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The Cost of Kinship:
Southern Literary Families and the Capitalist Machine

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
University of Mississippi

Joshua Lundy
August 2012

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the thematic role of families and the familial in the literature of the Southern Renaissance. Whereas a number of scholars have come at this matter from a strictly cultural perspective, this analysis utilizes an economic framework. Following the example set by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, I attempt to formulate an understanding of the southern family not as an independent and singular social organism, but, rather, as a mechanism for the distribution of capital, firmly embedded within modern capitalism's expansive network of production, consumption, and exchange. My argument is that the ruptures and various points of tension that typify so many of the southern literary families encountered during this time period indicate not so much the degradation of an older social order, as has often been suggested, but, instead, the proper functioning of a fundamentally economic device.

In order to make this case, I examine two of the key texts from the Southern Renaissance: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* (1946). Both novels are preeminently concerned with the breakdown of families that appear to embody the "Old South" ideal. Moreover, both novels repeatedly frame these breakdowns within the context of contemporary economic concerns. Employing the work of historians such as Gavin Wright, Grace Elizabeth Hale, and C. Vann Woodward, I argue that this pattern of familial dissolution indicates the manner in which such families function as extensions of the operational logic that characterized the New South economy, engendering those repeating cycles of destruction upon which modern capitalism relies.

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INTRODUCTION: FAMILIAL ECONOMIES/FAMILY AS ECONOMIC APPARATUS

Donald Kartiganer has suggested that William Faulkner may well be “the premier American novelist of the family” (381). A valid enough proposition. Tracing the convoluted contours of those intertwining genealogies that make up the social landscape of his imagined Yoknapatawpha county, Faulkner’s novels are pre-eminently, and almost uniformly, concerned with the familial. But within his own time and place, Faulkner was hardly alone in harboring this preoccupation with matters of family. Eudora Welty, Faulkner’s neighbor to the south, was equally attuned to the manner in which matters of legacy and filiation informed our understanding of the human condition, something recognized by numerous critics, including such figures as Dan Fabricant, Sara McAlpin, and Noel Polk. However, while many critics have recognized the central importance of family in the work of both authors, it is my contention that their understanding of the form and function of the familial within these works has often been skewed, informed as they are by certain presuppositions about what a family should or should not be. In order to counteract this trend, I want to examine the southern family as it appears in the works of Faulkner and Welty and to do so through an economic lens, in particular that framework established by the cultural and economic revolution generally referred to as the New South. By doing so, I believe we might finally come to an apprehension of the southern literary family in its rawest form, one informed by an appreciation for its most rudimentary operations within the social field.

A primary reason for what I am here interpreting as the fundamental misunderstanding of the southern literary family has been the influence of what one might call the pastoral myth, first developed in the post-Reconstruction era and then codified, in as sense, by the Agrarians in the early twentieth century. Empowered by the methodological dictates of New Criticism, many early scholars of the Southern Renaissance actually helped to perpetuate this mythic quality of southern narrative by generally refusing to acknowledge any forces outside the text proper. Critics such as Irving Howe, Cleanth Brooks, and Michael Millgate, emphasized the primacy of symbol and archetype. Even when such matters as history or economy were given due consideration, their impact was mitigated by a sustained emphasis on representationality and metaphor. In her seminal essay on William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Olga Vickery interprets the tragic downfall of Thomas Sutpen as representative of the antebellum south's own decline. However, Vickery's reading of this decline is thoroughly allegorical, positioning Sutpen not so much in history as such, but rather a very particular historical narrative. For some of Vickery's colleagues, even this allegorical treatment proved a bit much to swallow. Millgate, for one, insisted that Sutpen's downfall in fact reflected a contemporary degeneration within American society as a whole, a degeneracy that Millgate maintained was actually more prevalent outside the South.

Because of this Agrarian influence, many of these early scholars perceived the southern literary family in much the same way they viewed the South itself, as something static and immutable. Mother, Father, Son, and Daughter figure in these readings as narrowly defined archetypes rather than products of a particular socio-economic reality, flesh-and-blood avatars of those supposed verities of the human, or simply southern, condition. Although altering the critical framework and opening up new and undeniably product avenues of exploration, the

psychoanalytical works of the 70s, including such seminal publications as John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest*, simply reinforced this archetypal perception of the southern family, insisting that southern figures be read through the lens of a narrowly defined Freudian type. If, as John William Corrington and Miller Williams suggest, the familial and the communal are central to any understanding of the south and southern culture, then it would seem that such myopic interpretations of the southern family pose a genuine problem for reading the South in manner that is thorough and accurate and eschews the temptations of mythic or reductive narrative regarding tortured scions, chaste matriarchs, wise mammies or the like (McAlpin 480).

Fortunately, criticism of the last thirty years or so has increasingly distanced itself from these various essentializing tendencies, recognizing more and more the manner in which (southern) literature is both situated in and responsive to the economic and material realities of history. Faulkner has received a particularly notable amount of attention in this regard. In *Fictions of Labor*, for example, Richard Godden proposes that "the long decade of Faulkner's greatest work" locates its root and inspiration in "a labor trauma," and that what has often been read as abstract interrogations of race, gender, and class are in fact historically concrete responses to the shifting realities of the southern economy in the early twentieth century (Godden 1). Similarly, Kevin Railey suggests that much of Faulkner's early work reflects the author's, as well as the south's, attempts to negotiate between the competing socio-economic frameworks that characterized the New South: paternalism and liberalism. According to Railey, many of Faulkner's texts serve "a productive critical function, pointing to the failings of the ideological solutions determined by real human agents in history" (Railey 45).

Like Faulkner, Eudora Welty, another of the Southern Renaissance's major figures, has also been the subject of much critical reconsideration in recent years, particularly in regards to

matters of economic and political history. Even more than those concerning her neighbor to the north, these reassessments of Welty's work signal a major shift in the approach to southern letters given that Welty work was long perceived as being resolutely ahistorical, a literary exemplar, in certain respects, of that Agrarian ideal of a timeless and immutable south, immune to the vagaries of modernization. Barbara Ladd cites one early reviewer who "suggested that Welty made a conscious decision, in order to clear space for her own voice, to stay out of the Dixie Special's territory, to avoid History" (Ladd 52). But as Ladd points out, Welty's seemingly ahistorical approach actually functions as an interrogative mechanism, excavating the often-ignored elements constituting southern history, particularly the role of women. Susan Donaldson offers a similar assessment, asserting that Welty's focus on so-called "domestic" matters does not ignore larger questions of historicity, but rather questions the means by which historical narrative is constructed, establishing a narrative wherein "the male hero of history...retreats to the back of the stage, while those figures who would ordinarily serve as his supporting players – his wife, nieces, sisters, and sister-in-law – his background, as it were, step to the front" (Donaldson 5). This revelatory recalibration of historical narrative is evident as well in Brannon Costello's reading of Welty's early novels, works that, according to Costello, offer candid, if sometimes oblique, examinations of class and race in the modern south (Costello 39). The great benefit of such critical reconsiderations is the manner in which they denaturalize (southern) historical narrative, exposing with full force the numerous contingencies – and complexities – that undergird historiography.

Since the particular contingencies at issue in this study are economic and material in nature, these newer readings of southern literature are also helpful for the way in which they expose the expansive and interconnected network in which the south is, and has always been,

situated, thereby extricating southern narrative from the hermetic isolation in which had for so long been sealed. This trend is particularly evident in that body of critical work that examines southern authors through the lens of the south's slave economy and its persistent residual effects in postbellum American society. Examining the question of how race might be most effectively examined in the works of Faulkner and Toni Morrison, Erik Dussere insists upon the importance of economic considerations, noting that "if slavery's foundation was the attempt to transform people into monetary value, then this attempt was the initial act in an ongoing process by which cultural traditions of race in America have been figured through concepts such as debt and repayment, exchange and accounting, property and the market" (Dussere 1). For Dussere the persistent influence of slavery in southern culture is most particularly evident in the quasi-mythic status of ledgers and other material embodiments of calculation. But as Melanie Benson points out, this numerical conception of social organization is not necessarily restricted to matters of race or the legacy of slavery. Benson maintains that "the calculations of twentieth-century southerners are so 'disturbing' precisely because they evoke not slavery's cold calculus but that of American capitalism in its most basic and enduring forms" (Benson 2). In other words, it is not simply a matter of slave economy specifically, but of the capitalist economy more generally and the rapacious logic of consumption and exploitation on which it is based. Such a distinction is vitally important in that it acknowledges the specificity of particular cultural-historical phenomenon, while simultaneously situating that phenomenon within the broader apparatus of modern capitalism, thereby positioning the south – and "southernness" – within, rather than in opposition to, a national and, in some respects, international framework.

Benson's analysis is also revealing in the way it decenters the southern economy and culture, linking both quantities to a broader economic matrix. The preponderance of numerical

calculations in the construction of southern identity is, according to Benson, a reflection of the southerner's "narcissistic desire to own the colonizer's (that is, the northern capitalist's) world" (Benson 5). Consequently, what we might identify as the southern condition cannot, in the light of economic and historical realities, be isolated within the geographic or conceptual parameters of a presumed south.

This has obvious consequences for how we read the form and function of the southern family, for if the family serves as the pivot point not in a static field of constancy but rather as a central node in the fluid network of the modern (southern) economy, it would seem that such a social organism must, by definition, be thoroughly heterogeneous and essentially ever-changing. Indeed, many scholars in the field New World Studies have made this a central conceit in their analysis of southern literature. Critics such as George Handley have noted that rather than signifying an immutable archetype, the family actually serves a thoroughly deconstructive role in modern literary works. "Writing about family history," Handley explains, "allows the authors to revise the metaphorical meanings of genealogy that have been assumed by the plantocracy and by emergent nationalists and that have contributed to a consolidation of their landowning social power" (Handley 3). Rather than a mechanism for ensuring a uniform mode of social continuity, the family represents a complex network of interlocking parts, one that, in its genuine rather than mythological contours, actually undermines rhetorics of homogeneous "purity."

However, as important as these new avenues of critical interpretation undoubtedly are, I would argue that in some respects they do not go far enough in excavating the material foundation underlying those texts that constitute the Southern Renaissance. For while critics such as Handley and Benson certainly break new ground through her examination of how matters of economy undergird literary representations of the modern south, their analysis remains, to my

mind, still too reliant on matters of symbol and metaphor. Benson, for instance, understands the influence of financial calculation on southern identity as being a primarily symbolic matter involved in the psychological process of identity formation. The point is certainly legitimate, and indeed very important for any consideration of southern culture. However, it ignores many of the more material factors in play and how such factors – commodities, labor capital – compel or inhibit particular actions and ideologies within the social structure of the south. My interest here is not simply in understanding how the relationship between capitalism and the southern family produces particular symbolic and social economies, but, more importantly, how such a relationship constitutes a unified and interdependent ontology, a system wherein the antinomies of capital correspond to those marking the familial dynamic, and vice versa. To be sure, metaphor is never entirely escapable, particularly in regards to matters of production and economy. Value is, after all, an entirely representational quantity without objective referent in the strictly material sphere. Marx himself notes that our modern conception of valuation, as something exceeding the rudimentary constraints of use-value, is in fact a kind of fetishization, an embodiment of abstracted labor. Even so, my aim here is to attempt, as best I can, to map out the complex economic network that helps to formulate the form and function of the modern southern literary family, the manner in which the cotton economy of the early twentieth century informs our understanding of the Fairchilds or the manner in which shifting patterns of commerce influence the “downfall” of the Compson family.

My reason for doing this is quite simply that I believe a reconsideration of the family through a “strictly” materialist/economic lens opens up new avenues for considering how familial structures operated in the era of the New South and how exactly it was positioned within the broader socio-economic schema. My central claim is that southern familial identity, whether

conceived singularly as father, mother, son, daughter, etc., or collectively as family, depends upon an integration into, rather than an opposition to, the modern economy. Above all, I want to argue – and emphasize – that both Faulkner and Welty expose the manner in which the vital interplay between family and economy meant that even those social forces putatively opposed to the modern economy were actually instrumental in facilitating its implementation and perpetuation in southern society.

In order to do this I will be examining two texts, works that, depending upon one's definition, effectively bookend the Southern Renaissance. These are: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* (1946). While sixteen years separate the publication of the two novels, the narratives themselves inhabit a shared temporal space, one positioned squarely in the shadow of the ascendant New South economy, a vital historical factor that will play an important role in the analysis that follows since it serves as the primary cultural framework for both texts. Moreover, both novels take place in Mississippi, meaning that while both texts certainly gesture towards broader questions of how the modern economy affected matters of social organization in the south, they also establish a narrow enough framework so that we might treat them as a kind of joint test case. I read both novels as being preeminently concerned with the intersection between family and economy, particularly as that intersection existed and functioned in the context of the New South. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner figures the dissolution of the Compson clan as a direct response to the shifting realities of bourgeois culture in the face of the New South economy, a response that demonstrates the deep-seated ties between matters of economy and filiation. Likewise, Welty's *Delta Wedding* examines the structural contradictions inherent in the familial organism through a parallel exploration of contradictions within the plantation economy in the early twentieth century.

Following the theoretical precedent established by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* and later refined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their two-part work, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, I locate one of the primary mechanisms – arguably *the* primary mechanism – for this process of integration is the complex process of what I here will refer to as integrative consumption,¹ a distinctly bourgeois mode of consuming that encompasses both the physical and the metaphysical in a single intricate system, the design of which I examine in greater detail in the following chapter. For now it will suffice to note that both Marx and Engels and Deleuze and Guattari identify this particular kind of consumption as the primary function defining the modern bourgeois family. Owners rather than workers, the bourgeoisie distinguish themselves from the laboring class by consuming rather than producing, an ostensibly passive mode of “labor” that characterizes both the Compson and the Fairchild clans. In particular, both families maintain their social status through the consumption of black labor. Consequently, I want to suggest that in order to understand who and what the Compsons and the Fairchilds are as social organisms and what accounts for the apparent dissolution of these families, particular attention must be given to the various patterns of bourgeois consumption in which they engage.

But if consumption serves as the one of the primary mechanism by which the bourgeois family defines itself, this process of consuming simultaneously compromises any notion of the family as a static and insular social organism. To consume – whether it be foodstuffs, commodities, labor, or even ideological frameworks – entails the incorporation of outside, or alien, forces within either the self or the larger social body (i.e. the family). This paradoxical

¹ For convenience sake I will henceforward refer to this process simply as consumption. However, it should be borne in mind that I employ this term in order to denote not only the act of literal of ingestion but also those other various manners in which capital becomes integrated within the fabric of the bourgeois family, including the acquisition of goods, the promulgation of ideology, and, of course, the accumulation of capital.

arrangement is reflected in both Faulkner and Welty's texts, as well as the particular historical context in which both texts are situated. Set in 1920s Mississippi, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Delta Wedding* both respond to the social realities that characterized the New South, including the influence of increasing industrialization and shifting modes of commerce. In particular, both texts explore the impact of what C. Vann Woodward famously described as the colonial economy, an economic model wherein northern and foreign investment bankrolled new industries while maintaining both financial and operational control. Consequently, southern identity became increasingly entangled in, and reliant upon, a network of influences that ranged far outside the presumed boundaries of the American South.

Even within the local economies of the south, such tension between internal and external is clearly evident in those local labor arrangements that simultaneously established and complicated the ostensibly rigid lines of demarcation distinguishing the two major spheres of racial identity. It is this tension, situated within its specifically southern context, that Godden identifies as "a labor trauma," "a primal scene of recognition during which white passes into black and black passes into white along perceptual tracks necessitated by a singular and pervasively coercive system of production" (Godden 1). Relying on black labor not just for the production of those goods that form the basis of their personal wealth, but also their very sense of identity – reliant as it is on such production, and, more particularly, the capacity for consumption thereby enabled – the south's white bourgeoisie is forever in danger of merging, symbolically or biologically, with blackness. This is particularly apparent in *Delta Wedding* where the influence of labor is continually complicating static notions of whiteness, especially in regards to Dabney's marriage to Troy Flavin, Shellmound's Irish – and consequently "off-white" – overseer. Moreover, both novels examine the manner in which this complex racial dynamic

simultaneously complicates concepts of class. If bourgeois families like the Compsons and the Fairchilds are indeed reliant on the toil of a laboring class, if the very nature and form of their collective identity is in many respects the consequence of such labor, just how distinct are these families from those figures – black or white – that have been coded as socio-economic others?

This question of how labor complicated the integrity of social categories was a notable sticking point in the development of the New South economy, particularly in the agrarian sector. In an attempt to neutralize the implications of this paradoxical state of affairs, southern conservatives devised a number of ideological techniques that “mythologized” the nature of social relations in the post-bellum south. This mythologizing process was particularly apparent in the complex rhetoric surrounding black-white labor relations and especially the development of southern “paternalism,” a cornerstone of conservative ideology defined by Costello as “a whole range of racialized social practices stemming from a belief that African Americans are fundamentally inferior, even childlike, and, as such, require the almost parental care and protection of well-to-do-whites” (Costello 4). Framed within a kind of pseudo-familial discourse – what Richard King refers to as the southern family romance – paternalism effectively hid the brutality of slavery, and later on, various modes of exploitive black labor, behind a veil of presumed necessity, insisting as it did that blacks were little more than children, incapable of handling their own affairs. Moreover, by conceiving of their labor force as children, the planter class was able to view their economic endeavors as a familial rather than a capitalist enterprise. But even as this fantasy of southern society as an extended metaphorical family managed to suture some of the fissures opened up by the inherent paradoxes in the New South economy, it also managed to open up new points of contention. King puts matters rather succinctly, stating: “To recognize blacks would be to soil the purity of the racial-social lineage, the infrastructure of

the tradition. On the other hand the family romance also claimed that blacks were ‘childlike’ and thus permanent members of the metaphorical Southern family” (37). This inherent contradiction within paternalist ideology rendered it susceptible to breakdown. Significantly, it is just such a breakdown in strict racial and class divisions that frames much of the dissolution attending the Compsons and Fairchilds in their respective familial dramas, their shared difficulty in retaining a clearly defined status as “pure white” southern bourgeoisie.

In both novels, this breakdown in the paternalistic order is often understood as a failure of perpetuation, a difficulty or outright inability to reproduce a particular vision of southern culture in the movement from one generation to the next. While generally non-productive in terms of traditionally defined labor, the bourgeoisie are deeply invested in matters of biological and ideological reproduction and so too are the Compsons and the Fairchilds. This too is very much evident in the southern familial structure as envisioned by Faulkner and Welty. Narrative, custom, and, particularly in the instance of *The Sound and the Fury*, education are revealed as primary devices by which ideological frameworks are replicated within the familial sphere. And while such conceptual matters as custom or education might seem at first glance to be thoroughly immaterial in nature, both Faulkner and Welty reveal how they are in fact deeply embedded within material networks of exchange, exposing in turn how what would otherwise appear to be self-serving and hermetic familial practices – marriage, continuation of family lore, receiving an education – are in fact inextricably bound up in a webwork of broader economic concerns. In order to send Quentin to Harvard, the Compsons must sell Benjy’s pasture; in order to marry off Dabney in proper plantocratic fashion, the Fairchilds must purchase a number of manufactured goods from Memphis and elsewhere. Continuity and replication are therefore continually framed within economic terms.

This material aspect of reproduction is particularly apparent in the manner in which it is inscribed upon the bodies of the female members of the Compson and Fairchild clans, establishing a particularly southern “economy of women.” In both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Delta Wedding*, the female body is rendered a kind of contested commodity in a network of sexual exchange, providing the southern family with a biological mechanism for perpetuating their position within society while simultaneously rendering the family susceptible to “contamination” from outside forces. Indeed, it would seem that for both Faulkner and Welty, the most glaring indication of the paradoxical position the southern family found itself in under the New South’s economic regime is the frantic anxiety attending matters of female sexuality, particularly where daughters are concerned. To be sure, notions of chaste white southern womanhood pre-date the advent of the New South. However, both Faulkner and Welty frame their portrayal of female sexuality, and gender politics more generally, within the socio-economic context of the New South, and particularly the debate surrounding the phenomenon of the so-called New Woman, that turn-of-the-century figure whose unprecedented independence was directly correlated to her unprecedented access to disposable income; income, more importantly, derived from her own labor. The influence of this phenomenon is reflected in Caddie’s romantic forays with “town squirts,” itself an example of the relatively new and economically driven custom of dating, and Dabney’s teasing remark regarding her barefooted female friends who stay up all night dancing, an allusion to the libertine customs that characterized social life in the roaring 20s, even in such a purportedly conservative enclave as the Delta.

Outside the text-proper, both works are also positioned in historical moments of particular socio-economic import. Published in 1929, the year of the great stock market crash,

The Sound and the Fury is also shadowed by a series of “mini-depressions” that wreaked havoc on Mississippi’s cotton industry in the early 1920s, as well as the great flood of 1927 that proved equally devastating for the local economy. Consequently, Faulkner was writing in a time when the volatility of southern markets was being increasingly understood in negative terms, particularly in regards to its impact on social stability. Conversely, *Delta Wedding*’s publication in 1946, immediately following the conclusion of World War II situates the text in an era of almost unprecedented prosperity that witnessed the rise of America as the economic superpower on the world stage. Such prosperity was defined in no small part by the development of new patterns of consumption, evidenced in new modes of advertisement and the rise of the metropolitan suburbs, as well as the advent of the military industrial complex. Arguably, both these periods also represented “high water marks” for the distinctly bourgeois culture of consumption.

Before concluding this introduction, I would like to offer a few comments regarding what some might well perceive as my misapplication of the term “bourgeois.” Although traditionally framed as members of the planter class, it is the contention of this study that it is in fact more accurate, and indeed more critically beneficial, to understand both the Compsons and the Fairchilds as bourgeois families, albeit for distinctly different reasons. In the former instance, it is not apparent that any member of the Compson family has any direct ties to matters of agrarian production. Although particular family members attempt to cultivate an aristocratic mien, they are in fact a clan of merchants and business professionals. Jason Compson III, the family patriarch, is a lawyer who habitually neglects his practice while the inheritor of his name, Jason the IV, is a figure of mercantile economy, selling goods to the local farming community and attempting to profit from cotton production on the stock exchange, but in no way actually a part

of the south's plantocratic culture. The bourgeois nature of Faulkner's fictional family is equally evident in their relationship to the land. Living on property situated well within the boundaries of Jefferson, the Compsons are very much "townfolk," as opposed to the rural figures that constituted the southern plantocracy, a topographical positioning that would also suggest that their familial plot would not be sufficient for undertaking agrarian production on the plantation scale. Moreover, the Compsons profit from their land not through cultivation but through selling off small parcels to various private interests over a number of years.

On the other hand, while the Fairchilds are undoubtedly members of the southern plantocracy, Welty's novel exposes the manner in which the aristocratic pretensions cultivated by the south's planter class were in fact thoroughly erroneous, designed to cover up what was in fact an unmistakably bourgeois enterprise. Historians for a long time understood the planter class as being, at the very least, quasi-aristocratic since they engaged in nothing like modern industry employ slave rather than paid labor. But as Clyde Woods observes, "capitalist development...often...is established in the countryside first," and, moreover, slaves were in fact "subsistence wage workers" (46). This distinction becomes all the more evident with the transference from slave labor to "free" paid labor, a complication for the plantocratic mythology that Welty explores in a comical re-imagining of the concept of money laundering. As a number of critics have pointed out, including Costello and Patricia Yaeger, this discrepancy between bourgeois identity and aristocratic pretense, itself a key example of how southern familial identity was formed through an often problematic integration into modern economy, functions as one of the primary points of thematic tension in *Delta Wedding*.

But it is the distinction in how Faulkner and Welty cope with this tension between ideal and reality that renders the relationship between their respective texts most intriguing and

critically valuable. Noel Polk observes that “Faulkner’s struggle is epic, a heroic confrontation between cosmic forces...that are eternally antagonistic to each other and to human peace: one lives only under the terms of existential combat” (Polk 11). This antagonism is certainly present in *The Sound and the Fury*, with more than one character conceiving of himself as being at war with the existential forces ranged against him. However, the polarities that constitute such binaries are rarely pleasant: for Quentin, it ultimately becomes a matter of concession or repudiation, an impotent existence or the clean flames of Hell, familial and economic normativity or the realization of one’s “true self.” If Kevin Railey is correct in claiming that this novel is where Faulkner first attempted to work out a place for himself between the competing social modes of paternalism and liberalism, positions that Faulkner apparently found equally untenable, there is a way in which Quentin’s static entrapment between comparably unfavorable options mirrors the predicament of his creator.

Welty in *Delta Wedding* – indeed, in all her work – firmly rejects this notion absolute duality. While the Fairchild’s undeniably display a propensity for dualistic thinking, the narrative ultimately seeks out a tertiary space between the various spatial, personal, economic, and ideological oppositions that accumulate over the course of the novel. Significantly, Welty locates this space between cultural polarities in what seems for the Compsons one of the most difficult quantities to negotiate: perpetuation of the family line. Among other things, Dabney’s marriage to Troy signals an attempt to conceive of a way around the opposition of insider and outsider, tradition and novelty. Coded as distinctly other, Troy is nonetheless part of the local plantation economy; by marrying Troy, Dabney formulates a way to enact continuity with difference, an act of appropriation that mirrors the complex mechanisms of the Capitalist Machine.

Placed side by side, the two texts constitute a developing discourse regarding how the southern family might overcome the paradoxical position in which it finds itself, relying upon the vast and homogenizing network of modern capital in order to realize its own sense of singularity. For Faulkner, it would seem, there is ultimately no position outside the push and pull of these polarities. For Welty, though, re-conceiving what these polarities mean – what the nature of family is; what the nature of economy is – constitutes a, admittedly modest, means for opening up a space of redemption and genuine self-realization – a land of “other cotton.”

BLOODLINES AND THE SOUTHERN MACHINE(S): THEORIZING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN FAMILY AND CAPITAL

“Affections, and long memories, attach to the ancient bowers of life in the provinces; but they will not attach to what is always changing.” -- John Crowe Ransom (1930)²

John Crowe Ransom’s meditations on the value of tradition and constancy, outlined in his essay “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” could well serve as an exemplar for a particular body of rhetoric concerning the purportedly inherent nature of Southern culture. Distilling various strains of discourse drawn from Redemption politics, Lost Cause ideology, and the Agrarian movement, of which Ransom was a central figure, the poet and scholar formulates a vision of an ideal and supposedly authentic South that stands in firm opposition to the vagaries of industrial development and modernization, the social and economic revolutions that would come to define the so-called ‘New South’ during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although condemned by many for advocating a regressive approach toward regional politics, many of the sentiments expressed in Ransom’s essay have still managed to exert a profound and persistent influence on the manner in which the South is both portrayed and perceived within the American imaginary.³ Although published two years after the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* and sixteen years prior to the publication of *Delta Wedding*, the vision outlined in Ransom’s essay nonetheless articulates the specific contours of the cultural framework in which both novels

² Ransom, John Crow. “Reconstructed but Unregenerate.” *I’ll Take My Stand*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983. 5.

³ Cf. Louis D. Rubin, Jr.’s introduction to *I’ll Take My Stand*.

operate, and against which, I want argue, both also stand opposed.

As Nicolas Tredell has demonstrated, the influence of the Agrarians has been particularly apparent in the realm of literary representation (Tredell 60). A critic as well as a poet, Ransom, along with such fellow Agrarians as Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, was instrumental in establishing the symbolic framework through which we read southern literary works, a framework deeply invested in the notion of a dichotomous world split between tradition and progress, and with authenticity and moral rectitude understood as attributes of the former. This has no doubt affected the manner in which critics have long approached many of the central motifs in southern literature, such as violence, gender, and memory. And it has certainly had an impact on how we interpret literary representations of the southern family, particularly those found in the work of Faulkner and Welty.

Critical assessments of the southern literary family have long hewed to notions of metaphoricity and idealism, betraying pre-occupations with what the family should be and how it should function according to certain cultural presuppositions.⁴ Such criticism reinforces the Agrarian conflict between tradition and progress, figuring the southern family as stable entity under siege from the outside forces of change. By doing so, such criticism also finds itself invested in two problematic fallacies. The first is simply the persistent belief in an ideal and immutable form known as ‘the family.’ The second is a concomitant perception that the relationship between the family and society-at-large is inherently antagonistic and binary, engaged in a form of negotiation that always presupposes firm lines of demarcation. Neither of these propositions stands up to scrutiny. As Michael J. Shapiro observes, “the ‘family’ is a contingent form of association with unstable boundaries and varying structures” (Shapiro 2). The

⁴ This tendency is particularly apparent in the first major wave of Faulkner critics, Irving Howe and Michael Milligate being particularly salient examples. Cf. Irving Howe’s *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*. Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991. 3 – 10.

purpose of this analysis is to map out the coordinates of these various contingencies, particularly as they relate to the spheres of economics and industrial progression. Through my examination of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Delta Wedding* I will attempt to formulate an understanding of the southern literary family that moves beyond the tradition of Agrarian binarism and embraces a more thoroughly materialist reading.

Patterns of Privacy

Contemporary notions regarding the form and function of the purportedly immutable nuclear family unit originate in the cultural revolutions of a specific historical era. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, American kinship networks underwent a series of dramatic alterations both structural and conceptual, perhaps the most significant of which was the compression of the basic familial organism. While the family had long been organized around a central core, or ‘nucleus,’ the nature of this organizing locus in pre-modern⁵ times was distinctly more nebulous in both principal and in practice than it is today; “non-kin could, and did, join this unit [including] orphans, apprentices, hired laborers, and a variety of children ‘bound out’ for a time in conditions of fosterage” (Demos 47). Even within the more narrow parameters of filiation, extension was the rule rather than the exception and it was by no means uncommon to encounter several generations of far-flung kin inhabiting the same domicile, distinctions between mother and grandmother, first-cousin and second-cousin, bearing little significance beyond basic nominal designations (and the ever developing prohibitions against incest) (Engels 103 – 110).

Such porous and infinitely malleable attitudes towards matters of alliance reflected an

⁵ Following the lead of Michel Foucault and Marshall Berman, this analysis locates the origins of modernity somewhere around the end of the 18th century, alongside the ascent of the Industrial Revolution.

absence of strict divisions between private and public spheres, an absence that allowed for easy transference between what would later become distinct – and, particularly in the south, segregated – social bodies (Marx 55). Prior to the nineteenth century, networks of association moved seamlessly through various communal sites such as home, church, and the workplace by enacting a series of successive transmutations. John Demos illustrates this point by noting how during church services, New England families in 17th and 18th centuries effectively fragmented in order to reconstitute themselves as members of the congregation, men on one side of the main aisle, women on the other, children relegated either to the back or upstairs galleries (Demos 48). As this distributive practice indicates, the pre-modern family did not simply enter into the sphere of a particular religious community. Rather, by undergoing a kind of temporary dissolution, the familial unit enabled its various coordinates to “plug-into” the circuit of a complimentary social network. A similar relationship can be discerned in the domain of labor, as evidenced by the phenomena of hereditary guilds and various forms of communal production; at the dawn of America’s Industrial Revolution, many families worked side by side in the country’s new urban factories (Hareven 221).

In the face of increasing industrialization, however, the various tendrils composing this extensive social network effectively receded, being drawn back into the tightly congealed and distinctly more isolated cultural formation that became the modern America family. Social bodies gradually transformed into private spheres, establishing definitive, if necessarily mobile, boundaries. Families now sat through church services as a unit, and by “the early 1830s, the development of new machinery had introduced specialization, so that families no longer worked together in the factory” (Hareven 221). The familial body no longer merged effortlessly with the congregation, just as the congregational body ceased to merge effortlessly with the labor force,

and so on throughout the larger social network. This fervent sense of unity and distinction from other social bodies defines the operational nature of Welty's Fairchilds; it is the failure to secure such unity or realize such distinction that is often cited as the undoing of Faulkner's Compsons. Modernity thus ushered in a regime of division, establishing a matrix of interlocking binaries upon which society mapped out its operational and ideological coordinates, a tactical mode that Michel Foucault has characterized as "the art of distributions." Whereas the dispersal of bodies within a given space functioned as a mechanism for synthesis in the pre-modern era, such social technology was reconceived in the modern age as an instrument of disjuncture, emphasizing not so much the actual distribution of individuals proper, but, rather, the pattern of gaps and fissures thereby produced, the development of an intensely fragmentary "cellular" grid where "each individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (Foucault 143). In this bifurcated order, the "nineteenth-century family – far from joining and complementing other social networks, as in the earlier period – seemed to stand wholly apart. Indeed its relation to society at large had been very nearly reversed so as to become a kind of adversary relation" (Demos 50). This adversarial relationship was largely defined by the notion that the home, and what came to be known as home-life, served as a "refuge" from the chaos of the outside world, particularly in what was increasingly perceived as the maelstrom of industrial progress and rampant capitalism (Demos 51). Moreover, this dichotomy was articulated in explicitly moral terms, with the family serving as a consistent ethical counterweight to the pernicious currents thought to be forever circulating through the public sphere (Shapiro 53).

Familial Production

As noted above, the various social recalibrations that occurred during the course of the nineteenth century were essentially operational and ideological in nature. However, there was one particular element of the familial structure that carried over from the pre-modern era: its social character. Specifically, the family continued to function as the central distributive mechanism within society; it may even be argued that modernity's hyper-fragmentary order actually magnified this core feature of the familial sphere. Despite its new, purportedly peripheral character, the family remained a central node within the broader social network. More importantly, it actually became the central node in the modern capitalist network that came more and more to dictate the form and function of modern society.

Few thinkers better apprehended the position of the family within this new social schema than Karl Marx. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx dismisses traditional conceptions of familial organization, understanding it first and foremost as an engine for capital. For Marx and his co-author Friedrich Engels, the routing, accumulation, and distribution of capitalist flows is not simply one incidental attribute of the modern nuclear family, it is the primary function of the familial organism. In their estimation, the "foundation [of] the present family, the bourgeois family," is based "on capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution" (Marx and Engels 239). Here we encounter Marx breaking entirely from the more conventional rhetoric of nineteenth century America. Despite the retention of interior-exterior, public-private dichotomies, this assessment situates the home firmly in the center of the great capitalist machine, functioning as a kind of generative engine, consuming capital and driving production. Moreover, the very constitution of the modern family is here understood as a phenomenon working in concert with the forces of

capitalist distribution, an arrangement evident in the apparent distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat social structures, specifically the notion that coherent familial organization is possible only within particular economic enclaves.⁶ Indeed this may be one of the most glaring examples of how purportedly private institutions both rely upon and help facilitate public energies. And such reliance, it should be noted, is not simply the effect of comparative binarism - - the inside requiring an outside, and so on --but is in fact thoroughly functional and interactive, composing what might be thought of as a dialogic (though *not* dialectical) relationship between the supposedly antagonistic spheres. The nature of this circuit can be discerned in Marx and Engel's description of the bourgeois family and the proletarian non-equivalent as complimentary social formations. Such a characterization seems to suggest that the former effectively produces the latter, at least in part through the acquisition and selective distribution of capital, a process that mobilizes many of those divisions that define the modern capitalist paradigm (Marx and Engels 240).

Reading Faulkner and Welty through the lens of Marx's critique allows us to understand the family at a purely functional level, as something not unlike a machine. Moreover, it helps us to read the family outside its presumed insularity, understanding its various rituals and patterns of behavior not simply as isolated or self-serving events, but as part of a broader functional system. Indeed, the work of Marx and Engels demonstrates how what are often perceived as the most private and intimate aspects of the familial organism, such as reproduction or child rearing, are often vital elements in an interdependent network that exceeds the parameters of the family proper. It suddenly becomes insufficient to simply say that Quentin takes his life due to negligent parents or his obsession with his sister because none of these figures exist in isolation.

⁶ The term 'in concert' is important here. Even though Marx is responsible for contemporary notions of historical materialism, he himself avoids any absolutist concepts of causality, particularly where the family is concerned. Cf. Selected Writings, 353.

This issue of how the most intimate elements of the family serve broader socio-economic functions was something that particularly preoccupied Engels. Examining the productive capacities of filial networks in still greater detail, Engels posits that the institutional linchpin of the modern family, i.e. monogamous marriage, relies on similarly complimentary distributions of power and capital, being as it is a social practice “based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father’s property as natural heirs” (Engels 125). Marriage, in Engels’s estimation, operates primarily as conduit for the transmission of a *material* legacy: in order to perpetuate a cache of private capital, an individual must generate a line of heirs. At its very origins, we already find the familial unit operating as a distributive instrument designed for the circulation of various forms of capital. Here again, though, we find that the family’s ability to function as a productive mechanism entails a contradictory process which conflates seemingly opposed elements, particularly in regards to notions of public and private. The generation of offspring requires that an individual break open the parameters of filiation in order to form an alliance with a (presumably) non-filial agent (i.e., a wife). In other words, the integrity of an interior quantity can only be maintained through its exposure to exterior forces. Engels’s description of modern marital logic, effectively traces the manner in which capital continually fractures and sutures the social body, a perpetual double-movement in which the modern family is deeply complicit. This seemingly paradoxical element within the ritual of marriage, and in matters of familial continuity more generally, serves as a central motif in both Faulkner and Welty’s texts, matters of perpetuation being of the utmost importance for both the Compsons and the Fairchilds, but also a matter of serious anxiety.

What the analysis of Marx and Engels indicates is that, the modern family was firmly

embedded within the social network of nineteenth and twentieth century America, engaged in kind of continual psychosomatic relay with multiple economic currents, something evident in the work of both Faulkner and Welty, particularly in their respective depictions of familial consumption. It was a process that had a fundamental influence in determining the shape and nature of the American family. As Tamara K. Hareven notes, familial responses to industrial development “encompassed both the family’s interaction with the industrial system externally and the marshalling of its members’ labor force and resources internally” (Hareven 220). If anything, the rise of modern capitalism resulted in a social schema that all but precluded the possibility of seclusion or isolation. Marx insists that capital is, by its very nature, infinitely expansive, reaching into every crack and crevice of the known world. In the modern era it “has pushed beyond national boundaries and prejudices, beyond the deification of nature and the inherited, self-sufficient satisfaction of existing needs confined within well-defined bounds, and the reproduction of the traditional way of life” (Marx 364).

Family Without Organs

Certainly, such a description forces us to reconsider how we view the family when situated within the economic sphere. But while the work of Marx and Engels helps us in recalibrating our understanding of Faulkner and Welty’s work, a particular aspect of their cumulative philosophy poses something of a problem for the analysis to follow. Namely, even while Marx and Engels’s critique of (Western) socio-economic structures stresses the influence of interconnectivity, it also tends to be profoundly binaristic, a tendency that actually reaffirms many of the critical propensities that this project is attempting to refute. Consequently, I want to

supplement my application of Marxist theory with a consideration of the ontological model promoted by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their seminal work, *Anti-Oedipus*, a philosophical tract that entirely rebukes the notion of binarism or hierarchies in favor of pure multiplicity. Fusing empirical methodology and cosmological inquiry, Deleuze and Guattari propose a truly radical vision of the world, one that is composed of an infinite network of interconnecting productive organs referred to as “desiring machines.” It is an interdependent network of productivity encompassing every facet of reality, interior-exterior, microcosmic-macrocosmic: “everywhere it is machines -- real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections” (Deleuze and Guattari 1). These machines are bound together in their continual production and distribution of various flows -- blood, money, urine, industry -- which are both driven by, and in turn help to disseminate throughout the existential field, that which Deleuze and Guattari designate as the single vital force driving everything: desire. This is not desire as it is colloquially understood, but rather a kind of blind force that might be understood as something akin to energy: it is the desire that drives cellular division and genetic mutation, the ceaseless cycle of creation and destruction. Existence, therefore, is always and everywhere a matter of production -- or, more specifically, “production of production,” a specific productive mode, the only aim of which is its own perpetuation. What’s more, all the constituent parts that compose the fabric of reality are complicit, at all times and in all places, in this process, since “every ‘object’ presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow the fragmentation of the object” (6). To recognize one machine is to recognize, simultaneously, the connective trajectory of the flow moving through it; to recognize the flow itself is to apprehend the conjunction of the various machines necessary for its production.

Significantly, the production undertaken by the desiring-machines, their perpetuation of particular flows, actually relies upon a kind of breakdown within the system. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a “machine may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks...every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it” (36). Every point of conjuncture between the machines therefore entails an accompanying break that simultaneously perpetuates and, in a sense, diverts the flow connecting the two organs.⁷ Consequently, every instance of connection is also an instance of becoming, an alteration in the nature of the flow. This existential arrangement undermines the concept of essential and immutable social forms, familial or otherwise. Even though every facet of the material world is bound together in a network of machinic couplings, the cosmological order thereby produced is not hegemonic but multitudinous, resulting in an endless proliferation of variance. The world of the desiring-machines is one of “pure multiplicity...an affirmation that is irreducible to any unity,” inimical to any notion of “the One and the many” (42). Stable singularities, whether individual or collective, are wholly untenable in this cosmic schema since “one machine is always coupled with another” (5).

What creates the ‘appearance’⁸ of singular social entities -- what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as molar formations -- are specific distributions of flows within a given social field. Echoing the precedent set by Marx and Engels, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that such arrangements are historically contingent. Under the capitalist regime, flows are subjected to a kind of perpetual double-movement. Unfettered by certain strictures inherent in prior historical

⁷ An oft cited example of this phenomenon is the image of baby breast feeding, the flow of milk being effectively broken in its movement between the breast machine of the mother and the mouth machine of the baby.

⁸ In Deleuze and Guattari’s cosmology, the distinction between appearance and inherent character is often rendered blurry in the oscillation between states of molecularity and molarity. Hence the scare quotes.

eras, capitalism releases its flows to the proverbial four corners, allowing them, as Marx and Engels have already noted, to seep into every last sector of the globe, to be forever expanding. Developing this idea further, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize something that is ostensibly obvious but also vitally important to understanding how this process works: namely, that this dispersal of flows is contingent upon whether or not such dispersal will serve the interests of the Capitalist Machine. Therefore, even as it is liberating various flows and disseminating them throughout the social field, capitalism is also simultaneously retracting these and other flows, drawing them back toward what might be thought of as the network's functional center, an obvious example of this latter move being something like investment in regulatory agencies.⁹ In the parlance of Deleuze and Guattari, this double-jointed operation is known as deterritorialization/ reterritorialization (226 – 240).¹⁰

This oscillating process of dispersal and retraction uncovers new layers of complexity in the phenomenon of alienation. Specifically, it signals that the fissures constituted by those divisions within the labor field are not the main force behind modern alienation -- as Deleuze and Guattari indicate, ruptures are a central component in the social apparatus at all levels (224 – 225). Rather, it is the distribution of those breaks, their continuous re-envelopment within the coordinates of the capitalist system that is the central issue. What is important is that the breaks no longer belong to the machines but to capital. In a sense then, alienation is in fact a capitalist “corruption” of the machinic break, itself a primary component of being.

Deleuze and Guattari offer nothing so much as a quasi-biological blueprint of the

⁹ Marx and Engels also note this phenomenon, albeit in a somewhat less metaphysical sense. In *The Communist Manifesto*, they observe how bourgeoisie capitalists are forced to set limits on their own creativity, comparing these figures to a “sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.” Cf. *Manifesto*, 225.

¹⁰ It should be noted that this process of re/deterritorialization is not unique to capitalism. What is unique is the operational model of expansion and retraction.

intricate substructure under-girding the capitalist network mapped out by Marx and Engels. This is beneficial to this project because it figures capital not as something that the family simply interacts with or (re)distributes; it is simply a vital component within the familial organism, ultimately no more different than blood or custom. It is a cosmological schema that at once deepens and expands the reach and application of prior Marxist critique, excavating the base within the base, so to speak. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, it allows for a neat marriage between the economic and the psychological, one that does not rely on metaphor or convoluted theories of negotiation between the two quantities. There is no meaningful distinction between libidinal and capital investment since both participate in the same network of production and flow. The implications for the family are, to say the least, rather profound. Arguably, Deleuze and Guattari's assessment of the relationship between the familial and the economic is even more dramatically materialist than that of their philosophical forebears. For Deleuze and Guattari, alliance and filiation are not simply mechanisms for the transmission of capital; they are themselves actual flows of capital (263). Here the notion of the familial unit as a distributive mechanism is rendered profoundly literal, referring not simply to the structure's operational character, but to its most fundamental, machinic design, its various gears and levers: its desiring-machines.¹¹ Families do not simply facilitate the flow of capital, in the mode of active, conscious agents; they themselves are, in all their movements and interactions, the raw stuff of capital itself. Under the Capitalist Machine, "the family is...simply the form of human matter or material that finds itself subordinated to the autonomous social form of economic reproduction, and that comes to take the place assigned it by the latter...the familial determinations become the application of the social axiomatic" (263 – 264).¹² In Deleuze and Guattari's estimation, the

¹¹ This is all contingent on specific historical flow schemas.

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, 263-264.

modern capitalist family is defined not by production or reproduction, but by consumption, and the proliferation of what it consumes. And what it consumes -- all it consumes -- is capital; money, food, clothes, and above all else, self-conception (the great Oedipal triangle of “daddy-mommy-me”) are all so many capitalist flows producing the familial unit. Therefore, to speak of the family is not simply to speak of something related to or in negotiation with the forces of capitalism; it is to speak of capital itself. This phenomenon is certainly evident in the changing economic landscape of the early twentieth century south where matters of identity formation were becoming increasingly dictated not by what one did or what one produced but by what one bought. Examining the influence of advertising and mail order catalogues on southern culture, Ted Ownby observes that the modern marketplace of the south produced an environment in which there was the ever-present suggestion “that goods could change the people themselves by making them the smiling contented figures they saw in the newspapers or catalogs,” an economic environment that “urged potential shoppers to dream and to imagine how new goods could transform them into new people” (Ownby 91). This new concept of identity formation influenced not only the individual but the family as well, an influence evident in the way that local merchants promoted specific consumerist notions of what a family should be in order to turn Christmas into an overtly commercial holiday (94 – 95). Family as site of consumption, as distributive site of capital; it is this conception of the modern family that will frame my examination of Faulkner and Welty.

Creative Destruction

Coupling the observations of Marx/Engels and Deleuze/Guattari we encounter two

remarkable propositions regarding social bodies: 1.) Even in their most private iterations, they are always intimately connected with other social bodies, specifically through the medium of capital 2.) In their capacity as distributive mechanisms, such social bodies serve a primarily destructive function. This latter claim is vital to my larger project. Consequently, I would like to take a moment to consider its logic and its implications.

As we have seen, the capitalist cosmologies proposed by both Marx/Engels and Deleuze/Guattari rely on a central operative mode of rupture. In the case of the former, we encounter the notion of alienation, in the latter, the concept of the break or interruption in the machinic flow, albeit ‘corrupted’ by the influence of capitalism’s retracting mechanism. Moreover, both concepts posit a kind of positive or generative disjunction, a joining enacted through a fissure: the division of labor that produces the factory, the break in the flow between breast-machine and mouth-machine producing milk-as-nutrient. This form of creative destruction is the very foundation on which modern capitalism is built. Capital is dependent upon it, its capacity to extend ever outward being enabled “by [the] enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces...by the conquest of new markets, and by the thorough exploitation of the old ones...by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented” (Marx and Engels 226). The consequence of this is a social order characterized by persistent and revolutionary change. As Marshall Berman puts it, “to say our society is falling apart is only to say that it is alive and well” (Berman 95).

If destruction is the central operative component in the capitalist schema, and if the family is indeed a vital operating organ within that schema, we find ourselves face to face with an intriguing, if perhaps somewhat unsettling, syllogism, the result of which is an image of the family as a profoundly destructive social instrument, one inextricably bound to those extensive

flows of capital forever laying waste to precedent and tradition; an image, in short, that is all but the polar opposite of what has so long been the cultural standard. The family's destructive capacity is evident in its accumulation of capital, as well as its related involvement in the formulation of social and territorial divisions. Such capacity is particularly evident in the family's tendency to function as an engine for the production of surplus value, reflected in the deep-seated conviction that each generation should 'do better' than the generation that preceded it, although as the work of Faulkner and Welty indicates, how exactly better is defined is far more complicated than this rather reductive aphorism would suggest. What's more, and despite all rhetoric concerning notions of unity and cohesion, the familial unit is also inherently self-destructive, marked by an infinite series of both micro and macro disjunctions that coordinate its composition at any given moment. Children leave home and produce their own familial units; these units in turn are fragmented through the formation of alliances, the next generation of offspring dispersing in their own good time, and so on and so on. Although it may be stretching the terms somewhat, birth itself may be considered a kind of destructive act, a breakdown in the marital dyad necessary for the formation of the "daddy-mommy-me" triumvirate, an idea certainly evident in *The Sound and the Fury* wherein childbirth tends to jeopardize rather than galvanize familial cohesion. At the cellular level, certainly, the procreative process is primarily a sequence of numerous divisions. According to Engels, even those facets of the familial structure designed to ensure coalescence often result in concomitant forms of fragmentation, the notion that modern marriage essentially produces adultery being particularly prevalent in his analysis (Engels 130 – 131). Engels, along with Marx, further develops this idea in the Manifesto, proclaiming that "bourgeoisie marriage is in reality a system of wives in common," an arrangement born out of the bourgeoisie male's compulsion to simultaneously follow the dictates

of private property and productive expansion (Marx and Engels 240). Whether or not we accept the strictly causal nature of this argument (i.e. the notion that fidelity invariably leads to infidelity), Marx and Engels's assessment nonetheless vividly illustrates the manner in which familial procedures consistently open up innumerable points of rupture within the social network, productive breaks that in many instance are actually capable of generating capital.

It should be noted that an acknowledgment of the family's destructive capacities in no way negates its productive potential. As has been noted, the two qualities are always inextricably linked within the capitalist model. Moreover, recognizing this particular facet of the familial structure allows for a fuller, and more 'honest,' portrayal of the modern American family, one that provides us the opportunity to reassess the logic and the mechanics of such deeply engrained sociological/literary paradigms as the 'broken family' and the 'familial crisis.' Following Berman's lead, I want to suggest that there may be both a literary and political benefit to posing the question: is the image of the family "falling apart" really just a sign that "it is alive and well?"¹³

The Southern Machine

But wither the Southern family? This too is a question worth asking. For even while scholars continue to debate what it is that truly characterizes the soul and psyche of Dixie, the one conviction that remains constant is that of Southern exceptionalism, the persistent belief that that which occurs below the Mason-Dixon and east of the Mississippi never quite corresponds in any neat and easy manner to that which occurs elsewhere. And so it is with the Southern family.

¹³ It should also be borne in mind that both the concept and the act of destruction need not be understood in qualitative or ethical terms within the context of this analysis. Rather, it should be understood in more objective or empirical terms.

For while the analysis of Demos, Hareven, and others is certainly applicable to all regions of America, in the South, such application, while more than valid in most instances, requires a certain amount clarification, and possibly one or two caveats.

As with most of the country, the nineteenth century signaled an era of radical change in the American South, particularly in the decades following the conclusion of the Civil War; and as with most of the country, such changes were directly linked to the vagaries of industrial development. The period was marked by dramatic expansion in the manufacturing of textiles, lumber, and ore. Cotton remained a vital component in the Southern economy even as Southern agriculture underwent dramatic changes in both form and function, and despite the crop's increasing volatility in both national and global markets (Daniel 18). However, many of these economic developments bore a character unique to the region, a singularity stemming from matters of investment. As C. Vann Woodward and others have noted, a number of the industrial ventures undertaken in the South during the early post-bellum period were actually financed with either Northern or British capital, resulting in what Woodward famously dubbed a "colonial economy." In this respect, the South experienced a kind of compounded iteration of the newly formulated private-public dichotomy that was altering the nature of various communities throughout the country. Adding further complexity to the situation was a newfound willingness among many southern legislators to act as "forceful advocates of national aid, especially in the area of agriculture," "in spite of their states rights tradition" (Grantham 67). While such political recalibrations were a practical response to very serious problems within the agricultural sector -- drought, overproduction, the dreaded boll-weevil -- they were also indicative of an increasing sense among the Southern populace that the region was suffering something akin to an identity crisis, a wide scale version of more intimate anxieties concerning modernization's increasing

influence on the social landscape (Woodman 105, 111).

Such influence had a particularly noticeable impact on both the organizational and ideological character of the Southern family. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the shifting structure of the post-bellum plantation economy and its concomitant influence on regional social bodies. After emancipation, the South's planter class lost what had long been their primary financial asset: slave labor. Adapting to new economic paradigms, plantation owners reinvested both their energies and their capital in the accumulation and development of large tracts of land, an alteration that rendered stationary what had been, in the pre-war years, an essentially mobile enterprise. This transition from labor-ownership to landownership had serious repercussions for the entire region as more and more of the South's fertile terrain was consolidated in the hands of a small minority of wealthy planters and outside investors. Prior to this development, "the southern range had been open, and property rights in land given lower priority than the rights of small herdsman and farmers to hunting, fishing, and foraging. After the war, landowners in state after state led campaigns for fence laws, stock laws, strict trespass laws, and enforcement" (Wright 49). This new emphasis on private property, along with the propagation of those various legal technologies designed to safeguard its perceived sanctity, made it increasingly difficult for all but the wealthiest of Southerners to own land. Many of the region's yeoman farmers were increasingly boxed in, and in some instances effectively rendered homeless, by these legal and economic developments. Unable to establish independent homesteads, many Southern families became dependent upon the plantation system for both sustenance and, rather ironically, a certain sense of cohesion, renting out farms in the newly established sharecropping system. For even as the new plantation economy broke up the terrain, pushing back and dispersing local populations, it also produced an economic space that promoted

the aggregation and interdependence of familial, albeit in the financial interests of the planter class. On the one hand, such promotion was simply a recruiting a tool, a way to get workers out in the field (9). On the other hand, it also reflected practical, if somewhat crass, economic considerations. As J. William Harris notes, plantation owners were reluctant to take on single men as tenants since it was believed that “the labor of women and children was essential to the success of the farm -- so essential, indeed, that a man without a wife could seldom expect to rent a farm on his own” (154). Similar to the arrangements found in Northern factories, this perversely symbiotic relationship between the planter class and the tenant family had a profound effect on the interior coordination of the latter. One of the most salient examples of this influence is the manner in which “the sharecropping and small-farm economy promoted early marriage and many children,” among the tenant farmers (155).

However, even while the new plantation culture encouraged both the formation and maintenance of the modern family unit, the elements of exploitation and abuse inherent in the sharecropping model also led many families to engage in what might be referred to as fragmentary practices. This double-sided element of post-bellum society was an effect of the complex negotiations that defined planter and tenants relations, a complexity vividly illustrated in Gavin Wright’s analysis of regional labor markets. Deviating from prior assessments of the tenancy system, Wright maintains that attempts by landowners to institute a form of neo-peonage through the application of exorbitant liens and draconian debt arrangements actually resulted in an increasingly mobile labor force. Ill-used by their landlords and facing debts that could take them months, if not years, to settle, many tenants simply left, seeking employment elsewhere. Consequently, “owners who wanted to retain a tenant were more likely to write off an end-of-year debt as an inducement to stay rather to exercise legal compulsion to block mobility” (Wright

65).¹⁴ How effective such a tactic was is unclear, however, given that statistics from the era indicate that a significant proportion of the labor force engaged in frequent migration between the Southern states.

As a result of this mobility, Southern families adopted an organizational framework that both adhered to and undermined the broader cultural patterns articulated by Demos and others. While Southern families participated in the trend toward strictly defined domesticity, they also exhibited a reluctance to completely abandon older, more malleable, modes of filial coordination. Even as the nuclear formation increasingly became the social *ideal* (Woodman 110), particularly among the growing middle class, “most rural black and white southerners [remained] enmeshed in a wider world of kinship that went beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family of parents and children,” a mode of social organization definitely evident, albeit to varying degrees, in both *Delta Wedding* and *The Sound and the Fury* (Harris 156). And while the multigenerational household of pre-modern America gradually became less prominent, it was still by no means uncommon to find families cohabitating with “in-laws, cousins, [and] other relatives” (56). Much like the tendencies toward early marriages and the production of numerous offspring within the laboring class, the retention of more ‘traditional’ and expansive filial networks helped to ensure the efficiency of the plantation operation. Such an arrangement meant that laborers could call upon relatives to act as babysitters and nurses when the need arose, thereby reconciling, to some degree, the competing interests of work and family.

Although this relationship between the economic and the social is arguably most evident in the figure of the tenant farmer, it was by no means confined to the realm of agriculture. Similar patterns can be found in the region’s mill towns and textile factories. Moreover, it was not only the laboring class that was affected. The planter class routinely exploited the economic

¹⁴ See also Woodman, 109.

potential in their own bloodlines, forming financially advantageous alliances in order to expand into other enterprises, including “cotton gins, cottonseed oil mills, real estate, insurance, publishing, banking, and cotton factorage” (Woods 94). Exemplifying the primary features of Engel’s analysis, the region’s burgeoning bourgeoisie demonstrated an acute understanding of the vital interplay between filial and economic forces.

In sum, the New South exhibited many of the social alterations occurring throughout America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, albeit in a distinctly singular form reflective of the region’s unique economic character. It was a time and place marked by significant recalibrations in the organization and distribution of social, industrial, and individual bodies, characterized as it was by increasing patterns of migration and new modes of habitation, both direct consequences of shifting economic-industrial paradigms. Fragmented by the forces of privatization, the Southern topography played a vital role in the formation of these new organizational paradigms, a contribution evident in such phenomena as the imposition of trespassing laws and the spatial divisions inaugurated by the tenancy system, as well as those various social divisions instituted by Jim Crow. The New South was, in short, a place where the interdependent relationship between the economic and the social lay raw and open.

Textual Implications

The two texts I will be looking at all illustrate in varying ways the vital interplay between the familial and the economic spheres, and the manner in which such interaction functions as a response to the realities of the New South economy. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner details the dissolution of the Compsons, a once prosperous family whose fortunes, both figurative and

literal, have been significantly depleted in the time since the Civil War. The novel depicts the manner in which capital functions as both the primary binding device, as well as the central instrument of division, within the Compson family. In *Delta Wedding*, Welty examines the changing shape of familial structures within the New South's plantation economy, particularly as it is manifested in the interior struggles of the wealthy Fairchild clan. Centering on the marriage of Dabney Fairchild to the overseer Troy Flavin, Welty's narrative subtly picks apart the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in the plantation's social structure. For while Dabney's marriage to Troy undermines the quasi-aristocratic character of the Fairchilds, it also becomes apparent over the course of the novel that the shifting socioeconomic terrain of the New South renders such a coupling necessary for the perpetuation of the Fairchild lineage.

Acknowledging, as both writers do, the vital interplay between commerce and consanguinity forces us to reconsider how we read the Southern family. It strips away the buffer of symbolism and forces us to recognize that a critique of capitalism cannot operate apart from a critique of the familial and vice versa. That which we say about the one we say about the other, whether or not we are cognizant of it. It is for this reason that conceiving of the family as a 'victim' of capitalism is problematic. Even as we recognize the pain inflicted on the individual and on individual relationships, we should not be so quick to apply the title of victimhood to the structure itself. In what follows, I want to attempt to map out a new way of tracing the lines of destruction and cohesion formulated in the social sphere of modern capitalism, suggesting, in all seriousness, that the dissolution of the Southern family should be understood not as a breakdown in the broader socio-cultural apparatus, but rather as an indication that the apparatus and its various mechanisms are actually operating properly.

KEEPING THE BLOOD IN: SHIFTING PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND THE
PROBLEM OF BOURGEOIS IDENTITY IN *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

Faulkner situates his examination of how economic forces mold familial structures firmly within the historical context of early twentieth century modernity. This particular time period, with its attendant, and radical, transformation in regards to matters of culture, economics, and even phenomenology, remained a subject of fascination, if not obsession, for Faulkner throughout his career, and with very few exceptions, functioned as the primary framework in which he set his narratives. Often, Faulkner portrayed the advent of modernity in the south as kind of regional incursion from the outside, particularly where matters of economic transformation were concerned, a tendency manifest in such interloping and invasive figures as Thomas Sutpen and the rapacious Flem Snopes. It is perhaps due to this recurring motif in Faulkner's work that there has been a propensity in the critical community to adhere to the binary model laid out by Polk, viewing the world of Yoknapatawpha as an epic battleground where diametrically opposed forces waged their existential campaigns. However, while this perception is not necessarily invalid, I want to suggest that Faulkner's vision is ultimately more nuanced and complex than such a reading would suggest and, furthermore, that such complexity – one that complicates notions of opposition – should be the lens through which we examine matters of family and economy in Faulkner's works.

In the opening lines of "That Evening Sun," Quentin Compson provides the reader with a thumbnail sketch of Jefferson Mississippi as it looks and operates in the first decade of the twentieth century, noting that:

Monday is no different from any other weekday in Jefferson now. The streets are paved now, and the telephone and electric companies are cutting down more and more of the shade trees...to make room for iron poles bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes, and we have a city laundry which makes the rounds on Monday morning, gathering the bundles of clothes into bright-colored, specially-made motor cars...and even the Negro women who still take in white people's washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles. (289)

Quentin's assessment of his hometown's spatial and social topography bears the implicit mark of lamentation, a sense of loss evident in his depiction of local shade trees savagely cut down, only to be replaced by those "ghostly and bloodless" grapes perched atop newly erected telephone poles. It is a portrayal of modernization markedly bereft of optimism. In Quentin's estimation, the destructive power of such alterations has no great potential since all it can produce is a world of degraded forms, bloodless facsimiles of a prior lost glory. Whatever benefits a telephone pole might enable, it cannot hope to adequately replace the water oaks, maples, and elms that have been swept away in the tide of modern development.

Such scenes of bitter rumination proliferate across the vast expanse of Faulkner's oeuvre. Throughout his career Faulkner meticulously documented both the profound and the banal manner in which modernity went about altering the southern terrain, and all his greatest characters function, in one way or another, as equally meticulous, if not outright pathological, documentarians. From Anse Bundren's ambivalent meditations on the process of urbanization to Ike McCaslin's guilt-ridden pre-occupations with regional degradation, Yoknapatwpha County is littered with figures who spend much of their time grimly bearing witness. Among these figures,

however, it is Quentin Compson who stands out as a kind of exemplar, the doomed son of the South for whom time itself was the great tragedy.

However, the exact nature of Quentin's temporal anxiety remains something of an open debate among critics. It has long been suggested by a number of critics – perhaps most notably, John T. Irwin – that Quentin's incestuous longings for his sister Caddy actually reflect a deeper desire to cease the forward moment of time and retain the prelapsarian idyll of childhood. More recently, a number of critics have attempted to locate a point of causality within the historical context of Faulkner's early work. Kevin Railey has posited that Quentin's pathology stems from his attempts to negotiate the transition from older forms of southern patriarchy to newer forms of southern liberalism, a negotiation evident, according to Railey, in Quentin's often-haphazard attempts to play the part of the cavalier. Convincing though these readings might be, I want to suggest that the opening lines of "That Evening Sun" provide us with a different framework in which to examine this question. Specifically, Quentin's depiction of Jefferson in this passage registers a moment of crisis within 20th century bourgeois consciousness, signaled by the breakdown in the public/private divide, that rudimentary spatial dichotomy that helped the bourgeoisie in establishing their status as both authoritative and somehow exceptional within society.

While pre-eminently concerned with a broader account of technological advancement, it is important to note that the portrait of Jefferson we encounter here also serves to map out numerous points of ingress and egress plotted out across the changing face of the community. Paved streets register the final consummation of the emancipatory promise of the automobile, a promise held in abeyance for many years in Mississippi by inadequate roads often more mire than motorway (Lesseig 61). These streets also indicate the manner in which towns such as

Jefferson are transforming from isolated outposts to vibrant nodes within an ever expanding network of asphalt conduits. Moreover, Quentin's invocation of telephony and electricity indicate the manner in which notions of isolation and exclusion are becoming increasingly untenable within the community itself as homes, businesses, and other local edifices become increasingly bound together in a webwork of interconnecting wires.

As Manuel DeLanda notes, "Technological innovations (in both transportation and communication) have deterritorialising effects on organisations similar to those in face-to-face interaction, that is, they allow organisations to break from the limitations of spatial location" (DeLanda 260). However, while such spatial recalibrations enable the various forms of expansion necessary for the perpetuation of capital, these very same alterations and adaptations also endanger the psycho-cultural coordinates of capitalism's primary generative engine: the bourgeois family, that social organism responsible for the continual consumption and distribution of capital. As Delanda indicates, advancements in technology render the parameters of a given locality or social formation malleable, indistinct, and, above all else, porous. The problem is that this spatial indistinction fundamentally undermines the central mechanism by which the bourgeoisie both manifests and enforces its power within the social sphere: that is, the mobilization of public and private spheres. "The distinction between the public and the private is," according to Louis Althusser, "a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority'" (97). In order to be actualized and authoritative, bourgeois identity relies upon a series of interlocking social practices that engage in various modes of privatization, including the acquisition of private property, the promulgation of a private identity, and above all else the establishment of private spaces within the community. It is the ability of the middle class to carve out these ostensibly

isolated enclaves that distinguishes it from the proletariat – the naked masses forced to submit themselves to the exposure of the labor market – and that situates it (that is, the middle class) within a *comparative* position of power.

But in establishing this vast matrix of division bourgeois culture also simultaneously establishes a unitary, if paradoxically complex, ontological network, plotted out along a series of interconnecting ruptures. Telephones, electricity, indoor plumbing; all these modern advancements galvanize the private, familial home space, rendering it more and more a self-sustaining structural organism. However, such galvanization requires that the bourgeois home subject itself to a series of perforations within the exclusionary membrane that constitutes its presumed exterior: entry points for wires and cables, exit points for various forms of waste. This seemingly contradictory arrangement underscores the manner in which capitalism organizes various social ruptures into overlapping patterns of connectivity, all for the purpose of enabling that state of narcissism that Marx identifies as the central feature of the bourgeois ethos, expanding the reach of the private sphere. Those technologies that bring various goods and services to one's proverbial doorstep allow one to entertain the notion that his/her home is the functional center of the world. However, this same process turns the familial home into a distributive site for various flows of capital, rendering the ostensibly private space an extension of the telephone company, electric company, and other various industries and thereby muddying the distinctions between public and private spheres.

The socio-economic topography of Jefferson reflects the paradoxical nature of bourgeois identity formation. In order to increase their sense of singularity, their sense of self-contained uniqueness, a distinction reliant of the ever-increasing consumption of goods and service, the residents of Jefferson must embed themselves deeper and deeper within that porous network of

exchange that fills Quentin with such a sense of unease. What I want to explore in this chapter is the manner in which this paradoxical arrangement underlies the familial structure of the Compson clan and informs both the singular and collective identities of the various family members. For the Compsons, then, family is not the place where genuine singular identity is located, where a communal sense of selfhood is formulated; rather, family is where notions of ego and personal agency become subsumed in a network of contingencies and interdependencies linked in turn to the dictates of the broader economic schema. It is this lack of agency, this overwhelming sense of the contingent that drives all three Compson brothers to various degrees of insanity and despair.

Benjy

The Sound and the Fury begins with an image of division. Moving along the fence that borders the Compson property, Benjy, the youngest Compson son, watches with rapt attention as individuals on the neighboring golf course play a round. Suffering from extreme mental retardation, Benjy describes the moment in sparse prose that emphasize the spatial, the sensorial, and the kinetic:

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree....Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass....They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence

and watched them going away. (3)

Like his brother Quentin, Benjy's spatial assessment of his home terrain is one defined by a sense of curiously porous bifurcation. While the fence establishes a clearly defined border between the Compson property and the golf course, it also functions as a kind of window, marked as it is by those "curling flower spaces," through which Benjy peers onto the activities occurring in the adjacent space. Moreover, there is a way in which the fence also functions as a mechanism for the transmission of what might be loosely referred to as data (or input). Benjy's shadowing of the golfers' movements establishes a scenario in which the composition of elements within the one field has a direct impact on the compositional nature of the neighboring field: "they stopped and we stopped." Significantly, these movements are also always traced along the length of the fence's trajectory; Benjy, so far as we can gather from his monologue, as well as the comments of others, never moves forward or backwards in relationship to the fence, but always side to side, strafing the border between these two plots of land, a positional arrangement underscored by the image of Benjy holding the fence in immobilizing defeat as the golfers walk away from him. Therefore, a distinction needs to be made: if this opening scene does in fact constitute an instance of mirroring, as Benjy's movements would seem to suggest, it is not simply mirroring in the classical Lacanian sense, where an external stimulus (the reflection) constitutes the individual's sense of self. Rather, what we encounter in this passage are a series of reflective (and reflexive) gestures implicitly contingent upon a set of very particular spatial factors.

These factors correspond to what Michel de Certeau has described as the ontological nature of boundaries, the fact that "it is the partition of space that structures it. Everything refers

in fact to this differentiation which makes possible the isolation and interplay of distinct spaces” (123). This leads to a peculiar arrangement in which the exterior is always embedded in the interior, and vice versa. “Within the frontiers,” writes de Certeau, “the alien is already there...a disquieting familiarity” (129). To signify what something is, we must have recourse to what it is not, a curious shadowing process clearly evident in this opening scene wherein the interior world of the Compsons is shown to be thoroughly reliant upon external forces. Significantly, the division between the golf course and the Compson property – and by extension, its ability to function as a kind of constructive mechanism – is coded as an explicitly economic formation, one linking the fiscal with the familial. The pasture that serves as the fairway was once Compson property. Initially designated as Benjy’s inheritance, the land is sold in 1909 in order to pay for Quentin’s matriculation at Harvard, a measure meant to retain the bourgeois status of the Compson family. Consequently, that boundary meant to maintain the outer perimeter of the Compsons’s private world, the spatial contours of their collective identity, also binds them to the open and ever-expanding network of modern capital. Because of his incapacity to register the effects of time, Benjy, by virtue of his perspectival limitations, literalizes this curious spatial arrangement where the external defines the internal, conceiving of former and contemporary Compson property as an essentially unified field, albeit one bifurcated by the fence across which data moves, becoming interpolated into the history of the Compson homespace. When one of the golfers yells “caddie,” Benjy responds with a mournful bellow establishing a trans-divisional call and response that, through a reflective bit of homophonic wordplay, articulates two key elements within the scene: the presence of the golf course on one side of the fence and the absence of Caddie Compson on the other side, corresponding features that signal, however obliquely, the disintegrating status of Benjy’s own home space and the unified production of lack (lack of

Caddy; lack of pasture) upon which the Compsons current condition is inscribed.

The significance of this relationship bears particular import in reading Faulkner's novel, particularly if we consider Benjy's role as a figure of capital, a kind of "useful idiot" whose impairment helps to sustain particular labor arrangements which in turn sustain specific flows of capital. Admittedly, placing Benjy within the modern capitalist schema is rather difficult given that Faulkner portrays him as an ostensibly non-productive figure, an essentially mute eunuch whose capacity to engage the broader world is, at first glance, markedly negligible. Reading the character within the context of his "affliction," Railey maintains that Benjy actually represents a kind of pre-capitalist cognitive state, one incapable of "calculation, classification, and prediction" (52). Indeed, one would be hard pressed to "prove" definitively that Benjy ever betrays the manipulative character so central to capitalist endeavors. However, this particular incapacity should not be misconstrued as the whole story. For even while Railey's portrayal is undeniably accurate in most respects, it overlooks Benjy's engagement in what is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the primary mode of labor for the bourgeois class: consumption. Locked in his intrinsically passive and helpless state of being, Benjy is forever consuming the labor of others, specifically the various members of the Gibson family who are charged with looking after him, entertaining him, and feeding him. This perpetual work of consumption not only establishes Benjy's own bourgeois bona fides, it also compels the maintenance of the coordinates of bourgeois identity within the matrix of the familial home. Experiencing one of his "flashbacks," Benjy recalls a moment in his youth where his Uncle Maury insists that Versh take him (Benjy) out to play: "Keep him out about half an hour, boy....Keep him in the yard now" (5). A drunken ne'er-do-well endlessly derided by his brother-in-law, Uncle Maury is nonetheless able to exploit his nephew's affliction in order to derive a sense of authority within the familial community.

More importantly, Maury's exercise of presumed authority, his admonishment to Versh to "keep him in the yard," demonstrates the somewhat paradoxical manner in which Benjy's condition actually reaffirms the exclusive nature of bourgeois subjectivity, the conviction that the (white) bourgeoisie represents something "special" that needs to be cloistered from society at large, an arrangement facilitated in large part by the toil of a (black) laboring class. In other words, Benjy might be fairly understood as a tragically grotesque iteration of the bourgeois notion that the bourgeois family should be understood as something "special," the nature of which must be kept, at least in part, secret from the general public.

However, Benjy's socio-economic relationship with the Gibsons, and Luster in particular, also complicates – and indeed jeopardizes – the very process of bourgeois subject formation that such a relationship is meant to engender. The reason that we can comprehend Benjy's reaction to the golfer's call in the novel's opening scene is not because he himself comments upon it within his own internal monologue but because he records Luster's response to his howling: "Ain't you something, thirty three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning" (3). Luster's remarks not only clarify the nature of Benjy's actions, they also serve to establish the fact that the latter is thirty-three years old and that April seventh is his birthday. Moreover, Luster provides the reader with the first truly tangible clues regarding Benjy's condition. Thus the formulation of identity that Benjy enacts through his consumption of Luster's service labor entails not only an element of interaction but also externalization; we locate the coordinates of Benjy's biography not within the vague text of his often indecipherable musings but rather in the comments of those surrounding him, and particularly those who are effectively within his employ. What's more, this particular "exchange" by the golf course is far from an isolated incident. Luster is repeatedly called upon

throughout that portion of the novel set in 1928 to act as a kind of mouth-piece for Benjy, and it is primarily, if not solely, through his intercession that Benjy's character is rendered comprehensible within the wider world. The interactions between the two characters indicate a telling interdependence between black labor and white subjectivity, a culturally freighted relationship that is forever blurring distinctions between putatively oppositional categories: black and white, proletariat and bourgeoisie. Dilsey's observation that her grandson has "jes es much Compson devilment" in him as the rest underscores the manner in which the labor relations that bind the Gibsons and their employers effectively meld the two families together, suggesting that there is in fact an obverse element in Dilsey's comment, implying Benjy's own integration of Gibson identity, his own blackness (276).¹⁵

I freely acknowledge that my characterization of Benjy as bourgeois consumer may be difficult to readily accept, especially given that large body of prior criticism so insistent and uniform in its reading of the character as "merely a filter" (Polk 105). However, I want to suggest that this difficulty may have less to do with matters of validity and more to do with a very particular distinction that needs to be made regarding Benjy's personal mode of consumption. Arguing that Benjy possesses a far more "active" consciousness than he has previously been credited with, Richard Godden points to the numerous time shifts that mark his monologue, noting that a "time shift is an act of analogy that brings one time into conjunction with another; the result could be expressed as a simile in which Benjy prefers the original to the secondary term" (11). We might add to this that analogies essentially represent a pair of disparate quantities unified through an imposition of comparative value. Benjy's thought process thus resembles a proliferating series of exchanges. However, there is nothing organizing this series

¹⁵ Obviously, questions of race and the legacy of slavery complicate our reading of the labor relations binding the Gibson and Compson clans. See below.

into a discernible or codified pattern, nothing to impose a sense of overarching meaning. The distinction to be made then is that Benjy engages in consumption sans ideology, that mechanism which “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 109). To put it perhaps a bit too crudely, Benjy can only organize the world in relation to his desires – his longing for Caddy, specifically – and those impediments which hinder the realization of such desire – Caddy’s absence, the fence, etc. Consequently, although he is capable of mapping a rudimentary schema of desire (production) and inhibition (anti-production), he is incapable of grafting onto this design what we might deem signification, things such as morality, rationality, calculation, and so on. Even when Benjy deploys his oft-repeated simile, “Caddy smelled like trees,” there is little indication that this symbolic economy is anything more merely associative at a strictly visceral level (19). While his two brothers (attempt to) suture these divisions with ideological fantasies – tales of incestuous union in the case of Quentin and fantasies of fiscal recompense in the case of Jason – Benjy, bereft of the ability to compose such narratives, simply maps out the network of ruptures that make up the Compson universe, points of “positive disjunction” inscribed on the land, the community, and within the coordinates of the family itself. Providing a mode of cognition that is “too clear,” Benjy allows Faulkner to establish the raw coordinates of the economic grid upon which the Compson family enact their tragic drama (Kartiganer 622).

Quentin

If Benjy is incapable of adapting to the cultural contradictions of modern capitalism, his brother Quentin is “simply” unwilling to do so. My invocation of will is intentionally suggestive in as

much as questions of desire and intent are central to our understanding of Quentin and where he stands in relation to his family, particularly as regards the issue of incest. However, I would contend that many critics have fundamentally misread this question by attempting to frame it as a matter regarding what Quentin wants rather than emphasizing what he doesn't want, what he actively seeks to avoid. Even those critiques that are ostensibly concerned with matters of aversion often fall back onto problematic claims regarding desire.

In his seminal work *Doubling and Incest*, John T. Irwin maintains Quentin's pathologies stem from a longing to purge himself of the guilt he feels regarding his perceived failure to "protect" his sister's virginity. Although difficult to argue with in many respects, Irwin's analysis is problematic in that it insists we read Quentin's guilt within the context of a stunted Oedipal complex, an insistence that forces us in turn to make certain presumptions regarding matters of family, gender, and labor, presumptions that I hope to show are not necessarily well founded. Many of the critiques that attempt to read Quentin as an artist figure pose similar problems. Arguably, one of the most compelling readings of Quentin in recent times is that provided by Kevin Railey. According to Railey, "Quentin seeks the role of moral exemplar and authority figure both within his family and within society at large...because he identifies with Cavalier values" (Railey 55). What makes this particular reading so compelling is the manner in which it seems to fully account for Quentin's tangled relationship with matters of gender, sex, race, and family. Moreover, Railey's reading situates Quentin's predicament within the context of specific socio-historical contingencies, providing a degree of specificity that frees us from having to make the Freudian presumptions that Irwin's reading requires. However, even Railey's interpretation poses certain problems. For while I agree that Quentin generally comports himself in the manner of the cavalier, I want to argue that this may not indicate that he actually

subscribes to the ideals that this title would suppose. As Gary Storhoff notes, Quentin's relationship with the dictates of familial obligation is almost always attend by a degree of dissonance that complicates any reading of the character within the context of his family (470 – 472).

This dissonance can perhaps be best understood if we consider Quentin's decision to take his own life. Critics such as Irwin have long suggested that it is Quentin's failure to fulfill the role of brother protector that drives him to his final act of suicide. Curiously though, few have allowed for the possibility that this sense of failure might be understood as a kind of secondary pathology compounding pre-existent anxieties regarding the perceived demands of familial obligation. Indeed, if Quentin's true desire is to play the part of the cavalier, to act as the safeguard of his sister's purity, it seems curious that he chooses to seek refuge in contrived narratives of incest, a scheme that is equally problematic for the Compsons as a bourgeois family since it jeopardizes their reproductive capacity.¹⁶ Even if we accept the suggestion of Irwin, and others, that this tactic reflects an attempt to become a brother seducer, a kind of shadow form of the cavalier, the methodology itself remains problematic. For within his own musings, these incestuous fantasies do nothing to actually restore the structural integrity or perceived honor of the Compson family. On the contrary, Quentin envisions them as a mechanism for tearing the social structure asunder and allowing both Caddy and himself a mode of egress:

¹⁶ That Quentin's incestuous fantasies pose problems for both paternalist and bourgeois modes of familial organization suggests that the two social ideologies may not be as opposed to one another as they might otherwise seem. See below.

Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. (79)¹⁷

Quentin doesn't seek to maintain or restore the coordinates of any given social schema; rather, he seeks to escape the matrix composed by the social schema in which he finds himself locked, to formulate a plan that will cause the world to "roar away," even if it means seeking refuge in the "clean flames" of hell (177, 116). He does not want things to be sustained nor reverted; he wants them to be finished. To understand Quentin's neurosis in terms of social failure and its attendant traumas puts the cart before the proverbial horse. What is truly wreaking havoc on Quentin's psyche is not his apparent sense of failure, nor, it may be argued, even the feelings of impotence thereby incurred, but rather the constellation of cultural obligations mandated by the logic of bourgeois normativity, in particular, the demand that progeny work, in essentially all aspects of their life, to maintain the family's position within the broader socio-economic schema.

Although this demand arguably manifests itself in numerous different iterations, there are two primary variations that we encounter over the course of the novel, at least they pertain to the figure of Quentin. The most obvious example is Quentin's sense of obligation regarding Caddy's virginity and its protection from "unapproved" violation. Another, perhaps less obvious, example is actually evident from the outset of Quentin's own monologue. Waking up in his dorm-room at Harvard, Quentin watches a shadow move across the window curtains and hears the ticking of his grandfather's watch, noting how in this instant he finds himself "in time again"

¹⁷ Miss Quentin reiterates her namesake's conception of hell as a haven from familial imposition when she tells Jason, "I'd rather be in hell than anywhere where you are" (189).

(76). Moments later, his roommate Shreve enters, warning him that there is a “bell in two minutes,” and if he doesn’t “run” he’ll end up late for chapel. “I didn’t know it was that late,” Quentin responds, “I’ll have to hustle. I can’t stand another cut. The dean told me last week...”

(78). Quentin’s world is thus established from the outset as one defined by demands and obligations: the incessant ticking of the watch, the rigid academic schedule, the looming, punitive figure of the dean. Moreover, the exchange between Shreve and Quentin indicates that this sense of external obligation locates one its most salient manifestations in an element of the novel rarely talked about: the role of education.

Although often read as a figure defined by his artistic temperament, or his cavalier pretensions, Quentin is equally defined by his decidedly more quotidian status as a student. During the course of Benjy’s monologue, reference is made to Quentin’s scholarly status on at least four separate occasions. Prior to slapping Caddy for taking off her dress at the branch, a youthful Quentin seeks to establish his familial authority by invoking his elementary matriculation, declaring “I’m older...I go to school,” a comment that conflates the familial and the pedagogical (17). However, what becomes apparent during the course of his final day among the living is that Quentin’s attitude towards education is decidedly ambivalent if not outright hostile. His remarks to Shreve concerning “cuts” indicate that he has been engaging in a fairly regular pattern of truancy during his brief tenure at Harvard, and his decision to skip class in order to prepare for his eventual leap into the Charles River suggests that self-emancipation, the overriding rationale for his suicide, is seen by Quentin as something requiring a departure from the environs of academia. Even when he attempts to incorporate his education into his suicidal design, Quentin encounters something of an impasse, thinking at one point that “the displacement of water is equal to the something of something,” his inability to remember the

entirety of the Archimedean formula for volume signaling an acute difficulty where matters of praxis are concerned (90). Consequently, there appears to be something of a gap between Quentin's scholarly labors and what might be termed his "true self."

Here again, it is no doubt tempting to read Quentin as simply being impotent, as much a failed scholar as he is a failed cavalier. However, such a reading underestimates the profound interdependence that exists between the educational apparatus and normative social structures within the capitalist regime, something that would seem to suggest that there must be more to Quentin's scholarly disposition than simple incompetence or sloth. Althusser maintains that "the school...teaches 'know-how,' but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice.' All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, not to speak of the 'professionals of ideology'...must...be steeped in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously.'" (Althusser 89) Far from a simple mechanism for edification, schools ensure the perpetuation of capitalist social norms. Quentin's identity as a kind of "professional student" implicates him in this process of indoctrination and regulation, a fact evident in his youthful invocation of scholarship as a pretense for regulating his sister's behavior. Quentin's implication in this process is rendered all the more explicit when he gets into a fistfight at school attempting to defend the "honor" of a female classmate, an event where school quite literally becomes a staging ground for the (re)enforcement of social codes, a place to perform ideological "tasks." That at least part of what Quentin "learns" in school is how to play the part of the cavalier seems to signal a kind of convergence between bourgeois and paternalist ethos, a conflation evident as well in his remarks to Caddy at the branch concerning his elementary matriculation. At first glance, such a categorical collapse would seem to be highly problematic since paternalism, by definition situates itself in stark opposition to the acquisitive materialism

that defines bourgeois culture. However, as previously noted, the plantocratic culture from which the paternalist ideal sprang was arguably little more than performative cover for what was in fact a thoroughly bourgeois social schema. Consequently, while certain operational features might distinguish the two ideologies, I would like to suggest that in terms of primary concerns, they are in fact deeply intertwined, something evident in the shared emphasis they place on matters of the female body and female sexuality. After all, Jason is just as obsessed with the bodies of his female family members as Quentin is; however, its doubtful anyone would ever mistake him for a cavalier.

But even as Quentin appears to embrace the mandates of his scholarly labor, at least within the Benjy chapter, a certain dissonance is clearly evident in his execution of this labor. When Mr. Compson learns that Quentin got into a fight with one of his classmates because the other student threatened to put a frog in the desk of a female student, the father poses a practical question to his son: “Where was he going to get a frog in November” (68). Again, there is a temptation to read this as an instance of failure on Quentin’s part. But, in truth, Quentin has successfully fulfilled the obligations of his putative social role; he has “protected” the “honor” of the young girl and thereby done his small part to maintain the cultural status quo. What becomes apparent then is that it is not so much that Quentin is *incapable* of playing the role assigned him; it’s more that the role simply *does not fit*, its various cultural demands refusing to adhere to his own psychic coordinates, its enactment producing a kind of tragically-comic distortion within the social field with the end result being that otherwise normative behavior is rendered absurd. Situating Quentin’s failed attempts at gentlemanly propriety within the context of the schoolhouse we encounter a framework in which we might read such impotence as not simply a

failure of action but rather a failure of indoctrination, a reluctance within Quentin to learn, to “be steeped” fully within ideological conventions of modern capitalism.

What becomes increasingly clear over the course of Quentin’s monologue is that modern education and its attendant ideologies do not represent Quentin’s actual desires – i.e. that which he wants or believes himself to be as an active agent within the world – but rather the effects (and affects) of those social expectations imposed on him, especially by his family. At one point during Quentin’s imagined conversation with his father, Mr. Compson insists that “you will remember that for you to go to harvard has been your mothers dream since you were born and no compson has ever disappointed a lady” (178). That this conversation occurs within Quentin’s own imagination in no way diminishes the importance of what is said. On the contrary, it signals the fact that Mr. Compson’s emphasis on familial obligation reflects Quentin’s own understanding of the pattern of causality behind his educational career, one that in no way corresponds to his own apparent drives and desires but, rather, hews to the external demands of bourgeois social structures, especially in regards to family and gender-based propriety. By the time Quentin graduates from highschool it is apparent that his youthful attempts to conform to the role of student have proven unfruitful with earlier reluctance having become outright repudiation. “Let Jason have it,” he says in regards to the scholarly trajectory that has been laid out before him, “Give Jason a year at Harvard” (77). So overwhelming is Quentin’s desire to repudiate, to negate the coordinates of his condition, it is difficult ascertain what it might be that he actually wants in any positive sense. After all, the only clearly articulated desire that he articulates is one of negation, his longing to have the world “roar away.”

Quentin desire to reject his scholarly labors is particularly intriguing because it also signals a concomitant desire to reject his patrimony, the two quantities being all but inseparable.

Indeed, it is seemingly impossible to divorce his pedagogical anxieties from his familial anxieties, the former more often than not serving as a kind of reflective appendage of the latter, his repeated fisticuffs with various schoolmates – the unnamed frog-wrangler, Gerald Bland – corresponding to his supposed obligations as brother protector and thereby reinforcing the interplay between the two social spheres, a connection particularly evident in his violent interrogation of Bland: “Did you ever have a sister? did you?” (166). Given the thematic coupling implicit in this double-rejection, it may be fairly argued that Quentin’s scholarly reservations, the fact that he evinces “little interest in academics,” correspond to equal reservations regarding his own family and his functional position within it, and that he harbors a deep-seated desire to emancipate himself from both pedagogical and familial demands (Storhoff 472). Of course, what Quentin’s eventual suicide indicates – at least in part – is an overwhelming incapacity to enact such an emancipatory act. But even suicide proves incapable of liberating Quentin from the socio-economic structure that hems him in. In order to ensure that his body will sink to the bottom of the Charles River, Quentin purchases two iron weights, a measure that, while arguably necessary for his scheme, also reaffirms his position within the bourgeoisie’s consumption culture. Moreover, not long after his death, we encounter a number of Quentin’s family members appropriating his memory as a kind of abstract device for perpetuating particularly bourgeois agendas. Jason, for instance, invokes the memory of his dead brother in order to justify his various acts of financial duplicity, insisting that there can be nothing untoward about such actions since he is merely balancing the books. Similarly, Mrs. Compson uses the memory of her son’s suicide as a pretext for regulating – or, at any rate, attempting to regulate – the movements of her granddaughter, Miss Quentin, insisting that the shared name constitutes a curse that must be guarded against.

But why does Quentin harbor this frantic yearning for emancipation from family and school? The simplest answer is that both these social spheres represent external factors that have been imposed upon Quentin rather than constituent elements “genuinely” integrated into his sense of self. They signal what he is *supposed* to be. Admittedly, ego formation always requires the influence of external input. But as Jurgen Habermas points out, this process is not simply somatic in nature; it requires a degree of recognition, of “intersubjective acknowledgement” (152). Unable to remember who discovered the Mississippi River, incapable of saying “mother,” Quentin repeatedly fails (or refuses) to make such acknowledgments, operating in a manner that often seems more reactive than actually engaged (88).¹⁸ Consequently, his attempts to fulfill the roles assigned him, whether in the schoolhouse or the home, often have the quality of shallow pantomime, a series of effectively empty “gestures,” constituting little more than what Donald Kartiganer identifies as “an exercise in style” (391). This is something particularly evident in his confrontation with Dalton Ames where his insistence that he’ll give Ames “until sundown to leave town,” smacks of the most abject kind of cliché (159). The problem, then, with reading Quentin strictly as an artist, a cavalier, or a brother-protector is that these titles indicate what he does but not necessarily who he is, and, as previously noted, much of Quentin’s pathology stems from the apparent schism between matters of action and identity. At best, the aforementioned appellations only get at part of the story. Quentin’s sense of alienation from his own labor, whether familial or academic, his sense that what he does not necessarily constitute a genuine extension of his interiority, and its profound existential import is reflected in his conviction that every task he has ever performed is essentially meaningless: “all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent in

¹⁸ It’s worth noting that Quentin’s imagined conversation with his father often feels more like a two-sided lecture than a genuine conversation, or even a real argument.

themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was not who was not was not who” (170). Significantly, Quentin frames this personal crisis not as a problem of failure but as one of negation. Even that which he has in fact accomplished, all that he has “done” and “felt,” is seen as being “without relevance,” the sum total of his labors constituting nothing more than a series of “shadows.” As a consequence, Quentin reaches the conclusion that his work, whether familial or pedagogical, actually affirms that he is “not who” those actions would actually seem to indicate. In short, his labor is not his own; bourgeois though he may be, he is completely lacking in anything like control. He is without any sense of ownership, literal or symbolic.

Quentin’s profound lack of agency is epitomized by the stifling air of entrapment that characterizes his psychic space. Even in the face of his conscious opposition, education stills ends up locking Quentin into the coordinates of his presumed socio-economic role as the primary male scion of a bourgeois household, a “man of the house” in training. When he proposes to Caddy that they run away with Benjy to a place “*where nobody knows us*,” Caddy responds with incredulity, asking “*On what on your school money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard don’t you see you’ve got to finish now if you don’t finish [Benjy’ll] have nothing*” (124). Quentin’s attempt to expunge the guilt of his perceived fraternal theft and to escape the demands of bourgeois culture only ends up leading him deeper into the webwork of economic contingencies that constitutes the modern capitalist system. Given the nature of capitalism-as-social-apparatus, this should not strike us as surprising. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, “capitalism...has no exterior limit, but only an interior limit that is capital itself and that it does not encounter, but reproduces by always displacing it” (230-231). Seeking to open a line of flight by which he, Caddy, and Benjy can escape the boundaries of bourgeois normativity

and capitalist constraint, Quentin only manages to locate new modes of debt and is immediately drawn back into his labor, a retraction signaled by Caddy's insistence that he's "*got to finish*" his work.

Moreover, Caddy's pragmatic protest indicates the manner in which capital functions as the primary binding mechanism in the Compson family; it is what establishes the synthesis between Harvard and the home, and it is what reinforces and oversees the bonds between the family members even as it threatens to tear them apart. Faulkner makes this more than apparent by rendering Quentin's education financially contingent on the sale of Benjy's pasture, thereby establishing a kind of narratological juncture point that firmly situates both the familial and the pedagogical within the coordinates of the New South economy, rendering the family sustained position within the socio-economic schema contingent on the sale of southern land to outside interests, an arrangement that echoes, however obliquely, the general design of the South's colonial economy. In other words, what ultimately dictates Quentin's identity, as son and as student, are the various calculations and vagaries of modern capital.

Jason

And then there is Jason whose own relationship to the economic verities of his age might be described as a kind of ambivalent or contested faith. His faith rests not only in the apparent promise of the New South economy, as a number of critics have noted, but also in the more general capacity of capital to foster and enable change, to open up the future and reorder his own chaotic past (if only provisionally). But even if Jason embraces the realities of the New South's socio-economic paradigm, his relationship to it is notably ambiguous, something evident in both

his questionable fiscal aptitude and what might be called his propensity towards continual vacillation.

Of course, the doubled nature of Jason's character has generally been noted not for the manner in which it negotiates the commercial intersection between the spatial and the temporal, but rather for the way in which it manifests itself in a compulsive mode of seemingly self-defeating hypocrisy that borders on outright schizophrenia, a kind of frantic and continuous cognitive oscillation. While earlier critics generally accepted Faulkner's portrayal of Jason as the "first sane Compson since before Culloden" (*Sound and the Fury: Norton Critical Edition* 212), scholarship of the last forty years or so has firmly rejected this assessment, insisting that Jason is just as mentally unhinged as his two brothers, if not more so. Donald Kartiganer, for one, characterizes Jason as being thoroughly "irrational" and "neurotic" (630). Offering a similarly negative assessment, James Guetti describes the character as "fanatical," and an "eternal loser" (Quoted in Wallach 79). But even while it is certainly valid to read Jason's seemingly contradictory behavior as an indication of mental dysfunction, it is important to make a distinction regarding how this dysfunction should be understood. For Benjy and Quentin, cognitive distortion registers either an inability or an outright refusal to function within the normative standards of modern capitalism. On the other hand, if Jason is indeed crazy, it's precisely because he is a capitalist of the first order.

Indeed, Jason's investment in the modern capitalist ethos is most clearly evident in his often contradictory behavior. Contradiction is not, as Marx famously noted, simply a random element within the schema of modern capitalism, and modernity more generally (Berman 19). It is, rather, something like a foundational principle. Instigating a seemingly endless proliferation of conjunctions, capitalism establishes a vast network of interdependence, often fusing together

disparate, and even oppositional, elements (Deleuze and Guattari 254). For those southerners entrenched in the operations of the New South's economy, these numerous structural antimonies must have been all too apparent. It was, for all intents and purposes, the primary feature of their economic milieu. As C. Vann Woodward indicates, the era of the New South was characterized in large measure by the ascent of a new southern commercial class, one that was able, more often than not, to accrue a handsome profit from the increasing industrialization of the southern states. But even as they amassed their collective fortune, few of the individuals that made up this new class ever rose above the level of functionaries, acting "as agents, retainers, and executives," for Northern interests but rarely operating as "principals." Consequently, the economy over which these individuals "presided" increasingly became "one of branch plants, branch banks, captive mines, and chain stores" (Woodward 292). Establishing an integral and persistent mode of tension between region and economy, this economic arrangement produced a scenario in which financial success almost invariably meant working against one's own (regional) interests. Although the Compsons generally conceive of themselves as members of a prior, presumably antebellum, bourgeois class – a not wholly invalid conceit given the family's history – their various attempts to stay socially solvent within the new economic order, including the selling off of their land and Jason's attempts to play the cotton market, implicate them in this new commercial paradigm, make them members of this new commercial class in action if not necessarily in fact.

An investor in the cotton market, Jason clearly comprehends the economic coordinates of his cultural reality, even if his capacity for negotiating and expressing such comprehension rarely rises above the vulgar. He fumes over what he understands as the inherent injustices of the system, claiming how he can't "see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people

to take the money way from us country suckers...I don't want a killing...I just want my money back that these dam jews have gotten with all their guaranteed inside dope" (234). Jason's chauvinistic demonization of the great urban metropolis and economic "puppet master" reiterates the basic terms of Quentin's own misgivings regarding the changing face of the South, albeit in a decidedly more caustic and paranoid register.¹⁹ Like his brother, Jason appreciates the manner in which the integrity of Jefferson's social interior composition has, like most of the South in the early twentieth century, become paradoxically reliant on exterior forces, forces whose input is simultaneously feared and desired.

And yet it is this recognition that actually draws him in deeper. Jason's attempt to reconcile the apparently contradictory facets of this new cultural paradigm hinges on his willingness to accept this paradigm more or less on its own terms, to fully inhabit the new space carved out by the New South economy. It is this acceptance, qualified though it may be by bitter frustration, that constitutes Jason's neurosis, his crazed and putatively hypocritical mien. Like Quentin, he is trapped in the binding circuit of capitalist contingencies, a state of entrapment exemplified by his contentious relationship with the cotton market. In order to get his money back from those "dam jews," Jason finds himself in a position where he is compelled to invest further still in the system that he believes has plundered his own resources, something particularly and comically apparent in his contentious relationship with the investment firm that advises him on trading: "if I wasn't going to take the advice, what was I paying ten dollars a month for" (192). Walking away would mean admitting his loss and adopting a position outside the network of investment capital. This latter point is particularly significant in that Jason's interest in the cotton market – and the modern economy more generally – often seems to be more

¹⁹ Wayne Westbrook notes that "Jason's conviction that the Western Union Telegraph Company was hand in glove with those 'Eastern' sharks is a comic example of the conspiracy theory (widely believed in the agrarian South) that Wall Street was getting richer while the rest of the country grew poorer." (Westbrook)

a matter of pride and authority than profit as such. Within the network of capital, “every investment is collective, every fantasy is a group fantasy and in this sense a position of reality” (Deleuze and Guattari 280). One’s interests cannot be divorced from the capricious movements of the capitalist machine, and yet it is one’s interests that effectively constitute subjectivity, at least where matters of economy and labor are concerned (Zizek 196). Deleuze and Guattari offer the example of the menial worker who refuses to repudiate the capitalist model that has exploited him because he has invested years of labor in his particular industry and feels this defines who he is: it is what allows him to support his family and claim a position, however meager, in the social schema. Therefore what is of the utmost importance within capitalism’s curious power-schema is not necessarily how much money one has – although this certainly bears an undeniable degree of significance – but whether or not one is plugged into the circuit of capital. One’s very notion of subjectivity relies on it. Under the capitalist regime, to be either without capital or incapable of producing capital, renders one effectively non-existent, outside the bounds of interpolation. Jason signals his understanding of this economic reality when he tells Earl that if ever runs a business it will be his own, suggesting that capital and whatever power comes with it is ultimately a matter of carving out one’s position within society.

Therefore, while it is tempting to interpret Jason’s pathology strictly through the lens of his more explicitly economic endeavors, whether that be playing the stock market, stealing from his family members, or engaging in the mundane life of rural commerce, there is a way in which such a reading actually misses the point. As several critics have demonstrated, what Jason truly cares about is not money but what money represents, and what it represents is that which Jason believes he has been denied, the bank job promised him by Herbert Head, the ordinary lost object and the central “metaphor by which his identity is established.” (Guetti Quoted in Wallach 79)

As Jason himself declares at one point, “money has no value; it’s just the way you spend it. It don’t belong to anybody, so why try to hoard it. It just belongs to the man that can get it and keep it” (194). At first glance this comment seems like the most abject, and comically absurd, display of hypocrisy, and indeed there is undeniably a degree to which it is just that. It would even appear to contain a basic contradiction. However, whatever absurdity it might be said to indicate, this comment also illustrates Jason’s acute understanding of how money actually operates within the social sphere.²⁰ His emphasis on the active quality of capital, “the way in which you spend it,” stresses its inherently functional nature, a nature that he applies even to the seemingly static condition of possession; one does not simply own a quantity of money, rather one must be sure to “keep it,” to figure out a way to perpetually consume one’s income. His comprehension, if not mastery, of capital’s inherently kinetic quality is evident as well in his attempts to play the cotton market. As Rick Wallach explains, “values in arbitrage are never fixed until the speculator sells or calls; they float freely, subject to the vicissitudes of trade. The fixation of value only occurs when the speculator acts” (Wallach 84). Similarly, Wayne Westbrook notes that investors “have no interest or stake in the underlying commodity but seek to profit by predicting market moves in futures prices” (Westbrook 55). As someone who fancies himself a consummate investor, Jason, it may be argued, is more interested in consumption than any particular product, including money; what ultimately matters is the movement of capital. For him money is a means to an end rather than the end in itself.

Within the grand scheme of the modern economy, this seemingly counterintuitive distinction makes sense. Since the social schema of capitalism is defined by the organization of capital flows, power resides in those individuals or institution capable of effectively

²⁰ This is not to say that Jason possesses any sort of real business acumen. As with Quentin, Jason’s apparent capacity for understanding does not always equal a commensurate aptitude. Cf. Kartiganer 630.

manipulating the organization of these flows. After selling a brief glimpse of his niece to Caddy for a hundred dollars, Jason thinks to himself: “I reckon that’ll show you. I reckon you’ll know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it” (205). What matters to Jason is not the acquisition of the fifty dollars itself but rather the sense that he has subjected his sister to a form of deprivation symbolically commensurate to his own perceived loss and thereby reestablished a particular balance of power within the coordinates of the Compson family. Money thus functions as a mechanism for ensuring that Jason retains a particular position of (perceived) authority within the social schema, both as constituted by his family and by Jefferson more generally. His true interest, therefore, lies in matters of dominance and those elements in his life that he can exploit in order to maintain a grip on his putatively dominant social position. For Jason the main arena where he proves himself even remotely capable of exercising this dominance is not in the field of commerce – try though he might – but within his own family household. His role as tyrant within the Compson home thus illustrates the manner in which capitalism generally, and bourgeois ethos specifically, appropriate the power dynamics within the familial organism in order to extend their reach, something particularly evident in the fact that Jason’s petty tyranny almost always bears the stamp of economic concerns, in particular his deep-seated conviction that his family is impeding his attempts to make his way in the world of the New South economy even as he is robbing a number of them blind.

It is important to note that Jason’s various attempts to assert this dominance, particularly within the Compson home, disproportionately affect a very particular segment of society. Jason’s description of the “the man who can get and keep” money, subtly indicates the thoroughly gendered nature of the capitalist economy in which he operates and the manner in which this distributive network of capital helps to ensure the perpetuation of a patriarchal ideal. For while

Jason certainly frames his notions of economy around matters of race and region, it is gender that functions as his primary referent for establishing the chaotic coordinates of his own personal fiscal ideology. His great sense of self-affirmation resides in his oft-repeated conviction that he is “man enough to keep [the] the flour barrel full,” a sentiment that equates masculinity with the capacity to function effectively within the marketplace (208). It is women that he steals from and it is primarily women who suffer at the hands of his desire to assert authority. Therefore, to understand Jason as a figure of economy is to conceive of him not as a businessman but as a would-be patriarch. What truly signals Jason’s position within the matrix of modern capital is not his relationship with money or traditional modes of commerce; it is, rather, his relationship to the women in his life and in particular his niece, Miss Quentin; or, more precisely, her body. Both surrogate daughter and engine of capital, Miss Quentin represents a kind of fulcrum upon which matters of socio-economic control are balanced within the Compson family.

Jason repeatedly frames Miss Quentin’s body within the parameters of commerce. Harshly critiquing the clothes she wears and making numerous references to the “paint“ she is apparently forever “gobbing...on her face,” he often seems incapable of understanding his niece without recourse to various material signifiers (180). When he attempts at one point to whip Miss Quentin with his belt, Jason notes how her “kimono came unfastened, flapping about her, dam near naked” (184). Suffused with overtones of rape and incest, the scene also underscores the operational quality of the material goods involved in the tableau, Miss Quentin’s sexuality inscribed not only her flesh but also her clothing, just as Jason’s presumed authority is distributed between both the hand that grasps his niece’s wrist and the belt he brandishes before her. Jason’s attitude toward his niece – and his deep-seated misogyny more generally – illuminates a point of convergence between sex, capital, and power, one that serves as a kind of

wellspring for his own sense of subjectivity.

This subjectivity is inextricably bound up in notions of possession and an overarching conviction on Jason's part that his family is, in most respects, little more than an extension of his varied business interests. This conflation of the familial and the commercial is evident in the often-charged language he uses to describe his own kin. In response to his mother's plea that he remember that Miss Quentin is his "own flesh and blood," Jason makes a revealing comment, stating, "that's just what I'm thinking of – flesh. And a little blood too, if I had my way. When people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger" (181). Asserting his position of authority within the Compson family, and in particular his role as disciplinarian and arbiter of his niece's behavior, Jason invokes a telling constellation of images corresponding to an antebellum rhetoric of slavery and white supremacy. Jason's re-appropriation and reformulation of the term "flesh and blood," his designation of Miss Quentin as a "nigger," situates the matrix of interfamilial relations within the explicitly corporeal economy of the master-slave relationship, one in which the labor of the latter always functions in the service of the former's economic subjectivity and wherein the regulatory apparatus is inscribed directly on the flesh; indeed, wherein matters of the flesh are paramount. Jason's remark is intriguing as well for its invocation of a prior mode of Southern bourgeois economy wherein the labor force (i.e. slaves) was made up not of capital wage workers but "subsistence wage workers," to use Woods's term. This latter title bears a certain resonance when considering Miss Quentin's position within the Compson family given that her own subsistence relies on Jason's own capacity to provide, a fact that Jason is never hesitant to raise. Consequently, this conflation between niece and slave not only suggests that Jason views himself as owner of Miss Quentin's body but also that Miss Quentin is, in Jason's estimation, a laborer whose corporeal

capacities, however defined, are meant to serve his own economic interests. It also illustrates, however obliquely, the manner in which the rise of the New South economy did not so much eradicate prior economic models outright but rather forced such models to recede into particular enclaves and adopt new operational veneers, the practice of sharecropping being the most salient example of this shift.

As noted already, the body of his female family members represents a persistent preoccupation for Jason, one working in tandem with his various fiscal obsessions. However, this preoccupation is not so much erotic or pious as it is brutally pragmatic. His concern with Miss Quentin's perceived sexual impropriety has nothing to do with the latter's actual welfare and everything to do with his ability to maintain an economically viable position within the community. "Do you think I can afford to have her running about the streets with every drummer that comes to town," he says at one point, "and them telling the new ones up and down the road where to pick up a hot one when they made Jefferson" (230). The use of the word "afford" is neither incidental nor accidental. It indicates, with crude precision, the manner in which Miss Quentin is conceived of as an item of balance within a larger network of calculations. Moreover, the specificity of Jason's complaint, his evocation of drummers and networks of quasi-prostitution, indicates the tenuous nature of such calculations, a realization that "exchange, by definition, both encourages and disallows fixed positions" (Snead 140). For if Jason's commodification of Miss Quentin's body enables him to recapture a position of power, however meager, whether it be through the extortion of funds from Caddy or the more general sense of control derived from presumptions of ownership, it also opens up his interior world to various invasive currents of capital. Rendering his niece a commodity, he also renders her a mobile item of exchange; circulation becomes her *raison d'être*. Consequently, when Miss Quentin tells her

uncle, “Whatever I do, it’s your fault...If I’m bad, it’s because I had to be. You made me,” her words are not simply the result youthful self-pity or petulance; they are the condemnatory markers of fact (260).

Indeed, it may be argued that Jason is the first one to position Miss Quentin’s body within the framework of commerce, the one who most explicitly activates the mechanisms that enable bourgeois gender convention. When he agrees to allow Caddy a glimpse of her own daughter in exchange for a hundred dollars Jason renders his own kin an object of exchange value while simultaneously reframing his filial network as a kind of corporeal economy, one wherein the feminine – generally speaking – functions as a source of profit for the masculine. Admittedly, as an instance of exchange this episode must implicate more than one individual and, as Deborah Clarke, for one, is quick to point out, Caddy would appear to be just as sullied by her involvement in this transaction, one that “undermines” Caddy’s “idealized status and her maternal position” (Clarke 63). However, I would submit that the realities of the particular economy in which the novel is set, one that is overwhelmingly patriarchal, renders such a verdict a bit too harsh, or at least somewhat problematic. For even while it is Caddy who initially suggests this exchange it stands to reason that her decision to purchase a kind of fleeting moment of motherhood is actually driven by an understanding of her brother’s socio-economic predisposition. As she says to Jason, “I know you. I grew up with you,” a comment that not only condemns Jason for his duplicity, but also revives images of the young boy seemingly incapable of removing his hands from his pockets (204). When Jason threatens to send Quentin “away” after he learns that Dilsey has allowed Caddy to visit with Benjy – at no cost, it should be noted – Caddy simply responds by asking, “How much?” (208). This almost pavlovian response indicates Caddy’s innate understanding that the only method of recourse available to her when

dealing with her brother is the deployment of capital and that whatever power is available to her within the social schema of the New South economy resides in her capacity to further enable and empower its far reaching circuit of commerce. In order to see her daughter Caddy must pay Jason, a figure of commerce, thereby mobilizing capital within the circuit and enabling Jason's own ravenous patterns of consumption. Therefore, the only way in which she gain a degree of authority within the Compson's family structure, the only way in which she is capable inhabiting the position of motherhood, even if only fleetingly, is via those channels of capital constituting the modern economy. To be a mother or a brother is to be a consumer.

That the onus for this "perversion" of family relations rests primarily, if not solely, on Jason's shoulders is evident in the fact that he continually reasserts the fundamentally economic nature of the arrangement between him and Caddy. When Caddy visits Earl's store to express her feelings of betrayal at the brief glimpse she received of her daughter, Jason reacts with indignant fury, proclaiming, "if it had been a thousand dollars, you'd still owe me after the risk I took," a comment that resonates with the cold and calculating logic of the cotton market, particularly in its invocation of comparative value and "risk" (206). Moreover, it is Jason who perpetuates Miss Quentin's commodified status by purloining those checks Caddy sends her daughter, a scheme that effectively transforms the mechanics of familial care into a protracted economic endeavor.

In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault observes how corporeal productions played a central role the development of bourgeois culture:

The emphasis on the body should undoubtedly be linked to the process of growth and establishment of bourgeois hegemony: not, however, because of the market value assumed by labor capacity, but because of what the 'cultivation' of its own body could

represent politically, economically, and historically for the present and the future of the bourgeoisie. (125)

According to Foucault it was this cultivation of the body that helped to situate the bourgeoisie in a position of socio-economic dominance, allowing the bourgeoisie to “retain its differential value” as something exceptional, rendering status a matter of corporeal consideration (123). Faulkner’s novel is deeply invested in the dark and deleterious nature of this cultivation process. In many respects, this process is the primary thematic template upon which his characters are distributed and key incidents are drawn. Anxieties regarding Mr. Compson’s alcoholism, Uncle Maury’s various improprieties, and the perceived danger of Benjy’s latent sexuality, all function as central narrative engines within the text because they underscore the manner in which perceived physical aberrations compromise the social and economic viability of the bourgeois family – indeed, compromise its very ability of the family to be labeled “bourgeois.” It is anxiety regarding female sexuality, however, that is, in many respects, the novel’s true thematic linchpin. The Compson’s obsessive preoccupation with disciplining the bodies of their female offspring both constitutes and endangers the integrity of their structural coordinates, all while producing a field of action in which nurturing and abuse effectively collapse into one another.

This conflation is particularly apparent during the dinner scene wherein Jason employs gestures of nourishment and filial concern in order to assert his dominance within the household. Turning to his niece, Jason inquires whether she has received enough food:

“Will you have some more rice?” I says.

“No,” she says.

“Better let me give you some more,” I says.

“I don’t want anymore,” she says.

“Not at all,” I says. “You’re welcome.” (258)

This bizarre instance of attempted force-feeding signals the manner in which nourishment within the Compson/bourgeois household is bound up in a network of economic contingencies mapped out on an implicitly gendered framework. As the home’s putative breadwinner and the keeper of the “flour barrel,” Jason quite literally oversees the physical integrity of his mother and niece through his regulation of domestic patterns of consumption. Such regulation functions in turn as one of the key elements within the Compson family’s rather tenuous power structure, with consumption signifying not only a mode of sustenance but also control. As though to make the point explicit, Mrs. Compson tells Miss Quentin that it is in fact Jason’s “bread that you and I eat,” and therefore it is “only right that he should expect obedience from you” (260). Circulating the modes of consumption dictated by contemporary economic norms, Jason effectively replicates the colonial economy within the home, adapting it to the particular gender dynamics of bourgeois culture. Whatever nourishment, whatever corporeal prosperity, that Miss Quentin – or Mrs. Compson for that matter – acquires within the context of the familial economy ultimately profits the socio-economic system itself, overseen by the figure of the patriarch. Although technically situated outside the coordinates of the bourgeois homespace, even Caddy finds herself subject to this oppressive arrangement of economic contingencies through her interactions with Jason. When Jason agrees to accept the child support checks for Miss Quentin on Caddy’s behalf he makes sure to add the telling caveat: “as long as you behave and do like I

tell you,” an admonishment that entails, among other things, the regulation of Caddy’s movements, an assurance that she will remain outside the boundaries of Jefferson (210).

Much like her namesake, however, Miss Quentin refuses to accept this system of obligation and contingency, insisting that she doesn’t “want anymore.” Miss Quentin reiterates this refusal several times throughout Jason’s monologue. During a particularly heated argument Miss Quentin points to the dress she is wearing and asks Jason, “do you know what I’d do if I thought your money or her’s either bought one cent of this...I’d tear it right off and throw it into the street” (187-188). Miss Quentin’s threat to tear off her dress acknowledges that her refusal to accept the economic contingencies of bourgeois normativity renders her vulnerable and naked, a figure positioned outside the protective, if stifling, membrane of middle class propriety. However, such nakedness also posits a genuine form of liberation, a stripping away of the economic contingencies that dictate the cultivation of her flesh, whether that be in the guise of food, clothing, or the shelter that Miss Quentin ultimately abandons. Moreover, this threatened divestment also doubles as an act of reclamation, an insistence on Miss Quentin’s part that she be the one to dictate the articulation and ornamentation of her own body, whether that means “painting” her face or “playing out of school.”

Obviously, the potential for such an emancipatory gesture poses a real problem for Jason. After all, Jason has a literal investment in his niece’s “well-being”; if anything were to happen to her, if she were to escape the boundaries of the Compson family-proper, one of his primary channels of revenue would be cut off. Repositories of material inheritance, male offspring have long functioned as a primary vehicle for traditional modes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, enacting such operations through the mechanism of alliance-formation. Female offspring, on the other hand, tend to move laterally across the strata formations inscribed

on the socius through these operations. In other words, it is the body of the daughter (or granddaughter as the case may be) that moves across the lines of division established by the bourgeois family. Such transgressive movement is absolutely necessary if the bourgeois family is to remain a viable and solvent social organism since it is this horizontal trajectory that effectively constitutes alliance and helps to ensure the perpetuation of filial networks. As DeCerteau notes, it is only through the transgression of boundaries that such lines of demarcation can be firmly established and maintained, an observation that applies equally to both spatial and social divisions (127). The problem is that by opening up these particular “lines of flight,” controlled though they may be, the familial unit renders itself susceptible to various forms of “contamination.” Moreover, the continual movement of the female body across the social strata as necessitated by the mechanics of bourgeois culture means that in order to sustain itself the bourgeois family must submit itself to a perpetual process of dissolution.

What this means is that even as it empowers certain modes of patriarchal dominance, the modern economy also renders the very conceit of patriarchy profoundly tenuous and problematic. As Engels argues, it is actually capitalism that inaugurates contemporary notions of cuckoldry, the intense and ever-present masculine anxiety that one’s legacy, one’s patrimony, is susceptible to corruption by outside forces.²¹ And it is this more than anything that underlies Jason’s neurosis. Even as he seeks to exploit the consequences of this socio-economic phenomenon, profiting, in effect, from his niece’s bastard status, Jason also suffers under its apparently all-consuming logic. A would-be patriarch himself, Jason must continually contend with the fluidity of female sexuality just as he must contend with the fluidity of a mercurial cotton market. Even within his presumed position of power, Jason is just as bound by the

²¹ Of course, it may also be inferred that this means that the need to assert the rule of patriarchy becomes all the more fevered and violent under the regime of capitalism, even as it becomes an ever more tenuous and dubious proposition.

network of contingencies that define the bourgeoisie's familial economy. Indeed, Jason's most lucid pronouncement might well be his declaration that "blood is blood and you cant get around it" (243).

The Gibsons

What needs to be noted, of course, is that all the matters we have thus far examined, whether that be issues of time, space, or modes of exchange are bracketed, refined, and ultimately complicated by attendant issues of race. Indeed, within the context of the modern southern economy, as well as the Western economy more generally, matters of race and commerce often prove more or less inextricable, a residual and arguably inescapable consequence of colonialism's longstanding investment in both the rhetoric and practice of racial hierarchy. Throughout *The Sound and the Fury*, black-white interaction is almost invariably enacted on the field of economic exchange, the Compsons refusing to apprehend black individuals outside the context of labor. Conversely, scenes concerning matters of labor or commerce are almost always attended by issues of race.²² Given the socio-economic legacy of American slavery and the cultural context in which the novel is situated, there is, admittedly, little surprising in this racist and demeaning attitude. However, as a number of critics have noted, this racially coded mode of productivity, whatever its historical "logic" might be, underscores the profoundly ambiguous and problematic nature of subjectivity within the social framework of

²² A very brief list of examples: Quentin's encounter with the Italian girl while purchasing buns in the bakery outside Cambridge, as well as his scuffle with her brother Julio who we later learn has left work in order to search for his sister; Jason's interactions with Job at Earl's shop and his continual condemnation of those New York Jews who he relies on for advice regarding the cotton market.

the New South economy, primarily as a consequence of the slavery economy which was its antecedent.²³

Assessing the relationship between the Compsons and the Gibsons, Thadious Davis notes that “it is the ‘place’ of the blacks to sustain the whites and reinforce their world” (Davis 73). Moreover, Davis points out that this sense of obligation derives from “a ritual of survival enacted by the black servants and the southern white gentility: service and loyalty in exchange for material goods and protection” (72-73). Davis’s portrayal of this interracial “ritual” indicates the manner in which racial identity locates many of its primary coordinates within networks of material economy, her invocation of a white “world” emphasizing the manner in which black labor empowers not only a particular system of production but also a specific socio-ontological regime. Without the toil of black labor, “white gentility” could not exist. But more than this, the relationship that we see play out between the Compsons and the Gibsons exemplifies the often problematic nature of this interdependence between social conceptions of white and black, one that threatened to jeopardize the integrity of such categories even as it helped to engender their particular contours.

This is particularly true where the Compsons are concerned. For while ideologies of white supremacy allow the Compsons to retain some vestigial sense of authority, the mechanisms and methodologies required for the perpetuation of such ideologies simultaneously endanger their position within the social schema. Patricia McKee asserts that this shadowing process whereby whiteness depends on constituent forms of blackness effectively bifurcates white identity, noting that to “equate being black with being the shadow of a white man’s self is not only to include black persons within the identity of white persons but also to make black

²³ Cf. Loichot, Valerie. *Orphan Narratives : The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007. 19 – 36.

persons necessary to that identity, which depends on an internalized division or opposition” (McKee 101). Similar to capitalist logic that figures individuality as a paradoxical process of consumption, ideologies of white supremacy require an interpolation of the racial other within the matrix of the interior self. Unabashedly racist, both Quentin and Jason exhibit an almost obsessive preoccupation with African Americans and speak of them with an air of presumed authority. Quentin’s remark that a “nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among,” demonstrates the manner in which he and the other Compsons view blacks as mere extensions of a functionally white world (87). Moreover, it reveals how this framework of function and utility in which the black subject is placed also works to effectively conflate black and white identity. For if black a individual essentially represents an “obverse reflection of the white people he lives among,” then black identity, by its very definition, contains elements of whiteness, at least within the context of white perception. Conversely, white identity cannot escape the black elements within its own design.

On the one hand, the interdependence evident in the relationship between the Compsons and the Gibsons simply reflects the complexities of a protracted commercial exchange. The contingencies inherent in any labor schema always complicate, and indeed endanger, presumed systems of power and authority since the upper echelons are so thoroughly dependent upon the laboring segments of society. When ideologies of racial supremacy are grafted onto this paradoxical framework, however, the import of such a scenario becomes all the more profound since such ideologies conceive of particular power arrangements not as simply right or proper but as thoroughly natural and biologically essential. For Philip Weinstein, the influence of this ontological quandary – and the concomitant drive to naturalize social categories – is particularly

apparent in that scene wherein Quentin spies from a train window, a black man seated atop a mule, describing the figure as being “carved out of the hill itself” (87). According to Weinstein, such language indicates the manner in which Quentin and the Compsons (and possibly Faulkner, at least at this point in his life) perceive blacks as “pure symbol...a monument to a certain temporal sanity and mode of social relations” (173). But we should be quick to add that the symbolism Quentin chooses to employ is profoundly autochthonous, the black rider rising from the very earth. Consequently, within the context of the New South economy, the contradictions of the modern labor force signal a crisis that is not merely functional or political, but also thoroughly existential, exceeding the bounds of general production. Davis suggests that Jason’s virulent bigotry stems in large part from the fact that “his own manhood does not allow him to admit that, at least in the case of his family, not only do the servants think they run the whole family, they actually do run it” (84). The complex synergy that exists between the Compsons and the Gibsons, therefore, complicates not only questions of authority but also concomitant questions of identity, not least of these being the issue of Jason’s “manhood.” But, as Davis notes, Jason’s sense of his own masculinity is also largely dependent upon his ability to keep the Gibsons in his employ and, what’s more, to keep them fed, to nourish those figures that undermine his own sense of authority (87).

McKee argues that the functional nature of the Gibsons, as well as all of the black characters in the novel, renders them essentially two-dimensional, their sole narratological purpose being to refine the contours of their white counterparts. However, while I agree that Faulkner’s depiction of black identity is decidedly more uniform than his depiction of white identity, I want to suggest that we should not be too quick to read the symbolic miscegenation instituted by the south’s racialized modes of labor as being simply unidirectional in its influence.

Although comparably marginal within the novel's racial rhetoric, black fears of white contamination are indeed present. Luster's description of the Compsons as "funny folks" who he is glad not to be any part of, registers the youth's relief that he is genetically separated from a potential strain of "funniness" (276). It seems noteworthy as well that the black Luster establishes his own normalcy in contrast to the aberrance of the white Compsons. Though perhaps less explicit and direct than his grandson's pronouncements, Roskus' insistence that there is a curse on the Compson family and the Compson property signals similar notions regarding white contamination. "Ain't the sign of it laying right there on that bed," he says, indicating the "afflicted" Benjy. Dilsey dismisses this, insisting that Benjy "ain't hurt none of you and yourn" (29). In a parallel scene from several years later, however, Faulkner describes Dilsey placing "a long piece of wood" between an infant Luster and Benjy as the two lie together in bed, Dilsey telling the latter to "stay on your side now...Luster little, and you don't want to hurt him" (32). Although by no means a literal instance of potential contamination, this latter scene certainly indicates the "danger" posed when whiteness gains a certain degree of proximity, especially when whiteness is understood as a marker not only of race but class as well. Given the fact that Luster's future obligations to Benjy will indeed prove stifling to the precocious youth, Dilsey's admonition, her attempt to maintain a degree of separation between her kin and her charge, signals, however obliquely, the danger, both physical and metaphysical, implicit in black labor. Even if no real discernible curse comes to pass, there is a recognition on the part of all the Gibsons, even Dilsey, that the threat of affliction, embodied in the starkly white figure of Benjy who is in many respect the living avatar of their collective labor, is all too real.

Perhaps the most compelling example of perceived contamination by whiteness comes when the Gibsons are walking to church on Easter Sunday with Benjy and Frony expresses concern:

“I wish you wouldn’t bring him to church, mammy,” Frony said. “Folks talkin.”

“Whut folks?” Dilsey said.

“I hears em,” Frony said.

“And I knows whut kind of folks,” Dilsey said. “Trash white folks. Dat’s who it is. Think he aint good enough fer white church, but nigger church aint good enough fer him.”

“Dey talk, jes de same,” Frony said. (290)

Critical attention has tended to focus on Dilsey’s reaction in this scene, reading her forceful repudiation of “white trash” rumor as a quintessential example of the character’s integral sense of Christian charity and tender mercy. But due consideration should also be given to Frony’s own misgivings and the social implications behind them. Although what exactly is being said by these unidentified “folks” is never clarified, Frony’s concern allows us to infer that the Gibsons are, at least to some degree, implicated in both the rhetoric and the social consequences of this talk. Her particular anxiety regarding Benjy’s presence in church indicates that her concerns are primarily in regards to matters of the public arena and the manner in which the public sphere corresponds to issues of identity. Through their association with Benjy, an association inextricably bound up in matters of labor and economy, the Gibsons find their position within the

black community, as well as Jefferson's community at large, rendered decidedly ambiguous as they themselves are increasingly perceived as extensions of Benjy's aberrance.

When the Gibsons pass a cluster of black children on their way to church, the youths dare one another to run up and touch Benjy, one of them insisting that his or her compatriots won't do it, "case Miss Dilsey lookin" (291). The children's treatment of Benjy as an almost folkloric boogeyman signals the manner in which this strange white figure informs the cultural practices, social perceptions, and internal mythos of the black community. Moreover, this youthful game is significant in the way that it both foreshadows and parodies the body politics of race that will play such a central role in the lives of these children when they grow up. Not incidentally, it is a process of inculcation overseen by Dilsey, the youths noting that their capacity to negotiate the presence of this white body is effectively regulated by the question of whether or not Dilsey is "lookin." As Benjy's caretaker, then, Dilsey and the other Gibsons effectively find themselves inhabiting a kind of racial liminal space, their very identity as laborers establishing a point of convergence between the races. Dilsey's condemnation of those "white trash folks" who would contend that Benjy isn't good enough for white church yet too good for black church, acknowledges that in order to do their work, in order to care for this individual seemingly without a place in the socio-spatial coordinates of the New South, must be manipulative, if not outright transgressive, when it comes to the task of negotiating racial boundaries.

But while Benjy is no doubt an aberrant figure, the labor scenario that his condition produces is not. It is rather a kind of hyper-realization of the complex social structure that derived from the south's complicated labor history, steeped in mythologies of race and the often convoluted consequences of the slave economy on which the region's wealth was built. Valerie Loichot notes that even while the slave economy was a "system meant to sever and divide," it

actually had the effect of binding “together individuals and polar opposites” (21). According to Grace Elizabeth Hale, the New South economy effectively followed this same paradoxical model, albeit with some notable recalibrations, the model being mapped out not so much on a field of production but more so on a field of consumption, the marketplace that drew the races together also being one of the primary places where Jim Crow statutes were first implemented (143). In both models, it is clear that the concept of an insular and homogeneous social organism is entirely untenable, incapable of actual manifestation anywhere outside the realm of ideological fantasy.

By consuming the labor of the Gibsons, the Compsons distinguish themselves as a bourgeois family, a unit of capitalist consumption set apart from the laboring class unable to afford servants. However, this arrangement also opens up those multiple points of perforation that define patterns of consumption. While the Gibsons’s work to keep Benjy contained, to keep that “special” element of the Compson family matrix from broader society, they also end up distributing that element through the social field, both literally, in their journeys to and from church, and figuratively, in the various networks of association and narrative evident in the knowing remarks of the children who dare one another to touch Benjy. Via such transmission and dispersal, the Compsons have, in an abstract sense, become “integrated” into Jefferson’s black community. Conversely, the contours of the Gibson family are defined in no small part by their interactions with their employers. The various generations of Gibson males are defined in the text primarily by their role as Benjy’s caretaker, this almost ritualistic form of labor functioning as a signal that one is entering into maturity and manhood. Consequently, the saga of the Compsons and the Gibsons complicates our understanding of where filial lines end and how we distinguish what exactly constitutes family. For while matters of labor always complicate

matters of identity within the economic field, that “curious institution” that defined southern modes of labor for several hundred years reached further still into questions of subjectivity. Complicating matters of genealogy, slavery and its legacy confused matters of not only who one’s family was, but also where that family came from and what they might be in the future.

Although the vision Faulkner offers us of the family in *The Sound and the Fury* is undeniably bleak, this should not be misinterpreted as a failure on the part of the novel to envision methods of transformation or development beyond those socio-economic paradigms that characterized the New South; it is to say that the vision offered by Faulkner is decidedly less sanguine, and far less reliant on notions of religiosity and transcendence, than many previous critics have supposed. It is a vision that recognizes many of the key elements in Marx and Engels’ analysis of capitalism and even appears to anticipate many of the revisions and reassessments later offered by Deleuze and Guattari. More specifically, it is a vision that understands the in/capacity for both individual and communal liberation within the confines of capitalism’s particular social ontology.

Capitalism is by no means adverse to change, perpetual change being a central component within its structural apparatus. Within the capitalist system, “all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 223). But what Marx and Engels’ portrayal of capitalism’s inherent fluidity indicates is that under such a socio-economic regime change is a function not of transcendence or emancipation from prior modes of social normativity. Rather it is result of a dissolution, or, more accurately, a perpetual pattern of destruction and reconstitution. Deleuze and Guattari contend that this oscillating process, what they refer to as molecularization and molarization, is a

fundamental element within all natural and social formations. Within the capitalist schema, however, this process is always bounded, hemmed in by the retracting device of the capitalist machine, that mechanism that draws all that is new and novel back toward the center and compels it to serve the interests of capital. Consequently, while capitalism not only enables but encourages continual alterations within the social schema such alterations are rarely radical in nature because they signal not so much a revolution as a reformulation, a reconstitution of old elements within a new form, and, above all, a re-envelopment of the novel within the axioms of the capitalist machine.

It is this process of creative destruction, with all its elements of liberation and constraint, that serves as the thematic pivot point around which Faulkner weaves his familial narrative. Moreover, it is the relationship between the Compsons and the Gibsons that indicates where the particular lines of destruction and reconstitution are being inscribed within the text. As a number of critics have noted, the novel implicitly positions the Gibsons as avatars of that social order which will eventually, and inevitably, come to replace the dissolute regime of the Compsons. In the second version of his ultimately unpublished introduction to the 1933 version of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner recounts the process of writing the novel, noting how at the end of it, “there was Dilsey to be the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient and indomitable; and Benjy to be the past” (73). This curious image registers what Railey identifies as Faulkner’s seemingly irreconcilable ambivalence regarding the transition from Old South conservatism to New South progressivism, a transition that, for the author, signaled little more than a movement between two equally problematic and ultimately untenable positions. For while this tableau explicitly renders the manner in which the old order, as represented by the Compsons, must be swept away so that a newer social paradigm might

come to the fore, that represented by Dilsey and the Gibsons, it also signals the manner in which this process represents a mode of transformation that actually constitutes a kind of destructive continuity. Even as the figure of Dilsey heralds a putatively new order, that same figure remains a “ruined” element within the prior social “structure.” Dilsey does indeed endure, but only as the charred remains of that which came before. Consequently, even while the transition from the world of the Compsons to the world of the Gibsons marks a genuine social transformation, it is one that occurs within the confining strictures of the capitalist schema, adherent, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it, to the axioms of capital. Luster, in all his irreverence and single-minded determination, perhaps best exemplifies this seeming paradox, for even as his demeanor suggests a breakdown in social convention, the manner in which his irreverent behavior so often corresponds to matters of economy – the quarter, the show, the hat – simultaneously reifies the coordinates of the broader economic order. Miss Quentin’s escape from the Compson home is similarly dependent upon capital.

While *The Sound and the Fury* clearly responds to a very particular historical era, it also examines more broadly the manner in which the familial organism functions as a vital instrument within the schema of modern capitalism. Specific examinations of class and race corresponding to the social realities of the New South economy allow Faulkner to expose the manner in which the family, far from being the holistic and immutable entity supposed by so many, is in fact an inherently porous organism whose various patterns of dissolution – marriage, childbirth, generational strife, degeneracy – reifies the capitalist machine by forever opening up new flows within the schema, new networks through which modes of bourgeois consumption might be transmitted. However, even as Faulkner appears to realize these larger implications for the relationship between family and economy, he still seems unable to move beyond the residuum of

the modern era, incapable of overcoming those multiple paradoxes that define modernity, particularly within its economic coordinates. In novels such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Go Down Moses*, and *The Hamlet*, Faulkner will return again and again to these same issues, failing again and again to envision a mode of familial continuity that is sufficiently destructive *and* productive. In a sense, the task of locating this particular modality, at least within the arena of southern letters, ultimately falls to Eudora Welty who, in her own work, locates, if not a line of absolute egress, than at least a beginning point for potential liberation.

“OTHER COTTON”: *DELTA WEDDING* AND THE PARADOXES OF PLANTATION
PATERNALISM

Like *The Sound and the Fury*, Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* registers a moment of crisis within the southern bourgeois familial structure. Detailing the events surrounding the marriage of Dabney Fairchild, daughter of a prosperous plantation dynasty, to the family's overseer, Troy Flavin, the novel examines what might fairly be described as the gradual dissolution of the closely-knit Fairchild clan. Although distinctly less dire and tragic in its mode of representation, Welty's novel shares in Faulkner's assessment of the family as a complex, contradictory, and intrinsically unstable social organism, one that relies on a paradoxical pattern of destruction in order to maintain its structural integrity, and explores the manner in which this condition is rendered increasingly problematic by the socio-economic verities of American modernity. One of the key elements that distinguishes Welty's project from Faulkner, however, is the incisive exploration the novel offers of those cultural mythologies which Southern society formulated in an attempt to elide the dissonance between reality and ideal, matters certainly present in *The Sound and the Fury*, but rendered decidedly oblique and obscure, a possible consequence of Faulkner's own lingering investment in such mythologies. In particular, *Delta Wedding* examines how the myth of the insular southern bourgeois family unit was developed and maintained through the twin ideological lenses of paternalism and white supremacy.

Wealthy, powerful, and living in a putatively cloistered world defined by boundaries of kinship, the Fairchilds epitomize the Southern plantocracy, a socio-economic formation that, while functionally similar to the mercantile class to which the Compsons belong, is rendered unique by its position in what might be thought of as the south's mythological economy. Titans of the modern cotton industry, the planter class served a central symbolic and economic role in the New South economy, particularly in the Mississippi Delta. However, the cultural mythology surrounding the planter often rendered his relationship to modern capitalism rather convoluted and ambivalent, complicating his status as both social entity and figure of commerce. Existing in a gray liminal space somewhere between fact and fiction, the image of the "planter" "suggested aristocracy and inherited wealth, the habit of command," and a general and pervasive sense of exceptionalism, of existing apart from the other elements within society (Cobb 131, 125). Such aristocratic pretensions necessarily engendered in the plantocracy a preoccupation with notions of purity, particularly where matters of filiation were concerned, and this same preoccupation is clearly evident in the worldview espoused by Welty's fictional family. Susan V. Donaldson observes that the "Fairchilds pride themselves on their similarity, their physical and emotional resemblances, and in their world there is little room for anomaly, difference, contradiction" (Donaldson 9). This investment in similitude is particularly evident in regards to matters of physiognomy, a preoccupation that echoes the Compsons family's own obsessive attempts to regulate familial bodies.²⁴ At one point, the nine-year-old Laura McRaven, a cousin of the Fairchilds in town for Dabney's wedding, thinks to herself that "All the Fairchilds in the Delta looked alike...solid people with 'Scotch legs'...Without a primary beauty, with only a fairness of color (a thin skinnedness, really) and an ease in the body, they had a demurring, gray-eyed

²⁴ As with the Compsons, the Fairchilds insistence on physiological hegemony is rendered problematic by the presence of an "aberrant" family member, in this case, the mentally retarded cousin Maureen.

way about them that turned out to be halfway mocking” (17). What distinguishes the Fairchilds as a clan is not their beauty or physical prowess but their capacity to adhere, as it were, to a uniform physicality, to maintain a mode of appearance that continually invokes and perpetuates a continual and homogenous lineage, a lineage evident in their “Scotch legs.” That this physical uniformity also functions as a marker of their social position, their identity as an aristocratic Fairchild from the Delta, indicates as well the interdependence between questions of economy and questions of corporeality that characterized the plantocracy’s mythological sense of self, as well as the plantation more generally.

Originally centered on an investment in slave labor, the plantation economy was long distinguished by this conflation where matters of profit and the human body intersected, resulting in a curious site of modern production where proprietors went out of their way to conceal or mitigate any overt signs of conventional industry. This was particularly evident in the tendency among the planters to view their agricultural interests not as an aggregation of economic endeavors but rather as a kind of holistic and extended familial concern. Richard Slotkin notes that in the context of the Southern plantation, “the planter saw himself not as employer/exploiter, but as patriarch, as the baronial ruler of a small tribe enjoying the caste marks of aristocratic superiority” (Slotkin 141). This paternalistic mode of industry resulted in two key social consequences.

On the one hand, this paternalist vision allowed the plantocracy to entertain illusions regarding the perceived insularity of their world, a world idealized as pastoral and immutable, immune to corruption from outside forces. According to Cobb, this isolationist fantasy allowed the post-bellum South’s emergent middle class to engage in and profit from the modern industrial economy while maintaining a veneer of “moral” – i.e. non-materialist – rectitude.

More importantly, it allowed Mississippi's white economic elite to perpetuate the mythology of an organic and above all static South, an idea that I will return to momentarily. But even if paternalism was successful in fostering this illusion of the plantation as a completely cloistered and self-sustaining socio-economic space, it also resulted in no small amount of confusion, producing a perpetual state of dissonance between the plantocratic ideal of stasis and insular uniformity and the verities of continual flux and external multiplicity. It is this profound and problematic shortcoming that Welty explores at length throughout the novel. Given that Shellmound is not simply a conventional homespace but also a site of industry and commerce, this insistence on insularity leads to a state of continual dissonance and anxiety within the Fairchild household. Driving about the grounds of Shellmound, Laura's cousin Orrin points out an "old track" telling her that it leads to a portion of the plantation called Marmion. When Laura responds by telling Orrin that "Marmion's my dolly," the latter immediately rejects this assertion, insisting that "it's not, it's where I was born" (Welty 5). Subscribing to the notion that Shellmound constitutes the whole of the known world, Orrin is incapable of negotiating information or claims that complicate the primacy of his home schema, and so his only real line of recourse is repudiation. Laura's doll cannot be Marmion for this would mean that the ancestral Fairchild home corresponds to elements of production outside the space of Shellmound itself. Orrin's somewhat absurd and knee-jerk rejection of his cousin's assertion, indicates the manner in which paternalism necessitates an ultimately untenable mode of blindness, one that insists on a uniform cultural narrative that does not allow for any recognition of the complexities of historical contingency or the socio-economic reality (not to mention necessity) of exchange and hybridity.²⁵ And while it may be tempting to read Orrin's remarks as a simple reflection of

²⁵ This brief exchange is made all the more intriguing when we learn later in the novel that Laura's doll was actually made – which is to say, produced – by Laura's mother, herself a Fairchild. This relatively simple

youth's narcissism, his comment's underlying message, its repudiation of any outside influence that may disturb the symbolic coordinates of Shellmound, is echoed by a number of the elder Fairchilds throughout the novel, particularly George Fairchild's wife Robbie Reid.

Of course, like any other bourgeois home, Shellmound requires the absorption – that is to say, the consumption – of outside materials in order to maintain its bourgeois status. A prime example of such material, and one examined in Welty's novel, is money. However, in as much as capital and its attendant purchasing power helps to establish the authority and power of the Fairchild clan, an authority and a power implicitly coded as white, money also places this privileged position in constant jeopardy. The most obvious, and comical example of this, occurs when Dabney's fiancé Troy discovers the elderly Aunt Mac ironing a stack of money. Inquiring into the rationale for this peculiar behavior, his future mother-in-law Miss Ellen responds: "Why, that's the payroll...Didn't you know Aunt Mac always washes it?...I get the money from the bank when I drive in, and she hates for them to give anything but new bills to a lady, the way they do nowadays. So she washes them" (126). Absurd as this all may seem, there is a certain perverse logic to Aunt Mac's behavior, at least within the parameters of white-supremacist fantasy. As Costello trenchantly observes, "this literal money laundering serves a function remarkably akin to money laundering in the legal sense: it mystifies and obscures the origins of the money, washing away the physical and figurative evidence of its history of exchange, thus allowing the Fairchilds to imagine themselves as unconnected to the common outside world" (Costello 44). Conceiving of the plantation as a familial enterprise, as an endogamous site of production, Southern planters were able to create a space of independent, untainted creation.

object signals the manner in which Fairchild patterns of productivity and consumption, however defined, cannot be isolated within strictly defined parameters exactly because they always correspond to various outside forces. Moreover, Marmion-the-doll indicates the manner in which such heterogeneity actually originates within the putatively homogeneous sphere of the Fairchild's since its name, not to mention its very existence, was bestowed upon it by an insider. For more on this complex ontological arrangement, see below.

However, this paternalist illusion concealed not only contamination from without but also from within, covering over the unpleasant realities of cotton production. Costello notes that the Fairchilds harbor a “revulsion toward...active engagement with their workers” that indicates a refusal to acknowledge the often-brutal realities of labor in the New South’s cotton industry (49). This willful blindness is reflected in Laura’s description of errant strands of cotton accumulated during the night as faerie gifts, a motif repeated by Ellen who leaves a sugar almond on the napping Bluet’s pillow, this too being a deemed gift from faeries (85). Alienation, as defined by Marx, defines the Fairchilds’s reality to an almost absurd degree, labor being pushed so far into the background, so suppressed beneath the fantasy of paternalism, that the production of material goods takes on a natural, if not magical, aspect. Like Bluet’s sugar almond, things simply appear, ready for consumption. Paternalism thus has the effect of thoroughly essentializing the organization of labor and commerce within the southern economy, leading to what Joel Williamson has identified as “the organic society,” in which individuals knew “their own places and functions and those of others around them” (Williamson 17). Eschewing those more fluid concepts of industry as envisioned by liberal democracy, a vision where status within the broader social fabric was understood primarily as a consequence of one’s own determination and hard work, the plantation economy conceived of a rigid social hierarchy in which one’s position was primarily determined by matters of blood and birth, of coming from the “right” family, and more particularly the right race. As Williams points out, the formulation of this somewhat archaic ideology derived primarily from the need to reconcile the moral quandary posed by the institution of slavery. In order to avoid conflict with predominant enlightenment notions regarding “the natural rights of man,” Southern planters devised a number of theories positing the inherent inferiority of blacks, an inferiority that rendered them incapable of inhabiting any

position outside peonage (Williamson 5, 13). After Emancipation, and well into the twentieth century, this generalized theory of black inferiority continued to dictate labor practices, white southern conservatives insisting that blacks needed to keep their “place,” not only because this was their proper position in society, but also because deviation from that position would put blacks in danger of reprisal from the more radical segments of the South’s white population.

Ironically, this need to define blacks as intrinsically inferior and other was often accomplished through an invocation of familial rhetoric. The theory and practice of racial paternalism, a primary feature of plantation culture, particularly in the years immediately following the Civil War, promoted a vision of all blacks as children, incapable of taking care of themselves and requiring the care and supervision of white “parental” figures. As Brannon Costello indicates, this infantilization of African Americans is clearly a prominent element in the operational structure of Shellmound, the Fairchilds’s plantation (Costello 39). At least two of the field laborers – Man-Son and Big Baby – bear names that explicitly indicate their state of imposed infantilism. When Big Baby is shot in the buttocks during a fight with another worker, Troy laughingly tells him, “Pull down your clothes, Big Baby, and get over my knee,” a gesture that both reinforces the coordinates of paternalism as well as white dominance over the black body (258).

Rather than opening up the vectors of the local social schema, however, this organic, familial conception of plantation society actually magnified a uniquely regional compulsion to enforce strictly defined racial and social boundaries. Not only was the notion of “place” perceived as natural, it was also understood as being a vital element in the maintenance of the broader socio-economic structure. Williams writes that “if blacks were to be held in place,” as children, “white people would have to assume a place to keep them there...if there were to be

Sambos, there would have to be Sambos' keepers, and the keeper role, being superior, had to be even more firmly fixed than the role of the kept." (Williamson 17) Thus, as Grace Elizabeth Hale has noted, the retention of a well-defined black labor force (and blacks more generally) was just as much about defining a clearly delineated concept of pure whiteness. In the effort to codify these racial categories, and especially the privileged position of whites within the economic order thereby produced, matters of genealogy were paramount, as evidenced by such legal mechanisms as the so-called "one drop rule." Filiation therefore became a central technology in the enforcement and regulation of those exclusionary lines of demarcation that characterized plantation culture and southern (and American) society more generally. Exhibiting an often profound suspicion of outside influences as well as concomitant and proprietary pride in their own family lineage, the Fairchilds conduct their affairs in a manner that continually reinforces these lines of demarcation. Examining the role of family in the Welty's oeuvre, Sara McAlpin notes that families such as the Fairchilds are often defined by their penchant for "categorizing...people, both implicitly and explicitly," a tendency that establishes the family's capacity to "define certain people as insiders and others as outsiders" (McAlpin 484). Maintaining the integrity of the (white) family structure became a primary facet of the plantation economy and the system of labor upon which it relied.

What Welty's novel demonstrates, however, is that this ideal of insular purity, of non-negotiable boundaries separating interior and exterior, insider and outsider, is extremely problematic and ultimately untenable. For even as this ideal valorizes the cultural primacy of the nuclear family, its ideological precepts are simultaneously compromised by the various complexities that necessarily attend modern modes of filiation. Thinking of her children, Ellen Fairchild, wife of the Fairchild's patriarch, Battle, observes that "she had never had a child to

take after herself and would be as astonished as Battle now to see her own ways or looks dominant, a blue-eyed, dark-haired small-boned baby lying in her arms” (27). Ellen’s inability to imagine any of her children inheriting her physical features underscores the peculiar anxieties present at the heart of paternalist ideology. For while Ellen’s capacity to function as a generative figure is necessary for the continuance of the Fairchild line, it is important that she, and more specifically her genes, not become too thoroughly interpolated into the cloistered world of Shellmound, lest those physical markers of Fairchild identity become erased through the vagaries of exogamous reproduction. This frantic need to maintain an order of purity actually ends up establishing lines of division within the structure of the family itself. Even though the institution of Shellmound relies upon her labor, maternal and otherwise, it is apparent that a number of the Fairchilds have never actually accepted Ellen as one of their own. Laura, at one point, recalls overhearing her Aunt Tempe the previous summer telling India that Ellen “has never learned what is reprehensible and what is not, in the Delta” (25).

But even if Ellen and Battle have succeeded in perpetuating an untarnished hereditary line, such success is rendered problematic by its own deleterious consequences. Ellen herself notes that when it comes to the uniform physicality and pale features that typify the Delta Fairchilds, such “fineness could so soon look delicate – nobody could get tireder, fall sicker and more quickly so, than her men” (28). Ellen’s recognition of this fragility within her menfolk illustrates the manner in which the primary indicator of Fairchild superiority, their fine features, also serves as a signal of their intrinsic weakness and a harbinger of their coming dissolution. Incestuous in design, if not biological fact, the endogamous ideal exemplified by the Fairchild clan is shown by Welty to be inherently self-destructive, a project destined to eat itself.

These contradictions within the plantocracy's paternalist ideology are only amplified by the economic context within which they operate. Positioned within an increasingly national and international marketplace, the modern plantation economy relied upon an expansive network of investment and exchange that thoroughly undermined any pretense of insularity or pastoral self-sufficiency. Ironically, the plantocracy's insistence that it was above the more vulgar considerations of capital and commerce, including such things as budgets, meant that a number of plantations actually operated primarily on credit. LeRoy Percy, writing in the early twentieth century, declared "ninety-five percent of the planting operations of this section of the Delta are carried on upon borrowed money" (Quoted in Cobb 132). Functionally, the plantation economy was, in general, far more invested in the practices and conventions of the modern economy than many planters were willing to acknowledge. According to Cobb, even while many plantations wrapped themselves in a veneer of antebellum nostalgia, most "more closely resembled modern factories than Old South estates," when it came to "their modes of operation" (Cobb 98). If the southern plantation was indeed a familial enterprise, whether literally or symbolically, its dependence upon these various economic contingencies would seem to suggest that the southern family, far from being an isolated and self contained social organism, was in fact firmly embedded within and indeed reliant upon the vast and ever expanding heterogeneous network that was the modern American economy. While it is not necessarily clear what the Fairchilds's economic situation is, Welty does examine this question of debt and ownership, albeit through the lens of gender. "In the Delta," we are told, "the land belonged to the women – they only let the men have it, and sometimes they tried to take it back and give it to someone else" (190). Although not an instance of literal credit, Welty's description of property distribution in Delta society, with its invocation of loan and repossession, registers the fact that whatever material

wealth the region's (male) planters might claim signals an implicit debt to what was at one time an outside force, drawn into their own familial and financial economy through the process of filiation.

Welty's recognition that the southern family does not, and indeed cannot, exist in isolation is most clearly exemplified in the image of the Yellow Dog, a train that travels from Jackson up to Memphis, and functions as a recurring motif throughout the novel. It is this emblem of modern industry that effectively bridges the purportedly insurmountable gap between Shellmound and the rest of the world and is therefore regarded with a certain degree of ambivalence by many members of the Fairchild clan. Significantly, it is also through the window of the Yellow Dog, and from the position of the outsider cousin, Laura, that we as readers get our first glimpse of the town of Fairchilds. Consequently, the entire narrative of *Delta Wedding* ends up functioning like a protracted act of incursion, attesting to the porous quality of this tightly knit world. Even Welty's bucolic description of the Yellow Dog's interior in the novel's opening pages indicates the train's capacity to open up terrain and undermine the integrity of once sealed borders:

In the passenger car every window was propped open with a stick of kindling wood. A breeze blew though, hot and then cool, fragrant of the woods and yellow flowers and of the train. The yellow butterflies flew in at any window, out at any other, and outdoors one of them could keep up with the train, which then seemed to be racing with a butterfly...[Laura's] ticket to Fairchilds was stuck up in her Madge Evans straw hat, in imitation of the drummer across the aisle. (2)

Emphasizing the open windows and resulting currents of air, Welty portrays the Yellow Dog as a thoroughly porous structure and a site of continual transmission, not only moving through space but also opening up various channels for the movement of other bodies. The image of butterflies fluttering through the open car which is itself infused with the odor of “the woods and yellow flowers” signals that one of the key transmissions occurring in this scene is between the natural world and the world of industry, topological categories that reflect the supposed opposition between Fairchilds and all that lies outside its borders. And while Welty’s description of the butterflies racing the train no doubt suggests a degree of competition between the two spheres, there is also an equal, and arguably more powerful, suggestion of harmonious, and even amenable, convergence, these hallmarks of Shellmound’s pastoral idyll being thoroughly incorporated into the motions and operations of the Yellow Dog.

A resident of Jackson, Mississippi’s decidedly more urban state capital, Laura herself, in her role as passenger, exemplifies the scene’s theme of convergence. Sitting by the window, Laura gazes at the passing scenery, and eventually, Welty writes, “thoughts went out of her head and the landscape filled it” (3). As an avatar for the metropolis, Laura’s reaction upon encountering the Delta is not one of conflict but of immersion. More importantly, her reaction signals an instance of symbolic consumption, a being “filled” up that reminds us that this picturesque terrain is also a vast site of agrarian production, a mode of production that enables a kind of abstracted intimacy in its capacity to fill up the consumer with the fruits of its labor. The banana that Laura begins to eat as the train pulls into Fairchilds further underscores her identity as a consumer and her position within an expansive – indeed a global – network of exchange, a position shared by her relatives who exhibit their own taste for “exotic” and non-indigenous fare, coconuts being a particularly salient example. Moreover, Laura’s decision to imitate the

drummer suggests the influential power that commerce wields within this permeable environment, a subtle indication that the open state evident in this scene is very much a consequence of the New South economy.

As Betina Entzminger observes, the Yellow Dog and its regular “intrusion on the Delta...threatens the white community’s stability,” and as an “unstoppable emblem of progress and the future,” it jeopardizes the perceived sanctity of tradition (Entzminger 56). But while Entzminger reads this threat as one predicated particularly on questions of race and miscegenation, I would like to suggest that Welty’s somewhat simple and open description – “It was a mixed train” – invites us to read the Yellow Dog as a force of heterogeneity itself, whether defined in terms of race, sex, or class (Welty 3). Indeed the capacity of trains to function as vehicles for convergence often encompasses multiple categories. Cobb, for instance, notes that LeRoy Percy, in his capacity as an “attorney for the Illinois Central Railroad” was instrumental in local “efforts to promote immigration to the Delta by Italian farmers,” a move that not only compromised distinct categories of race, but also class and nationality (Cobb 110). So even while trains were themselves strictly segregated – *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the court decision establishing “separate but equal,” concerned rail travel – such transportation still served to complicate racial and class boundaries by compressing notions of space and offering mobility to many portions of society that previously been profoundly immobile, physically and otherwise.

Entzminger’s interpretation is also problematic in its seeming failure to fully account for the train’s role as a literal, physically invasive force within that novel, something evident in treatment of race as something more absolute and less complex than Welty’s novel actually suggests. For while black characters certainly inform and complicate our understanding of the Fairchild’s and their whiteness, these characters are defined in no small part by their native,

quasi-insider status at Shellmound Plantation, even though they are in many respects distinctly peripheral, particularly when compared to the Gibsons in *The Sound and the Fury*. Consequently, it becomes difficult to read blackness as an invasive force in and of itself given that is already a primary, and indeed, a vital element within the plantation culture.

Trains, it may be argued, are fundamentally engines of conflation, not only drawing together disparate peoples and goods within a confined space, but also collapsing traditional divisions in space and parameters of access. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century this was particularly true where distinctions between public and private space were in play, leading to a phenomenon that Amy Richter identifies as public domesticity. “At its most basic,” Richter writes, “public domesticity attempted to bring the cultural associations and behaviors of home life to bear upon social interactions among strangers, to regulate public interactions and delineate the boundary of Victorian respectability” (Richter 60). But by transposing the well-regulated order of the domestic sphere onto a public and commercial space, the distinction between home and the public arena became increasingly muddled. More to the point, the supposed sanctity of the household became increasingly compromised as its various operational and aesthetic qualities were increasingly replicated in different public enterprises, including railroads, but also such things as restaurants and luxury hotels (Richter 8).

It is in fact the economic aspect of the modern railroad and railroad travel, the capacity of capital to cross all borders and draw disparate elements together into a network of exchange, that renders the Yellow Dog a vehicle of “intrusion.” What is truly driving this penetration of the Fairchild’s hermetic world is commerce. The Yellow Dog is both an extension of and a symbol of the modern marketplace and its seemingly inexorable proliferation of various modes of exchange. What this means, however, is that certain distinctions need to be made when

considering how trains function as an invasive force within the text, and, indeed, whether the term “invasive” is even necessarily appropriate in the given context. Examining the symbolic role of the Yellow Dog and its relationship to Shellmound, Joseph Millichap notes that “railroads like this one are the technological connections to the larger world, the commercial links that make the extractive industry and plantation economy viable here” (77). Millichap’s analysis reaffirms that the Yellow Dog does in fact puncture the insular membrane that the Fairchilds have devised for themselves through the rhetoric and custom of paternalism. However, by underscoring the manner in which the plantation economy fundamentally relies upon such a linkage, Millichap also demonstrates how the Fairchilds are deeply complicit in what they so often choose to interpret as an encroachment by outside forces. To put it perhaps somewhat strangely, the Yellow Dog is actually a constituent element in the formulation of Fairchild identity. Laura’s trip to Fairchilds in order to attend Dabney’s wedding actually illustrates the paradoxical manner in which this central mechanism of the vast and heterogeneous network that is the modern economy is actually necessary for enacting a moment of familial cohesion, a reinforcement of the Fairchilds’s collective identity.

Even the oft-repeated tale of George and Maureen’s near death experience before the oncoming train, with its grim if somewhat comical undertones of looming demise, makes this point abundantly clear. For while the incident certainly figures the Yellow Dog as a potentially destructive force, on the one hand, it also reveals its productive capacities, allowing the family a vital opportunity for the construction of a nascent family legend, a by no means minor consequence given the central importance that storytelling plays in Welty’s conception of the modern southern family and its basic operations. This importance is particularly apparent when India relays the story to Mr. Rondo and her various family members continually interrupt her

narrative in order to offer encouragement, critiques, and emendations, rendering the telling a communal-familial event and positioning the Yellow Dog in the role of a foil against which Fairchild mythology might be constructed, recalibrated, and reaffirmed. What's more, this construction of familial legend actually embeds the Faichilds even more firmly within that open and public sphere against which they so often claim to position themselves. This is evident in the way the Fairchild's tell such stories, framing them as "narrations, chronological and careful, as if the ear of the world listened and wished to surely know" (23). In their quest to maintain their quasi-mythic status, a socio-cultural position meant to distinguish them as being somehow separate from the normative masses, the Fairchild's actually render themselves verbal commodities, ready for consumption by that listening world that surely wishes to know.

Although largely relegated to the background, this gradual accumulation of matrimonial goods is central to the problematic construction of the Fairchild's collective whiteness within the economic sphere. As Mills notes, the formulation of whiteness, and more particularly white supremacy, is to a large part dependent upon an unmediated access to the market place. The capacity of the Fairchild's to acquire whatever esoteric items they might choose from far off Memphis attests to their perceived power. When it seems as though an order of shepherdess crooks may not make it in time for the wedding, the black servant Roxie protests, "Dey come...Ain't nothin' goin' to defeat Miss Dab, Miss Ellen" (126). While this may simply be comforting fluff on Roxie's part, her insistence that Dabney will inevitably prevail in her quest for material acquisition nonetheless figures the Fairchild's relationship to the marketplace as something inviolable and almost godlike. What's more, as a descendent of slaves speaking of the descendents of slave-owners, Roxie's words refer, however obliquely, to the perpetuation of a plantation power dynamic in which whiteness is explicitly understood as control over systems of

production, distribution, and consumption.

That the act of consumption is central to the Fairchilds's identity is evidenced, both literally and metaphorically, by their almost obsessive preoccupation with food and cooking, as well as the truly remarkable appetite displayed by many of the family members. Before making a trip out to Marmion, Dabney partakes in what Welty describes as an essentially light, pseudo-breakfast of "milk and biscuits and a bit of ham and a chicken wing, and row of plums sitting in the window" (156). Dabney's considerable repast, apparently perceived by herself as being rather meager, reflects the gluttonous appetite that both typified and defined the New South's plantocracy, a class that understood profligacy as a sign of their exalted status. However, it would be reductive to simply read Dabney and her kin as rapacious gluttons, since the relationship between the Fairchilds and food is not simply a matter of what is ingested or how much, but, more importantly, the specific rituals that define the former's particular mode of consumption. Food and its attendant patterns of production and consumption provide the Fairchilds with a mechanism for formulating a coherent and collective subjectivity through various acts of eating, cooking, baking, etc. An early scene in the novel depicting the family sitting down to dinner illustrates this interaction between food and identity, demonstrating the manner in which the meal, a site of gathering, affirms the form and function of the collective family unit with Battle, the family patriarch stationed at the head of the table, overseeing the proceedings and barking orders at the diners. Confirming the analysis of Deleuze and Guattari, Battle, at one point described as "helpless as a child with machinery," derives his authority not from production or even replication, but through his capacity to dictate the modes of consumption that define the Fairchild clan (142). Observing her uncle, Laura notes that his "thick fair hair over his bulging brow had been combed with water before he came to the table, exactly

like Orrin's, Roy's, Little Battle's and Ranny's. As his eyes roved over them, Laura remembered that he had broken every child at the table now from being left-handed" (13). Those various elements that constitute the nature of Fairchild identity – appearance, demeanor, performance – converge around the act of consumption and eating becomes a significant ritual wherein the Fairchilds can enact their homogeneous and purportedly singular mode of being, embodied in the uniform dinner-time quaff exhibited by the males, as well as their right-handed method of eating. Indeed, Laura's very notion of who her uncle is inextricably bound up in notions of consumption. Having heard her uncle described more than once as a fire-eater, Laura is "ever hopeful that she would see Uncle Battle...take up some fire and eat it" (13).

What renders this arrangement problematic for the Fairchilds, and indeed the plantocracy in general, is that consumption is never an insular or self-contained process; it always implies the intervention of "outside" forces. Welty's exploration of food preparation makes this point clear, particularly in the scene where Ellen prepares to bake "Mashula's coconut cake," a special family recipe implying the singularity of lineal inheritance. Upon entering the kitchen, Ellen encounters the black servant Roxie and the brief conversation that ensues complicates the role of consumption within the process of (collective) identity formation:

"Get out of the kitchen, Roxie. We want to make Mr. George and Miss Robbie a cake."

"You loves *them*," said Roxie. "You're fixin' to ask me to grate you a coconut, not get out"

"Yes, I am. Grate me the coconut." Ellen smiled. (29)

This exchange imbues the scene with an air of the performative, and it is in certain respects a rather clumsy performance, suggesting as it does a point of slippage, a certain degree of disjunction between the operational and the symbolic aspects of the baking process. Mashula's coconut cake, a product of consumption supposedly unique to the Fairchild clan and the preparation of which therefore constitutes an ostensibly unique family ritual, actually requires the input and the expertise of a non-familial agent. And while paternalist ideology may no doubt attempt to cover over this problem by asserting Roxie's supposedly infantile nature and thus her connection to the Fairchilds as a kind of ward, the fact that Roxie is in actuality a paid employee of the Fairchilds actually situates the baking of Mashula's cake within the contingent network of the New South economy, reliant as it is on an increasingly independent, and thus external, black labor force. Furthermore, Roxie's refusal to play along with Ellen's farce, to feign childish ignorance regarding the various household procedures, indicates the waning power of paternalism and increasing desire of those like Roxie to have the true nature and value of their labor acknowledged. Of course, the scene still demonstrates an obvious and racially coded power dynamic mapped out along the coordinates of the contemporary labor market. But even while this labor arrangement allows Ellen the opportunity to assert the social dominance of the Fairchilds, particularly through an invocation of white supremacist ideology, it also compromises the structural integrity of that ideological framework, acknowledging as it does, however implicitly, the simple fact that that sustenance which maintains the Fairchild clan is prepared, at least in part, by black hands.²⁶

Significantly, when Dabney and Troy are married, the wedding cake is not something

²⁶ As Costello and others have noted, the contingent and thoroughly interdependent nature of Fairchild consumption is also evident in the thrum of the cotton compress that attends the Fairchilds's meals, Welty writing how "Laura could feel it now in the handle of her cup, the noiseless vibration that trembled in the best china" (20). Cf. Costello 43. See also Patricia Yaeger and Susan Donaldson.

derived from an old family recipe but is in fact a commodity purchased from a bakery in Memphis.²⁷ Produced outside the physical parameters of Shellmound and the metaphysical parameters of familial tradition, the wedding cake signals an alien quantity, its position within Fairchild patterns of consumption being highly suspect: “Only God knew if it was digestible” (263). In certain respects, the wedding cake is something of a disruptive and destabilizing force, its ability to foster an air of tenuous unease being very much evident in Ellen’s admonishment to Bitsy: “You’ve got to find a *level* place to set that down now” (265, emphasis mine). And yet this strange commodity is one of the primary centerpieces in a ritual meant to sustain and perpetuate the Fairchild bloodline. As much as it compromises the various boundaries that establish the outlines of Fairchild identity, it also helps, in its admittedly oblique fashion, to prop them up through its facilitation of custom and ritual, functioning as well as a signal of authority, a testament to the Fairchild’s purchasing power within society. Moreover, as noted above, the baking process involved in the preparation of Mashula’s coconut cake already necessitated a degree of alienation, alienation necessary for perpetuating a mode of consumption that helped to sustain the ideology of white supremacy so vital to Fairchild identity. Large and unwieldy and requiring the intervention of (black) labor, this new delicacy actually maintains this labor dynamic, albeit in a somewhat different form. In other words, the wedding cakes signals not so much the introduction of alienation within the familial sphere, but rather the recalibration of alienation within said sphere.

This ability of the novel’s central eponymous event to both disrupt and enable particular patterns of consumption is central to Welty’s larger narratological project, and illustrates the deep-seated contingency that exists between materiality and identity formation within the plantocracy. This particularly apparent if we understand the question of Fairchild identity within

²⁷ They do, however, retain “Mashula’s cloth.”

the framework of whiteness. Mason Stokes observes that whiteness “works only...when it attaches itself to other abstractions, becoming yet another invisible strand in a larger web of unseen yet powerful cultural forces” (Stokes 13). The relationship between commodities and white performance in *Delta Wedding* can be understood as an instance of such attachment. Dabney’s project of self-construction, particularly as a bride-to-be, is contingent upon notions of material ownership. Speaking with her Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen about the various material goods that will be involved in the wedding ceremony, Dabney declares that “Everything’s from Memphis but me. I have Mama’s veil and Mashula’s train – I could hold a little flower from your yard, couldn’t I?” (55). Setting aside for the moment the underlying anxieties in Dabney’s remarks, what is immediately apparent in this statement is the recognition of an inherent dichotomy that informs the speaker’s subjectivity. Dabney recognizes that she herself, as ego, is spatially and historically separate from those items cited. However, her comments also indicate that in order to appropriately perform the role of bride -- to be “pure white” -- she must graft onto herself various, though particular, commodities, products and productions fundamentally “outside” herself. Her question to her aunts regarding the flower is, at one level, an inquiry into the possibilities of a materially contingent piece of identity performance. However, in true plantocratic fashion, it is a performance that aspires to a kind of autochthonous authenticity, seeking to counteract the more overt materiality of those items purchased from Memphis with a “natural” counterweight derived directly from the familial homespace. Products of an industrial site of trade that nonetheless signal a kind of faux pastoralism, the shepherdess crooks that Dabney obsesses over throughout the early part of the novel arguably serve a similar function, attempting to conceal the influence of the modern economy on identity formation under a veneer of naturalistic and pastoral mythology.

In order to get a firmer bead on the reason for this intrinsic – and intrinsically contradictory component of Fairchild identity – it may help to turn very briefly to some of Marx’s comments regarding the origins of modern commodities and commodification. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx writes that,

The exchange of commodities...first begins on the boundaries of [primitive] communities, at their points of contact with other similar communities.... So soon, however, as products once become commodities in the external relations of a community, they also, by reaction, become so in its internal intercourse....Meantime the need for foreign objects of utility gradually establishes itself. The constant repetition of exchange makes it a normal social act. In the course of time, therefore, some portion at least of the products of labour must be produced with a special view to exchange. From that moment the distinction becomes firmly established between the utility of an object for the purpose of consumption, and its utility for the purpose of exchange. (88)

In Marx’s analysis then, the commodity is something that is denotatively other, by its very nature existing outside the confines of the originary community’s methods of production. But, as Marx notes, through repeated engagement in exchange, this outside quantity becomes a vital part of the community’s identity, part of its “internal intercourse,” fundamentally altering the modes of production that define the social group in question. Consequently, in order to perpetuate this new, or modern, sense of identity, the once tightly cloistered, homogeneous collective must depend, at least in part, on external and alien sources of exchange. Otherness becomes internalized. This socio-economic paradigm has significant ramifications for myths of

racial purity since such mythologies are centrally reliant upon a belief in the hermetically-sealed, “pure” community. Modern capitalism, it would seem, exposes not only the constructedness of whiteness, but also, and perhaps more importantly, what might be understood, however counter-intuitively, as the intrinsic heterogeneity of whiteness as construct, the fact that it must rely on external, alien factors in order to both manifest and perpetuate itself.

This internalization of otherness, as well as the ruptures it produces in the façade of white authority, is perhaps most evident in the novel when Roxie’s reassuring prophecy regarding the shepherdess crooks proves false. Asked about where they are, Ellen laments that “They haven’t come....They’re up there in Memphis still. Dabney makes Battle phone every day, the crook people and the cake people, and bless them out, but it doesn’t do a bit of good...We’re not sure of anything” (Welty 142). It is for the powerful Fairchilds a moment of profound impotence. For while the capital market grants the family seemingly overwhelming and unlimited power, it is a power that is paradoxically reliant on outside forces over which they wield limited control: the crook people and the cake people far away in Memphis. In turn, the recognition of this dependency produces a sense of internal alienation within the family as they find themselves “not sure of anything,” unable to independently determine the rituals and procedures that define them as a community. The security of the Fairchild identity becomes unstable.

This existential conundrum directly parallels the self-complicating process by which whiteness becomes manifest in the broader social order. Richard Dyer notes that “As a product of enterprise and imperialism, whiteness is of course always predicated on racial difference, interaction and domination” (Dyer 13). Dyer’s observation reminds us that modern forms and formations of race and economy share a common origin. More particularly, it indicates the manner in which both constructs rely upon a complex rhetoric of binary opposition, a system of

“difference, interaction, and domination.” However, as illustrated above, such binarism has a tendency to conflate and collapse the seemingly opposed terms it seeks to uphold. In regards to race, this produces what some have called the “black shadow,” a phenomenon whereby the nature of whiteness can only be manifested through the form of black agents. Toni Morrison remarks that “images of impenetrable whiteness need contextualizing to explain their extraordinary power, pattern and consistency. Because they appear almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people...these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote to and *meditation on the shadow that is the companion to this whiteness*” (Morrison 30, emphasis mine). This “shadowing” is certainly something that we witness, however subtly, in *Delta Wedding*, particularly in regards to what might be called the construction of Dabney. It is, after all, a black figure (Roxie) that announces the breadth of Dabney’s economic power and thus delineates the nature of her character vis-à-vis the marketplace. Such “shadowing” is also evident in the economic sphere. Dabney’s identity as white bride is reliant upon those forces of economic otherness cited above. Both racial and economic others, therefore, can be seen to inhabit a shared position of problematic interdependency.

The paradox of this interdependency persists even as the family attempts to overcome it. Seeking a solution to the issue of the missing shepherdess crooks, Aunt Tempe declares that she will send Uncle Pinck to Memphis to retrieve the items in question: “Pinck will wear himself out! But he’s so wonderfully smart about anything in Memphis” (Welty 142). This particular uncle’s familiarity with Memphis, his internalization of the various mechanisms of an outside site of production, a process here understood as his ability to be “wonderfully smart,” seems to suggest that the character is defined, at least in part, by a kind of cultural-commercial hybridity.

In fact, his very name seems to underscore this hybrid nature, pink being of course an admixture of white and red, a kind of “off-white.” Consequently, even in turning to one of their own the Fairchild’s find themselves reliant upon particular forms of heterogeneity in their attempts to successfully engage, or, to utilize Dyer’s terminology, dominate the market.

A final, though no doubt central, element to consider in regards to the panoply of material goods flowing in from Memphis is that the arrival and accumulation of these various items is predicated upon the upcoming wedding between Dabney and Troy. This eponymous event is easily the most salient example of capitalism’s destructive productivity as it relates to formulations and perpetuations of whiteness. As previously mentioned, these materials facilitate particular modes of performativity, and in particular, the nuptial performance around which the novel and its network of commodities circulate. Recognizing such contingency, it becomes apparent that Dabney and Troy’s marriage both reflects and participates in the system of commercial exchange that runs throughout Welty’s text. The wedding as ritual signifies the perpetuation of the Fairchild lineage through the technology of heterosexual (and hetero-normative) production. However, what is immediately apparent to all the Fairchilds is that this particular technology represents yet another problematic form of exchange: in short, the exchange of their daughter for the promise of future offspring. In some abstracted sense, the wedding gowns and shepherdess crooks, in helping to facilitate the matrimonial performance, also help to facilitate the “loss” of Dabney, the dissolution of the pure family unit.

In *Delta Wedding*, the institution of marriage is presented as something almost inextricably bound up in matters of class and commerce. This particularly is true in regards to the novel’s two key unions: Troy and Dabney’s nascent relationship, and George and Robbie’s own deteriorating marriage. Both these couples are marked by a stark socio-economic distinctions,

representing instances of a Fairchild marrying “beneath” him or herself (Welty 30). Despite whatever prestige his position as overseer at Shellmound may confer upon him, Troy is still inescapably working class. Robbie is herself of similar “humble” origins, having “grown up in the town of Fairchilds to work in Fairchild’s store” (30). Ironically, however, it is this very position of servitude that allows both Troy and Robbie the opportunity to engage in the most profound modes of intimacy with members of the powerful and distinctly upper class Fairchilds. Troy, obviously, first encounters Dabney in his capacity as overseer; describing his pursuit of Robbie, Welty describes George as “courting over the counter” of the Fairchild’s store (211). The ability of both characters to infiltrate the circumscribed social boundaries of Shellmound is predicated upon their respective positions within the network of commerce upon which the Fairchilds rely. Here too then, in the guise of matrimony, capitalist exchange produces a rupture in the cloistered parameters of the Fairchild family circle.

The figure of Troy makes this aspect of Welty’s narrative especially evident. As Costello notes,

Troy is the only character in the novel who uses physical force in his dealings with the Fairchild workers or who intercedes in a skirmish between black laborers. The fact that Mr. Bascom, the previous overseer, got away with stealing from the family for so long because of Battle’s lack of business acumen suggests that the overseer has a greater familiarity with the economic aspects of the plantation as well. (Costello 53)

Like the crook people and the cake people of Memphis, Troy is a socio-cultural other upon whom Dabney and her family are dependent for maintaining their position within the

broader economic order. He maintains order among the workers at Shellmound and ensures that day-to-day operations run smoothly. More importantly, as Costello points out, he possesses a knowledge (and consequently a power) concerning the economic nature of Shellmound that supersedes even the Fairchilds themselves. Like those external sites of alien production, Troy is simultaneously external and internal to the putatively contained realm of Fairchild identity.

Moreover, Troy's seemingly contradictory, dual position is understood not only in economic terms, but in racial terms, as well. That is to say he is figured, at least initially, as being simultaneously both white and non-white. But if whiteness is meant signify an absolute condition, such a portrayal renders the character racially problematic. Considering the characters often complex portrayal within the text, Entzminger poses a central and vexing question: "Is Troy, the lowly overseer whose job it is to associate closely with the black field hands so the land owners will not have to do so, a real white man? Or is he tainted, whether physically or metaphysically, with black blood?" (Entzminger 61). We may expand upon this question and ask: does labor reinforce or endanger white identity?

One way to approach this query may be to interrogate the inner thoughts of Troy's bride-to-be. Pondering the nature of her fiancé at one point, Dabney thinks to herself that "Sometimes Troy was really ever so much like a Fairchild. Nobody guessed that, just seeing him go by on Isabelle! He had not revealed very much to her yet. He would – that dark shouting rider would throw back the skin of this very time, of this moment... There would be a whole other world, with other cotton, even" (Welty 41). Here again we encounter Troy's double nature. Dabney maintains – rightly – that there are ways in which he is already one of the family; as already mentioned, Troy is integral to the operations of Shellmound. Yet in envisaging him in his role as overseer, the fiancé is seen as a "dark shouting rider," uncouth in his volubility, physically

othered in his perceived darkness, an appearance further magnified by position atop – and thus unification with – the black horse Isabelle. Significantly, Dabney imagines this tableau of conflation as signifying a moment of transition and forthcoming revelation. While Welty leaves the deeper import of Dabney’s ruminations somewhat ambiguous, it is a strain of thought notably marked by three distinct features: time, flesh, and commerce, the last here represented by the image of “other cotton.” Taken together, these three elements indicate that Dabney’s vision of Troy outlines an alteration in whiteness, and throwing back of the skin, that is predicated upon changing forms of labor and commerce – the ascension of other cotton.

The positioning of Troy within the Fairchild’s socio-economic, and eventually, familial network, exposes the manner in which the machinations of the modern capitalism are forever reformulating the boundaries and definitions of whiteness. Looking at the history of the white working class in America, David Roediger describes the manner in which individuals and groups exploited their position within the labor force in order to effectively make themselves white. This was a social procedure that required workers to conceive of themselves in contrast to a slave labor force inherently understood as “black.” “White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as ‘not slaves’ and as ‘not Blacks,’” writes Roediger (Roediger 13). Consequently, the question of white identity became – and to varying degrees remains – synonymous with the question of personal agency in the labor market. For particular ethnic groups – Italians, Irish, Jews – labor, or at any rate a particular ideological perception of labor, provided an entry point into the world of whiteness.

This process is something that Troy clearly understands. For while he is physiognomically differentiated from the Fairchilds by his red hair and “dark” mien, Troy is nonetheless able to collapse this differentiation by situating himself in a shared position of opposition to the forces

of black labor. “I can’t tell a bit of difference between me and any Delta people you name,” he tells Ellen at one point, “There’s nothing easy about the Delta either, but it’s just a matter of knowing how to handle your Negroes”(Welty 125). By situating blacks in a position of subservience within the networks of commerce and production, Troy effectively unites otherwise disparate forms of whiteness under the banner of free, or empowered, labor. Moreover, it is his very occupation that allows him to “legitimately” employ such rhetorical maneuvers. For while Troy’s position as overseer no doubt produces a problematic degree of intimacy with black laborers, as Entzinger indicates, his occupation also sets him in perpetual opposition to blackness. It is his job to establish the parameters of a specifically black labor, to regulate black bodies in an economic space. His work handling “Negroes” affirms his whiteness; it effectively makes him a Deltan, which is to say, a Fairchild, which is to say, white. Additionally, Troy’s use of the possessive “your” unites him and the Fairchilds in a bond of collective ownership. His employment allows him to share in the commodification of black bodies, thus partaking in not only white identity, but also broader rhetorics of white supremacy. It is, after all, somewhat unclear just whom this “your” is meant to refer to.

Troy’s marriage to Dabney might be understood as an extension of this process of integration. Despite his physical markers of difference, Troy’s position as someone both inside and outside the Fairchild circle, as someone already “ever so much like a Fairchild,” allows Dabney and her kin to at least entertain the idea that the marriage between the two characters might be somehow understood as endogamous. Strange though this may sound, it is very much in keeping with much theory regarding the social functions of commercial exchange. As Gayle Rubin writes, “Capitalism is a set of social relations – forms of property, and so forth – in which production takes the form of turning money, things, and people into capital. And capital is a

quantity of goods or money which, when exchanged for labor, reproduces and augments itself by extracting unpaid labor, or surplus value, from labor and into itself” (Rubin 29). Clearly, capital exchange has produced a particularly intimate social relationship binding Troy and his future in-laws, both through the former’s labor, as well as through Dabney’s commodification as an item of exchange. Additionally, and even prior to marriage, there is already a suggestion that the relationship between the Fairchilds and their overseer is already producing a surplus value. In the same scene where Troy is made privy to Aunt Mac’s money laundering, he is also put to work polishing silver, presumably “off the clock.” Moreover, the union between Troy and Dabney will take on particular capital value when the latter experiences a very precise form of “unpaid labor,” thereby producing a surplus of Fairchilds.

Welty’s implicit critique of paternalism and its attendant ideology of white supremacy thus reflects the inherent contradictions in the bourgeois familial structure, particularly as constituted in modern southern culture. Both social systems rely upon a heterogeneous system of exchange in order to establish a coherent sense of homogeneity, a contradictory framework founded on patterns of exploitative oppression and rabid consumption. Because of this contradiction both systems are also forever subjecting themselves to a self-inflicted process of dissolution: whiteness must continually alter its contours through the realities of heterosexual, endogamous reproduction, as must the bourgeois family. Consequently, as *Delta Wedding* reveals, those social forces, like the Fairchilds, ostensibly opposed to the New South economy were in fact instrumental in facilitating the South’s entrance into the modern economic paradigm.

(IN) CONCLUSION

Early in his autobiography, *Black Boy*, Richard Wright recalls the last time he saw his father alive.

A quarter of a century was to elapse between the time when I saw my father sitting with the strange woman and the time when I was to see him again, standing alone upon the red clay of a Mississippi plantation, a sharecropper, clad in ragged overalls, holding a muddy hoe in his gnarled, veined hands – a quarter of century during which my mind and consciousness had become so greatly and violently altered that when I tried to talk to him I realized that, though blood made us kin, though I could see a shadow of my face in his face, though there was an echo of my voice in his voice, we were forever strangers, speaking a different language, living on vastly different planes of reality. (34)

In a manner similar to both Welty and Faulkner, Wright depicts intergenerational exchange as a site not so much of commiseration or simple continuity but of alienation. Moreover, this alienation is framed in explicitly economic terms, shadowed as it is by various markers of rural black labor. The different plane of reality to which Wright refers, while certainly metaphysical on the one hand, might also fairly be understood as the plantation grounds on which father and son meet, a possibility of no small import since it suggests the origins of such division are in fact located within the rapacious economy of the New South cotton industry.

It is no doubt the cotton fields – and the New South economy more generally – that have rendered Wright’s father such an alien figure, all but unrecognizable to his own offspring. If only Wright could say “father.”

But even as this alienation is tragically destructive, it is also curiously constructive. In a manner similar to Dabney’s wedding or Miss Quentin’s flight from the Compson’s home, Wright’s estrangement from his father is actually understood by the author as a positive, if painful and troubling, episode in his personal development, his sense of selfhood being mapped out in the space separating him and his father. Couching his reflection on the matter in the archetypal southern dichotomy of rural and urban landscapes, Wright proclaims that “my father was a black peasant who had gone to the city seeking life, but who had failed in the city; a black peasant whose life had been hopelessly snarled in the city, and who had at last fled the city – that same city which had lifted me in its burning arms and borne me toward alien and undreamed-of shores of knowing” (35). Had Wright remained too tightly tethered to his patrimonial framework perhaps he too would have fled the city, thereby losing his opportunity to ascend to those “undreamed-of shores of knowing.” Like Dabney and Miss Quentin, Wright recognizes that the familial ruptures produced by the modern economy might actually function as escape valves, albeit highly contingent and often problematic escape valves, independence purchased at the cost of an unstable and often insecure existence.

And yet it would be exceedingly inaccurate to maintain that Wright’s depiction of his own familial plight corresponds in exact measure to those (fictional) familial narratives composed by Faulkner and Welty. Abandoned by his father as a child, Wright’s sense of alienation is arguably even more visceral and immediate than that experienced by anyone from the Compson or Fairchild clans. His sense of filial dissonance is literally embodied in the figure

of a father whose ragged form he barely recognizes and whose voice is all but indecipherable to his mature ear. What's more, even as this encounter indicates the complex dynamics of Wright's own family drama, it also signals his relationship to matters of black identity and the experience of black subjectivity within southern society, matters markedly, if not wholly, distinct from the familial dramas portrayed in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Delta Wedding*.

For better or for worse, the above analysis represents only a small, and in many respects narrowly defined, portion of what is in fact a much larger phenomenon, both in Southern literature and the society it attempts to represent. Although in many respect distinct from one another, the Compsons and the Fairchilds inhabit what is, for all intents and purposes, the same social stratum, a position of comparative privilege situated atop the triangle of wealthy white-poor white- black that a number of historians have identified as the basic social schema of the post-bellum south. Consequently, the poor white experience depicted by such authors as Erskine Caldwell and Larry Crews has gone by without due consideration, as has the experience of black southerners as depicted by such authors as Alice Walker and, perhaps most germane to this particular study, Wright. Indeed, it might be fairly stated that whatever consideration these two groups have received has been, in essence, subordinate to their decidedly more affluent and powerful peers. Although not included within the classic triangulation of southern society, the region's indigenous population, as well as the various "non-white" immigrant populations that have become an increasingly central feature of the Southern landscape in the last century or so, further complicate the picture, demanding due recognition of how exactly they fit into Dixie's broader socio-economic schema.

I offer this acknowledgement not as an apologia for what are, admittedly, some rather glaring oversights, but rather as a recognition that there is still far more work to be done in

considering how exactly questions of economy influenced, and continue to influence, the various social organisms that constitute the South, and the manner in which such organisms influence the nature of the South in turn. I also point out these gaps in order to counteract any presumption that preceding argument is somehow relegated only to the white bourgeois family, or, conversely, that the manifestation of this phenomenon is necessarily uniform in its manifestation throughout all segments of Southern society. It is often assumed – incorrectly – that Marxist theories regarding the form and function of society and its various organisms discount any possibility of singular human experience, all considerations being reduced to a simple matter of bourgeoisie versus proletariat. Certainly, Marx and Engels did no one any favors by describing the whole of history as “the history of class struggles,” a claim that, while certainly meritorious and indeed vital in many respects, is also incredibly reductive (Marx and Engels 219). However, more recent iterations of Marxist theory, as well as many of its companion discourses – post-colonialism, in particular – have recognized the manner in which examinations of the material, economic, and ideological influence of particular historical epochs actually illuminates, rather obfuscates, the complex singularity of that human experience. Far from encouraging an essentialist agenda, reading these works and others like them through a Marxist-materialist lens precludes us from essentializing questions of Southern identity by continually foregrounding the intricate network of contingencies constituting that curious socio-cultural space we call the American South.

Given the manner in which particular elements within the South, and (the) America(s) more generally, have developed and perpetuated rhetorics of homogeneity in order to maintain specific power regimes, it is apparent that recognition of such contingencies serve not only a critical but also an expressly, and vitally important, political purpose, as well. Reading narratives in light of their material framework allows us an opportunity to decenter and destabilize imperial

rhetorics of uniformity; it allows us to see the multilayered and interconnected webwork of history in all its vast complexity. Discussing the rhetorical function of post-slavery literature, a genre in which Faulkner and Welty certainly participated, George Handley notes that this “literature by implication teaches that because of the persistence of slavery’s legacies in our economies, our modes of thinking about race, and our discourses of nationalism, we need to be reminded of the importance of identifying and weeding out, with determination, those legacies wherever we may find them” (Handley 4). However, if we fail to recognize the interconnected patterns of production and consumption running through these texts, patterns rooted in a system of brutality and exploitation, we will fail as well in benefiting from those lessons that Handley identifies. To understand the function of social organisms in their historical contexts, one must situate them in the matrix of their material contingencies. To do otherwise is to lose oneself in the obfuscatory mire of a pernicious mythology.

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