultural, geographical, racial, and sexual displacement, in particular through the circumstances of his birth, his youth, his social status, the decadence in which he indulges, and the seductive power of his personality. In this way, he generates the possibility, as Philip M. Weinstein argues, of housing "Faulkner's most audacious fantasy: that black is more beautiful than white, that the unconscious desire for miscegenation lurks deep within the white psyche" (1987, 181).

Charles Bon's birthplace, to begin with, sets him apart from a homegrown black insofar as it emphasizes his descent from French planter stock in the remote and exotic Haiti, a place whose connections with the antebellum South are realized through its plantation culture, slavery, and easy acquisition of wealth. Within an established plantation background, the construction of Charles Bon's exoticism continues through his birth and youth in the cosmopolitan upper-class precincts of New Orleans—the city where he learns important lessons on racial and sexual ease as well as the essentials of Creole culture—which made him, as Faulkner explains, act "as an elegant and indolent esoteric hothouse bloom possessing merely the name of a city for origin history and past" (AA 77). This sentence, in containing three key words—*esoteric hothouse bloom*—encapsulates the essence of Charles Bon's Haitian-New Orleansian appeal since it focuses upon the sheltered, privileged, superior, and seductively dominant quality of his presence among the small-town Mississippians.

Similarly, Charles Bon's indelible aristocracy, which he displays "with an ease of manner and a swaggering gallant air in comparison with which Sutpen's

pompous arrogance was clumsy bluff and Henry actually a hobble-de-hoy” (AA 58), verifies not only his upper-class social status but also depicts him as subscribing to the same ideals as white Southern men and, in addition, makes him an example of the most genteel, refined, and sophisticated man in *Absalom, Absalom!*. This occurs because he clings to “the older continental version of the Cavalier ethos, which, according to Richard Milum, was considered ‘more pure’ than its Anglo-Saxon counterpart” (Singal 1997, 202–203). As a consequence, his aristocracy becomes so visible and so desirable that his college colleagues “ape” his manners and style and look on him with sheer envy, and Ellen Sutpen wants to recruit him for her household. Ellen objectifies Charles Bon’s aristocracy, as she perceives it in the same way as she would “a garment which Judith might wear as she would a riding habit or a ball gown” (AA 59), “a piece of furniture which would complement and complete the furnishing of her house and position” (AA 59), or an “example to correct Henry’s provincial manners and speech and clothing” (AA 59).

Linked to his adoption of the “older continental version of the Cavalier ethos” that did not insist on the repression of natural instincts or sexuality is Charles Bon’s indulgence in earthly pleasures. Having quickly learned that “there were three things and no more: breathing, pleasure, darkness; and without money there could be no pleasure, and without pleasure it would not even be breathing” (AA 240), he satiates all of his (unnamed) desires by spending money “on his horses and clothes and the champagne and gambling and women” (AA 242). This adherence to the concept of indulging in earthly pleasures without jeopardizing his genteel status is also emphasized by Charles Bon’s participation in the *plaçage* system—a system involving a socially sanctioned form of miscegenation—which flourished in New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century and in “which probably all his contemporaries who could afford it were likewise involved” (AA 74). Like a real white and wealthy Southern gentleman, he selected a *placée*—a nameless octo-roon—from a collection of free women of color in New Orleans and gave her a household of her own where he treated her as more than a mistress and less than a wife. This social arrangement, combining aspects of marriage and slavery, operates for Charles Bon as the essential part of the process of growing up as a well-bred Southern gentleman; he never forgets that “this woman, this child, are niggers” (AA 94).

Challenges to Charles Bon’s exotic desirability begin to appear as his “blackness” is disclosed: once he is marked as black, he “loses his exotic camouflage, his menace is revealed, and he becomes . . . the target of every native code” (Weinstein 1987, 181). He becomes the taboo, the forbidden, “the nasty myth turned into flesh” (Karl 1987, 211), the anathema, “*the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister*” (AA 286, emphasis Faulkner’s). His transformation into the black rapist occurs and ends quickly and is, therefore, reciprocal to the length of its one-chapter description in the novel. Its contextualization, however, encompasses quite a few chapters, thus offering an insight into the premises upon which the construction of Charles Bon’s “one-drop” blackness was justified.

The first premise for the blackness in the character of Charles Bon is his origin: his need for “two races in order to be what he is” (Walter 2007, 502). As a high-

class free mulatto who passes as a white, Charles Bon has “too little” black ancestry to be discovered by the Southern aristocracy. His mixed blood is “rendered all the more dangerous because of its indecipherability” (Crowell 2004, 622) and, therefore, needs a reliable witness who can testify to its blackness. This is the point where Faulkner complicates the issue further, since he, once again, plays with the disturbed and dysfunctional Southern family and, as was the case with Joe Christmas (whose blackness was mainly created by his crazy and racist grandfather Doc Hines), chooses Thomas Sutpen, Charles Bon's poor-white-trash-gone-planter father, to reveal his “blackness” and transform him into the black rapist. The transformation started out almost 30 years ago in the West Indies. Misreading “the yellow aristocracy” for white French planters, Sutpen centered his design of acquiring “money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife” (AA 263) in the body of a Haitian planter's daughter, Eulalia Bon who, although a free mulatto woman in Haiti, as “part negro” (AA 283) would be designated a slave in the antebellum South. Their son, Charles Bon, represents

the unfortunate product of this fusion and the truth of that inheres in his blood and his being. It is written all over him in the traces of his effaced history, the absence of his father, his tense relationship with his mother, the mysterious sources of his wealth, and his nihilistic predisposition for pleasure. (Walter 2007, 502)

The issue of mixed blood is clearly tied to the taboo of miscegenation, which, in order to be realized, involves “‘coming out’—risking the danger of public exposure of both color and desire, and . . . fail[ing] to reproduce biologically the whiteness . . . [Southern] society values above all else” (Entzminger 2006/2007, 92). In *Absalom, Absalom!* the impossibility of tracing back one drop of black blood produces the most dreaded fear of the white Southerner—that Charles Bon, as a free mulatto “passing” as white, will intentionally continue the process of miscegenation by engaging in “forbidden” sex with white women and will thus pollute the Southern racial hierarchy. This is why he has to be put in the context of the myth of the black rapist; this is why Henry “*will have to stop*” (AA 286, emphasis Faulkner's) him.

Faulkner's handling of the black rapist myth in *Absalom, Absalom!* is, however, different from that in *Light in August*. Unlike Joe Christmas, who needed any kind of a wronged white woman to be perceived as the black rapist and, consequently, spent his life looking for her, Charles Bon enacts his black rapist myth in a genteel way, thus giving the whole story a nuance of aristocratic splendor. Familiar with the “milieu where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions . . . ladies, women, females—the virgins whom gentlemen someday marry, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested” (AA 87), Charles Bon chooses Judith Sutpen who, as the Southern belle, provides the whiteness and asexuality which are essential to her symbolic function as the wronged white woman in the black rapist myth. Captivated and seduced by Charles Bon—“her first and last sweetheart” (AA 75)—Judith hopes to make him “the image hers through possession” (AA 75) but fails because he perceives her only as “the blank shape, the empty vessel” (AA 95) that should be marked by his race. In this way, Judith unintentionally yet willingly becomes his

creation, a part of his design. To complicate the issue further, Judith is not only Charles Bon's "woman vessel" (AA 86)—a pure Southern belle who should be sacrificed in order to bring the black rapist myth into being—but also his half sister. As her sibling, her flesh and blood who "loved [her] . . . 'after his fashion'" (AA 75), Charles Bon intends to inscribe Judith's body with both miscegenation and incest. In attempting to do so, he demythologizes the Southern "domestic metaphor" that, on the one hand, condoned the miscegenation and incest forbidden by the system of legally imposed white superiority and, on the other, severely ostracized the products of such liaisons and denied them legal, parental, and, in the broadest sense, human recognition.

A deeper investigation of miscegenation and incest in the novel demonstrates that there could be another black rapist story going on in *Absalom, Absalom!*, involving, this time, Charles Bon as "the black rapist" and Henry Sutpen as his "victim"—a wronged white *man*. This black rapist story thus calls into question the assumption that the reproduction of race goes through white heterosexual male bodies, and shatters the white supremacist idea that "the white male body is that which possesses and penetrates; the black body, like the female and the homosexual body (which the dominant culture perceives as feminized) is that which is penetrated and possessed" (Entzminger 2006/2007, 92). This focus on the taboo of homosexuality in the South demonstrates that there is resemblance, if not interaction, between the taboo of miscegenation and that of homosexuality.⁹

Crucial for this, rather different, reading of the myth of the black rapist is the idea that something is missing, that something is omitted or, at least, left unspoken in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Mr. Compson, for example, explains that "They are there, yet something is missing" (AA 80), and Henry, talking with Charles Bon, describes how "You give me two and two and you tell me it makes five and it does make five" (AA 94). The missing link to which Mr. Compson refers is the information about why Henry killed Bon. The extra one in Henry's addition exercise is Charles Bon, the illegitimate son, whose racial and sexual presence evokes forbidden desires and sets the black rapist myth into motion. The silence in the narrative, whether emphasized by the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* or indicated by the novel itself, thus foregrounds the intermixing of miscegenation and homosexuality—a prospect so terrible that it has to be left unspoken, unwritten, and unseen because it, by joining black/mulatto and white male bodies, threatens to bring down the symbolic order in the South.

This interpretation relies upon the aspects of the narrative that confirm both the existence of the sexual (and incestuous) desire between Henry Sutpen and Charles

⁹ The motif of homosexuality also appears in *Go Down, Moses*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August*. In addition, Minrose Gwin asserts that either Faulkner or his publisher deleted four scenes showing same-sex eroticism from *Mosquitoes* (Did Ernest Like Gordon?: Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* and the Bite of Gender Trouble in *Faulkner and Gender*).

Bon and the “killing” of that desire through the transformation of the object of love into a common “nigger.” The existence of Henry’s homoerotic desire for Charles Bon can be seen, for instance, in the repetition of the phrase “Henry loved Bon” (AA 71). Other examples are Henry’s self-feminizing fantasies of Charles Bon “by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride” (AA 77); his complete trust in Charles Bon that can only be a consequence of deeper feelings: “who every time he breathed over his vocal cords he was saying *We belong to you; do as you will with us*” (AA 262, emphasis Faulkner’s); the description of Henry’s love to Charles as “corruption” (AA 91); his knowledge “of the insurmountable barrier which the similarity of gender hopelessly intervened” (AA 75–76); and his unwitting invocation of the marriage vows: “‘Yes. I do’, looking straight at the other, the esoteric, the sybarite, standing (the youth) now, erect, thin (because he was young), his face scarlet but his head high and his eyes steady” (AA 253). Henry’s desire goes so far that he is prepared not only to perform as Judith for Bon but to “transform her body into an Edenic American womb” (Walter 2007, 495), inducing Bon to think: “*I am not hearing about a young girl, a virgin; I am hearing about a narrow delicate fenced virgin field already furrowed and bedded so that all I shall need to do is drop the seeds in, caress it smooth again*” (AA 260–261, emphasis Faulkner’s).

It can also be seen that Henry, by transforming Charles Bon into the black rapist, “kills” these homoerotic feelings and, consequently, his feminine side, by killing Charles Bon. Just a few minutes before he is killed, Charles Bon pronounces: “*So it’s the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear. Henry doesn’t answer*” (AA 285, emphasis Faulkner’s). Henry’s failure to answer, the silence in the narrative, functions as the unspoken confirmation that Henry Sutpen rejects his lover (who is also his half brother) because he now sees him as black. Charles Bon’s racial disclosure—the revelation of what he “really” is—makes Henry “consumed with a violent need to throw off that identity, out of disgust that he has taken it inside of himself in the form of an incestuous, homoerotic fantasy” (Walter 2007, 501). To justify this rejection, Henry draws upon the Southern prejudice that any sexual contact between a black man and a white woman is rape, and therefore punishable by death, appropriates it to his situation (any sexual contact between a black and a white man is rape punishable by death), and kills him. The very act of killing takes place at the gate of Sutpen’s Hundred. Henry Sutpen, who earlier was willingly engaged in the self-feminizing process, switches from the stereotypically feminine to the stereotypically masculine role and “demonstrates” his manliness by penetrating a bullet into Charles Bon’s body. The phallic gun and the endangered homestead are suggestive of “the violence enacted against those who bring the possibility of [miscegenation and] homosexuality too close to [the Southern] home” (Entzminger 2006/2007, 97).

2.2 (Re)Reading Southern Womanhood in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Fiction¹⁰

Another recurring motif in much of Faulkner's fiction is the idea of Southern womanhood, the depiction of which reaches its peak in his Snopes trilogy. A sentence from Book Two of *The Hamlet*, the first part of the Snopes trilogy, when the omniscient narrator referring to Linda Snopes Kohl says the following: she "had left the South too young too long ago to have formed the Southern female habit" (Snopes 996),¹¹ introduces a possible starting point for an analysis of Southern womanhood and its traits in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century—the phenomenon known as the *Southern female habit*. The concept of Southern womanhood was, during that period, founded on a canonized discourse, resting on gender discrimination—a law, a regulation, a prescription—which authorized the interpretation of superiority and inferiority, power and subordination, masculine and feminine, culture and nature, civilized and primitive. In other words, the concept of Southern womanhood rested on the idea of masculine domination which was comprehended as "normal," "natural," and "self-evident" since it was legitimized by the social order in, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, "the objectified state—in things (in the house, for example, every part of which [was] 'sexed'), in the whole social world, and—in the embodied state—in the habitus of the agents, functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action" (2001, 8).

The unquestionable reproduction of masculine domination in Southern society of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century was supported by social institutions—family, church, and schools. Focusing on a woman's intimate sphere, family and church represented the secondary sources of institutionalized gender role distribution. They were "objectively orchestrated and had in common the fact that they acted on unconscious structures" (Bourdieu 2001, 85). On the other hand, education imposed itself as the primary source of gender role distribution in the South as it influenced not only the pure process of elementary and advanced learning but also the outcomes of learning processes in the form of employment opportunities, job distribution, financial and, in the broadest sense, civil rights. During the abovementioned period, Southern education system was a mirror image of Southern society and culture: it was underfunded, overcrowded, segregated, and mostly staffed by overtly racist teachers and administrators. It was, too, affected by the legacy of the plantation system and the Civil War, perceived "as a means of . . . normalizing the gender hierarchy," and seen as "crucial to institute racial segregation [to] maintain the racial hierarchy" (Rushing 2002, 170). In addition, formal

¹⁰ The analysis relies in part upon the idea of white Southern womanhood presented in my paper (De)Formation of "Southern female habit": A Case Study of William Faulkner's Snopes Trilogy published in *EurAmerica* 40.3 in 2010, pp. 1–31.

¹¹ Subsequent page references for *The Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion* will be given as Snopes in parentheses in the text.

education of any kind indicated the class and race privilege, thus restricting any kind of higher education to (white) male and, more rarely, female elites.

Southern elementary education curriculum, to begin with, did not differ much from the antebellum's and consisted of the same basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. Classes were held in one room where boys and girls were physically separated. The classroom sitting arrangements emphasized gender segregation: girls "would assume their seats on the opposite side of the room from the boys . . . and had to be seated so as not to face each other" (Vinovskis and Bernard 1978, 865). Evidence also shows that, although teaching was organized in the spirit of coeducation, "boys and girls met in the same classrooms a good deal less than they had earlier" (Rury 1984, 22). New South educational reformers worked to replace one-room schoolhouses with graded institutions taught by well-trained but poorly paid female teachers and stressed understanding over rote memorization and a sense of duty over fear of authority. For example, Hindman Settlement School and Pine Mountain School in Kentucky were elementary and middle schools that taught discipline, industriousness, and social graces to African Americans and mountain whites to help them adjust to the industrializing and urbanizing New South.

The similar differentiation continued in Southern secondary and higher education: "while young men trained for college or for careers in business, young women were to seek present satisfaction rather than future advancement" (Vinovskis and Bernard 1978, 865). Young women who were fortunate enough to continue their education at college/university experienced the same kind of gender segregation because their options concerning the choice of curricula, courses, and professions were limited. For example, the Lucy Cobb Institute in Athens, Georgia, created the new educational ideal—the "new belle" which "preserved aspects of antebellum elite femininity while also borrowing from the Progressive-Era New Woman" (Case 2002, 19). Founded in the same town, Spelman Seminary, on the other hand, trained African American women who would later help in uplifting and educating other newly freed women and men. A helpful insight into the Southern educational reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gives Benjamin D. Burks (2002) who in his dissertation discusses Southern normal schools. Southern normal schools emphasized the importance of the quality of teaching as crucial to the success of the public system of education. The female normal schools in Virginia's Farmville, Radford, Fredericksburg, and Harrisonburg promoted Christianity, preached proper etiquette and appropriate attire, and policed the relations with boys.

All these educational institutions offered adjusted or less difficult academic programs which were usually divided into three academic departments: liberal arts (foreign languages, English, mathematics, science, art, music, pedagogy, history, etc.), business or commercial education (typewriting, bookkeeping, stenography), and domestic science or home economics (cooking, sewing, bacteriology, study of house consumption or household economics, nourishment, family relations based on psychology and sociology, personal hygiene). Each of these curricula had its definite purpose and its special objective. Whereas liberal arts educated women to become teachers, business or domestic science courses, as their name implies,

were more concerned with manual activities and thus operated as female counterparts of male curriculum. Quite specifically, courses in domestic science were considered “as another context in which young women could learn manual dexterity and practical lessons about science” (Rury 1984, 23) and thus improve the living conditions not only in the micro way—in their family—but also in the macro way, in the institutional household and community. In contrast to domestic science curriculum, business courses responded to changes in the labor market which demanded more qualified and more educated workforce, even if it meant to employ women. Of course, the difference between business classes for men and women was more than obvious. While men were educated to become bankers, managers, or lawyers, women “needed training for relatively short term employment as secretaries and typists” (Rury 1984, 33) because “the technical details of office procedure were considered sufficient for women, whose working careers were generally short” (Rury 1984, 33).

The analysis set forth in the previous paragraphs points out at least three issues Southern education of the period was struggling with. First, it shows that the South depended heavily on “the traditional division of labour [that] assigns to women familiarity with the things of art and literature” (Bourdieu 2002, 63) rather than involvement in business, science, and technology. Second, it reveals that the purpose of women’s education in the South was to instill in a girl “a well-disciplined mind, high moral aims, refined tastes, gentle and graceful manners, practical views of her own duties and those resources of health, thought, conversation and occupation which bless alike the highest and lowest station of life” (Vinovskis and Bernard 1978, 865). Third, in being perceived “as the final polish necessary to gentility” (Jabour 1998, 40), women’s education in the South was also seen as “an asset in the marriage market” (Jabour 1998, 40). In other words, as a process of character building aimed at perfection of women’s future responsibilities in marriage formal education in the South during the period of concern here was intended to develop simplicity of disposition and manners, modesty and inclination to self-negation, and, consequently, create a perfect wife.

The idea of “necessity” of women’s education in the South was closely connected with the woman’s place in Southern labor market. This place was determined by the “popular” patriarchal belief that “women ‘help’ rather than work, that their true ‘place’ is in the home, that when they venture ‘out’ of home they are best suited to doing work that replicates housework” (Kerber 1988, 28). Accordingly, in the Old South, where industrial and commercial activities were kept at the minimum, women’s labor was considered to be an integral part of the household economy. This had multiple implications for Southern women, not the least of which was the continued integration of home and work into the plantation and yeoman household. In the postbellum and New South, women’s domestic labor was even more devaluated due to private and public needs that drew women out of home. In addition, the widespread loss of property and men providers after the Civil War, large numbers of widows and orphans who could not realize their class privileges through men, and an infusion of Northern capital after Reconstruction

stimulating Southern economy and accelerating industrial capitalism helped include women in Southern market economy.

This, however, produced a backlash, as men who questioned gender equality grew nostalgic for the Old South and resurrected the image of woman as the household mistress and administrator. As a result, women were again mostly offered jobs that implied handling “raw materials”—children, food, and clothes. Perceived as “‘unskilled,’ interruptible, nurturing, . . . [they were] appropriately awarded primarily by love and secondarily by a segregated marketplace that consistently value[d] women’s work less than men’s” (Kerber 1988, 28). These jobs offered little or no opportunity for advancement and confined women at the bottom of the economic ladder. When confronted with the prevailing public opinion on career women and the reality of low wages and sex-segregated jobs, an educated woman in the South could opt for one of these two possibilities. She could either

proclaim . . . herself “a woman, and therefore less an achieving individual, or an achieving individual, and therefore less a woman.” She could not do both, and if she chose to follow the second option, she took the risk of losing forever to be “a loved object, the kind of girl whom men will woo and boast of, toast and marry.” (Chafe 1988, 260–261)

It is then little wonder that women in the South, although the statistics showed “the great leap forward in women’s participation in economic life” (McGovern 1968, 320)—as much as 29.7 % from 1890 to 1930, did not want to “risk” marriage by fighting the patriarchal mainstream which claimed that “women who worked outside their homes did so only under duress or because they were ‘odd’ (for which read ‘ugly,’ ‘frustrated,’ ‘compulsive,’ or ‘single’)” (Cowan 1976, 148).

Women’s education in the South was, too, embedded in the family and attempts to analyze it apart from the familial context risk overlooking a central assumption of Southerners—that women were to be educated for their “roles” within the home. As a consequence, most of the period of concern here, even though characterized by cultural and social changes that could not be disregarded, clung to the model of Southern womanhood introduced during the antebellum days and known as the Cult of True Womanhood (1820–1860). The notion of Southern “true womanhood” rested on four, either ornamental or domestic, features or skills—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Piety, purity, and submissiveness were seen as ornamental features and were thus pursued (1) to find a proper match in the marriage market and (2) to contribute to man’s public image after marriage was contracted.

The first feature on the list—piety—was given to women as God’s gift; it belonged to them by divine right and represented the source of their strength. As moral instructresses, women were responsible for the souls of their nucleus family, which in turn emphasized the importance of their role within family. It also gave them something else: a source of common identity and an opportunity to take part in charitable work in their community. Of course, it goes without saying that the emphasis on woman’s piety actually tranquilized “the many undefined longings which swept the most pious young girl and about which it was better to pray than to think” (Welter 1983, 373) and kept her in her “proper sphere”—her home.

The second feature—purity—was seen as woman’s priceless virtue and her most valuable asset in the marriage market since it guaranteed her upward mobility in Southern society. It set forth woman’s superiority as the guardian of her own innocence since women, “weak in themselves and sources of weakness, being the embodiments of the *vulnerability* of honour” (Bourdieu 2001, 51, emphasis Bourdieu’s), symbolized negative honor which could either be defended or lost. Needless to say, this very virtue forbade them to demand sexual gratification and gave Southern patriarchal hierarchy the perfect instrument of control of female sexuality and reproduction.

The last ornamental feature—submissiveness—was brought into being by focusing upon woman’s passivity, helplessness, selflessness, renunciation, and sacrifice. An example of the demands and duties that women were expected to fulfill provides an insight into how this feature operated: a really submissive woman had to spend her life servicing others—her husband, her children, and, occasionally, her parents and relatives—with ambitionless cheer, never-ending strength, and unconditioned love. Tellingly, all this was justified by the premise that women “*choose* to adopt submissive practices, . . . or even that they love their own domination, that they ‘enjoy’ the treatment inflicted on them, in a kind of masochism inherent in their nature” (Bourdieu 2001, 39–40, emphasis Bourdieu’s).

The fourth feature of the Southern “true” woman—domesticity—had its share in the formation of the Southern female habit as well. It provided the basis for multiple oppression of women which manifested itself through women’s rendering to the role of mother, nurse, educator, plantation/yeoman household administrator, and “custodian of culture” (Bartlett and Cambor 1974, 11). Simply put, women were supposed to be mothers since this was their civil and racial duty; they were expected to dispense with comfort, morality, cheer, and hospitality; to engage in housekeeping, health care, and elementary education of their family; and to provide enough refined entertainment for both their family and their guests. All these tasks/duties were presented as uplifting steps in emphasizing woman’s importance and authority and as her contribution to the social capital of her family and her community. But given the fact that the man was by divine, constitutional, and legal right the possessor of money, law, and voting right, woman’s “elevation” was actually used to mask the reality in which women operated as dependent, voiceless, and nameless property.

Just as education, job distribution, and feminine skills and features determined the traits of Southern womanhood, so, too, the attitudes to reproduction took their share in its construction. In much the same way as the features and skills discussed in the previous paragraphs, they stemmed from “the division of the social statuses assigned to men and women” (Bourdieu 2001, 15). In linking social status with gender, and vice versa, Southern society compelled belief that the ability to reproduce and give birth was the highest female civil and racial duty and the feature of “truly Christian personality” (Rosenberg 1973, 137). Southern patriarchy found an additional impetus for this argument in psychology and medicine which proclaimed that sexual excess in women, or restraint from reproduction, could “frequently cause uterine inflammation, and ulceration, leucorrhoea, deranged

menstruation, miscarriage, barrenness as well as debility, hysteria, and an endless train of nervous and other diseases" (Rosenberg 1973, 135–136). In other words, with the help of science, religion, and (popular) culture, Southern women were presented as the products and the prisoners of their reproductive organs which, in turn, provided the basis for their "social role and behavioral characteristics" (Rosenberg-Smith and Rosenberg 1973, 335), their intellectual abilities, and their personality.

Lastly, the idea of Southern womanhood was inseparable from the ideology of separate spheres. Its instrumental character, which found support in woman's physiology and anatomy, "oriented . . . [woman] toward 'inner' view of herself and her worldly sphere" (Rosenberg-Smith and Rosenberg 1973, 337). With the reproductive organs hidden in her body, women had to seek their fulfillment in the closed space, i.e., in the house, which established a kind of analogy between the body of a woman and the body of a house. In addition, the instrumental aspect of the ideology of the separate spheres was praised as "useful and emotionally sustaining, a familiar link between the older patriarchal culture and the new bourgeois experience" (Kerber 1988, 26).

Interacting with the instrumental character of the separate spheres ideology was its prescriptiveness which not only defined the main areas of woman's interest and performance but also determined the frequency, quantity, and quality of prescribed modes of thinking, acting, and behaving. "The Word of the Father," who actually did not have a clue about domestic or other female activities, thus transformed housekeeping and, in particular, such "inspiring" chores like cooking, washing, and cleaning into healthy exercise or even art or science. There were suggestions that "chemistry could be utilized in cooking, geometry in dividing cloth, and phrenology in discovering talent in children" (Welter 1983, 381). Relatedly, the emphasis was put on the emotional impact of duties and obligations performed by women. They were thus transformed into the signs and the signifiers of symbolic value. In this context

laundering . . . was an expression of love. Feeding the family . . . was a way to communicate deep seated emotions. Diapering was . . . a time to build the baby's sense of security; cleaning the bathroom sink was . . . an exercise for the maternal instincts, protecting the family from disease. (Cowan 1976, 151)

As a Southerner, Faulkner could not resist the influence of values, myths, and images of his birthplace. They shaped, or it is tempting to claim tried to shape, his personal and literary attitudes toward women, their status in family and community, and correspondingly the idea of Southern womanhood. He tried to redefine the idea of Southern womanhood by negotiating it through the subversive potential of Southern women education and the prescriptive rhetoric of Southern cultural codes it asserts once it is separated from its institutional binding. Through formal and informal aspects of Southern womanhood—the choice of schools, the almost nonexistent distribution of jobs, prescribed skills and features, backward attitudes to reproduction and childbirth, and the importance of home as woman's private sphere—Faulkner appears to depict rises and falls of his South, its (in)capability to

survive changes it faced, its struggling with the changed values and new traditions, as well as “the powerlessness of modern man, victim of the shallowness and dissolution of the twentieth century” (Entzminger 2002, 27).

This issue appears as a recurring motif in much of Faulkner’s fiction. *Sanctuary*, for example, is a story about the rape of Temple Drake, a college girl. In *The Sound and the Fury* there are brief references to Caddy’s and Miss Quentin’s schooling as well: Uncle Maury insists that Caddy “needs the fresh air [because] she’s been in school all day” (SF 7).¹² Unlike her mother, Miss Quentin does not take her schooling seriously for she spends more time “on the streets” (SF 180) than in school, which results in Professor Junkin’s warning that “she will have to leave school if she’s absent one more time” (SF 180). Another example is that of *Light in August*’s Joanna Burden and Lena Grove who embody two different approaches to women’s education in the South. Lena Grove represents the woman skilled in housewifery—after the death of her parents she moved to her brother where she “did all the housework and took care of the other children” (LA 6)—and in no control of her sexuality and reproduction abilities, she rationalizes this by “I reckon that’s why I got one [child] so quick myself” (LA 6). Conversely, Joanna Burden gets enough formal education as a daughter of a civil rights activist to run her property like a man and to spend “a certain period of each afternoon . . . writing steadily” (LA 175). She “received . . . business and private documents” and “sent . . . replies—advice, business, financial and religious, to the presidents and faculties and trustees, and advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnae, of a dozen negro schools and colleges through the South” (LA 175).

One aspect of this social and cultural complexity employed by Faulkner is his representation of Southern womanhood in his Snopes trilogy—*The Hamlet*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*. The trilogy depicts three generations of the Varner Snopes women who, owing to the socioeconomic changes in the South, embody three different conceptions of Southern womanhood. They are:

1. Mrs. Varner, who embodies the perfect product of Southern patriarchal ideology—the real “true woman”;
2. Eula Varner Snopes, who, as a kind of the “new belle,” balances between accepting and subverting the idea of Southern womanhood;
3. Linda Snopes Kohl, who is presented as an outsider—the anti-belle.

2.2.1 Mrs. Varner

As the first in the successive line of the Varner Snopes women, Mrs. Varner opens a discursive space on the formation of Southern womanhood in the Snopes trilogy. Mrs. Varner’s appearance, which occupies a modest share of *The Hamlet*’s

¹² Subsequent page references for *The Sound and the Fury* will be given as SF in parentheses in the text.

narrative space and is thus corresponding to her place in the patriarchal matrix, is tied to Southern patriarchal views on a woman's role in family and community. As the embodiment of the ideal Southern woman, and in accord with the demands of Southern phallogentric economy, Mrs. Varner has a highly practical value because of her ability to reproduce which she proved no less than 16 times. She did fulfill her racial and civil duty and she did contribute not only to her family and community but also to the image of Dixie Madonna stereotype.

Further investigation of Mrs. Varner's motherhood reveals another striking thing. The mere fact that she has 16 children, which implies that she had one child every year and, given the fact of undeveloped health care in the South at the time, probably many miscarriages which were not recorded, demonstrates convincingly that she was not in control of her reproductive ability, that she was denied access to any means of contraception. This fact is additionally confirmed by Will Varner who admits the following: "[We] already had a mess of children and maybe we ought to quit then. But I wanted some more gals. . . . a gal will stay home and work until she does get married" (Snopes 293).

In pronouncing the words *children*, *home*, *work*, and *marriage*, Will Varner encapsulates in four words a mode of thinking that places woman in the home where she is supposed to do household chores and take care of her family. By the same token, Mrs. Varner "was one of the best housewives in the county and was indefatigable at it. She derived an actual physical pleasure . . . from the laying away of ironed sheets and the sight of packed shelves and potato cellars and festooned smoke-house rafters" (Snopes 95). The vivid content of this passage sets forth the importance of domesticity as the skill each Southern "true" woman should imbibe. As something that was learned within the family and generationally passed from mother to daughter, the skill of domesticity here also points out woman's acceptance of such knowledge as some kind of learned behavior. The very notion of learned behavior implies the existence of intention on the part of both the learner and the teacher and thus justifies a rendering of Southern woman's bringing up and education to the idea of the idealized Southern womanhood. It is then not strange that Mrs. Varner's "conviction was . . . that the housewife who had to wait until she had been to school to know how much money she had left after subtracting from it what she had spent, would never be a housewife" (Snopes 95).

This specific fictional instance gives way to one more idea that pursued the concept of Southern womanhood. Once again, there is a specific word—*school*—which draws attention to the role and the importance, or the insignificance, of formal education in Southern woman's life. This very word assumes a somehow pejorative meaning in Mrs. Varner's narrative space since it bears connotations of unnecessary burden and undesired property. As such, the schooling is either neglected:

She did not read herself, though at the time of her marriage she had been able to read a little. She did not practice it much then and during the last forty years she had lost even the habit, preferring now to be face to face with the living breath of event, fiction or news either, and being able to comment and moralise upon it. So she saw no need for literacy in women. (Snopes 95)

Or it is rejected as something unnecessary and quite suspicious: “It was you insisted she had to go to school. It wasn’t me. I raised eight other daughters, I thought they turned out pretty well” (Snopes 97).

Lastly, interacting with the previously mentioned Mrs. Varner’s features is her invisibility on the linguistic level. She appears to be quite nameless as there is no indication of her name or her origin in the novel. She is always just Mrs. Varner or “mammy” (Snopes 293). This, again and again and again, points up the representative blankness of her role of mother and wife in the patriarchal gender matrix and thus presents her as the perfect, “straight A,” student in the cultivating and civilizing school of Southern patriarchy.

2.2.2 *Eula Varner Snopes*

Unlike Mrs. Varner, her mother, who did not go to school but was “educated” within the family in the art of housewifery, who gave birth to 16 children because she did not have access to any kind of contraception and who considered her home and her family to be her sanctuary, Eula, whose name “suggests a eulogy” (Crosby 2000, 118) and thus symbolizes the celebration of the eternal feminine, does not lose her name and consequently her identity through the act of marriage. By adding her name to her husband’s, Eula announces her position of a “half-breed,” a hybrid, or “the locus of conflicting ideologies” (Crosby 2000, 114) balancing between accepting and subverting the idea of Southern womanhood.

So, why is Eula the “half-breed”? Or, more specifically, how does she balance between accepting and subverting the principles of Southern womanhood? Eula did not, to begin with, “object to attending it [school], to being in school” (Snopes 95). On the other hand, school meant close to nothing to Eula—she attended it because her brother Jody “had insisted that she go to school” (Snopes 95). This is the point when we, as the observers of the Varner family dynamics, ask ourselves the following question: If Eula’s parents were not interested in their daughter’s future since they perceived her “in stereotypic terms, as a housewife and sexual object” (Clarke 1994, 76), then why did Jody take such great care of his sister’s education given the fact that he was not involved in the education of his other eight sisters? At first glance, his intention “mark[s] him as more sympathetic and progressive than his parents” (Clarke 1994, 76), especially when humiliation and frustration which he endured to send Eula to school are taken into consideration. Underneath Jody’s conviction “of the necessity of that” (Snopes 95), lurks, however, something else: the obsessive need to participate in the cult of protection of Southern womanhood which in turn symbolized honor, pride, and morality of Southern manhood. In other words, when Jody sends Eula to school, he actually wants to “educate Eula away from sexuality” (Clarke 1994, 77) and to desexualize her since he perceives her as the threat to family honor and, in the broadest sense, to himself because, although he is Will’s first born, he is not his favorite child and Eula is.

Perceived as a means of “normalizing” the gender hierarchy, Eula’s schooling, too, addresses woman’s objectification in Southern education system. Quite specifically, Eula is objectified by Labove, her teacher. Unlike Jody, who is convinced that schooling will civilize and consequently desexualize Eula, Labove completely fails in his teaching, i.e., civilizing, responsibilities since he, as Deborah Clarke asserts, “views her in exclusively sexual terms, as beneath and beyond books” (1994, 78). Aware of his failure as a teacher and a man, Labove ventures to regain his position in the educational and gender system by force. In pronouncing the following sentences: “That’s it. . . . That’s the trouble. You are not afraid. That’s what you have got to learn. That’s one thing I am going to teach you, anyway” (Snopes 117), he attempts to assert his superiority as a teacher and a man.

The result, however, is doubly devastating for him: first, Eula is physically stronger than he is and fights back his rape attempt:

He held her loosely, the better to feel the fierce resistance of bones and muscles, holding her just enough to keep her from actually reaching his face. She had made no sound . . . He held her loosely, still smiling, whispering his jumble of fragmentary Greek and Latin verse and American-Mississippi obscenity, when suddenly she managed to free one of her arms, the elbow coming up hard under his chin. It caught him off balance; before he regained it her other hand struck him a full-armed blow in the face. He stumbled backward, struck a bench and went down with it and partly beneath it. She stood over him, breathing deep but not panting and not even dishevelled. (Snopes 117–118)

Second, when Eula compares Labove to “old headless horseman Ichabod Crane” (Snopes 118), she demonstrates that she is, despite the widespread popular disbelief in female ability to learn, actually capable “to imbibe at least some knowledge as she taunts him with deadly literary accuracy” (Clarke 1994, 78). Furthermore, by naming him in this way, Eula “identifies the ‘dead’ body of Washington Irving’s fictional character with the ‘living’ body of the schoolteacher” (Levitsky 1993, 494), which is another insult and another blow for his male ego.

The failure to “civilize” Eula in the institution of formal education made Jody invent other means of restricting and rewriting her identity. One of those is a corset. In being made to restrain and reshape the female body to fit the male ideal of femininity, the corset helped confine woman’s body and imposed itself as the instrument of patriarchal gender control. Aware of this fact, Jody “had nagged Mrs. Varner into making her [Eula] wear corsets. He would grasp her each time he saw her outside the house, in public or alone, and see for himself if she had them on” (Snopes 126). The corsets, however, could neither hide the sensual quality of Eula’s body nor transform her into something she is not; they, underneath “the dresses of silk” (Snopes 127), reveal the body of “a woman of thirty dressed in the garments of her sixteen-year-old sister” (Snopes 127) and, strangely enough, generate a possibility of the “protest against the Cult of True Womanhood” (Blanchard 1995, 37).

Similarly, in attempting to control the female body, the corset, at least in this fictional instance, operates as the more or less successful instrument of preserving woman’s virginity: “Jody . . . wait[ed] for her in the hall until she came out, dressed, the buggy waiting, to grasp her arm and exactly as he would have felt the back of a new horse for old saddle sores, grimly explore with his hard heavy hand to see if she

had the corset on or not” (Snopes 129). Challenges to his viewpoint on the importance of virginity began to appear before Jody could have grasped them since the very act of physical control he engaged himself so eagerly in could not impose the patriarchal control over Eula’s body. The corset could not erase the sensual quality of Eula’s body; it could not prevent her from choosing the circumstances of losing her virginity, i.e., the time, the place, the way, and the man. In honoring *HER* wishes, Eula demonstrates her unwillingness to take part in the construction of patriarchal honor and refuses to be reduced to an object of exchange in the marriage market. In other words, she did not care about wasting her value of untouched and unspoiled goods, called into question the premises upon which the concept of Southern womanhood was constructed, and showed that “her social position and reputation mean nothing to her” (Clarke 1994, 72) although single and pregnant.

Even though this appears to be a significant shift in the way women in the South were supposed to think and behave, it could not have been justified by the society which valued its members according to gender, race, and class roles it imposed on them. As one would expect, the Varner family honor had to be restored not by finding a biological father who, by the way, was “halfway to Texas now” (Snopes 138) but by finding a suitable husband who was desperate enough, or greedy enough, or probably both, to get married to a ravished belle and to secure in this way “a considerable check, . . . a deed to the Old Frenchman place, . . . [and the paid for] marriage license” (Snopes 140). And they found him in Flem Snopes:

a dwarf, a gnome, without glands and desire, who would be no more a physical factor in her life than the owner’s name on the fly-leaf of a book, . . . who would not possess her but merely own her by the single strength which power gave, the dead power of money, wealth, gewgaws, baubles, as he might own, not a picture, statue: a field, say. (Snopes 115)

Eula entered this marriage as “the calm beautiful mask” (Snopes 140). Probably “because she cares nothing about legality and social convention, a husband, any husband, is simply an extraneous appendage, a different kind of corset which may or may not succeed in confining her body” (Clarke 1994, 82). On the other hand, Eula could have seen her pregnancy and marriage to Flem as a “ticket to Jefferson” (Fulton 2005, 457), as an opportunity to leave the rural and backward hamlet that could not have held her.

Eula’s comprehension of femininity and reproduction complicates the issue further since she once again balances between accepting and subverting the prescriptions of Southern womanhood. In being constantly compared to nature, no matter whether to animals (cat, dog, and horse), land, fruit, food, or moon, and in doing nothing to fight it, Eula accepts partaking in the patriarchal binary hierarchy which always identifies women with nature in order to have an excuse to cultivate and civilize them. She thus becomes the metaphor of a virgin land which has to be penetrated and contaminated in order to be used. Furthermore, Eula is throughout most of the trilogy presented as the embodiment of Eve, Aphrodite, and Venus—“the eternal female” (Bašić 1996, 196).¹³ The mythological background of Eula’s

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Croatian to English were done by B. O.

“divine sensuality” (Bašić 1996, 196) is additionally emphasized by her “appearance [that] suggested symbology out of the old Dionysic times—honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof” (Snopes 93). As the embodiment of another ancient goddess—Juno, the protector of household, motherhood, marriage, and moon, Eula also fulfilled the function she was predestined—she was impregnated and gave birth to her daughter Linda. Yet, in being perceived as “mammalian female meat” (Snopes 97), “the supreme primal uterus” (Snopes 110), “the queen, the matrix” (Snopes 112), “miraculous intact milk” (Snopes 117), Eula, on the other hand, seems surprisingly infertile with one child only. This implies that she was probably in control of her reproductive ability and did not depend on man’s will to regulate it, which, for sure, represents a subversive nuance in the creation of this woman character.

2.2.3 *Linda Snopes Kohl*

Linda Snopes Kohl, the last link in the successive line of the Varner Snopes women, marks a crucial turning point in the literary (de)formation of Southern womanhood in the Snopes trilogy. When compared to her “true woman” grandmother and her rebelliously indolent yet “civilized” mother, Linda appears to have been quite removed from the realms accorded and assigned to both her mother and her grandmother. This placelessness Linda immerses herself in is present as a continuous thread woven into the fabric of the Snopes trilogy and is tied to her linguistic, public, and private appearance in the subversive disclosure of Southern womanhood in the Snopes trilogy. In this way, she becomes an outsider in the Southern domestic metaphor and expresses triumphantly “her subversive feminine discourse” (Kang 2005, 509) in the narrative space of the trilogy.

Linda’s “failure” to cultivate typical feminine features and to take part in the “civilizing” processes imposed on women in the South is somehow set forth by the circumstances of her conception, birth, and name-giving. Whereas the story of her conception and birth pays homage to the rebelliousness of her mother Eula, the name given to her, intentionally or not, undermines everything the patriarchal South had ever done to “civilize” its female population. Linda’s first name, which is derived from a Spanish word meaning “pretty,” appears to be a name for a Southern belle. However, Linda is not “pretty” in terms of white Southern womanhood; she is “not reducible to a single trait, an admired appearance but a person of much complexity, unassimilable into the usual categories used to divide and conquer in the southern symbolic order” (Roberts 1994, 140).

Linda’s family names—Snopes Kohl—shatter another Southern stereotype, the stereotype of the pure and unquestionable origin guaranteed by the virginity of a woman and the first child conceived in a legitimate marriage upon which Southern patriarchy based its institutional being. For Linda is a “bastard” (Snopes 544); her biological father is Hoake McCarron, which makes Snopes in her family name “a

legal fiction” (Roberts 1994, 141). This is not to say, of course, that Snopes in her family name does not acquire a new and special meaning: the meaning of being an outsider. As the outsider, she could escape the South before it “civilized” her to adjust her to projections of the idealized Southern womanhood. In addition, her second family name—Kohl, which is not pronounced “Cole” (Snopes 820) and thus “don’t sound very American” (Snopes 820), brings into focus one more aspect of her subversion of the Southern myth. Linda married a Northern Jew, who was a sculptor. On some symbolic level and in the context of the Southern ideology of “whiteness” as a property, her marriage could appear to hold the connotative value of the forbidden mixing of races or miscegenation. As such, it represents Linda’s protest against the prescribed modes of thinking and behaving in the South which required that the subject of marriage, i.e., man/husband, should preferably be a Southerner, white, Christian, and well-off.

Besides Linda’s symbolic namelessness, there are at least two other issues that point up her placelessness, i.e., her status of the outsider. First, she is not the product of Southern culture and she, therefore, resists any stereotypical classification. This occurred because she “had left the South too young too long ago to have formed the Southern female habit” (Snopes 996). In containing three key words—*Southern female habit*, this sentence draws attention to features Linda should but did not develop to fit the context of modern Southern domestic metaphor. She is neither pious nor pure nor submissive nor domestic although many attempts were made to teach her how to adopt skills and features of Southern belle. Specifically, Linda is always depicted as a being-perceived and an object of the male gaze. Her whole community takes part in her construction and deconstruction; her entire being is filtered through them.

Second, Linda’s “only” love, Gavin Stevens, tries to civilize her by treating her as a tabula rasa, as a blank page or a blank space that should be marked by the male spirit. He engages eagerly in “forming her mind” (Snopes 506) by giving her books to read, talking with her about them, and examining her on them; he intends to send her off to a college and eventually plans to marry her to a real Southern gentleman. Given all his “efforts,” it is no wonder that he “sees Linda in some ways as *his* creation” (Roberts 1994, 141, emphasis Roberts’).

Third, there is Flem Snopes who “was her father even if he did have to be her enemy” (Snopes 629). He tries to civilize Linda by the choice and the content of higher education she will receive. He thus sends her to a female academy—“one of the last of those gentle and stubbornly fading anachronisms called Miss So-and-So’s or The So-and-So Female Academy or institute whose curriculum includes deportment and china-painting, which continue to dot the South though the rest of the United States knows them no more” (Snopes 597).

Although quite different from Gavin’s, Flem’s intentions show similar adherence to the concept of a woman as the tabula rasa. In much the same way, he wants to construct Linda to become an obedient, dutiful, and submissive daughter who should be

homely and frightened from birth and hence doomed to spinsterhood to that extent that her coeval young men would as one have taken one glance at her and then forgot they had ever seen her; and the one who would finally ask for her hand would have one eye, probably both, on her (purported) father's money and so would be malleable to his hand. (Snopes 595)

Lastly, the early twentieth-century Southern culture and society believed that college education presented "proper youthful behavior for a young woman [and] a pleasant interlude on the way to growing up" (Graham 1978, 770–771).

Linda, however, subverts the Southern womanhood mythology by living her life far from the reach of patriarchal control. Her subversion of Southern womanhood operates as a travesty and/or transgression of everything she is expected to do, say, or think. Specifically, unlike her grandmother who "was one of the best housewives in the county and was indefatigable at it" (Snopes 95) and her mother who worked "behind the counter in the restaurant in another greasy apron, frying the hamburgers and eggs and ham and the tough pieces of steak on the grease-crusted kerosene griddle" (Snopes 358), Linda has not developed any inclination for homemaking. For "what would she want in a Ladies' Auxiliary, raffling off homemade jam and lamp shades. Even if she could make jam, since obviously cooking is the last thing a sculptor would demand of his girl" (Snopes 850). In much the same way, Linda subverts another facet of the Southern womanhood myth: the one concerning the necessity of student performance in the Southern belle's education. She was thus "the year's number-one student, the class's valedictorian" (Snopes 521–522). Similarly, she let Gavin Stevens feed her with poetry, John Donne in particular, and sweets, but somehow she appeared equally interested in geometry.

Further investigation helps to reveal that Linda, although young and inexperienced, understood the rules of Flem's world and was ready to compromise to escape the South. She thus issued her will—"it was her idea. She did it herself. . . . she thought of it, wanted to do it, did it herself" (Snopes 626–627) —and gave "her share of whatever she would inherit from . . . [Eula] to her fa—him" (Snopes 626)—Flem. Flem let her go and she fled out of the South to Greenwich Village in New York—"a place with a few unimportant boundaries but no limitations where young people of any age go to seek dreams" (Snopes 652). And Linda found there more than one dream: she became a radical and an activist, married a Jew sculptor Barton Kohl, went to fight in the Spanish Civil War, and eventually escaped the South and its discourses.

Linda's deconstruction of the Southern female habit does not stop with her linguistic and educational otherness; it is also brought into being by her unwillingness to participate in Southern phallocentric economy which commodifies women and values them according to their usefulness to patriarchy or their exchangeability in patriarchy. Unlike all other women characters in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels and short stories, Linda is not presented as yet another exchange object in the marriage market. By living "with the guy for years before they married" (Snopes 857) and wasting in this way her pure exchange value of the virgin, she not only refused to operate as goods in Southern phallocentric economy but also demonstrated that she is a free subject fully in control of her mind, her body, and her

sexuality. In other words, “if the contractual concept of law is shown in Faulkner to quantify women’s bodies as a matter of course and custom, then Linda may be seen as breaking that custom” (Lahey 1993, 521). She is even courageous enough to verbalize her desire:

“I love you,” she said. “Even when I have to tell a lie, you have already invented it for me.”

...

I wrote *No*

“But you can me,” she said. That’s right. She used the explicit word, speaking the hard brutal guttural in the quacking duck’s voice. . . .

“You’re blushing,” she said.

I wrote *that word*

“What word?”

that you just said

“Tell me another one to use. Write it down so I can see it and remember it.” (Snopes 892, emphasis Faulkner’s)

The omitted but, nevertheless, present F-word in Linda’s discourse strikes at the heart of the idea of the Southern female habit encapsulating in one word not only her distance from idealized Southern womanhood but also her partaking in the construction of her own sexual desire. In this way, she refuses to fall victim to the taboos and the codes of behavior that numbed her grandmother and destroyed her mother.

In being in legal, verbal, and bodily control of her sexuality, Linda manages to subvert one more aspect of the Southern womanhood myth: one which determined the boundaries of femininity and masculinity in Southern cultural and social discourses. By wearing male overalls, “building ships for Russia” (Snopes 906) in Pascagoula, driving an ambulance in the Spanish Civil War, drinking, smoking, and being the first and only war “hero” (Snopes 858) in Jefferson, Linda “challenges the one-sided, abusive distribution of power” (Entzminger 2002, 21), undermines the gender-segregated inscription of Southern patriarchy, and makes it somehow androgynous or, to quote William Faulkner, “rather sexless” (Snopes 899). In the narrative space of the Snopes trilogy, Linda is the one that has the phallus in the sense that she performs masculine acts of power denied to women of her time. She “out-womans women on the surface, and underneath she out-mans men” (Entzminger 2002, 8). As if to justify this point, Faulkner depicts Linda as a woman-warrior with “a fine, a really splendid dramatic white streak in her hair running along the top of her skull almost like a plume” (Snopes 989). Her “manliness,” however, does not endanger her femininity; it “serve[s] to separate her from the conventional woman, to minimize sex without destroying the power to attract” (Vickery 1986, 207).

Challenges to the Southern womanhood myth do not stop with Linda’s linguistic, educational, and sexual placelessness in the Southern patriarchal matrix. They are also present in Linda’s questioning of Southern class and race issues which she approaches from, for a white upper-class woman, a rather unusual point of view—that of “a communist” (Snopes 869) and a “*Nigger Lover*” (Snopes 881, emphasis Faulkner’s). In “meddling with the Negroes” (Snopes 877) and being their

“political affliator” (Snopes 870), Linda shows, to quote Soda Hiroaki, that “the white Jeffersons who socially and economically controlled Jefferson feared not the Communism itself but its association with African-Americans” (2002). In this specific fictional instance, she also unmasks Southern reality, in which “the socio-economic structure (class structure) and the racism structure were closely connected—in fact, the latter supported the former” (Hiroaki 2002). In Linda’s case, communism (as the class ideology) and antiracism (as the civil rights activism) are closely related and seen as constituent parts of the deconstructed and demythologized Southern “utopia.”

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