THE VOICE OF THE MANY IN THE ONE: MODERNISM'S UNVEILED LISTENING TO MINORITY PRESENCE IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND PATRICK WHITE

by

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Thesis Abstract

By comparing the novels of William Faulkner and Patrick White, this thesis reconsiders modernism's elitism and solipsism by revealing within them a critical interest in liberating minority perspective. Theoretical debates which continue to insist on modernism's inherent distance from the identity politics which front the postmodernist movement are overlooking modernism's deeply embedded evaluative mechanisms which work to expose and criticize the activity of psychic and social co-optation.

Faulkner and White are both engaged in fictionally tracing the complexities of a failing patriarchy which can no longer substantiate its primary subjects -- the white, upper class male. As representatives of modernism we can see that Faulkner and White, perhaps unwittingly, initiate the awareness that the 'failure' of their chosen subjects is in large measure due to processes of marginalization which both created the authoritative power structures within which they are constructed and helped serve to collapse them. The classic isolation of the modernist subject can be looked at not simply as an isolation predicated on endless self-referentiality, but rather on a desperate social outreaching for which he or she is not psychically equipped. By following the trajectory and perspective of specific novels and characters it becomes clear that it is precisely this handicap which clears the textual space for diversity of representation, just as it overturns the notion of modernism's functioning separatism.

Chapter one concentrates on the double-edged representation of the female subject constructed as always-already 'guilty' within the psychologically, emotionally and physically repressive terms of the dominant male power structures within the context of Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* and White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. Chapter two investigates the psychological parameters of the morally disenfranchised modern subject whose disillusionment results from prejudicial social practices promoted by virulent racial anxiety as exemplified in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and White's *Voss*. The third and final chapter discusses *Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot* with attention to modernism's own investigation of the exclusion of minority voices from collective social imagining.

The thesis posits that literary modernism is interested less with reconciling its literary subjects within a self-contained totalizing project than it is with invoking new social and psychological paradigms that stress the necessity of external, not internal, represented multiplicity, and that what has been (mis)recognized as modernism's self-closure is, in fact, the key not only to its own continuing relevance, but to the contemporaneous literary injunction to let all voices be heard.
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Introduction

Anyone now interested in critically assessing the dimensions of modernism must engage the question of why what mattered to modernists then, matters to us now. That it does matter is indicated by the unabated energy still being brought to bear in trying to refine a workable definition of the movement or to isolate it in a particular historical epoch. Neither has yet been achieved. It is frequently saddled with generalizations and cliches: its fragmentary nature, its elitism, its disillusionment, its linguistic experimentalism, its ahistorical nature, its near-pathetic lamentation over lost ideals, etc.

A good example of this is provided by Frank Davey who explains that because of the predominant non-European interpretation of modernism taken up by post-modernists and post-colonialists, modernism is viewed as “an international movement, elitist, imperialist and totalizing, willing to appropriate the local while condescending towards its practice” (119). A look at KumKum Sangari’s 1987 article, “The Politics of the Possible,” also conveys the prevalent and derisive terms within which modernism is often situated. She says,

Modernism is a major act of cultural self-definition, made at a time when colonial territories are being re-parceled and emergent nationalisms are beginning to present the early outlines of decolonisation. As a cultural ensemble, modernism is assembled, in part, through the internalization of jeopardized geographical territory -- which is now incorporated as ‘primitive’ image/metaphor or as a mobile non-linear structure. Though intended as a critique, such incorporation often becomes a means for the renovation of bourgeois ideology, especially with the institutionalization of modernism. *(The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, 144-145)*

These two examples will serve to indicate the tenor of criticism that, however justly,
objects to a generalized conception of what modernism was trying to achieve. To some extent, however, these reactions are clouded by their own investment in the perceived need to establish independent critical trajectories upheld in part by a repudiation of their own informative critical, aesthetic and intellectual antecedents. The resistance to modernism's 'appropriative' mechanisms is itself destabilized by a rather pointed neglect of the complexities which open up the dimensions of that same appropriation and have forced the issues incumbent within it center stage.

Putative dates have been ascribed to modernism, sometimes arching from the late 19th century and extending into our own time, more often roughly slotted in the period between the world wars. But modernism has yet to be cornered in such a way as to prohibit its continually shifting dynamic from setting up some kind of residence in the heart of (sometimes hostile) subsequent literary and critical models.

In positioning a thesis within the current debate on modernism, I think only a few points need to be made as to the general critical trend. It is worth noting that there has been a profound shift from such classic studies of modernism as Alan Friedman's 1966 *The Turn of the Novel*, and *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, which while offering penetrating analyses of the movement, categorize it quite strictly as a temporally bracketed phenomenon even when admitting, as Bradbury and McFarlane do, that "modernism [suggests] an extraordinary range of continuities through into present art" (52). There has been a steadily increasing tendency to suggest that modernism operates much more open-endedly, determining the parameters of subsequent movements as an active constituent of what can be perceived as movements themselves intellectually and aesthetically dependent on modernism.
There is increasing consensus that there are no easy divisions between modernism and those movements which would hold themselves apart from it. As Monique Chenaud notes in the 1986 volume she edited with Albert Wachtel, *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*, "Postmodernism does not succeed modernism. It evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress" (4).¹ Or as Sanford Schwartz remarks in the recent, and tellingly titled, *The Future of Modernism*,

...the legitimacy of the distinction is compromised by the very efforts to patrol the border that holds it in place.... Both supporters and detractors of postmodern literature have exhibited a tendency to caricature modernism, the first to clear an oppositional space for its successor, the second to uphold a view of modernism that obscures some of its most interesting features.... The prevailing division between modernism and postmodernism is simply modernism cut in half, and what we call the postmodern is nothing other than the forgotten side of modernism (17).

Instead of concentrating on how distinctions can be solidified, more attention is rightfully being paid to the strange and persistent exchange of characteristics between divisions that are now being regarded as permeable, it being understood that these binaries are themselves a construct created by the pressures of competing discourses. Even in books like *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes From a History of Modernism*, the acclaimed art historian, T. J. Clark, emphasizes "modernism's inward turning and its outward reaching --its purism and its opportunism, its centripetal and centrifugal force" (407). What Clark is interested in demonstrating is aptly captured by the lines of the Wallace Stevens’ poem he uses as an epigraph, "Farewell to an idea ... The cancellings, the negations are never final." Modernism
is itself an idea that has not finished conceiving itself.

Scholars, like the ones I have cited, have begun a careful reworking of modernism’s intentions with regard to its representation of the self, \(^2\) which is where my thesis inserts itself. I am maintaining that modernism’s obsession with the self, its peculiar autism, is actually the first intimation of a need to rework new relationships with the marginalized, and this is aptly demonstrated in the fiction of William Faulkner and Patrick White. Michael Levenson, notes in his discussion of T. S. Eliot that, “particular selves, named or not, remain caught within the politics of intimacy, they have nowhere to go, and no rhetoric of their own strong enough to repair the loss” (11). Since the elitist modernist self can find no internal release, though it searches for emotional, spiritual and psychological resolution primarily within the psyche, it has no recourse but to enlist and admit new representations of human subjectivity.

And although this engagement of the Other is imaginary at this stage, represented primarily in fictional scenes (as I will demonstrate) that while still relying on stereotype, try to show how one subject can contain both polarities inherent within any given stereotype -- the abstract ideal and the abjected humanity -- and still realize a voice. That Faulkner and White are both obsessed with articulating this imagined voice reveals a fear and fascination with the possible consequences of these shifts for their own situation, and a need to try and pin down a new definition of the Self and the Other. They are caught, as well, at a moment when the struggle for liberation is simultaneously -- and equally - a potential moment for the reconsolidation of their own power.

Nevertheless, Faulkner and White, as modernists, were anticipating, intuiting contemporary identity crises. They sensed that the implosion of the modernist self could, in fact, be arrested only by the inclusion of subjects in the authoritative discourse which by its
very nature depended on their non-recognition. But it is an inclusion they could only gesture towards. The fractured elitism within which they created beckoned those who have been hitherto seen as modernism’s excluded, but remained unable, naturally, to articulate them. Nevertheless, minority presence agitates White’s and Faulkner’s ability to conceive of the modern subject to such an extent that it can be perceived as a defining locus of their identity characterization. Current modes of scholarship with their insistent and obviously necessary focus on issues of gender, race and class cannot further their project if they dismiss the foreshadowing of identity politics, feminism, class-struggle, etc., that is found in modernist texts. All of this reasserts the value of a retrospective study as it informs the continuity of what is in essence an ongoing, unbroken discussion about the nature of modern identity.

The thrust of current scholarship’s interest in modernism remains dominated by a collective intellectual impulse to render the modernist obsession with identity in terms that can effectively situate it historically. Michael North is on the frontline of the project to historicize modernism. His 1994 book, *The Dialect of Modernism*, opened the discussion on modernist writers’ efforts to reimagine themselves as racial aliens, citing especially Joseph Conrad, Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot and their involvement with what he terms, “racial ventriloquism”(1,76), which should not be understood simply as a negative and appropriative mimicry, but as a more serious attempt to access a distinctiveness that carried within it the potential for insurrection -- insurrection itself being what the modernist author generally sought. North stresses the point that this innovation was not simply the much-noted modernist attraction to primitivism, but was a linguistic vehicle used to approximate a subjective position that innately opposed the norm.

I will carry the point even further by suggesting that it is in the interior collapse of the
modernist persona that the ‘stranger’, the ‘alien’ begins to change dimension. Begun as an inversion, the alienated self of modernist literature metamorphosizes from an internalized encounter of imagined identity possibilities to a genuinely cleared textual space on which to inscribe newly emergent minority voices. The marginalized voice is, in a fascinating reversal, heard first in modernism’s anticipatory echo.

Pericles Lewis, in *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, 2000, in keeping with his contemporaries, is intent on banishing the notion of modernism’s ahistoricity. Concentrating on James Joyce, he insists that the modernist writer intended not to escape the ‘nightmare of history’, but to recast it through the experience of the individual. As Joyce has Stephen Dedalus himself put it, “to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 252). Lewis speaks for the current re-evaluation of modernism when he suggests that modernists thought that “individual experience could be turned into intersubjective reality” (214). Somehow, the processes of interior psychic evaluation were thought to act as a template that would govern in turn the tenor of collective social imagining. This was a means of regaining a sense of control over historical predication and reveals one way in which the modernist project can be seen as trying to return history to its subjects.

In his article, “Can Modernism Have a Future?”, which offers a formidable discussion of modernism’s unallayed relevance to contemporary thinking, Charles Altieri suggests “it is a vision of history as a purgatorial necessity that clarifies how we might return art to historical answerability” (131). Again, note the implications of Altieri’s title -- the unwillingness, or inability to foreclose on modernism’s contemporary applicability. (It is worth observing that many of these works oriented around the continuing importance of
modernism couch that premise in essay or book titles that rhetorically situate modernism as an integral part of our critical future). We see repeatedly in the current critical literature the emphasis on how modernism represented the self, and how vigorously that representation was trying to rework the relationship between the subject and history as modernity itself seemed to erode the bonds between the two.

To further situate the argument, I will bring in John Jervis, whose exhaustive work, Exploring the Modern, has helped to set the terms of today’s discussion on modernism. Like the other scholars I have mentioned, he demonstrates how “many characteristics thought by contemporary scholars to belong to postmodernism actually have a long and complex history in modernism itself.... Modernism cannot capture itself reflexively without remainder -- it follows that reality still prowls around ghostlike in its effects. This disjunction between project and claims and results is experienced as risk” (336). The risk that Jervis speaks of often ends up qualifying itself as the beckoning vacancy at the heart of modernist discourse, that central nucleus in the imploded modernist self that is more absence than presence. And it is absolutely a point of risk, for it is there that the modernist representation of the self both fails, and to my mind, discovers its ultimate success. There the closed modernist self admits the stranger.

A brief mention of Stefan Jonsson’s remarkable study of Robert Musil, Subject Without Nation, is fitting here as it underscores the collective assessment of modernism’s intentions as it now stands. He traces Musil’s obsession with the nature of identity and, in so doing, registers as well the similar obsession of other modernist writers. He accentuates current indebtedness to a modernist vision that could create a character like Ulrich who exemplifies “the universal human element which resides in the inexpressible ability to differ
... an inclination toward the negative ... which leads a person to abolish reality and change the
world” (xii).

Musil’s hero, the ‘man without qualities’, is fascinated by the aberrant, the rebellious,
the criminal, the Other. This fascination reaches such a pitch that he can no longer conceive
of himself as an independent entity, but must borrow and emulate, dissemble and expose in
order to approximate a ‘self’. Jonsson links the historical political background of Vienna
where the novel is set with the emergence of a subject stripped of definition, of ‘quality’, and
shows how this divestiture anticipates poststructural, postcolonial and postmodern
reconceptualizations of human subjectivity. As he says in his preface, “what human beings
have in common is emptiness and lack. That the human being is characterized by lack
implies that it is characterized by need.... [But] the human being is at once particular, due to a
constitutive need to assert an identity that guarantees social recognition and communal
belonging, and universal due to an ineffable capacity to exceed the identities that condition
that belonging” (xi). Adding considerable momentum to the general trend of modernist
scholarship, Jonsson suggests that the modernist emphasis on issues of identity reveals “the
historical depth and genealogical beginnings of our own discourse, and it indicates the
cultural values and political positions that are at stake” (xiii).

So, in short, the current debate is particularly bent on restoring modernism to an
historical legitimacy from which intervening critical practices have attempted to separate it,
and to re-reading its myriad versions of identity in light of contemporary identity issues.
There is now new room to move in the study of modernism as we negotiate what are being
freshly understood as not its foreclosing, but its expanding boundaries. Though modernist
texts themselves advertise the failed effort to resolve the world into the essence of the
singular subject, we can recognize in them not the impotent gesturing of the human subject caught in endless self-inversions, but rather the generous flux of history examining its individual incarnations, its collective interdependence and potentiality for change.

My comparison of Patrick White and William Faulkner proves particularly valuable in light of the continual reassessment of what modernism itself means, as the former drifts between modernism and postmodernism and the latter is securely registered as a high modernist by his critics. Nonetheless the conceptual similarities of their work override what proves to be a highly unstable theoretical division. No thorough comparison of the two has ever been done, although it has been recognized as a fertile and viable possibility. Gordon Collier, in his 1992 work on Patrick White, stresses the importance of comparing them on the basis of “the fundamental lines of affinity between them - - [particularly] a preoccupation with subjective temporality, a difficult foregrounded style without which the fictions would crumble to dust in the mind, and a problematic relationship between auctorial authority and the narratorial presences experienced by the reader” (465).

It is also worthwhile to look at Robert Ross’s article, “Patrick White’s European Inheritance and the Need for a Comparative Approach,” wherein he asserts that “Patrick White’s novels reflect Australia just as William Faulkner’s works mirror the southern United States.... White sets himself a formidable task: to lift the novel set in Australia out of the mire of provincialism and away from the panegyrics of Australian virtues or a catalogue of the country’s oddities.... In addition, I believe a firm case exists for a comparative study of Patrick White and William Faulkner both sharing a view of man as a tragic and a comic figure” (29). 3

But what I will stage here is not an alignment of two modernist authors chosen
simply for a surprising similarity of prose style, nor even for the deeper ramifications of subjective representations that often eerily parallel one another. Rather, I will look to their fiction to investigate how the socio-historical contextualizing of subjectivity is rendered by each as capable only of dispossessing the modernist subject of clear direction -- individual or social. This literary endeavor seriously (if paradoxically) tags modernism as an historicizing modality and not as an enterprise engaged in historical retreat or denial, nor as an historical revisionism suited only to the purposes of reinstating the authority of a diminished patriarchy. What these modernists are registering is, in fact, the grave and growing historical deficit manifested in the moral displacement of the individual subject no longer in control of personal or collective destiny.

They are chronicling the phenomenon of modern identity formation itself in the increasingly impersonalizing wake of modernity that has absorbed the sense of history-making into its own invisible processes and taken it away from the individual. The modernists lay bare the psychological dimensions of this disillusionment by directly attacking and dismantling the mechanics of idealism itself. Hence we repeatedly encounter characters who define themselves in terms of their own self-fulfilling defeatism. But what amounts to the disempowerment of the modern subject who can no longer substantially affect his or her world has the dramatic side-effect of illuminating what I recognize as the modernist anticipation of the need for representational diversity. The slipping control of the dominant patriarchal voice is itself a complex representation that argues for the release and recognition of the previously disallowed vocabulary of the marginalized.

All things considered, the failure modernists are investigating -- the demise of an elite cultural singularity, i.e., the patriarchy in all its culturally specific forms -- that can no longer
sustain itself as the arbiter of cultural reasoning, can perhaps do nothing other than open the
door for those who have been excluded by that failed reasoning. The oppressed subject’s
inability to speak authoritatively is recognized (if often subtextually) as partially but
formidably responsible for that failure. A look at Gayatri Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern
Speak?,” is enlightening as she discusses how the minority figure, here the subaltern woman,
is blocked by her construction as already represented, spoken for or silenced, as the case may
be, even before she prepares to enter the dialogue. Spivak searches for “the absence of the
text that can ‘answer one back’ after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist
project,” but concludes that “there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can
speak.... The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. The subaltern cannot speak” (122,
129, 130). That blockage, though, in modernist texts has begun to register itself as a shared
subjective calamity, which without actually designating the blame in the exclusion of
minority voices, nevertheless show textual signs of recognizing where the blame resides.

Modernism’s convoluted engagement with its own conditioning sociological beliefs
and practices and the subjects who have been diminished and denied by them provides
perhaps the greatest and most continuous tension in the fiction of White and Faulkner. What
can and has been viewed as modernism’s evasion of its own constitutional prejudices and
elitism can be, with closer scrutiny, revealed as a far more self-confrontational project. Two
brief examples from Faulkner and White will give us a sense of how concerned these authors
are with the multi-layered processes of exchange that formulate the inter-relationships
between marginalized subjects and how profoundly this dialogue influences the sense of
narratorial authority and its ability to access historical, sociological and individual realities.

In Absalom, Absalom!, a text whose density is predicated on the force of a society’s
withheld voices, the obsessed Rosa Coldfield and the slave/daughter Clytie are represented in a standoff that cuts right to the heart of Faulkner’s acute sensitivity as to how marginalized subjects together function as an independently beating center of social awareness and imagining:

Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead.... I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman’s flesh. Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both: -- touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am’s private own: not spirit, soul; the liquorish and ungirdled mind is anyone’s to take in any darkened hallway of this earthly tenement. But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too.... We just stood there -- I motionless in the attitude and action of running, she rigid in the furious immobility, the two of us joined by that hand and arm which held us, like a fierce rigid umbilical cord, twin sistered to the fell darkness which had produced her. (111, 112)

Faulkner here deliberately arrests his chronicle of a doomed patriarchy in the locked tableau of two women, one white, one black, who together constellate an unimagined, unco-opted psychic territory in that there is a resonant possibility in their connection of something that might supercede the South’s racial determinism if they could only extricate affinity from
enmity. Their resistance to one another, their deep correspondence, is not a relationship that Faulkner can contain, but as a modernist he forces them, or forces himself, to allow them to touch. He thereby briefly and boldly registers the power and invites the danger inherent in the denied correspondence of the marginalized with itself and within the encompassing patriarchal discourse. The momentary confrontation between Rosa and Clytie is situated within the violence of the novel like the eye of a storm — calm, central, immaculate and total — the psychic dimensions of which remain unguessed.

However, Faulkner brings us joltingly back into the governing social dynamics within which Clytie and Rosa coexist by the words Rosa utters as a way to sever her connection with Clytie, saying with deadly directness, “Take your hands off me, nigger!” (111). That last word with all of its cumulative and massed significance relegates Clytie and Rosa both to the status of integers in an inescapable racial equation. The subjectivities that might have risen above their contextual social predeterminism through the ‘touch of flesh with flesh’ are cast back and away from the invention of a new dialogue by that single word which itself carries the entirety of their southern legacy. Connection reasserts itself once again as fatal and final division. We can look further ahead and juxtapose this incident with Jim Bond’s ominous, decentralized wailing at the end of the novel and perceive two alternate, anticipatory visions of how new voices might force themselves into the authoritative dialogue, the strain and stress on either side made abundantly, if metaphorically, clear.

In *A Fringe of Leaves*, Patrick White’s Victorian character, Ellen Roxburgh, becomes herself the slave or captive of a tribe of Aborigines. White tests (and ultimately rejects) the precepts of Imperialism and the patriarchy by attempting to represent the perception of a woman assimilated into the lives of blacks, a doubly-barred imaginative foray.
They enthroned her on an opossum skin rug after smoothing it with their flattened hands, and sat in a semi-circle staring at her. Their faces were her glass, in which she and they were temporarily united, either in mooning fantasy or mystical relationship. What the blacks could not endure, it seemed, was the ghost of a woman they had found haunting the beach. They may have felt that, were the ghost exorcized, they might contemplate with equanimity the supernatural come amongst them in their own flesh. Yet they lowered their eyes at last; could it have been for recognizing their own shortcomings? Ellen Roxburgh accepted the possibility and in her turn looked away. (267)

The represented, worshipful connection here cannot be sustained and suggests that White is gesturing towards a freedom for his character complicated by his own colonially-endorsed authoritative position. Yet he angles to reflect Ellen from a psychic place divested of the dominant discourse. Thus he represents her as achieving a deepening self-recognition in the exchanged gaze with the racial other where vocabulary itself is absent, or at least unavailable to the white male aristocracy. In the midst of this textual vacancy, in a near delirium Ellen imagines herself in conversation with her mother-in-law, “‘You haven’t forgotten all you have been taught?’ ‘The words’, Ellen could only mumble, ‘seem to be falling away.’ This was what she truly feared in the event of a long association with the blacks” (259). ‘The words’ are those carefully scripted by the social world that has effectively enslaved Ellen as completely as her primitive captors have, and White intimates that only after that discourse has been silenced can the muted, interior life of Ellen Roxburgh, representative of the oppressed female subject, be released as an active participatory voice. What is gained, then, by comparing White and Faulkner is a deeper understanding of the
intrinsic mechanisms of a modernism which continues to operate across formidable thresholds of cultural difference as one of its fundamental aims emerges as just that: the liberation of difference.

The cultural theorist Patrick Williams makes a point pivotal to my own thesis by noting in, “Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities: Theorizing Modernism and Empire”, 2000, that,

...the idea that modernism might possibly adopt something resembling an ethical stance towards ‘alien’ elements -- making use of them but respecting their difference -- clearly has not been taken up by post-colonial critics eager to assert the opposite. It remains, however, a suggestive possibility, especially in view of the way in which so many post-colonial critics have wrestled with the question of whether the relation of Self and Other (here figured particularly as the center and the periphery, the colonizers and the colonized, or the West and the Rest) is ineluctably one of domination and appropriation of the latter by the former, or whether, for example, the ethical attitude towards the Other (responsibility for the Other, being-for-the-other) proposed by Levinas offers a way out” (Modernism and Empire, 27).

This is an idea which leads directly into the central question being entertained here: don’t modernist efforts to imagine a newly coined sense of the subject, though criticized for their residence in patriarchal structures, in fact lay the groundwork for contemporary postcolonial and cultural criticism’s interest which, as structured in the ways of discourse, including literary discourse, supports the marginalization of the minority subject. There is operative in modernist subjective representation, however, an almost unbidden ethical
dimension realized most provocatively in its push to liberate marginalized perspective regardless of the damage done to its own authoritative legitimacy.

To ground the legitimacy and the originality of this discussion it is necessary to engage at least some of the cliches about modernism in order to expose the frequently attacked or suppressed or minimized vitality that continues to animate them in defiance of their own reductiveness. Also, they need to be aired as I will be using them as one who exits from a well-traveled highway to go into untraveled territory.

The resounding fall from grace, as it were, with its attendant loss of ideals and of a "center," is perhaps the single most identifiable feature that qualified modernism in its inception, in its height, and indeed, still qualifies contemporary re-readings of modernism. And I allude to that simplistic formula as it does spell out the terms of subjective representation in both Faulkner and White, however crudely. This 'fall', though, should be carefully distinguished from its biblical connotations, the religious terms of which have resounded through virtually all of Western literature, as modernism invokes new cultural and, indeed, resolutely historical dimensions in what becomes a collective, secular moral plummeting. Yeats’s famed lines in “The Second Coming” perfectly register the modernist reckoning of a fall from grace that abandons the modern subject to the terror of history:

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere,
The ceremony of innocence is drowned,
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity...
The religious yearning that continues to permeate the modernist imagination is mercilessly qualified by Yeats’s “rough beast” of doubt that cannot foretell what is coming into being, and can no longer emotionally or intellectually validate what is past. And so the modernist sensibility gathers itself around a profound vacuity as the source of its mournful awareness, or “that weary cosmopolitan irony”, as Faulkner critic Richard Moreland puts it (78). In this White and Faulkner do not differ much from most other modernists, as the movement is dominated by white, upper class men who are suspended together as a kind of fraternity in an ultimately vague and dilute disillusionment. But this is, again, to acknowledge only modernist cliches, though it is true that the faltering of the patriarchal schema and the disenfranchisement of the individual by modernity absolutely conditions the fiction of both. Further, there is in their texts an active recognition that the power of the individual was available only for some and that even for those particular elect it was severely constrained. The very act of modernist intellectualizing is itself something of a marginalizing project because it initiates its interpretation of subjective reality ultimately as an exercise in repudiation, deliberately creating distance between the represented self and anything that might constitute a normative cultural or psychological ‘center’. Modernist writers are searching quite specifically for the periphery of their given cultural context, and this is quite a direct effort to inhabit the margins.

What is lost in these generalizations are the subtler fictional mechanisms employed by modernists, in this case by White and Faulkner, that abraded the surface of modernist exclusivity. Even though both, inadvertently or not, enlisted an elite readership, their fiction also reached strangely to an unlocatable audience as though looking first for those who could receive that which they couldn’t yet quite say. In both authors’ work, there seems to be an
occluded but operative suspicion that their marginalized subjects are being represented only through what the authors themselves perceive is a highly suspect and ultimately inadequate perception, even when as richly conceived as Faulkner’s characters Joe Christmas, Dilsey Gibson, Charles Bon or even Temple Drake, or White’s Alf Dubbo, Mordecai Himmelfarb, Theodora Goodman or Ellen Roxburgh, to give just a short list. Faulkner and White realize they are creating through a glass darkly, as it were, fictional realizations of subjects who have not yet stepped into their own light. In this there is a tacit “possibility of recognizing both the acts of exclusion and the excluded” (33), as Moreland puts it. As this is a process in its initial stage, Faulkner’s and White’s authorial orientation is never unequivocal, and their various narrative voices rarely approach anything authoritative. There seems to be an underlying authorial concession on the part of both authors that their work is not finished, that only a new psychic paradigm, one that can work free of modernist anxiety, but one that they can only intuit, not invoke, will ever be able to put their riddling to rest. This might explain how both authors use the transcendental moment to stand for or even mark an unbridgeable gap, as in Clytie and Rosa’s “touch”.

As Michael Giffin notes of White’s visionaries, “In addition to not siring children, they are all deformed, afflicted and exiled beyond the symbolic order imagined by their parents.... As such, they represent the shadow which Western consciousness has tried to deny” (28). What is particularly interesting about this observation is that Giffin, himself an Anglican priest and expressly interested in the dynamics of White’s “religious imagination”, as he phrases it, nonetheless concedes the point that White as a modernist registers spiritual (and cultural) orientation primarily by defection, and is himself interested in the flipside of the traditions that ideologically situate him, resisting equally church and state.5 White’s
visionaries are effectively and relentlessly distanced from the patriarchal schema; vision, truth even, is the property of a new order. (Note that the childless character is also of critical importance in Faulkner’s canon -- and for the same reasons: Quentin Compson, Judith Sutpen, Henry Sutpen, Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas, Gavin Stevens, V. K. Ratliff, Harry Wilbourne, Popeye, Ike McCaslin, Flem Snopes, Linda Snopes, the Corporal, etc.)

By using Faulkner’s modernism to excavate White’s and visa versa, postmodernity can be seen to be nascent in modernism, and modernism understood as not only thoroughly prefiguring, but constituting postmodernity. As I have already discussed, though this correlation should be implicit in the term ‘post’, the deep interpenetration of the two movements is frequently minimized and is registered more as an ideological divorce than as an interdependence. Most importantly, what is at stake, whether viewed contemporaneously or retrospectively, is how the subject, how the “I” that modernity itself continues to construct and obliterate, is dependent on analysis that looks both forward and back for its articulation. I think that it is inaccurate and too easy to suggest that modernists like White and Faulkner unquestioningly assumed their patriarchal legacy, although their social positioning would seem to confirm it. They, in fact, both spent their literary careers, often violently and desperately, trying to write themselves clear of it. Whether they had any measure of success is another question. As Karl Zender has observed of Faulkner in 2000’s *Faulkner at 100*,

What model for psychic development is to replace the male-centered Oedipal model that Faulkner so exhaustively explores.... A tragedy at the heart of Faulkner’s fiction -- at the heart, one is tempted to say, of his anger -- is the suspicion that all male development is a form of psychic imperialism, a co-
optation of some ‘other’ (generational, sexual, racial) in the service of the self.

(117)

The ‘self’ spoken of here is still notably identified as the white male, and yet, as Zender suggests, retrospective analysis can discern modernism’s representation of the percolating perception that that long-dominant self is empowered almost exclusively by psychic (and material) appropriation of every sort. The confidence in the omnipotence of the white male persona is deliberately manipulated by modernist authors such as White and Faulkner who, in keeping with the emergent conventions of the movement, strive to distinguish multiple psychological possibilities from the interior of single characters not, I think, in the interest of reconstructing the Oedipal persona, but rather to expose the psychic faultlines caused by the activity of co-optation itself. Zender goes on by guessing at Faulkner’s ultimate question, “Where, Faulkner’s fiction seems to ask, does the expansionist economy of liberalism end? How far can its quest for inclusiveness extend, if its center in the male-dominated social order -- and in the white male psyche -- is still to hold?” (118). But I would suggest that the point of modernism is that it is not meant to hold and that it, in fact, never did.  

What we can see in modernist works is that although they search brilliantly for diversity of representation, they make the repeated mistake of trying to articulate that within the framework of an “I” still mysteriously substantiated by a collapsed value system. Diversity remains fallaciously predicated on the singular. Nevertheless, there is in this enterprise a suggestion that the subject empowered by the patriarchy is nothing but an amalgam the authority of which finally lies not in the singularity of that created self but in the multiple dimensions of the subjectivities who have been silenced in order to uphold the
dominance of its synthesized voice. By reconfiguring with ceaseless invention the implications of a fallen order, Faulkner and White as modernists are exposing the devastating flaws and egregious exclusions held in place by that order. That they repeat themselves through seemingly endless variations on a theme reveals the strength of that order; that they can reveal its flaws shows that it is beginning to shift.

As Phillip Weinstein has suggested in his 2000 essay, "A Sight-Drafted Yesterday": Faulkner’s Uninsured Immortality”, Faulkner is “the writer of pain radiated by the failure of culture’s defenses” (50). The two authors are both writing under the pressure of a paradox that outdistances even the one of attempting to reestablish the modern hero amidst the rubble of his ideals. They go further, in the sense that they are involved, finally, in ‘un-selving,’ by which I mean that they tear away, with whatever suspect regret and mourning, version after version of subjects who can no longer survive or dominate in the socio-historical roles that have encoded them. And it is just this project, regardless of its much-criticized white, male orientation, which will later open up the field for the admittedly slow assimilation of other cultural identities, as it itself starkly illuminates the vacancies. The alienated subject constructed in a discourse which is itself being destabilized by the modernist writer, is represented as being in the process of recognizing itself as a failure self-created by its own separatism.

Edward Said, in his article “Representing the Colonized,” posited that it was the modernist who first had to take the Other seriously, yet was unable to do more than exist in a “formal irony of a culture unable to say yes, we should give up control, or no, we shall hold on regardless” (222). Yet, as Marjorie Perloff questions, “What idiom have we developed to transcend the sophistication of [modernism’s] irony? What ‘neutral’ vocabulary might we
now employ to supercede the dialogism that is the self-reflexive heart both of the ethnographic encounter and of modernist irony - the kind of formalized self-questioning that, if it opens itself to the charge of ethical fence sitting, at least acknowledged the phenomenological structure of the dilemma" (339). Modernism in conversation with itself was perhaps a necessary, precursory inversion, and one that is being invoked now in the service of those who were excluded. The “I” that was disappearing was an essential, maybe inevitable focus of modernist writers which allows for the postmodern emergence of a whole constellation of previously unvoiced “I’s”.

Although some might argue that modernism exploded the represented self in order to undermine *any* attempt at identity by minorities by suggesting that no subjectivity can now be articulated after the collapse of the identity prototype, if you will, the nature of modernism’s self-castigation is so thorough and so virulent as to displace any notion of such willful hostility. Rather, the self-reflexivity of modernism with regard to the split subject can be regarded as the emerging recognition of cultural decay or disease, the contagion of which might be arrested by accessing the voice of the other. In proclaiming the failure of the patriarchy, modernism can’t help but beckon those which it has excluded.

Modernism announces the vulnerability of its represented subjects in what amounts to quite a direct invitation to the displacement of its own authoritative voices. This is not meant to imply that minority subjectivites will now be able to represent themselves as emergent voices equipped with full and equal authority, but that the Other might at least begin to speak from what is a reoriented and perhaps less coopted vantage point, as those writers manipulating the authoritative discourse have exposed its deep fallibility. In so doing, the configurations of power within that discourse have been irrevocably changed; what were
subject positions marked as absence have become those of presence, and a new
representational dynamic has come available. Though the paradigms of repression and
exclusion functioned in and survived the destabilizing of the dominant discourse, the shifting
itself remains a revolution of the first order.

As Altieri notes, there was “a willingness to face directly the darkest, most nihilistic
features of the disenchantments produced by modernity” (133). These naturally revolved
themselves around ‘selves’ that could no longer substantiate their self-hood. And we cannot
underestimate the danger at finally arriving at the “I” itself, stripped of social and spiritual
validation. The long fall from Enlightenment’s reason for being, or even reason as being, no
longer answered. Altieri’s companion assertion that we may be able to “break with the
modernist evasion of history as nightmare” (134) by retrospectively acknowledging its vital
engagement with that ‘nightmare’, serves as a preface to his well thought-out assumption that
modernists were themselves profoundly aware of their own historical grounding.

Patrick White and William Faulkner, with typical modernist fervor, plunged into
imagined interiorities where dangerous equations between new psychic paradigms and now
useless inherited psychic referents seemed to proliferate unbidden. The instability is
profound. Although both White and Faulkner spend considerable effort to describe interior
states of being there is an interesting difference: Faulkner’s characters are embroiled in
identity conflicts that are largely precipitated by socio-historical circumstance, whereas
White’s are caught up in socially distancing, self-referential spirals. As White critic
Veronica Brady points out, “For White, solitude, not society is the true human milieu, and
passivity, not action, the proper mode of being.... Characters primarily inhabit their own
inner space and draw their strength from it” (11). Manfred Mackenzie further supports this
by noting that, “White is primarily concerned with his own internal conflict and is dealing with historical issues only insofar as they provide a context for his psychological drama” (170). In this aspect the two authors together provide a neat distillation of modernism’s own primary conflicts: the struggle for self-identity in the encompassing structures of macro social definitions, and the collapse of the self within the self.

Stefan Johnsson has noted that, “Each time the subject attempts to express its innermost being, it stumbles on cliches, stereotypes, inherited or prefabricated conventions for speaking about psychic essences and finally loses itself in an interior landscape of petrified mental objects” (79). Does this suggest that the aggressiveness of modernist efforts to coalesce some workable, potentially ‘healthy’ vision of subjectivity that can survive the pressures of modernity is only a pathetic exercise conducted in a framework of debunked social criteria and exhausted ideals? Or even more to the point, is it a project that can be written off as no longer having any contemporary credence? The answer in both cases is no.

In discussing a modernist notion of identity, particularly the examples I will explore in White and Faulkner, I find that it is necessary to touch at least briefly on some ideas that are admittedly contaminated by residual strains of humanistic idealism. Jonsson, again, notes that there arose, “an obsession with the innermost substance of the self as the last source of personal identity and reality.... Lofty words such as ‘soul,’ ‘individuality,’ ‘subjectivity,’ and ‘self’ lose their meaning, or are taken apart and shown to consist of impersonal processes of historical or psychological provenance” (57). Inherent within these statements are arguments that, again, challenge the notion of modernism’s ahistoricity. The very search for these would-be independent qualifiers of human experience finds dramatic and repeated denial in modernist fiction as the represented subject is inevitably left in confrontation with his or her
cultural reflection. There is in Faulkner and ultimately in White a constant return to the socio-historical stage. The whole point is the return. And this exercise must be understood not as a nostalgic or endlessly self-referential revisitation, but as a complex reconfiguring of social orientation itself. The inability to transcend historical predication is, itself, the stuff of modernism.

Conversely, to think that in our current, deeply historicizing mode we are no longer answerable to spiritual, interior concerns is just as blind. As Altieri remarks, “One has to show that modernism’s insistent positivism about the soul can have the beneficial effect of forcing those who resist its values to engage the barest, most elemental, and perhaps most profound realizations we have of what can satisfy a Geist no longer willing to indulge in metaphysical speculation or to buy into prevailing ideologies without considerable self-questioning” (140). That self-questioning is itself considerably furthered when transferred back onto modernist texts with contemporary critical criteria intact. Both Patrick White with his sometimes unsuccessful metaphysical pretensions regarding the sublime within the ordinary, and William Faulkner with his underlying textual assertion that the ‘human spirit will prevail’ regardless of historical atrocity, afford us not just simple, outmoded, culturally isolated idealisms, but complex inscriptions of why an exploration of modern subjectivity mattered then and why it matters still.

That said, we must concede that modernism does have isolationism as, in some sense, a crucial underpinning of its sensibility. Faulkner and White can be viewed as isolated figures in very particular ways. White, simply by virtue of being an Australian, far from the cultural centers from which modernism originated, necessarily enters the movement at a tangent and had to contend with “the employment of Eurocentric discourses to understand
post-colonial realities" (Ashcroft & Salter, 293). It is worth noting that his attraction to modernism may already perforce have enlisted White in the continuation of this game, in that this evaluative inconsistency served well his pointed, cultural ironizing. And with an irony that worked to his advantage, the notion of an elite, isolated subject (more often than not the represented modernist persona) which appealed to White was reinforced by “a nation remote from world centers: one whose most potent visual and verbal images often centered on notions of the virtue of isolation. [White] was part of a rearguard action, fought in a quarantined culture” (A&S, 300, 302).

White also isolated himself further by projecting himself backward, to some extent, into the modernist movement. As Simon During has noted, “He seemed old-fashioned -- a throwback to pre-war modernist models” (6). What is important is that the governing ideological mechanisms of modernism facilitated White’s interest in exposing what he seemed to view as Australia’s cultural hypocrisy. He utilized modernism’s inherent rebelliousness to challenge the edicts of the patriarchy and Imperialism, modernism itself being the agent for socio-historical argument.

White suffered from the colonial mentality with its persistent sense of exile and/or exclusion that furnishes his writing with its repeated motifs of exile -- psychological, spiritual, emotional, sexual and geographical. Faulkner’s articulation of exile is perhaps a more complex one as the South is very much a part of a greater nation. The interesting distinction is, of course, that Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha is an imaginary county in a very real Mississippi. This makes its borders both strangely permeable and strangely locked. He can let in whoever he wants to let in, controlling even the infiltration of the ‘durn foreigners’. White does not imagine his own borders, but deplores both what they contain and what they
exclude. He says, “To return to this question of superficiality and density: it is the great question in writing about anything Australian; my (secret) solution is to bring in as many foreigners and eccentrics as possible” (*Letters*, 360).

White, like Faulkner, chose to live, however antagonistically, in his native country, but won’t admit to any nationalist sentiments and writes disparagingly of any of his characters he invests with them. Faulkner’s characters, however, are often substantiated by a tortured allegiance to the lost world of antebellum values, an allegiance that fosters a self-created exile every bit as formidable as that experienced by the subjects of White’s canon. As one of Faulkner’s critics, Irving Howe, points out, “After its defeat in the Civil War, the South could not participate fully and freely in the normal development of American society.... The South because it was a pariah region or because its recalcitrance in defeat forced the rest of the nation to treat it as such, felt its sectional identity most acutely during those decades when the United States was becoming a self-conscious nation.... Through an exercise of the will, it insisted that the regional memory be the main shaper of its life” (23).

William Faulkner, for all his attempts to embody a fictionalized subject that would somehow confine and describe the human condition in the modern world, created multiple psychic poses, all partial or possible answers to the cultural and material conditions of his southern world. As has been generally acknowledged, he is both liberated and fettered by his position as a white, southern male. In *The Making of a Modernist* Daniel Singal has noted, “[Faulkner discovered] that the two worlds of the local and the cosmopolitan could be brought together with enormous profit” (94). The implications of what that ‘profit’ was are multiple. It was certainly not just the opportunity to reduce and confine global universalisms on a miniaturized stage. Further, it allowed for both a sophisticated engagement and evasion...
of the South’s troubled social realities.

During remarks on the availability to White of a similar ‘profit’: “He attempted to detach contemporary Australian culture from its colonized past. Australian culture could still be Australian while pursuing universal rather than local topoi ... invoking the universal tragedy at the heart of the human condition was so seductive locally because it expressed the travails and horrors of white settlement while simultaneously concealing them” (18). And indeed, White forces his peculiar metaphysics on to fictional cultural subjects finally ill-suited to support them. By leaping from the particulars of what White configures as the mundane stagnation of Australian life into the confused blur of modernist psychic dilemma, he is able to effectively sidestep prevalent social issues.

World-traveller, Hollywood screenwriter, sometime statesman, Faulkner’s wide exposure nevertheless perpetually reiterated itself on his local canvas. Like White, who claimed, “I feel what I am. I don’t feel particularly Australian. I live here and I work here.... I’m not for nationalism at all - - not for flag-wagging and drum thumping. There have been plenty of authentic voices before mine and many Aussies would say that mine is not authentic” (Life, 536), Faulkner also repeatedly denied the importance of his origin. “It was not very important to him, just what he happened to know” (FC File, 14-15). Yet by far the greater majority of each of the author’s novels are set in their respective homelands. Regardless of the cosmopolitan influences that both writers were exposed to, isolation in some sense serves as the lived particularity from which each is able to apprehend multiple definitions of the modern subject abandoned in its wasteland.

White said of himself, “I am the stranger of all time. As a homosexual I have always known what it is to be an outsider. It has given me the added insight into the plight of the
immigrant -- the hate and contempt with which he is often received” (Life, 248). And as John T. Matthews suggests, perhaps too liberally, of Faulkner, “The force of his disillusionment with Southern mythology makes him something of a native outsider, a kind of hypothetical person of color” (F100, 80). How their cultures situated them in concert with modernism’s predisposition to elicit the condition of the psychologically and emotionally isolated modern subject contributes to both author’s probably unforeseen ability to access or gesture towards a representation of the marginalized, the most extreme incarnation of social isolation. (Modernists themselves tended to be psychologically, politically or geographically estranged from their formative cultural settings. Exile for them was either or both an inevitable and a desirable condition.)

What effectively isolates both White and Faulkner more even than the faint exoticism that clings both to the deep South and to Australia is their apparent psychic stance, one echoing that of the other, of needing to create, as Phillip Weinstein says of Faulkner, “in the presence of can’t matter and must matter, knowing that both are true and that they cannot coherently coexist” (F100, 50). Both authors persist in trying to navigate themselves free of what appears to be a nihilistic paradox. But this is, in fact, the in-between that modernism makes its own, resisting existentialism’s sense of futility by perceiving in this paradox not just the uselessly reiterated absurdity of the human condition, but a potential space, the potential space, for moral and psychological evolution.

As Faulkner stated, “I have worked too hard at my (elected or doomed, I don’t know which) trade, to leave no mark on this our pointless chronicle” (FC File, 7). And White in a similar vein says, “My writing seems to be a disease for which there is no cure” (Letters, 165). That they should both want “to leave a scratch on the wall of oblivion” (Faulkner in
the University, 61), can be condemned as simple egotism or lauded as the only courage that modernist irony permits. Either way, there is an unworkable conflict at the heart of their writing dictated by the vacillation between a certain brand of nihilism coupled with modernism's curious affirmation of its own troubled doubting which sets up double agendas evident in both authors' fiction.

This internal friction provides a template for an original investigation into how their modernist representations of the subject have embedded in them realizations of certain postmodern polarities that have themselves been used as signaling profound distinctions between postmodernism and modernism, and which as Sanford Schwartz remarks, "actually shows the battlefield on which modernism itself operates" (16). Schwartz suggests the following as the most important polarities commonly used to distinguish modernism from postmodernism, "ontological certainty/ontological uncertainty, presence/absence, determinacy/indeterminacy and hierarchy/anarchy" (16). These serve us quite well in this discussion though I would add a new binary and suggest that elitism and the validation of the marginalized are not the absolute provinces of modernism and postmodernism respectively, but can on occasion be recognized as functioning in either.

As the manipulation and reconfiguration of linguistic formulas is literary modernism's specific innovation, it cannot be neglected as the chosen battlefield for both authors' identity gaming. The complexity of their prose style relates directly to the socio-historical and individual instability they are representing. As George Steiner so dramatically pronounces in discussing modernism, "it is the end of language as logos, as the saying of being. It is this break of the covenant between word and world which constitutes one of the few genuine revolutions of spirit in Western history" (93). White and Faulkner carefully
harbor, even promote, a suspicion of language as a further indication of their rejection of traditional ordering. We can see how similarly disruptive their use of language is by aligning two perspectives on their writing. Citing T. S. Eliot, Ramachandra Rav observes of White:

His novels become the contemporary myths of cultural crisis, in which the adverse awareness of Australian society and the detached view of the European tradition are brought to confront and dramatize each other.... White’s words seem to ‘slip, slide, crack and perish with imprecision’, because they cannot bear the connotative burden imposed on them. Language fails to enact out of its internal resources the intended perimeters of meaning, much less rise to the level of communication that transcends the linguistic limitations. (39, 41)

This analysis placed next to Richard Gray’s semiotic interpretation of Faulkner reveals a striking similarity with Rav’s -- right down to the adjectival choices-- while granting Faulkner far greater conceptual success. Gray notes of Faulkner’s use of language,

Its slipperiness permits it to seep through conceptual boundaries; its random, discontinuous nature enables it to expose gaps in, or actively puncture, seamless figures of division, while its random fluency, its disjunctive pressures work towards a shattering of all ‘eggshell shibboleths, the thin carapace of dualistic ideology’. (126)

Gray, here, touches on my central point: that every facet of Faulkner’s (and White’s) modernist artistry is being used in the service of dismantling the mechanics of exclusion. The strain is apparent in the writing of both Faulkner and White to make language register not only the failure of the modern subject to rescue him or herself through introspection or to
be fully available to the reciprocating analysis of inter-relationships, but the failure of language to successfully facilitate as the mediator. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin Compson credits his grandfather with saying, “language [is]... that meagre and fragile thread ... by which the little surface corners and edges of men’s secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant now and then before sinking back into the darkness where the spirit cried for the first time and was not heard and will cry for the last time and not be heard then either” (*Absalom*, 202). But Quentin himself can only momentarily locate a sense of continuity when brushing up against the few, fugitive bits of written language that occupy the text of *Absalom* as he attempts to reimagine a history that might finally explain him to himself. He marvels at what might possibly be the long-dead Charles Bons’s letter to Judith Sutpen, and the marveling seems to be less at the mysterious, barely traceable relationships of past subjects, than at the transference of written language whose very immediacy compounds what is psychically untouchable, focusing on --

...that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of oblivion to which we are all doomed, of which she [Rosa] spoke -- Quentin hearing without having to listen as he read the faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he still did. (102)

As in this example, Faulkner repeatedly and subtly aligns Quentin the story-teller with arrested language -- language on a headstone “with here and there a carved letter or even an entire word momentary and legible in the faint light which the raindrops brought particle by particle into the gloom and released” (153), language in a letter whose author
cannot be verified, or the language in letters themselves the imaginative product of Quentin and Shreve’s speculating, or in a letter that lies half-open on an open book, an image Faulkner returns to several times in the novel, registering it as some kind of threat or invitation, “the rectangle of paper folded across the middle and now open, three quarters open, whose bulk had half raised itself by the leverage of the old crease in weightless and paradoxical levitation, lying at such an angle that he could not possibly have read it, deciphered it ... yet he seemed to be looking at it” (176). The strongest thing that comes across in Quentin’s relationship to language is the futility of its efforts to conjure the reality of subjective presence. The self cannot be found there; neither can the Other. Consider his and Shreve McCannon’s imagined letter to Charles Bon’s mother which is described in words that precisely echo Quentin’s own experience in reading the letter attributed to Charles:

...clutching the letter she couldn’t read (maybe the only word in it she could even recognize would be the word ‘Sutpen’) in one hand and brushing back a rope of lank iron-colored hair with the other and not looking at the letter like she was reading it even if she could have, but swooping at it, blazing down at it as if she knew she would only have a second to read it in, only a second for it to remain intact after her eyes would touch it, before it took fire and so would not be perused but consumed, leaving her sitting there with a black crumbling blank carbon ash in her hand. (245).

In these words, indeed in any words, there can be for her no realization of the complexities of love and betrayal and revenge, just as within the context of the novel, all the letters that crisscross the text only further occlude the deep racial and social dimensions that
are the novel’s foundation. In the intensely verbal world of Faulkner’s imagined south language functions as a direct conspirator in the silencing of truth, as it is recognized as always-already deeply biased and perpetually incomplete. And always, always there is the incalculable dimension of what is left unsaid. It is in this arena of multi-layered omission that we discover Faulkner and White reaching towards a tentative recognition of their own involvement with literary acts of exclusion.

Fredric Jameson, writing on modernism and imperialism, discusses the sense of absence that I register as a crucial element in the work of White and Faulkner, a crucial element in modernism:

...pieces of the puzzle are missing; it can never be fully reconstructed, no enlargement of personal experience, no intensity of self-examination (in the form of whatever social guilt) can ever be enough to include [the] radical otherness of colonial life.... As artistic content it will now henceforth always have something missing about it, but in the sense of privation that can never be restored or made whole simply by adding back in the missing component; its lack is rather comparable to another dimension, an outside like the other face of a mirror, which it constitutively lacks, and which can never be made up or made good. (Nationalism, Colonialism & Literature, 51)

And a look at Terry Eagleton resonates with a great deal of relevance to Faulkner and White. His ideas capture what happens to the modernist trying to invoke new identity paradigms which will, as he says, “be caught up in the very metaphysical categories it hopes to abolish; and any such movement will demand a difficult, perhaps impossible double optic, at once fighting in a terrain already mapped out by its antagonist and seeking even now to
prefigure within that mundane strategy styles of being and identity for which we have as yet no proper names” (NCL, 24). Just so, Faulkner and White are caught in a creative matrix that is both a place of resistance and one of curious submission; they have no choice but to utilize a legacy of inherited notions to devise new subjective representations that can answer to a changed psychological and social landscape.

Faulkner and White want to ‘name’ the subject freshly, to release new equations for the self, but these definitions turn back upon themselves. To some extent modernism’s self-reflexivity might work against them here were it not for the intuitive questioning of its own legitimacy. Faulkner and White seemed to realize that any version of the modern subject is constituted by the threat of never being able to comprehend itself, thus becoming the helpless target of its own aggressive quest. Shorn of trustworthy external referents, the modern subject is compelled to seek interior definition, but that interior rescue has been paradoxically foreclosed by the discoveries of psychoanalysis, the inseparable companion to modernism. The advent of the unconscious as the hidden controller of the conscious subject introduced a division so formidable that the Self now had to be understood only in conjunction with the hostile emergence of an unknowable Other.

As Phillipe Julien postulates, “I am indeed nothing but the other, yet at the same time he remains alienus, a stranger. The other who is myself is other than myself.... Either the other kills me or I kill the other. This is the result of the imaginary discord that is intrinsic to the constitution of the ego and its essential sign” (34). This internal stand-off will eventually force another turn of recognition, handing modernist strategy further along in its hidden impetus to engage a more wide-ranging representation of subjectivity.

Within the terms of Faulkner’s and White’s modernism, language itself enacts the
stalemate of the self looking for the self, and is suggested in the characters who cannot speak, or letters that are unfinished, lost, destroyed, or imagined. Words convey either too much or too little, and White and Faulkner explore both extremes with equal tenacity. In *Voss*, the title character attempts to send a fervent missive to the distant Laura Trevalyan using the elderly Aborigine, Dugald, as his courier. White probes the boundaries of language here by emphasizing the contrast between the articulate, metaphysical letter representative of Voss's highly intellectual world and the "primitive", illiterate Dugald who carries what are to him the meaningless black scratches in the pocket of the preposterously ill-suited European broadcloth coat he wears. He is in a state of near derangement as he travels through the harsh realities of the Australian outback and is overtaken at the last by fellow tribesmen, who begin to strip from him the vestiges of the white man's world, the coat and in it the quintessence of that world: written language.

Remembering the white man's letters, Dugald retrieved the pocket and took them out. The shreds of his coat fell, and he was standing in his wrinkles and his bark cloth. If the coat was no longer essential, then how much less was the conscience he had worn in the days of the whites? These papers contained the thoughts of which the whites wished to be rid, explained the traveller, by inspiration.... One woman, of flashing teeth, had come very close, and was tasting a fragment of sealing wax. With great dignity and some sadness, Dugald broke the remaining seals, and shook out the papers until the black writing was exposed. There were some who were disappointed to see but the picture of fern roots. A warrior hit the paper with his spear.... Away, away the crowd began to menace and call. The old man folded the papers. With the
solemnity of one who has interpreted a mystery, he tore them into little pieces. How they fluttered. The women were screaming, and escaping from the white man's bad thoughts. Only Dugald was sad and still, as the pieces of paper fluttered around him and settled on the grass, like a mob of cockatoos.

The pathos in this scene is striking and the authorial attitude towards language and the transience of identity is almost reverential in its very resignation. The import of it rises quite above the particulars of the text with a brilliantly conceived physical dismemberment of language that shocks with its graphic symbolism. The destruction of the letter functions here as a powerful indictment not against language specifically, but imperial, patriarchal language that wishes only to chronicle itself. The fact that White tenders the scene with an unmistakable poignancy can perhaps be forgiven as it is directed in a way that goes beyond just a condescending pity for Dugald's lapse into savagery, or a lament for the lost and forsaken Voss: it registers the failed communion between their two worlds. What must be recognized is that it is Voss, and not Dugald, who is now without a voice, without identity except that residue which in its turn has been strangely coopted. He is bereft of language in a desert both actual and psychological. The fallen, patriarchal hero has been handed on, but quite literally can no longer be read.

Dieter Hoffman-Axhelm's ideas on modern identity quite effectively situate the modern subject's perverse placement between a vague liberal wish for the abandonment of subjective social categories and a psychic vacancy that can as a result no longer be supplied with meaning:

Identity was one of the grand promises of the modern.... In the name of
identity, laws and species were to be abolished; traditions and corporate chains cast aside. It was hoped that the dominion of collective suppression and prevailing linguistic patterns would end and that identity would be based in one's own person and one's own responsibility. Identity was the paradise of the secularized promise -- in a world where as far as truth and justice were concerned, one need not be torn apart or identify with any rival power -- but could remain true to oneself. In its exhaustive effort, civil society's ideal of the mediation between destructive contradictions within the subject has, in our time, been sufficiently unmasked.... But the desire for identity is not thereby eliminated. In fact, having become useless, it reconstitutes itself as pure desire. (200)

As such, this desire translates primarily into a sense of futility as there is, in essence, no longer any attainable psychic objective. Eddie Twyborn, White's character in *The Twyborn Affair*, illustrates the urgent need of the modern subject to have a fixed, stable point of reference from which to push off into the unknown which has become the interior territory of the self. Yet he is, of course, bereft of such reference; the atmosphere in which he exists offers him nothing in the way of self discovery. As he aptly puts it, "I would like to think myself morally justified in being true to what I am -- if I only knew what that is -- I must discover" (110). Eddie's identity confusion speaks not only to the isolation of the homosexual in Australian society, but registers a larger resistance to the imposed restrictions of subjective definition. In *Riders in the Chariot*, White's character Mordecai Himmelfarb, a Jew, and therefore already thoroughly familiar with dispossession, has what might be called a negative epiphany in a moment when this modern spiritual destitution is made clear to him:
But once he was roused from sleep during the leaden hours to identify a face. And got to his feet to receive the messenger of light or resist the dark dissembler when he was transfixed by his own horror, of his own image, but fluctuating as through fire or water. The long awaited moment was reduced to a reflection of the self in a distorting mirror. Who then could hope to be saved? (136)

The desire for identity is stalemated in modernist representation by a mirroring that precludes any psychic advancement. White, in many ways the more literal of the two authors, uses mirrors themselves as a recurrent symbol of the psychic cancellation that occurs in looking in to look out. In *The Aunt's Story*, Theodora Goodman is frequently correlated with mirror images, a symbolic tactic which White uses to express modernism's would-be dead end in its own solipsism. Two examples will serve here: “She was walking in the passages of Meroe, a reflection walking through mirrors towards a door which had always been more mirror than door and at which she was now afraid to look.... She stood in the perspective of the brown room, which tried to contain her, but which failed, defeating its own purpose in reflections of reflections, endlessly” (110, 231). For Theodora the self becomes both witness and prosecutor. The self is confirmed only by its reflected non-answering and the modernist mirror seems, indeed, ‘more mirror than door’. In comparing White and Faulkner, though, we shall see that it is, in the final analysis, both. John Jervis, in 1998's *Exploring the Modern*, suggests that,

Through self-surveillance we attempt a panoptic grasp of self that can only succeed through the self becoming other to itself.... Through self-reflexive self-awareness, we project self into other as all seeing observer and the result
can be a paradoxical world, paranoid yet solipsistic, with the simultaneous inflation and diminution of the self as the center of experience, menaced by the ‘gaze’ it has itself projected. The other is no longer there as a presence but is omnipresent as fear, a principle of surveillance. (57)

This paranoid stance infiltrates all of White’s novels and certainly many of Faulkner’s, contorting them into modernist parodies of the advantages of the ‘examined life’. One crucial way Faulkner and White devise for their characters to avoid this uneasy perversion of self-observation is to have them resist the formulation of being named at all and to thereby step outside any identifying field. As Richard Gray puts it of Faulkner’s work, “characters ... place question marks over their attempts to turn experience into speech by turning aside from naming, to seek deliverance and redress in a non-verbal world” (147). White’s Theodora Goodman, again, provides a vivid example of this. Near the end of the novel, Theodora obliterates her name, the last vestige of her identity, by tearing up her train tickets: “There was also she saw, the strips and sheaves of tickets, railroad and steamship, which Theodora Goodman had bought in New York for the purpose of prolonging herself through many fresh phases of what was accepted as Theodora Goodman. Now she took these and tore them into small pieces which fell frivolously at the side of the road” (263). And shortly thereafter she gives a hastily assumed pseudonym to the Johnsons who have found her wandering in the country. In this act she makes the final step towards the abandonment of self: she denies her name, closing the door on that last embrace with an ‘accepted’ reality.

‘Joe, this is Miss...?’ ... Theodora’s throat was tight with some new terror that she could not swallow, in a new room. Her hands searched. ‘Yes,’ she said,
bringing it out of her throat, but her hands could not find. They waited. Her forehead pricked with sweat. ‘Pilkington,’ she said... Theodora could have cried for her own behaviour, which had sprung out of some depth she could not fathom. But now her name was torn out by the roots. (269)

The character unable or unwilling to identify him or herself or to be identified creates not only a profound and mobile vacancy at the heart of modernist artistic social interpretation, but is also modernism’s curious specificity, a socio-historical magnifying glass focusing intense analysis on why what is psychologically disappearing has to do so. (One might consider at this point Kafka’s Mr. K., Malraux’s Baron de Clappique, or even Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby). This willful desertion of the self by the self is almost a convention of modernist literature and is offered in many guises in the novels of Faulkner and White. It can be seen as reaching its extreme in the suicide of Quentin Compson in whom the prolonged torture of trying to name the complexities of historical, moral, emotional and sexual identity devolves finally into a sad list of words which exchange and confuse physical and psychic reality:

...hands can see touching in the mind shaping unseen door Door now nothing
... The corridor was still empty of all the feet of sad generations seeking water.... the gasoline, the watch telling its furious lie on the dark table. Then the curtains breathing out of the dark upon my face, leaving the breathing on my face. A quarter hour yet and then I’ll not be. The peacefullest words.


The vacancy left by Quentin’s passing is the most profound. Having torn the hands
from his watch, he has stripped time itself of its ability to chronicle and returns it to its circular endlessness. The formidable difficulty is how can any subject now step into an opening so generous that it forfeits even the universal referent? But with the ‘failure’ of each character a new door is opened, and left standing open, as a vacancy formulating not only the disaster of failed subjects but as a threshold for new subjective exploration. Faulkner spoke fondly of *The Sound and the Fury* as his ‘greatest failure’, and ranked his contemporaries in terms of the grandeur of *their* failure. Presumably, it is the failure of negotiating between the edicts of modernism and the emerging psychic necessities that modernism was both beckoning and forestalling.

And the failure itself glimpses the answer to the question I am posing: what is to be gained by any subjective representation that must necessarily fall short and fail? The answer: because they are each and every one a represented catalyst for change, an abruption pushing the envelope of further narrative possibility by seeking to connect with minority identity. This is not to say that the modernists assumed this connection would inevitably be benign; I would assert that they were negotiating, here, with a danger that they willingly invoked, perceiving it as a necessary, even a mandated risk. That is exactly, ironically, the mobile, vital quality of modernism that is often attacked as signaling its static and closed nature.

Rosa Coldfield, again, is perhaps an ironic choice to cite as revelatory of modernism’s strange hoping, yet from her elaborate and convoluted thinking we can rescue something suggestive of the dilemma and daring of the modernist subject in the process of recognizing itself not only as the abandoned victim of senseless history but as that history’s active sense. Faulkner presents her as saying,

...that living is one constant and perpetual instant when the arras-veil before
what is to be hangs docile and even glad to the lightest naked thrust if we had dared, were brave enough (not wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to make the rending gash. Or perhaps it is no lack of courage either: not cowardice which will not face that sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant, wroils ever upward ... in which all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but only how to recreate, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished: nothing -- but is that true wisdom which can comprehend that there is a might-have-been which is more than truth. (114)

What has been, what might have been, what can be, what will be -- these are no longer ordered probabilities in modernism's chaotic atmosphere, but have become mobile, subjective dimensions that blur both the ability of the self to sense a personal connection with history or to achieve independence from it. Language, in terms of modernism's willful disruption of temporal logic, strikes at the subject's ability to occupy any sense of historical space by suggesting itself both as momentary and transitory and as the only continuous cable which can be grasped. Yet there is a persistent subtextual assertion in modernist texts, those of White and Faulkner being no exception, that the resolution to the problem of this profound disconnectedness is to be found in the psyche of the subject. Like White's characters in Voss who exist, "in the terrible relevant irrelevance of some dream. They stood rooted in the urgent need to find the compass" (178).

But where is the modernist to look for direction pointing them towards a reintegration with a world order that by its own evaluation has been foreclosed? Where they search is precisely within the fractured sensibility of the fallen heroes no longer sure of their
psychological borders, sensing that in that deconstruction voices that have been withheld might speak, and in that foreseen speaking relevance rediscovered. Perhaps what can be salvaged from this modernist paradox is the buried optimism that continues to posit meaning in the self. I am not trying to suggest that it is our white literary ‘fathers’ who benevolently opened up the field of literary representation to include the marginalized, the oppressed and the suppressed, but that modernist inquiry could in fact lead nowhere else. The challenge to the authoritative patriarchal body was such that the evaluative paths that had led inward now had to be followed outward in order to correspond with and engage socio-historical change. This was accomplished by accidental, inevitable steps. As T. J. Clark observes in his recent book *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, “The counterfeit nature of its dream is written into the dream’s realization” (10).

In this vein, modernism tries simultaneously to posit potential unification while making fragmentation its paradoxical mechanism. Hence the rise of the alienated subject who is somehow supposed to be able to collapse a fractured world into internal coherence, a self-defeating enterprise at best. But it is a defeat registered only in terms of modernism’s reputed self-closure; looked at retrospectively we can see that the wish for escape is itself the exit. The brooding, self-involved entrapment of the fictionally realized modern subject will find its almost antithetical liberty in the voices that arise in its wake; those that it dispossessed are those who will effectively widen what might be acknowledged as a collective cry for freedom. The postmodern multiplicity of voices differentiated by the real divisions of class and gender and race, not merely by the multiple, interior schisms dividing the modernist persona within itself, will finally supply the array of subjective viewpoints that can effectively counter elite disillusionment. And it is modernism that in great measure
initiates this future vision.

White and Faulkner's writing registers an increasing sense, a threat almost, of that which it cannot contain -- the larger truths of their contemporary realities, the largest being the clamoring urgency of those still to a great extent unvoiced. Altieri, once again, remarks that, "Modernism because of its distance from both modernity and socialism kept it from establishing links with any substantial historically situated public. Its greatest artists were those who most intently and intensely revealed that failure in their work" (131). This is a thoroughly political exercise and one undertaken with serious attention by both Patrick White and William Faulkner in their capacity as modernists. I will assert that modernists, in fact, vehemently resist the elitist closure ascribed to them by postmodernists, neo-marxists, feminists, postcolonialists, etc., that the modernist discourse is porous and that its criticized self-awareness is actually a complicated beckoning that hails most particularly not its own multiple images, but a future literary subject that can speak from beyond the self-acknowledged limitations of modernist social imagining.

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In chapter one, I shall undertake a comparison of the novels Requiem for a Nun and A Fringe of Leaves with a particular emphasis on how Faulkner and White use constructions of guilt to widen the psychological and emotional parameters available to their respective characters, Temple Drake and Ellen Roxburgh, while underscoring the negativity of that narrative space. Both authors employ a prosecutorial atmosphere in which these female subjects struggle for some form, any form of empowerment. The sense of social control manipulating the female presence is intense in both novels, and is not absent in authorial representation. However, the silencing of their voices is subtly but profoundly argued
against and revealed as wrong.

Both novels ultimately come across as compassionate if guarded investigations of marginalized subjects who stray outside the confines of their relegated moral systems, and as such act as condemnations of oppressive social practices. Exploring the tension between the relinquishment of power and the desire to maintain control exposes the doubly-directional intentions of modernism itself which expresses a profound interest in the liberation of minority voices, yet is still deeply invested in its own mechanics of authority. By availing myself of Faulkner’s textual manuscripts in various phases of completion as well as primary sources chronicling the ordeal of the historical Eliza Frazer, on whom White’s character Ellen Roxburgh is based, I am better able to assess the implications of the choices both authors made. With respect to the representation of the female subject condemned as always-already guilty by societies who grant them virtually no psychological recourse for their own moral defense in responding to that assumed guilt, Faulkner and White independently corroborate a wider modernist awareness of and interest in overturning, or at least exposing, patriarchal prejudice.

In chapter two I will look at the moral and emotional courage available to the modernist subject struggling to cope with the processes of history and modernity by comparing *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Voss*. In the interest of resisting a certain disciplinary parochialism, I correlate the study of the novels with some ideas of Paul Tillich and Hannah Arendt as relevant modernist thinkers who by virtue of being outside the field of literature help situate literary modernism in the larger moral destiny of the twentieth century. When applied to the deep historical issues which resonate in both novels, we can better recognize the urgency of the modernist imagination to reconcile itself with power structures that have
failed the individual subject and forced it into a kind of moral quarantine by isolating ethical reasoning from the evidence of the emotional life. We will see that in each novel the sense of an ethical deficit is alleviated only by the incursion of repressed, marginalized voices, and that the allowance for liberal inclusion constitutes the modernist's courage to be in spite of historical foreclosure by reckoning moral survival as the property of a newly imagined collective.

In the final chapter I will compare *Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot*, paying particular attention to how the gaze of the marginalized reconditions society's power structures and its ability to perceive itself. Each novel is populated by 'outsiders' who circulate through the communities in question with a strange liberty, vouchsafing them tangent psychological perspectives that disrupt the continuity of social order. The outcasts represented in these novels are revelatory not only of the conditions of hatred and prejudice that keep a society closed in upon itself, but are also indicative of where and how that society might be opened up. By focusing on the marginalized subject, Faulkner and White are able to isolate the very center of modernist alienation itself, constructing it as the direct result of the practice of social exclusion which targets alike those in control of social power and those disenfranchised by it. The interdependence of subjectivities separated by gender, class, religion and race is suggested by how the terms of each classification slip and merge in role-reversals that constellate each novel.

And we can see in the terms of looking presented in the novels -- at the self, at the other, at the other that might be the self -- that modernism ultimately insists on a unity of vision that must reconcile itself as the collective property of its own examined differences.
NOTES


2. The titles that I have already cited all orient themselves around the question of identity as the burden of modernist authors has by their own machination been the representation of the self, and as such it is what scholars today still use as an evaluative nexus. Two more works worth looking at are Randall Stevenson’s *Modernist Fiction* (Lexington: Kentucky UP, 1992), which discusses the modernist movement and its multiple innovations with regard to the representation of subjectivity in terms of historical context, and the collection of essays edited by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), which in examining the relationship between modernist poetry and place offers a newly particularized explanation of why the literarily imagined modernist self evolved as it did.


4. Emmanuel Levinas’s arguments can be looked at in *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985).

5. Note that White’s relationship with the Anglican Church was alternately one of commitment and refutation -- and ultimate rejection -- just as his relationship with Australia was itself manifested by a perverse kind of loyalty qualified more often than not by his outspoken social disgust.

6. Note that in White’s fictional schema it is frequently a matriarchy that is being challenged and on to which White displaces his arguments with the patriarchy. See particularly *The Eye of the Storm*’s Elizabeth Hunter who operates much like *Absalom, Absalom!*’s Thomas Sutpen, also Theodora Goodman’s mother and Mary Hare’s. Simon During has commented that, “there remains a double Oedipal relation at the heart of White’s texts as a result of his mother’s
overbearing love and desire for him to be a genius” (Patrick White, 2). Biographically this unites White and Faulkner quite provocatively as the same charge could be levied at Faulkner’s mother, Maud Butler.

7. See Terry Goldie’s interesting interpretation of *The Twyborn Affair* in “The Man of the Land/The Land of the Man: Patrick White and Scott Seymour”, wherein he posits that, “The *Twyborn Affair* depicts a transsexual alternative in which the quintessential Australian is a combination of perception and receptivity never blinded by the absurdities of the macho Australian dream, but also not defeated by the vaunted superiority of refined European masculinity. This is an Australian male who does not cringe before the European but at once deceives and fulfills him.... White requires transgression because of the failure of absolutes, of the belief in a non-discursive truth.... Eddie/Eadie are able, in brief embraces to interface with some of those coherent subjects and show them the necessity of inversion” (*SPAN Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literary Studies* [October 1993]:161).
Chapter One: The Modernist Guilt of Being in *Requiem for a Nun*  

and *A Fringe of Leaves*

If civilization is a necessary course of development from the family to humanity as a whole, then -- as a result of the inborn conflict arising from ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between the trends of love and death -- there is inextricably bound up with it an increase of the sense of guilt, which will perhaps reach heights the individual finds hard to tolerate. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

What she offered was in some measure, surely, a requital of all he had suffered, as well as remission of her own sins? Of deceit and lust and faithlessness.... ‘Shall I have to listen to the prisoners’ screams as they receive the lash?... It does concern me why the good and the bad are in the same boat.’ *Fringe of Leaves*

‘If it’s got to be suffering, why can’t it just be your own? Why can’t you buy back your own sins with your own agony?... Do you have to suffer everybody else’s anguish just to believe in God? What kind of God is it that has to blackmail His customers with the whole world’s grief and ruin? *Requiem for a Nun*

In the characters of Ellen Roxburgh and Temple Drake, Patrick White and William Faulkner respectively have created fictional subjects who embody a fundamental split in modernist subjectivity. In them the distinction between victimization and guilt, blame and complicity has collapsed. Both characters resonate with the conflict which is a particular obsession of these authors as they manoeuvre through their modernism. The implied interior confusion of each character as she tumbles back and forth between these polarities alternately (paradoxically) strips them of validation and invests them with it. As Richard Moreland notes of Temple, “neither the role of innocent victim of horror and evil nor that of ironic self-castrator, the victim of rape ‘who asked for it’ -- is adequate to actively articulate her desire. So her desire endlessly circulates, or switches restlessly between the digitalized economy’s double bind of unsatisfying alternatives” (223).
In these destructive psychic dualisms that fashion identity through formulations of guilt we can chart the full trajectory of Faulkner's and Whites' modernism without belying the complexity of either one. As the play of guilt is manifested in Temple and Ellen we gain insight into the authors' sense that it is from within the confines of these binaries, ubiquitous in modernist fiction, that nascent, as yet only indirectly imagined voices are invoked and will have to be heard. This is available not only in the representation of the gendered other, naturally, but can be remarked as well in Faulkner's and in White's multiple and diverse character studies of the racially other, or of the subject isolated by class or even sexual orientation, all tempered by a polarizing guilt that monitors the distance between social belonging and non-belonging, and all to greater and lesser extents silenced by the power-gaming inherent within those constructions of guilt.

These two particular characters, who are themselves only partially heard, emerge into a fullness of being only as their sense of guilt evolves and deepens, the suffering it demands being their only available catalyst for maturation. Although it is a guilt inculcated in them by society's rabid investment in the sexual control of women, it is likewise one taken up by each as the explanation of who they are. Ironically, it is also this sense of guilt which affords Temple and Ellen the only real power they have; guilt assumes responsibility, critical agency, thereby casting them in a controlling role rather than one strictly of victimization, and they are vaulted, however negatively, into a position of psychic command over their condition. The narrative focus of each novel supports this idea while intoning that the power they have is not only momentary, but also restricted to and dictated by the particulars of their psychic and social containment. It is made quite clear in either work that though the acceptance of guilt renders them as more than helpless victims, any further freedom for either Temple or
Ellen would necessitate a decisive refutation of what are, in fact, imposed social paradigms. Neither character is psychically equipped to achieve this.

But as this peculiar faculty of Temple and Ellen's 'guilt' is manipulated and observed and participated in both by the other characters and by the authors' vision we see how thoroughly the modern subject and the modernist project itself is being examined as the list of those implicated continues to proliferate. It is no accident that Faulkner embeds his dramatic play in a veritable history of Yoknapatawpha which pivots on Jefferson's courthouse, on Jackson, the actual capital of Mississippi, and most importantly on Jefferson's jail, nor was it incidental to Patrick White that the brutal penal system of Australia is the moral backdrop of Ellen Roxburgh's struggle for survival. As John Jervis suggests in his 1998 study of the modern, "motives become central to the construction of self-identity; it might be said that the modern self emerges as something that has to be confessed" (52).

*Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fringe of Leaves* can both be viewed as exacting confessionals, or more precisely, tribunals, that put on trial not only the women whose guilt and victimization are performed as flipsides of one another, but also the deeply problematic orientation of the modernist subject in relation to him or herself and the societies which position them.

This orientation has served as the central point of attacks on modernism because, as I have already discussed, its circulating self-referentiality is seen as a vehicle of exclusion and elitism that precludes the fair representation of historical realities. However, it is a myopia which focuses not only on the fractured nature of the elite modern self, but -- by inevitable association -- the socio-historical factors which predicated such fracturing. Modernism's real covenant with itself is formulated precisely around the distrust of its own elitism. Therefore, the object of its identity quest is subtly displaced on to those subjects who occupy the
margins and might by virtue of that removal offer revelatory perspectives on the sensed shifting of the authoritative position. If in this reorientation there remains a considerable degree of opportunism and self-interest, that is perhaps inevitable as the subject represented by modernism is still divided between processes of appropriation and that of recognizing itself in and relinquishing itself to the very alterities which threaten its coherence. We will see that the study of guilt in these two novels anticipates contemporary crises of identity, and works to overturn modernism's self-obsession through its intuitive beckoning of marginalized voices.

A singular and under-explored aspect of literary modernism is that it figures guilt so centrally in its representational spectrum. From Shakespeare's Hamlet who first anticipated a thoroughly modernist confusion between guilt and blame, suffering and revenge, to the advent of Dostoevsky's Underground Man who makes guilt his sordid empowerment, to the religious/cultural crisis of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, to the aggressive despair in Hemingway and the moral abandonment in Fitzgerald, to the floating anxiety in Woolf, to the surreal entanglements of Kafka's heroes, guilt becomes an obsession of modernism. Borrowing energy from a Christian tradition that formulated its doctrine on the essential collective guilt of the human race, modernism refines that guilt into the nucleus of interior psychological realities. Guilt fuels what amounts to the self-immolation of modernism's literary subjects, but it is this overheated introspection that demands the infusion of Otherness. Modernism actually advances the imperative to include voices who will be able to historicize a movement darkly in conflict with itself, and opens the way for a more globally diverse representation of the subject.

But guilt in the hands of the modernists has radically changed its complexion in a
world stripped of divine edict. Negotiating the loss of the ethico-religious dimension of guilt in modernity (but not the loss of the guilt itself) forced a sudden and serious re-examination of what authoritative breach, exactly, was being enacted which continued to spawn feelings of guilt in the modern subject. The turn was quickly made into the interior psychic realm which, of course, provided the fertile hunting ground for psychoanalysis as well as providing modernists with a new model for guilt and retribution governed by the psyche’s own curious mechanisms of self accusation and punishment.

The modernists were no longer dealing with a fundamentally disobedient world whose actions could all be construed within the unquestioned terms of religious absolutes, but with individually and internally realized structures of shame. This powerful internalization, however, began to seep out as a form of social evaluation that sought answers and redress from a cultural momentum seen as perpetuating intolerable psychic conditions. In that outward return the representation of the isolated modernist self brought with it a new attention to the marginalized and dispossessed as the framework of guilt slowly resituated itself as a product of repressive, divisionary social practices.

As Moreland has postulated, “Faulkner’s modernism does not just self destruct, caving in on a vacuum within itself. It sees ghosts and hears voices, both within its own ‘Dark House’ and without, ghosts that begin to materialize and voices that grow haltingly but increasingly articulate and specific” (21). I would add that what is responsible for the slowly focussing specificity to which Moreland refers is Faulkner’s own slowly evolving understanding of what the totality of his literary project might be gesturing towards, and that his various constructions of guilt contribute greatly to the refinement of that vision. This is particularly true in *Requiem for a Nun* which is itself something of a revisionist exercise
conducted in and around the persistent motif of guilt.

The novel is something of a departure for Faulkner being written relatively late in his career and yet relying heavily on the historical particularities of his imagined Mississippi. Faulkner uses the interplay between his prose prologues and the dramatic verbal exchanges of his novel’s ‘acts’ to reorder his fictional world, to retell its stories and to recast their interwoven significance. That he chooses to reshape them through the chronicle of the fallen debutante, Temple Drake, and the gruesome act of a ‘nigger dope-fiend whore’, Nancy Mannigoe, and the guilt which they seem to share and exchange is one that exemplifies the daring, the risk, of Faulkner’s modernist experiment.

That these two are the central characters who become the players in what his prologues lead us to believe is, in essence, an ‘historical’ play is most significant. These riven women have suddenly and violently been given the stage and must now declaim their sins for having arrived there, their sins performing somehow as the culmination of a history over which they were vouchsafed no control whatever. The ‘ghosts’ are beginning to speak and, not surprisingly, it must be in the form of an apologia. Referring to them as ghosts is fitting, here, as these female characters are torturously stepping out and away from a history dense with the silenced haunting of those like them who were never given a voice. But forcing home what can only be a painful liberation, conducted as it initially must be in the discourse of the patriarchy, they are, in fact, put on trial.

Though *Requiem for a Nun* was written in 1951 and *A Fringe of Leaves* in 1976, their comparability on modernist grounds is assured by each of the text’s vigorous examination of how the subject is trapped in -- and might possibly escape from -- lethal cultural roles if only interior multiplicity could be socially realized, accomodated, or better still, validated. Patrick
White, in spite of his chronological tardiness, is invariably recognized by critics as a modernist, primarily because of his insistent engagement with perceived interior realities. As the preeminent Australian critic Simon During comments in his 1996 biography of White, “as in other modernists, characters’ subjectivities burst out of the plot, which becomes a scaffolding for the presentation of private consciousness” (85). White’s primary concern is the reconciliation of the modern psyche with itself, for him a process always redolent with guilt. His character, Ellen Roxburgh, is a remarkably flexible one in whom he can experiment with not only the binaries of guilt and innocence, psychic and physical freedom and bondage, but can test as well the implications of releasing suppressed voices into his textual (and by extension his con-textual) world.

His very exercise of re-imagining the historical Eliza Fraser and her experience as a captive of the Aborigine’s overturns notions of modernism’s closure as he is reaching across and through other real and imagined discourses to resurrect this figure as a conflicted subject of contemporary, modernist suffering. Even though it is a controlling and appropriating inclusion, still flawed by overtones of colonialism, he, like Faulkner, is participating in modernist revisionism. That White turns Ellen’s ordeal of victimization into one perversely ballasted by constructions of guilt gives rise to fresh speculation about the formation of the modern subject and the ultimate identity of victim and persecutor, which in turn widens the space for narratorial presence. Ellen’s emotional and mental dexterity in a captivity that can only be inadequately imagined by her author challenges the legitimacy of the very narratives with which he controls her.

As Susan Donaldson notes about the social climate in which Faulkner wrote, “even though the literary canon has always been defined as white, male and conservative ... the
profession of letters in the South and its accompanying literary texts have always had a peculiarly haunted air, an aura of repressed ghosts besieging the white male writer and destabilizing his writing ("Gender, Race" 493). Again we have the allusion of a haunting presence striving to break through into the represented world, a barred clamoring to be heard. Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe's story, like that of Ellen Roxburgh, thus seriously agitates the surface of modernist inquiry as they both hinge on the emergent voices of the gender, class and racial other.

Diana Brydon has commented in her study of *A Fringe of Leaves* that White is attempting to "give voice to the silent, secret female center ... in its shifting emphasis from a male focus to a female -- more diffuse -- focus ... [to move] from a single privileged voice, from a single language to a complex interplay of competing languages, away from 'either/or' towards 'both/and'" (389, 395). This somewhat surprising feminist affirmation of White's project does I think, hold up, but neglects to articulate that White is very cautious about when and how he allows this focus to sharpen and diminish. He takes what might even be a revolutionary risk with his portrayal of Ellen, but there is a constant two-way tug and pull between relinquishment and control. His vacillating representation of her is done with a strict attention to her social positioning and is as much indicative of his own arguments with 'civilization' as it is an exposé of the female subject’s repression within it. As he says himself, "the style loosens and coarsens, becomes more modern, during her life with Jack Chance the convict, and only constricts again after she returns to her corsets and life in so-called civilization" (*Letters*, 467). This statement alerts us much less to his alternating stylistic treatment, than to a deeper switchback occurring between closeted and open subjectivity that polarizes the whole text.
Though I am arguing that White and Faulkner, as representatives of modernism, invite the ultimate inclusion of marginalized voices, they are still harnessed by anxieties and ingrained forms of resistance that can only be intermittently escaped. In these two novels their anticipation of subjective multiplicity is daring and boldly fronted but it is just that: anticipation. Or better yet, it is the trial and error of invention itself. It would take the next generation to advance this prolonged and convoluted initiation into a truly opened forum wherein the representation of minority identity could stage itself as a directly articulated presence and not as one hinted at, contained, fronted and then withdrawn. But even if modernism’s recognition of the marginalized is a tangential exercise, it is a tangent that acts as one of the first legitimate representational trajectories of minority identity.

_Requiem for a Nun_ is, of course, the sequel to _Sanctuary_, written twenty years earlier. The earlier novel is in many respects a ‘captivity narrative’ as is _A Fringe of Leaves_. Though the definition is normally understood to involve inter-racial contact which qualifies _A Fringe of Leaves_ but not _Sanctuary_, (except in the repeated description of Popeye as a ‘black man’ which does invoke the presence of the black rapist, the most virulent Southern myth) the implications in both novels of the captivity itself are an essential starting point for this discussion. With Faulkner it is essential to bear in mind that he was working from within what was once a slave-holding culture that had captivity as its pivotal social underpinning. The graphic and constant reality of the captive black presence also operated as a psychological modality that must certainly have insinuated itself into any Southerner’s thinking, particularly a Southerner like Faulkner who was so deeply invested in his historical legacy.

It is also imperative to remember that the chronicle of the Old South is itself, when
examined from the right perspective, an extended captivity narrative which bears within it all the complexities of the genre, particularly the heated presence of sexual taboo. By its very nature a captivity narrative is a genre which is contained by unstable borders as it relies on the premise of absolute identity differences while installing itself at the point where those supposed differences influence (or contaminate) one another. The captivity narrative, more often than not written by a white male author, in a curious inversion of its intentions, serves as a potential revision of cultural identities in that the represented minority subjects are exposed to the intimate -- and secret -- interaction that is the very thing society vehemently forbids.

In his book, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*, Christopher Castliglia offers some very germane and illuminating observations by pointing out that,

...in reading captivity narratives ... women and people of color are interpellated within an ideological system that grants agency only to white, male subjects.... Captivity's epistemological 'contradiction' challenged Anglo-America’s assertion that racial and gendered identities are innate, unified and unchanging. The radical epistemology of captive white women begins with their revised relationship to colonialist discourses of race and nation, occasioned by their location at the shaky nexus of white/male domination.... At the same time, captivity caused many white women to investigate and ultimately challenge the essentializing white discourses of race on which imperialism rested. (5,6,7)

And indeed, we can see that in both *Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fringe of Leaves* the
greatest agitation in the texts is that experienced by the two heroines as they approach a position which doubts the legitimacy and power of the social systems that construct and repress them. Interestingly, this doubt in some fashion mimics the white, male modernist’s suspicion of his own cultural and ideological terrain. In Faulkner we can sense that beneath the particulars of Temple Drake’s actual and metaphorical captivity, the author is searching for the deeper borders which separate captor and captive in a society that still perceives itself as somehow beholden to that dynamic. He is both safeguarded by fronting a woman within this context as her always-already guilty status will shade and absorb more far-ranging cultural accusations, and threatened by potentially liberating a perspective that itself might recognize the latent power to reject repressive cultural formulations. In either case, a spotlight is placed on the marginalized subject as a focus that might explain both the dimensions of cultural rupture as well as the schismed modern personality that is its product.

Kay Schaffer in her exhaustive study of the Eliza Fraser stories offers some comments on captivity narratives that shed light on what is happening in both White and Faulkner’s works. She says,

Mrs. Fraser was ‘in captivity’ more because of the alterity of this space than because of the physical controls and constraints placed upon her. Within Western realms of knowledge, she was ‘nowhere’; that spatial positioning robbed her of an identity. Mrs. Fraser’s subjection was effected through her location and absorption in the imagined, unknown and threatening space of otherness.... And in the few examples where captives professed their love or admiration for their captors, later commentators on their narratives would label this love a perversion or sign of degeneration which could only happen
within the lower ranks of white settlers. (*First Contact* 41, 50)

The perception of Temple’s time in the Memphis brothel is precisely the same as that which Schaffer describes, regardless of the colonial dimension being addressed in *First Contact*. Though the unknown ‘space’ in Temple’s case is a sexual one it is as heavily freighted with threat to the social structure as is the one Ellen Roxburgh/Mrs. Fraser shared with the Aborigines, which is itself fraught with sexual overtones. More than just unknown, Temple has ventured into a space in her Southern society that must not be known by white middle and upper class women, and forever after it is only through that experience that she can be known. The paradox is as terrible as it is unforgiving. Temple and Ellen both will have to go ‘on trial’ to expiate their sin of exposure to otherness/evil which has become in the eyes of society the totality of their identity. As Temple says so bitterly in Act II, scene I of *Requiem*,

> You remember Temple: the all-Mississippi debutante whose finishing school was the Memphis sporting house? About eight years ago, remember? Not that anyone, certainly not the sovereign state of Mississippi’s first paid servant needs be reminded of that, provided they could read eight years ago or were kin to somebody who could read eight years ago or even had a friend who could or even just hear or even just remember or just believe the worst or even just hope for it. (101)

And in the aftermath of Eliza Frazer’s captivity increasingly sensationalized versions of her story spread quickly throughout Europe, America and the colonies culminating, reportedly, in her exhibiting herself as a six-pence sideshow spectacle in Hyde Park. The veracity of this event is debated, with some maintaining that it was an impostor representing
Eliza Fraser. It is, however, the last sighting of Mrs. Fraser that history records and, true or not, is deeply suggestive of how society and quite possibly Mrs. Fraser herself were participants in the debasing of her story.¹ The re-telling of her story continues, as the potency of the captivity narrative with all the slippage it effects in the discourse of gender, nation and race remains intact even after close to two hundred years have passed since the actual 1836 wreck of The Stirling Castle.

We can see that the initial guilt of exposure to otherness remains redolent with possibilities of subjective representation as it has been taken up successively not only by modernists, but by postcolonialists, feminists, and racially marginalized people. After John Curtis’s account, the event was chronicled widely in America and the colonies, but in the twentieth century there have been repeated treatments of Eliza Fraser’s story. The modernist painter, Sydney Nolan worked on an ongoing ‘Mrs. Fraser’ series and introduced Patrick White to what was quickly becoming a legend. The paintings were first exhibited in 1956. Gabriel Josipovici did a stage play, Dreams of Mrs. Fraser, which was performed in London in 1972. In 1976, concurrent with White’s novel, Michael Ondaatje wrote a long poem, The Man with Seven Toes, and Andre Brink wrote a South African version of the story, An Instant in the Wind. In the 1990’s Gillian Coote did a feminist oriented television documentary, “Island of Lies”, and the Aboriginal artist, Fiona Foley took up the subject of Eliza Fraser for her own series of paintings. The subject is fascinating, obviously, because in its abrupt and violent resituating of cultural identity multiple representational perspectives are inherent, each able to apprehend and articulate in widely various ways the dimensions of subjection or freedom, of appropriation or assimilation, of social acceptance or condemnation, of the narrative authority of the center or the imposed silence of the periphery.
In *A Fringe of Leaves*, after Ellen has been ‘rescued’ White writes, “Mrs. Roxburgh realized that she was standing stripped before Mrs. Lovell, as she must remain in the eyes of all those who would now review her, worse than stripped, sharing a bark-and-leaf humpy with a miscreant” (357). The full force of public condemnation weighs down on both characters with the unallayable suspicion that they relished the more sordid elements of their captivity. That is in fact the entirety of Temple’s husband Gowan Stevens’s obsession, as in the following passage where he alludes directly to captivity narratives.

Stevens: ‘What was that you said about held prisoner in a whorehouse?’
Gowan (harshly): ‘That’s all. You heard it.’ Stevens: ‘You said ‘and loved it.’ Is that what you can never forgive her for?— not for having been the instrument creating that moment in your life which you can never recall nor forget nor explain nor condone nor even stop thinking about, but because she herself didn’t even suffer, but on the contrary even liked it— that month or whatever it was like the episode in the old movie of the white girl held prisoner in the cave by the Bedouin prince?’ (64)

The fury of unforgiving that sabotages the marriage of Temple and Gowan goes beyond merely the intensity of sexual jealousy, just as Gavin Steven’s inordinate interest in Temple’s sexual past is indicative of more than just his familial moral involvement (a very questionable morality that I will take up later); Faulkner has unleashed the far more potent threat of the subject who has escaped from the accepted narrative. Secret experience has given a new threshold of perspective to Temple that no one but she can articulate no matter how assiduously others try to control her voice. As Kelly Lynch Reames notes of Temple’s relationship to Nancy, the black woman the Stevens’s employ to look after their children, but
more importantly to be Temple’s confidant and ‘secret sharer’, “While race and class differences ultimately separate Temple and Nancy in Faulkner’s text ... those differences are what make their unity a form of resistance that has not already been coopted and contained, precisely because it has remained unimagined” (46). Here, again, we are at the heart of modernism’s great risk: the deliberate disruption of its own internal stability in order to invoke that which has in part been silenced by its own mechanisms. In this case, it is the allowance, the intimation of a vocabulary or dialogue that by its very nature would seriously revise the patriarchal script.

Patrick White, in early preparation for what was originally to be an operatic libretto for *A Fringe of Leaves*, also anticipates that he will both liberate and strand his character by having her beholden to two worlds, but guilty in both. “She persuades herself for a moment, that as she stands transformed in her crinoline, she will be able to return to that former life, in which she channeled her sensuality into contact with things: ‘my necklace of topaz’ ‘my necklace of emerald’ etc., but she realizes at once when she descends the marble spiral that the trees she has climbed with the incredible Masters (the convict Jack Chance in the later novel) will be rooted in the hall” (*Letters* 252). Her spiritual allegiance will be to a “passion discovered only in a country of thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwrecks and adulterers” (*Fringe* 311). Yet she is also painfully aware that she will be perennially “punished and humiliated ... and it saddened her to think that she might never become acceptable to either of the two incompatible worlds even as they might never accept to merge” (370).

That both White and Faulkner choreograph the awakening of their characters through physical violence which includes rape and captivity, and then proceed to have them psychically tortured for having survived it, can only be viewed with ambivalence, yet from a
strictly historical point of view this is metaphorically or literally how new voices begin to be heard. As readers, we see the totally unjust bind both women and the racially other are put into and we can’t help but search for some evidence that these writers, too, were aware of that injustice.

As Donald Kartiganer has pointed out, “We have lived a cultural experience that has prepared us to focus on Faulkner’s treatment of various marginalized groups, invariably from a perspective of sympathy with those groups and a readiness to evaluate Faulkner’s fiction according to its ability to match that sympathy” (F100 xx). But both authors’ conflicted treatment of their heroines is a realistic reflection of their society’s operative double standards, as well as an intuitive formulation of what their represented subjects were fighting against. As Noel Polk observes in his book-length study of Requiem, “the price to be paid for freedom is bondage” (24), an observation which serves as a pithy identity tag for modernism as well.

A glance at some of the contemporary reviews that hailed the reception of Sanctuary is helpful here as they demonstrate how aggressive the response was to Faulkner’s temerity in introducing such explicitly sexual and violent themes. Paul Bixler from the Cleveland Plain Dealer wrote in February 1931, “Faulkner is interested in evil unadulterated.... Faulkner is a mental sadist, of course” (16). And Henry Seidel Canby in March of the same year writes in the Saturday Review of Literature,

Mr. Faulkner has come out at the further end of both Puritanism and anti-Puritanism, and in the dry light of complete objectivity weighs his subjects for their pound or ounce of life with no predilection for ‘ought,’ no interest in ‘why,’ and no concern for significance. He is cruel with a cool and interested
cruelty, he hates his Mississippi, and his Memphis and all their works, with a hatred that is neither passionate nor the result of thwarting, but calm, reasoned and complete.... Nor can any reader doubt that along the path he is following lies the end of all sanity in fiction. (673)

Of course, there were the contemporary reviewers who looked beyond the shock-value of a novel that even Faulkner claimed was written solely with the ambition of making money and acknowledged its emotional complexity. Sondra Guttman’s analysis of Sanctuary is worth mentioning here as she quite rightly points out that Faulkner’s economic stress directly influences the novel as it “links gender and racial ideologies to economic change” (15). She goes on to draw equations between Faulkner the writer, and Popeye the rapist, claiming that “These two texts together reveal deep anxieties about masculine identity in the midst of economic transition that is amplifying gender instabilities already existent in the profession of Southern letters” (15). These instabilities qualify themselves in Sanctuary through impossible equations that the dramatic portion of Requiem does little to reorder but rather carries to extremes of collapse: the rapist who is impotent, the bootlegger who cannot drink, the Southern virgin who is a whore, sworn testimony that is perjury, and in Requiem, the ‘nun’ who is a murderer, a ‘past that is never past’, love that isn’t love, guilt that is innocence and innocence that is guilt. These ruptures are brought about quite simply because, as she herself puts it, “Temple Drake liked evil” (117).

Her straying outside the moral system is registered in the text as determined and willful and effectively polarizes what were once authoritative, self-enclosed narratives. What begins in Sanctuary as a purported foray into sensationalism culminates in one of Faulkner’s most serious novels wherein a society’s motives are put on trial in the person of Temple
Drake, her persecution coming across as much harsher than the imminent execution of the actual murderess, Nancy. In his 1932 introduction to *Sanctuary*, Faulkner writes, “I took a little time out, and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks and sent it to [the publisher] who ... wrote me immediately, ‘Good God, I can’t publish this. We’d both be in jail.’” (*Sanctuary: The Corrected Text*319). Yet *Sanctuary*’s sensationalism is itself quite radically ‘corrected’ by the deep cultural, psychological and emotional resonance of Temple Drake’s continuing story in *Requiem*.

Temple’s guilt is exploited and encouraged by those around her to such a degree that it has, as already quoted from Freud, “reached heights too great to tolerate” (*Freud Reader* 763). This results finally in her split subjectivity as the dual personas of Temple Drake/Mrs. Gowan Stevens, a subjective split precisely echoed in Patrick White’s character who negotiates her own sense of guilt by vacillating constantly between her opposing identities as Ellen Gluyas/Mrs. Austin Roxburgh. In both works, though this dualism is finally “more about the split subjectivity of white men”, as Schaffer notes (16), the feminine, itself invoked by the racially other voice, are together in the process of imagining a new subjective space which cannot now be closed. It is modernism’s white, male-oriented self-investigation which inadvertently or not has thrown open the door.

In attempting to reckon with a divided interior self, the modernist subject was seeking with equal vigilance externalized possibilities that might grant them some rectification or at least explanation for their own faltering sense of self, and this was available most particularly through forays into different subjectivities. Struggling to comprehend the changing notions
of their own individuality finally succeeded less in mending the split subjectivity of white males than in encouraging the articulation of other voices. What they sought to discover through a displacement of their own psychic trauma in essence took on a life of its own, and though the representation of the marginalized character was conjured as a reflective presence, that presence was now an active and available part of the discourse waiting only to be independently taken up. The character of Ellen Roxburgh/Eliza Fraser is a perfect example of this as her imagined and co-opted subjectivity continues to offer itself as a catalyst for multiple interpretations ranging from that of the minority subject whose affinities with her subjection are more obvious, to the white male author or artist who still reconfigures her story to tell his own.

Discussing the genesis of *Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fringe of Leaves* yields us interesting clues as to how the authors themselves conceived of their novels and how the emphasis of their intention shifted. Like Faulkner, Patrick White let his novel gestate for many years. He first heard of the Eliza Fraser story in 1947 after his friend, the aforementioned modernist painter Sidney Nolan, had gleaned many of the raw details from John Irwin's 1837 account, *The Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle.* But as Nolan produced several exhibitions in his ongoing series of 'Mrs. Fraser' paintings, White could not bring his version to life and the barely begun manuscript languished in a drawer. In 1963, however, he was asked to write the libretto for an opera to celebrate the opening of the new Sydney Opera House and he determined it would be *A Fringe of Leaves,* as he had already named it. He wanted Nolan to do the sets which indicates how thoroughly he was influenced by the painter's take on the story.

Nolan's 'Mrs. Fraser' paintings have become a touchstone for modernist
representations of the story, and they were certainly so for White who expanded particularly on his visual themes of isolation, betrayal and guilt. Schaffer’s description of Nolan’s work sheds light on what White himself borrowed from it. She says, “... Nolan shifts between the Oedipal signification of the woman as betrayer (the phallic woman who threatens castration, impotence, lack of identity) and the pre-Oedipal imaginary mother of dyadic bliss and abjection (which can be linked with the land and primitive culture). In the latter, imaginary realm, women, Aborigines and the land come together to signify both a mysterious/alluring and an alienating/fearful feminine realm beyond language” (First Contact, 153). In the final version of the novel, Patrick White echoes the suggestions in Nolan’s imagery with his own doubled representation of the feminine, by creating a split between Mrs. Roxburgh who guiltily represses her Ellen Gluyas persona. Ellen nevertheless often dominates in her sensuality and mystical, non-lingual absorption of internal multiplicity and external otherness, including Aboriginal ritual.

Although plans for the opera collapsed, White obviously had a clear sense of how he wanted it to be.

When in answer to your question, I said Mrs. Roxburgh is a bitch, it is not strictly true, only in the end she does give way to her latent sensuality.... Always at the back of her mind there has been a vision of a boat beaching, and some kind of radiant male figure landing to play a part in her life.... [At the end of the opera] as the voices of kind friends are prescribing remedies, and Miss Sibilant is sounding her conscious notes, Mrs. Doke can’t resist sounding Mrs. Roxburgh on her second husband [Jack Chance] of whom she has spoken in delirium. But Mrs. Roxburgh replies: ‘It is too sad to tell.’ This
is the last line she utters as she goes out, and should be made most poignant. It must contain the whole of Mrs. Roxburgh's future in it. I could write about her endlessly, because I understand her so well. (Letters 253).

White hints in this letter written in 1964 of the Tristan and Isolde myth which thematically permeates the later novel. Tintagel, the mythical place in Cornwall where Tristan's ship is supposed to have landed is an image that Ellen Roxburgh is fascinated with, juxtaposing it with her Cornish girlhood, her life as a married lady and with her time spent in captivity with the Aborigines. But it was not until twelve years later that Mrs. Roxburgh would finally appear in *A Fringe of Leaves*, and in quite a different incarnation than White had originally intended. She is still something of 'Eve the betrayer', but it has taken a different perspective. In the original manuscript her affair with her convict rescuer is solely a psychological one, wherein she teases and tortures him with erotic possibility all the while intending to turn on him once she reaches civilization. In the novel Ellen Roxburgh gives herself completely to Jack Chance and it is in that sexual relationship that she is most fully realized. She, too, however, abandons the convict at the edge of the infamous camp at Moreton Bay and her imminent betrayal of Chance switches her back and forth between her Mrs. Roxburgh/Ellen Gluyas identities throughout their relationship.

White's biographer, David Marr, attributes White's riskier exploration of Ellen's sexual life to his fear that the Nobel Prize (conferred on him in 1973) would sterilize his prose and that he accordingly, in the later fiction, was far more explicitly sexual than he had been. It should also be noted that at the time of the writing of *A Fringe of Leaves*, the feminist movement had been in full force for some time and that gender awakening surely had its influence as well, though White undercuts his liberating impulses by embedding
Ellen's psychological orientation in a classic patriarchal myth of rescue at the hands of the masculine ideal. But it is her split subjectivity that remains the core of the novel from inception to completion. White writes that “all the other [characters] are there only for her sake. She is the only one who really interests me. Even the convict is no more than a necessity of Mrs. Roxburgh’s” (Letters 252). The psychic division of the controlled other is itself what White is most interested in here, for between its oppositions he can cast and recast formulations of his own status as a modern, white, male subject caught in the aftermath of imperialism and the diminishment of patriarchal authority.

Faulkner originally mentioned the idea for his novel in a letter to Harrison Smith in 1933, saying, “I have another bee now, and a good title, I think: Requiem for a Nun. It will be about a nigger woman. It will be a little on the esoteric side, like As I Lay Dying” (Letters 75). (That such an extraordinarily simple initial idea should fire Faulkner’s imagination captures the fascination of the white patriarch with the degraded Black Other. This spells out both the necessity and the doom of the self-enclosed patriarchal subjectivity which requires alterity to understand, validate or expiate the suspected fallacy of its own authority, and the incursion into otherness begun as a self-justification will end at the expense of its own dominance.)

Two months later, some excerpts from opening pages of two early, abandoned versions of Requiem, dated 17 December 1933, exhibit a rapidly increasing density of context that offers some provocative correlaries with the later novel. In the earlier version Faulkner writes, “He could remember when there was a fence about the jail, a picket fence.... It was not that in any sense it carried out the motif of the barred windows which frowned above it, for it did not. It was as tho [sic] fence and window bars had been subtly colored and
shaped over a long time by something which emanated from behind them both.” (qtd. in Polk Appendix, Critical 238). Here we see an early indication of Faulkner’s intention to center his story on the image of the jail. He jarringly requalifies a potent symbol of American innocence and freedom as it is conjured in the emblematic picket fence by correlating its naive decorativeness with jailhouse bars. In the published Requiem, by extension, the divisions between those held in prison as guilty and those who are not is often semantic only. Temple Drake with all the legitimization granted her by money and social standing -- a metaphoric picket fence -- is as effectively behind bars as Nancy Mannigoe.

In the second version we get a preliminary glimpse of a character who will later become Nancy.

The woman had not moved at all since she entered.... [She had] a quality more than the man’s apathy and waiting: a quality of immobility as tho the upper part of her body were crucified onto its own skeleton. Between the motionless folds of the shawl her face, lighter in color than the man’s, looked almost nunlike, [MARGIN: musing, quiet] almost dreamlike, like that of a child sinking back into sleep after a nightmare.... the woman did not even look around ... her face musing, still, not looking at anything. (Critical, 240).

Though in this version she is the victim of violence at the hands of her husband and not herself the guilty subject, the description is much like that which introduces us to Nancy in Requiem:

The prisoner is standing. She is the only one standing in the room -- a Negress, quite black, about thirty -- that is, she could be almost anything between twenty and forty -- with a calm impenetrable almost bemused face,
the tallest, highest there with all eyes on her but she herself not looking at any of them, but looking out and up as though at some distant corner of the room, as though she were alone in it. (*Requiem 44*).

Her distractedness is the most powerful thing about her. In the fragmented first effort and in her final incarnation she remains most potent as a presence, rather than as an articulate character, and here we brush up against modernism’s inadequacy in that Faulkner conjures the minority presence in the character of Nancy Mannigoe, but does not seem able to credibly give her a voice. We must try and know her almost exclusively through her one confounding act: the murder of Temple’s baby. Though we are given some brutal facts about her past and directed to her faith as a central element of the novel, both serve to hold her at a distance. In 1950 Faulkner wrote to Joan Williams, whom he was trying to enlist as a collaborator on the play (as well as whom he was elaborately trying to seduce, a personal dimension that interestingly qualifies his story of a young woman who was sexually ruined).

You can begin to work here. This act begins to tell who Nancy is, and what she has done. She is a ‘nigger’ woman, a known drunkard and a dope user, a whore with a jail record in the little town, always in trouble. Some time back she seems to have reformed, got a job as a nurse to a child in the home of a prominent young couple. Then one day suddenly and for no reason, she murdered the child. And now she doesn’t even seem sorry. She seems to be making it impossible for the lawyer to save her. So at the end of this act, everybody, sympathy is against her. She deserves to hang which reflects on the lawyer defending her. (298)

We get no sense in this synopsis of the almost unassailable faith that Nancy comes to
represent, and which is offered as a (heavy handed) salvation to Temple, rather Faulkner speaks only of the deeply disturbing enigma of her violent crime. Also, with regard to the last line, it is interesting to note how quickly Faulkner transfers Nancy’s guilt into something which will define her lawyer, Gavin Stevens, subtly revealing how operative the assimilation of the subjugated presence is, even in fields of negativity.

Taking a different tack, at the University of Virginia in April of 1957, Faulkner explained that he had revived Temple Drake because “I began to think what would be the future of that girl? and then I thought, What could a marriage come to which was founded on the vanity of a weak man? What would be the outcome of that?” (FU, 96). This comment seems to switch the emphasis to entirely different paradigms of guilt. But in May of the same year he again emphasizes the centrality of Nancy in a now famous quote saying,

Well, it was in the -- that tragic life of a prostitute which she had to follow simply because she was compelled by her environment, her circumstances, to be it. Not for profit and any pleasure, she was just doomed and damned by circumstance to that life. And despite that, she was capable within her poor dim lights and reasons of an act which whether it was right or wrong was of complete almost religious abnegation of the world for the sake of an innocent child. That was -- it was paradoxical, the use of the word ‘Nun’ for her, but I -- but to me that added something to her tragedy. (196).

(The far greater paradox that Nancy murdered an innocent child for the sake of an innocent child is curiously not addressed here or in the text of Requiem.) In these four references to Requiem, two written before the fact and two after, there are subtle alterations between theme and authorial intent, but no hint about the preconception of the dense
prologues that form the backbone of the novel. Though he does complain in a letter to Saxe Commings, about the word ‘Act’ “preceding the actual play scenes and not the prose prologue as I did them, since to me the prose is not at all a prologue, but it an integrated part of the act itself” (Letters, 316). (This correction was made in the published text.) Faulkner noted, again in 1957, that the acts “are necessary to give it the contrapuntal effect which comes in orchestration, that the hard give-and-take of the dialogue was played against something that was a little mystical, made it sharper, more effective” (FU, 122). What might really be happening is that Faulkner cannot resist historicizing his play which to some extent essentializes the guilt of women, as he senses at an intuitive level that the emergence of the traumatized and repressed subject -- in this case Temple and/or Nancy -- is the culmination of a long and dense historical process and not an innate subjective orientation.7

In Sanctuary, Temple Drake is the victim of a brutal rape and, because of her bearing witness to a murder, a subsequent kidnapping and incarceration in a whorehouse, all horrific and sordid experiences. Yet during the midst of all this she discovers herself sexually and never takes advantage of opportunities to escape. In Requiem for a Nun, her past annuls any possibility for happiness in the present, compromising her ability to love or be loved. Escape from her guilt is presented to her only in the harshest terms: she is blackmailed, her baby is murdered by Nancy Mannigoe, ‘the nigger, dope-fiend whore’ as she is almost invariably referred to, and she is unaccountably held responsible for the act of her child’s murderer and for both of their deaths. In some sense, the represented split between Temple Drake/Mrs. Gowan Stevens is split yet again by her curious alignment with Nancy who functions in the play almost as her alter ego.
In *A Fringe of Leaves*, Ellen Roxburgh travels to Van Dieman’s Land with her husband and in a rape scene with her brother-in-law Garnet, a criminal against whom nothing has been ‘proved’, likewise discovers her sexual awakening. En route back to England with her husband, their ship, *The Bristol Maid*, is shipwrecked. After her husband is speared to death by the Aborigines and the other members of the crew are scattered or killed, she survives to live among her captors. She is rescued by the escaped convict and murderer, Jack Chance, with whom she has a full-blown sexual relationship that frees all the repressed dualities in her psyche. Like Temple she is eventually returned to ‘society’ where she must stand forever as one who is accused by virtue of having stepped outside of her place in the accepted discourse of women: she has known the Other or is suspected of knowing the other, the ultimate guilt.

We see here how guilt has been historically manipulated to keep women within their traditional roles or bonds. In the context of these two novels it is also, conversely, used to explore wider subjective parameters for the female subject, while never releasing its fundamental hold over them. They are, even as victims, substantiated as the participants in what amounts to social crime. Even as the novel closes with the intimation of her probable marriage to the respectable businessman, Mr. Jevons, White metaphorically reasserts Ellen’s irrecoverably fallen status,

Mr. Jevons was advancing, all manly authority and calm, when by some incredible mischance he stumbled.... Mr. Jevons saw the cake flying off its plate, the cup shooting out of its saucer. On his knees, he watched the tea-stain widening, darkening in the folds of Mrs. Roxburgh’s skirt. Needless to say, the uproar was immense, so much so that Mr. Jevons got the shakes.
There was no disguising it as he mopped the stain with his ineffectual handkerchief. (404)

In the most simplistic terms, Ellen Roxburgh is a stained woman, and in the nervousness with which Mr. Jevons approaches the metaphorically overloaded situation we can recognize the same fear of the unknown element in the female subject that has panicked both Austin Roxburgh and Gowan Stevens. The sexual allusion in Ellen’s stained dress is also unmistakable, and again correlates her intimacy with the Other in the terms of what society irresistibly registers as a sexualized transgression.

Temple Drake as we re-encounter her in Requiem for a Nun, is as Noel Polk observes, “a character who stands morally, socially and psychologically between the two extremes they [Gavin Stevens and Nancy Mannigoe] represent: she knows both worlds, both sides of her own nature and has been trying for years to live with the incredible guilt her experiences have caused her” (62). What Polk does not register is that this division becomes a space not only of personal anguish, but a tear in the social fabric from which issue previously silenced voices of gender, race and class. This can also be viewed as expressive of the desire of the male author to himself engage or appropriate the dimensions of the feminine subject, and through her to approach as well the racially other, even the criminally other.

In both Requiem for a Nun and A Fringe of Leaves there is the indication that despite the unthinkably strong terms of repression and manipulation that form the subjectivity of Temple Drake and Ellen Roxburgh, respectively, they both know the full truth about themselves, and knowing that they must have access into the intimate world of other unknown subjectivities. Social practice and intuitive self-protection have here functioned together to keep that knowledge inaccessible to the male, while rendering the possibilities of
the feminine subject’s imagined interiority as virtually without boundary. As such, the female likewise becomes the suspected repository for all that the white male doesn’t know about himself. Though afraid of what they have created through the (perhaps unacknowledged) agency of social oppression, the white male author fears, yet also deeply desires, to hear the authentic voice of the other. So, he delves into marginalized feminine interiority while maintaining the constructions of guilt which surround its articulation.

Accordingly, we see that the representation of Temple’s guilt and suffering yield surprising, absorbent visions of her cultural legacy, as in her allusion to one of Faulkner’s most compassionate representations of grief as it was told in the story of the black character Rider, in “Pantaloon in Black”. She juxtaposes herself with him in her inability to grieve saying,

You see, if I could just cry. There was another one, a man this time, before my time in Jefferson but Uncle Gavin will remember this too. His wife had just died ... and so he buried her and so at first he tried getting drunk so he could sleep, that failed and then he tried fighting and then he cut a white man’s throat with a razor in a dice game so at last he could sleep a little while ... while they locked the chains on him -- lying there on the floor with more than a dozen men to hold him down, and what do you think he said? ‘Look like I just can’t quit thinking. Look like I just can’t quit. (Requiem 170)

In the original story none of the white characters are able to comprehend Rider’s grief. They misconstrue all his actions as evidence of racial degeneracy. Temple, however, identifies with him. Through Temple’s sense of guilt and grief Faulkner suggests the need for a continuation of Rider’s story; it is an opening for further, deeper articulation and is in its
particularity indicative of a general need to awaken other voices. Temple’s desire/need to hire Nancy Mannigoe -- a black woman and therefore innately able to relate to her own degradation -- to talk to can also be construed as serving what I qualify as modernism’s ultimate endeavor: to discover in its own myopic self-scrutiny the wider vision of the other, an effort that has been misrecognized as its elitist closure. Careful examination of Temple’s explanation of her relationship with Nancy shows how Faulkner is edging towards what is a contemporary mandate of the need for the marginalized to speak.

Allright. It was to have someone to talk to. And now you see? I’ll have to tell the rest of it in order to tell you why I had to have a dope-fiend whore to talk to, why Temple Drake, the white woman, the all-Mississippi debutante, descendant of long lines of statesmen and soldiers high and proud in the high and proud annals of our sovereign state, couldn’t find anybody except a nigger dope-fiend whore that could speak her language. (105)

Temple’s need for Nancy goes beyond just a relationship that Reames suggests “remains largely determined by the Southern social structure within which they live, a structure in which the black woman’s role as domestic and nanny is to function as mirror and support for the white woman” (41). Temple is identified with Nancy on a more urgent level where, again, Temple’s own sense of guilt alerts her to repressive structures that are locking out the possibility for the adequate expression of subjective realities, her own as well as Nancy’s. The roles they are expected to play are turned upside-down by the nature of Temple and Nancy’s confidences, their reminiscences of their days as whores, though Temple does seem to have been the one controlling the conversation, the one who was being heard. This is, of course, inevitable, and is just another opening, or rather the demonstration
of a need for one. Temple had as she puts it, “somebody paid by the week just to listen” (138). We are never privy to their conversations because Faulkner is directing us to the fact that these voices in their intimacy of revelation have not yet made it to the surface of textual representation, as Temple also makes clear in her continuing explanation of who Nancy is, and therefore why she hired her.

Whore, dope-fiend; hopeless, already damned before she was ever born, whose only reason for living was to get the chance to die a murderess on the gallows.--Who not only entered the home of the socialite Gowan Stevenses out of the gutter, but made her debut into the public life of her native city while lying in the gutter with a white man trying to kick her teeth or at least her voice back down her throat. (105, emphasis mine)

It is interesting to note that Faulkner later added the phrase “or at least her voice” to the first typescript manuscript by a scribbled addition in the margin, suggesting his awareness that this was, in truth, closer to the mark. (Manuscripts, 19, 90). Though buried in the text and attributed to a woman speaking about a woman, this phrase is one of the clearest acknowledgements we get that Faulkner was conceding and objecting to a practice of exclusion and violent suppression which dominated in Southern culture as well as in the world of Southern letters. His character, Temple, is leveling a clear indictment at the system which constructs her and she indirectly associates her own position with Nancy’s as she fights to be truly heard amidst the overwhelming pressure to capitulate and say only what society in the person of Gavin Stevens wants to hear.

There is, as Moreland suggests, “the possibility that Temple’s risky confession/analysis may allow her to articulate her own dissident critical voice” (219). She
is on the edge of moving from the thought that “maybe it’s just my own stinking after all that
I find impossible to doubt” to “I may even be wrong about Temple’s odor too” (57, 58). As
her sense of guilt causes her to reevaluate all that she has done and known she is close to
breaking through to a psychic space where her victimization would be freed of its accusatory
aspects. There she would be able engage her independent voice, but the torqued double
agenda imposed on her by Stevens (and Faulkner) forces her to vacillate between two
identities that aren’t allowed to merge and therefore cannot be clearly and fully realized. The
idea of the split in her nature is relentlessly driven home as in this exchange with Gavin
Stevens which echoes one that occurs in the text just two pages earlier.

    Temple: What do you want then? What more do you want?
    Stevens: Temple Drake.
    Temple: No. Mrs. Gowan Stevens.
    Stevens: Temple Drake. The truth. (76)

    Stevens, with what Michael Millgate identifies as his “fundamental anti-modernism”
(The Achievement of William Faulkner, 224) cannot brook the possibility that there is any
assimilative version of ‘truth’. The truth of Temple Drake resides for him absolutely in her
guilty past, and the only thing which lends any truth to perceptions of Mrs. Gowan Stevens is
that same guilt. In effect, he won’t let her move. He makes the fact of her exposure to evil a
perennial trap. “Even after eight years it’s still enough. It was eight years ago that Uncle
Gavin said -- oh yes, he was there too ... said how there is a corruption even in just looking at
evil, even by accident; that you can’t haggle, traffic, with putrefaction -- you can’t, you don’t
dare” (112). Faulkner himself had a different idea about evil as he stated, “[you must] never
use evil for the sake of evil -- you must use the evil to try to tell some truth which you think
is important; there are times when man needs to be reminded of evil, to correct it, to change it; he should not be reminded always only of the good and the beautiful” (*Lion in the Garden*, 94). But Gavin Stevens is fierce in his refusal to let Temple forget her exposure to evil. He seems to blame her for what he fears as his own contamination by it.

Gavin’s motives are irrevocably tainted by the fact that although he insists that Temple Drake must save Nancy by telling everything (74), he knows before he takes her to the Governor that there will be no pardon. Her forced ‘confessional’ becomes nothing less than a psychic rape, doubling him with Popeye himself who stood whinnying at the end of the bed in *Sanctuary* while Red had sex with Temple. Some of Freud’s thinking assists us in understanding how Stevens assimilates Temple’s experience until it becomes constructive of his own identity; the controlling of her guilt effectively installing him in the role of the super-ego and Temple in that of the ego.

The super ego manifests itself essentially as a sense of guilt, or rather criticism, and moreover develops extraordinary harshness and severity towards the ego ... we find that the excessively strong super-ego which has obtained a hold upon consciousness rages against the ego with merciless violence as if it had taken possession of the whole of sadism available in the person concerned. (*Reader*, 654)

Temple, crumpling under Gavin’s attacks desperately cries, “Will you for Christ’s sake stop?... What in God’s name do you want?” (77). But Stevens has to subordinate his own obsession with guilt so he redirects challenges to his ego by displacing them onto Temple. Guilt has inborn within it correlatives of sex and death which continually challenge one another with affirmation and negation, and these binaries constitute both the tension in
the novel as well as the conflict in Gavin Stevens which in turn dictates his merciless
treatment of Temple. Freud’s ideas, again, transfer with vivid accuracy to Gavin Stevens.

Even when it emerges without any sexual purpose in the blindest fury of
destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of that instinct
is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment,
owing to its presenting the ego with the latter’s old wish for omnipotence.
The instinct of destruction, moderated and tamed, inhibited in its aim, must
when it is directed towards objects which provide the ego with the satisfaction
of its vital needs and with control over nature. (Reader, 755)

Faulkner is more subtle in his underwriting of a growing suspicion of Gavin Stevens
as he alerts us to Gavin’s dangerous fallibility in stage directions that describe him as a
“champion not so much of truth as of justice, or of justice as he sees it” (43, emphasis mine).

By turning us ever so slightly away from an unquestioning fidelity to Gavin Stevens, still
often assumed to be Faulkner’s mouthpiece, I believe Faulkner is tacitly confirming that
modernism is in fact interested primarily and insistently in change, unlike Stevens who locks
Temple (and himself) into a psychological system that can’t change. (Olga Vickery’s work,
The Novels of William Faulkner, set the standard for the opinion that Gavin Stevens is a
‘father-confessor’ whose motives were purely altruistic. (118, 123). Michael Millgate also
originally granted Stevens a high moral status calling him the “grand inquisitor of Faulkner’s
particular brand of humanism” (Achievement, 221). Noel Polk’s 1981 work itself largely
began the more careful scrutiny of Stevens’ agenda.)

Stevens is, in any case, unwilling to admit the possibility that Temple may have
matured, nor does he credit her efforts with her husband and children, or that “she has spent
the last eight years verifying the truth of the difference [between Temple Drake/Mrs. Gowan Stevens]" (Polk 94). His browbeating emphasizes a doomed repetition beneath which Temple can only agonize: "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow -- Stevens (speaking her thought, finishing her sentence): -- he will wreck the car against the wrong tree in the wrong place, and you will have to forgive him again for the next eight years until he can wreck the car again in the wrong place, against the wrong tree--" (177).

In 1957, after publication of *The Town*, Faulkner said of his character Gavin Stevens,

> Well, he had got out of his depth. He had got into the real world.... he got into a real world where people anguished and suffered, not simply did things which they shouldn’t do. And he wasn’t prepared to cope with people who were following their own bent, not for a profit but simply because they had to. That is, he knew a good deal less about people than he knew about the law and about ways of evidence and drawing the right conclusions from what he saw with his legal mind. When he had to deal with people, he was an amateur- - *(FU, 140)*

Faulkner vouchsafes Gavin Stevens a somewhat softer landing than had he appeared last in *Requiem*, as one of his final lines in *The Mansion* is, “There aren’t any morals ... people just do the best they can.... The pore sons of bitches” (429). But his ‘amateurishness’ and his ‘anti-modernism’ are lethal in *Requiem for a Nun*, as they are in great measure responsible for the split subjectivity of Temple Drake. Yet the modernism of which Faulkner was a master manages to discover between the polarities of guilt new subjective referents. It is clear that the voice of the woman, Temple Drake, and the voice of the ‘nigger dope-fiend whore, Nancy Mannigoe, as representatives of the marginalized, *must* be heard and will have
to be articulated from outside of white, male discourse in order to genuinely locate the modernist subject or destroy the illusion it is. That a character like Temple is suspended by guilt between seemingly irreconcilable facets of her identity in order for the author to experiment with emerging voices speaks to the difficulty of the modernist subject’s continuing evolution and invites us to reconsider modernism’s investment in invoking psychic danger. Faulkner as a modernist perceives the blockages in subjective representation and disturbs them by this interior disruption and divorce.

Patrick White creates precisely the same model of split subjectivity arrested in discourse with Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves. “Now she too was interminable, transfixed by time as painfully and mercilessly as by any spear” (239). In his September 1976 Times Literary Supplement review of the novel, Randolph Stow notes that “in her post-lapsarian garment of convolvulus, Mrs. Roxburgh enters into Mrs. Fraser’s bondage. Or perhaps one should say that the widow Roxburgh and Ellen Gluyas enter it together, for the Cornish girl is constantly coming to the aid of the Cheltenham lady” (197). White’s character is torn between her instinctual, sensual self which erupts as Ellen Gluyas, and Mrs. Austin Roxburgh, more a product of her husband’s deliberate cultivation than a presentation of any inner reality. Like Temple Drake, she can address the compromising implications of her captivity only by switching between two competing aspects of her personality which illuminates White’s -- and the patriarchy’s -- limitations in representing the feminine other.

Ellen Gluyas is aware of her psychic and emotional needs; Mrs. Roxburgh is guilty of collusion with them. But unlike Temple, White’s character enters her ordeal with the psychic split already in place and she must channel her experience through an interior division which White uses to explore not only the psychic unrest of the modern subject, but colonial
answerability to the marginalization of race and gender. When she is first captured by the Aborigines, she vacillates between her dual personas with a violence and rapidity that expresses White’s emphasis on that dimension of her characterization.

*Ellen Gluyas* cried out from what was again an ignorant and helpless girlhood.... The party of ineffectual whites was soon surrounded by a troop of blacks, all sinew and stench, and exultant in their mastery. *Mrs. Roxburgh* might have felt more alarmed had any of their play concerned herself, but the natives seemed intent on ignoring a mere woman seated by her husband’s corpse.... This *Ellen* sensed, was the beginning of her martyrdom.... *Mrs. Roxburgh* flinched, not because sustained by strength of will, but because the strength had gone out of her.... *Ellen Gluyas* had not encountered a more unlikely situation since forced as a bride to face the drawing-rooms of Cheltenham.... The party of women strolled round her in amazement.... A young girl came up behind her and was tearing at her bedraggled gown.... Glancing down her front *Ellen Gluyas* recalled a certain vase on the mantelpiece of the room where old *Mrs. Roxburgh* spent her days.... She was finally unhooked ... thus isolated and naked, *Mrs. Roxburgh* considered what to do next. (242, 243, 244 emphasis mine)

She is left with virtually nothing but what society has decreed to her as the two available choices of self definition within which she must frame the ‘beginning of her martyrdom’-- her habitation with the other, or as Ian J. McNiven identifies it, “the ultimate ‘Thou Shalt Not’ -- a relationship between white woman and black man” (*Constructions of Colonialism*, 7). (Insofar as *Requiem for a Nun*’s background text grounds itself in captivity
narratives, which as I have discussed have an ineluctable racial element to them, this same
‘Thou Shalt Not’ is indirectly in effect.) In a sense Ellen Roxburgh is also modernism’s
martyr as she represents the subject split by the interrogation of its own definitions in the
interest of apprehending some kind of subjective multiplicity. Of course, it is still a white
male doing the splitting, yet the act of fronting the novel with an intensely rendered
investigation of feminine interiority in the heart of racial difference, itself begs the question
of narrative authoritativeness. Split, white male subjectivity is again encouraging its own
erosion.

Ellen Gluyas/Mrs. Roxburgh enters into an unimagined territory which is finally less
the reality of a white woman lost among the blacks of the “Great Sandy Region’ as it was
called by the Aborigines themselves, than as Schaffer defines it, “the universal, presocial and
individual aspects of the existential self” (Contact 162). However, I would argue that White
is even more seriously invested in how this existential self can be successfully engaged in, or
is thwarted by, contemporary social realities -- an orientation which plants him firmly in
modernism. His recreated Eliza Fraser is a vehicle for examining the costs of being
restrained by social roles, and he is unconcerned that it departs from historical accuracy. As
he explains, “my approach is not historical at all ... I deal with states of mind, and the content
is very contemporary although in a Victorian setting” (Letters 245).

White, however, did do a good bit of historical research for his novel, relying
particularly on John Curtis’s report and Michael Alexander’s Mrs. Fraser on the Fatal Shore.
He is also not alone in taking great liberties with historical fact as nearly everyone involved
in the contemporary myth-making out of the Eliza Fraser incident did the same. White also
notes that those critics
... professing to admire *Voss* did so because they saw no connection between themselves and the Nineteenth Century society portrayed in the novel. As child-adults many Australians grow resentful on being forced to recognize themselves divorced from their dubious antiques; they shy away from the deep end of the unconscious. So they cannot accept much of what I have written about the century in which we are living, as I turn my back on their gush about *Voss*. If there is less gush about that other so-called ‘historical’ novel *A Fringe of Leaves* it is perhaps because they sense in its images and narrative the reasons why we have become what we are today” *(Flaws in the Glass, 104).*

The convict, Jack Chance, articulates this last sentiment with even stronger resonance as White represents him as saying, “Praps none of us thinks ‘ard enough to remember what we done or was” (Fringe, 295). Or as Ellen herself laments, “I dun’t believe a person is ever really cured of what they was born with” (331). Patriarchal discourse is not itself able to effect conceptual or narrative disruptions sufficient to re-evaluating its own history; its domain is to hold such retrospective revision at bay. The modernism moving through it, however, is able to do so, primarily because it exercises itself in places where psychic crises collide with what amounts to cultural disobedience. In his groundbreaking work on the modernist writer Robert Musil, *Robert Musil and the History of Modern Identity*, Stefan Jonsson remarks on the Musilian subjects who

... transgress social boundaries and violate sacred taboos ... these figures of monstrosity are conjured up by an imagination afflicted by historical trauma, that is a historical moment when ideological appellations malfunction and the
normative point of identification on which the citizens normally rely recedes.

Well established categories of gender, class and ethnicity are then subjected to
debate, and the fabric of the community disintegrates (11).

This disintegration is precisely what happens in Requiem for a Nun as well as A Fringe of Leaves, and is predicated on the defection, as it were, of Temple Drake and Ellen Roxburgh. Their captivity, their victimization, however involuntary, allows for a mental
defection that is nothing less than subversion. But what is showcased is less righteous
societies being torn asunder, than flawed ones that need to be broken apart.

Moreland suggests in his analysis of Requiem that there is “a loss represented ...
primarily as the (aristocratic, white) male’s horrified or embittered loss of daughter or sister
from out of her proper place in his psychological, social and metaphysical system of thought
and action. This modernist representation of that loss has tended in many ways to leave that
society’s distinctions of sexuality and gender uncritically in place” (194). I would go further
and suggest that modernism’s unease with these placements is in fact calling, unconsciously
or not, for a reordering. In both Requiem for a Nun and A Fringe of Leaves there is an
undeniable contempt leveled at the men, the husbands particularly, who personally
internalize what they believe constitutes a threat to their sense of identity, and which is
registered, finally, as a fundamental lack of courage and the psychological innovativeness
necessary for change.

Faulkner and White are engaged in destabilizing the centrality of a male-dominated
social order and not just with the intention of reconfiguring a new version of the ‘male-
centered Oedipal model’ as Karl Zender has qualified it (118). Zender suggests that, “beyond
each level of achieved empathy ... stands a further level of exclusion and marginalization”
But this is precisely the point: each push reveals behind it more and more potential voices; it is an enlistment for future representation rather than an exclusion. It is a preliminary act of recognition.

That behind "each level of empathy is a level of exclusion" is not a perpetuating contradiction in Faulkner's fiction, but rather a testament to his sense that the dominant voices in patriarchal discourse will continue to reassert themselves until they are broken down or written through from freshly liberated perspectives. And I would venture that he senses also that this usurpation of the dominant voice is imperative, though he, of course, cannot be the one to do it. Faulkner's treatment of Gowan Stevens and White's treatment of Austin Roxburgh demonstrate both authors' failing confidence in representations of the patriarchy where there are no longer any heroes possible. Their characters' inability to negotiate with the agitation of voices engulfing them from positions of gender, class and race differentiation is presented as a kind of psychological and emotional (and in Roxburgh's case, physical) impotence.

The two characters are alike in their naive belief that social status will insure the psychic immobilization of their wives. Yet in their fixed ideas the intrusion of other voices is the most damaging. Gowan Stevens is incapable of framing Temple's ordeal in anything except self-referential terms; he wants "immunity ... From the past. From my folly. My drunkenness. My cowardice, if you like--" (Requiem, 62). His gallantry in marrying Temple is an effort to reinstate himself in the company of gentlemen "trained at Virginia" (62) not just to drink like a gentleman, but with the more important correlative of protecting the chastity of Southern women.

But of course, it is Temple's behavior, her 'guilt', which has cast him from the ranks,
and for that he can’t forgive her. Nor is he capable of seeing past broken codes of honor (in himself or Temple) to admit that the inscription of societal roles can themselves be the constituents of moral and psychic damage. As his uncle points out to him, he is being eaten alive by “having to be forever unable to forget.... What else happened during that month, that time while that madman held her prisoner there in that Memphis house, that nobody but you and she know about, maybe not even you know about” (Requiem, 64). In either novel, both authors again seriously undercut the efficacy of male authority by their representation of failed heroic rescue. These husbands have utterly lost control over their fallen women.

In A Fringe of Leaves, like the other characters who expect some kind of inarticulate moral desertion from Ellen, Austin Roxburgh is afraid of the unvoiced potential in his wife. He laments, “Oh the blackness in which it is never possible to distinguish the outline of a beloved form, or know the wife of one’s own choosing! No wonder that a state of doubt, anguish, even terror, should exist, to explore which might prove disastrous” (Fringe, 68). Simply by marrying her and inserting her into his formulaic world of ideas he engenders the polarized persona of Mrs. Roxburgh/Ellen Gluyas, a dynamic which itself elicits the very multiplicity of perspective which is to him the ultimate danger.

White effectively activates the latent psychic space between his characterization of Ellen Gluyas vs. Mrs. Roxburgh as an unimagined territory that registers voices of dissent. It is likewise a space where a communion with the other is achieved, and achieved beyond, behind or beneath the inscription of dominant voices. It is in that middle distance that she is able to absorb aspects of Aboriginal life. Although Patrick White depicts the Aborigines as an anonymous rabble rather than attempting to give them individual voice, he compensates somewhat by introducing a ‘first contact’ of the highest, most taboo order in Ellen’s
participation in their cannibalistic ritual.

It is for her an epiphany -- she literally eats the other -- makes it of her body. Looking at his representation of the Aborigines generously, it could be said that Ellen in this secret communion makes their silencing commensurate with her own. Like her own voice, theirs must be invoked as an interior, physical experience. Just as Temple Drake is drawn to Nancy Mannigoe as one thoroughly familiar with misogyny and the guilt which so ironically accompanies it and directly equates “Temple Drake’s shame” with Nancy’s “worthless nigger life” (Requiem, 116), so is Ellen imaginatively drawn to Mab, the murdered common-law wife of Jack Chance.

The sense of guilt that underwrites Temple’s identification with Nancy becomes so fundamental that in her mind they occupy a kind of joint psychic territory that is almost indistinguishable: “both of us should have got around to running, like from death itself, from the very air anybody breathed named Drake or Mannigoe” (Requiem, 232). Even, or especially if registered in a negativity which alone seems to confirm her place in the discourses which control her, Ellen Roxburgh likewise craves an ‘other’ to magnify and substantiate her identity. In another mimicking turn, Ellen and Temple are both replicating a kind of downward identification that is self-serving in the same way White’s and Faulkner’s choice of feminine voices is. It is a manipulated, negative spiraling that might be seen as excusing or displacing the authors’ own predilection for the same debased identification.

As Jack is describing to Ellen his life in the London slums with Mab a kind of queen of the underworld, she strives to engage all the depravity of it as a way of confirming her guilt and somehow exculpating herself from it, and as a final capitulation to the class driven judgements that she is suspended between.
She was committed to following him through whatever subterranean darkness he led, however foul the air, however daunting the rustle and splash of rats. She could accustom herself to slime, and would grope through it up to the elbow in search of 'valuable articles', hopefully a sovereign, at least a silver spoon ... out of shame or in hopes of forgiveness. (324)

Guilt has already informed the interior subjective split that situates Ellen Gluyas in opposition to Mrs. Roxburgh; this splits itself again as she looks for an equation between herself and another answering voice that can effectively hold her world together. In a delirium after her rescue Ellen conflates her sense of identity with an expectation of punishment and continues searching for alternative voices.

She thought that she might not be able to endure this onslaught by the present on accumulated memory.... Mrs. Oakes was at once suspended. 'You're a survivor', she asked, 'from the wreck we've heard tell about?'... It had become too terrible to answer. 'Are you Mrs. Roxburgh?' The patient shook her head. 'You won't persecute me? And string me up to the triangles? No one will believe but a person is not always guilty of the crimes they's committed'.... 'I am not Mrs. Roxburgh, whatever you may think.... I am Mab'.... Mrs. Roxburgh? The gong sounding in her head so bemused her she could not have denied the worst accusation. (336, 341)

As Mab, Ellen enters into a doubled identification as wife of her 'saviour-lover' Jack and as his murdered victim, the utterly silenced voice. But before she has even been invested with the identity of Mrs. Austin Roxburgh, Ellen realizes that she is rich with an unvoiced multiplicity. She anticipates, also, that guilt at the very discovery of her alternate selves will
predicate the terms of her life. In her girlhood she tries to purge herself of suspected later
betrayals which will be, like Temple Drake's, victimization which is itself culpable as it
shocks a voice through what has been silence.

She found the well (or pool rather) in the dark copse where they had told her it
was, its waters pitch black, and so cold she gasped as she plunged in her arms.
She was soon crying for some predicament which probably nobody, least of
all Ellen Gluyas could have explained; no specific sin, only presentiment of an
evil she would have to face sooner or later. Presently, after getting up
courage, she let herself down into the pool, clothes and all, hanging by a
bough. (Fringe, 110)

Temple Drake, too, retrospectively addresses the idea that she was somehow guilty
before the fact by not having been sufficiently morally prepared for something she could not
have anticipated. She says,

It's not that you must never even look on evil and corruption; sometimes you
can't help that, you are not always warned. It's not even that you must resist
it always. Because you've got to start much sooner than that. You've got to
be already prepared to resist it, say no to it long before you even know what it
is. (Requiem, 117)

In the context of these two characters, the sense of guilt which underscores and
precedes their emergence into their transformative life experiences cuts two ways: it
precludes their articulating themselves independently just as it banishes them from an
inclusion in accepted dialogue, yet the intense focus of it quite literally brings them center
stage. They are left in a kind of overlit narrative space where their voices nevertheless
cannot yet be registered by themselves or others except in condemnatory and isolating terms. Rather than being just a punitive gesture against women, though, this freezing of their developmental possibility functions in either text as a modernist opening in that it explicitly directs us to the fallacies inherent in the constrainment of Temple and Ellens’ (and Nancy’s) voices. By isolating while continuing to manipulate the terms of guilt traditionally used to repress women, Faulkner and White are pointing us toward a psychic gridlock whose effects are demonstrated not only in the subject directly traumatized and immobilized by the abstract and material violence of repression, but in the consequently arrested possibility of collective social evolution.

Though Andre Bleikasten admonishes that “Faulkner’s portrayal of Temple is pretty harsh, and one must be deaf to his shrill and savage rhetoric to turn the raving nymphomaniac of ... [Sanctuary] ... into the martyr-saint of male-oppressed womanhood” (F100, 208), I believe that the challenge to the discourse within which Faulkner constructs Temple is very much in evidence. In Requiem for a Nun, his handling of her is greatly mediated by the encompassing prose sections of the novel which supply such a large (and within his fictional world, historicized) context for her tragedy. By examining the conditioning which gives rise to the responses available to Temple, Faulkner is probing at the underlying social narrative that conditions the production of his own fiction, and Temple’s supposed moral failures themselves isolate what is wrong. Faulkner and White both balance their characters on a knife edge between what would amount to a rebellion of self-discovery and the external societal control which precludes that discovery, intimating that the continued dominance of the latter can only result in the abortion of any full self-realization for the marginalized female character.
Requiem for a Nun and A Fringe of Leaves both concern themselves quite fundamentally with the emergence of marginalized voices -- voices lost in history, voices coopted by literary traditions, voices denied simply by the accident of birthright. This is emphasized particularly by the way the act of writing itself is represented in either text. In the case of both Temple Drake and Ellen Roxburgh the relationship with writing is profoundly qualified by guilt. Ellen Roxburgh is not alone in recognizing that there is something, and something dangerous, that underwrites who she is and is a direct challenge to the status quo. Mrs. Merivale who is one of the middle class women responsible for welcoming the Roxburgh's to Van Dieman's Land says,

I cannot give you an account ... of the impression Mrs. Roxburgh made on me. Unless -- to put it at the plainest -- she reminded me of a clean sheet of paper which might disclose an invisible writing -- if breathed upon.... I only had the impression that Mrs. Roxburgh could feel life cheated her out of some ultimate in experience for which she would be prepared to suffer if need be.

(20)

Here White intimates quite directly that Ellen Roxburgh, as a woman, is a palimpsest, whose voice has not yet materialized legibly, credibly, on the surface of narrative. During the course of the novel he is very careful to show how tentatively Ellen is able to engage in the act of writing and how manipulated that engagement is. "After her marriage, her mother-in-law had advised her to keep a journal: it will teach you to express yourself, a journal forms character besides developing the habit of self-examination" (Fringe, 47). She does keep a journal, but bearing in mind the genteel woman who had directed her to do so, it is stiffly self-conscious and rarely makes any advances into representing her interior
I will make a start today at writing in this clean book which I hope not to spoil because *I owe it to Them* (emphasis mine).... She had been encouraged early to tell the truth, but found that truth did not always match what she was taught by precept or in church: it was both simpler and more complicated. Her parents in the past and now her husband and mother-in-law, expected more of her than they themselves were prepared or knew how to demonstrate ... she began accepting that there are conventions in truth as in anything else. As a young wife and 'lady' she saw this as an expedient she must convert into permanence. (*Fringe*, 73).

Rather than presenting it as a journal entry, any explication of Ellen's interior motivations are immediately taken over for her by the omniscient narrator. When she does venture an attempt at genuine self-articulation, White registers it accordingly by writing that “Mrs. Roxburgh wrote in the journal which from being a virtue was becoming a vice: ... I am better able to endure wounds. Women on the whole are stronger because more knowing than men, for all the knowledge men lay claim to. We also learn to numb ourselves against suffering, whether of the body or the mind” (*Fringe*, 75). The numbing is, of course, essential as women's experience is not given a voice in her Victorian world, inwardness being the only directive. So it is not surprising that after her sexual encounter with her husband's brother that would have been a rape had it not been that “she was in control ... [and] admitted to carrying away a cold, consummated lust” she “lost the inclination for writing in her journal” (116,120, 128). She instinctively resists chronicling anything that would so dangerously expose her interiority, or White lets us know that she is not permitted
Her secret interior self as the realm of feminine sexual reality must remain elsewhere.

Patrick White presents Ellen Roxburgh as incapable of being the voice of her own sexual identity. Excepting her liberating sexual freedom with Jack Chance, her sexuality must remain only a mirroring faculty. He writes, “She herself had only once responded with natural ardor, but discovered on her husband’s face an expression of having tasted something bitter or looking too deep. So she replaced the mask which evidently she was expected to wear, and because he was an honorable as well as a pitiable man, she would refrain in future from tearing it off” (Fringe, 76). This ties in quite neatly with the thinking of Luce Irigaray who suggests that there is

...one path ... historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) subject, that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference ... to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced by it. (*The Sex Which is Not One* 76-77)

We can also observe that a character like Ellen who is presented as inhabiting a sense of guilt as though it were a sort of interior continuum itself largely qualified by a perceived sexual dimension, does so as a subtle way of maintaining a deep resonance with and control over her sexual identity. This hidden, and admittedly perverse ‘affirmation’, is manifested by White in his representation of Ellen’s relationship to written language. And the implications of this are not strictly negative. Ellen’s refusal (or inability) to disclose herself in writing
which she realizes is practiced by her as a studied obedience, a private act controlled by public expectations, is a way of maintaining ownership over her interior world, the most profound one available to her. (We shall also see that Temple Drake, in the letters she writes, does, at least secretly demand to speak as a masculine subject.)

Nevertheless, Ellen’s writing becomes very valuable to her, a place of invested fears and desires, that though not explicitly, or even obliquely detailed, are resonant just with the potential of her hidden voice. That her personal truths aren’t recorded in her journal is precisely what gives them life; their omission is the loudest statement of their existence. She discovers she is pregnant while aboard The Bristol Maid, and again she withholds this profoundly physical experience from any articulation in writing, “Yet her body told her that this child was the truest part of her, of such an incontrovertible truth that she had not admitted it to the company of those ‘formed’ thoughts, affectations, and hypocrisies recorded in her journal, just as she had banned from its pages another, more painful truth -- herself as compliant adulteress” (Fringe 175).

As their ship is sinking, Ellen can give thought to nothing else than the rescuing of her journal, so frightened is she that some residual inner truth might be discovered and read by another. Her guilt at having a narrative at all is overwhelming, as White expresses in his representation of her panicked state,

Had she perhaps expressed herself too explicitly, Mrs. Roxburgh wondered, if only by the tone of a phrase, the absence of a word, in her journal?... As she rummaged it became of increasing consequence to find, to read, to confirm that she had not written more of the truth than can bear looking at. In her mind’s eye she saw the vellum-bound volume floating in the tipsy waters of
the wrecked saloon, salvaged by her husband at a danger to his balance and finally her own complete equilibrium.... Armed with such hints and overt disclosures as the journal contained, he would break his silence, the lines on either side of his mouth opening like wounds healed but temporarily. (Fringe 177)

Now what she finds is not her own journal but that of her husband, and she becomes freshly alarmed at how she will be represented in that narrative: “Would she find herself looking in a glass at a reflection which no amount of inherited cunning and cultivated self-deceit could help her dismiss? Anticipation of her husband’s portrait of her, whether it proved to be true or ideal, made her whimper softly” (Fringe177). She cannot conceive of her representation in any narrative that is not reflective of an essential guilt. And if we refer to the many re-tellings of the historical Eliza Fraser’s story, there is not one that does not invest her with some form of guilt. (It is interesting to note that even in the oral tradition of the Butchulla Aborigines, Eliza Fraser is supposed to have been “written” on. Olga Miller recounts that “the women had marked the “stranger” with “ochre signs” which read “let this woman through” and “do not harm this woman” (Constructions of Colonialism 35), a living script which contradicts the many highly disputable ‘historical’ accounts of Mrs. Fraser’s ill-treatment at the hands of the Aborigines.)

White’s ending for his novel clearly indicates that Ellen Roxburgh as a fictional character is captured in a narrative written for her and not by her, and thereby ultimately remains an unheard voice. She is still, in essence, in captivity. “I bet you had a time of it yourself, Mrs. Roxburgh, before the rescue. She answered yes. As though the rescue ever takes place.... There was a jewelry of stars such as Ellen Roxburgh believed she might be
seeing for the last time before a lid closed” (Fringe 378, 401). Like an artifact or necklace, Mrs. Fraser/Mrs. Roxburgh has been taken out of a box and examined in the light of a discourse which cannot truthfully represent her, and she is put back in, still unwritten, and White realizes this.

Temple Drake’s relationship to writing is presented somewhat differently, though the guilt qualifying it is strongly intact. It is the recovery of letters she wrote during her captivity in the Memphis brothel that precipitates her blackmail by Pete, Red’s brother, her second succumbing to ‘evil’ in determining to run away with Pete, and Nancy’s murder of her baby girl. But rather than repudiating the letters, Temple is fiercely proud of them. She recognizes them as the only instance when she freely, independently wrote herself into discourse. Instead of taking available opportunities of escaping from the brothel, Temple writes passionate, pornographic letters to Red. “...I didn’t even fall, I was already there: the bad, the lost: who could have climbed down the gutter or lightning rod any time and got away.... So I wrote the letters.... They were good letters.... I mean -- good ones” (Requiem, 128, 129). It is the one thing she latches on to amidst all the depravity, all the guilt, as a symbol of her worth. That Faulkner makes such a point of her pride in the letters directs us to an understanding less available in his early work, that there must be a relinquishing of control, that new voices must be written in, and written in by their own hand.

It is a relinquishment fronted defensively on many counts however, not least by the nature of the letters themselves, presumably graphic and obscene. “...they were the kind of letters that if you had written them to a man, even eight years ago, you wouldn’t -- would -- rather your husband didn’t see them, no matter what he thought about your -- past. Better than you would expect from a seventeen-year-old amateur” (Requiem, 130). We are also
never presented with the letters themselves which could be a tacit admission that the white male writer cannot present them, but this admission is likewise bolstered by an instinctive resistance to Temple’s “demanding to speak as a masculine subject”, as Irigaray puts it (*This Sex Which is Not One*, 76). The choice of her subject matter makes Temple’s secretive usurpation of narrative control all that more audacious. But trying to write herself, however covertly, into the text is Temple’s greatest and most profound rebellion. She recognizes this and therefore attaches no guilt to the writing of the letters. One of the most significant things about the letters, however, is how they tie Temple Drake to Cecelia Farmer and how the implications of that bond work to change the direction of the representation of the marginalized subject.

Cecilia Farmer has made an appearance in *The Unvanquished* and in *Intruder in the Dust*, but the reverberations of her story are immense in ‘The Jail’ which is a Faulknerian tour de force not eclipsed by anything else in his canon. The faint script of her signature, “her frail and workless [sic] name *Cecelia Farmer April 16th 1861* (197), scratched in the glass window of the jailhouse, by a girl remarkably passive, insubstantial, -- in effect without identity -- is a momentous entry into narrative because the ineluctable presence of a woman acting on whatever deep-seated instinctual impulse is made permanently available in this tiny advertisement of her need to be accounted for and remembered in the great socio-historical dialogue, and the history of her time seems to rage around that profound, declarative epicenter. It also provides us with one of the most fascinating parallels with *A Fringe of Leaves*.

Like Cecelia, Ellen Roxburgh takes a diamond ring to scratch a message, a silent, cryptic declaration of identity, into a glass pane.
One evening as the light on the elms had started to wane, she found herself scratching on an attic window with a diamond, as she had heard it was possible to write. She printed on the glass TINTAGEL in bold, if irregular letters, and then was ashamed, or even afraid, for what she had done, though neither her husband or her mother in law was likely to climb so high, and those who did would not connect the name with their mistress’s thoughts or any real part of the world. (Fringe 77)

Ellen Roxburgh is at least metaphorically in her own jail as she does this, trapped by convention and role-playing and social inequality. Her writing of the word ‘Tintagel’ with all the resonance it has for her of freedom, escape, rescue and love, is more deeply personal than anything she commits to her journal. It is the greatest and guiltiest expression of herself that she can register. And she chooses to make her mark where it will almost certainly remain unfound and could not be interpreted if it were.

Faulkner, however, leads us very deliberately to Cecelia’s signature, addressing the reader directly as nowhere else in his fiction, thus including us in the detective story that is part of the modernist’s quest to rearticulate identity. It is a quest the nature of which is progressively, but slowly disclosed as the cumulative solution of clues, and reveals it as a psychic puzzle completed only by the missing articulation of minority presence.

...until suddenly you, a stranger, an outlander say from the East or the North or the Far West passing through this little town by simple accident ... to try to learn, comprehend, understand what had brought your cousin or friend or acquaintance to elect to live here — not specifically here, of course, not specifically Jefferson, but such as here ... to lead you across the street and into
the jail .. and into the kitchen and so to a cloudy pane bearing the faint
scratches which, after a moment you will descry to be a name and a date....you
would think merely What? So what? annoyed and even a little outraged until
suddenly, even while you were thinking it, something has already happened:
the faint frail illegible meaningless even inference-less scratching on the
ancient poor-quality glass you stare at, has moved, under your eyes, even
while you stared at it, coalesced, seeming actually to have entered into another
sense than vision. (Requiem 217, 218, 219)

The intensity of this uncharacteristically directed journey is cumulatively
overpowering as it is embedded in a 42 page sentence that continues to gather speed and
density as it chronicles the rush from a vanished past to an engulfing modernity. The flood
of rhetoric is so potent that we are arrested totally by the inscription of identity we finally
find at the end.

...to stand, in this hot strange little room furious with frying fat, among the
roster and chronicle, the deathless murmur of the sublime and the deathless
names and deathless faces, the faces omnivorous and insatiable and forever
incontent: demon-nun and angel-witch; empress, siren, Erinys: Mistinguett,
too ... for you to choose among, which one she was -- not might have been,
nor even could have been, but was: so vast, so limitless in capacity is man’s
imagination to disperse and burn away the rubble-dross of fact and probability
leaving only truth and dream -- then gone, you are outside again in the hot
noon sun: late ... to get back onto a highway you know, back into the United
States; not that it matters, since you know again now that there is no time: no
space: no distance: a fragile and workless scratching almost depthless in a sheet of old barely transparent glass, and (all you had to do was look at it a while; all you have to do now is remember it) ... across the vast instantaneous intervention, from the long long time ago: 'Listen, stranger; this was myself: this was I'. (Requiem 225)

Spinning from the possibilities of male-imagined women -- women full of power and history and magic and art -- we are caught suddenly and fiercely in this powerful singularity, the lone and unknown simple subject who has declared herself, the declaration alone engaging her with history. This is precisely the message that Temple and Ellen cannot get across; neither one can enter themselves into discourse as “I”, with the notable exception of Temple’s letters. Instead they must search for their voice as for a declaration of guilt.

In Act I, Temple Drake is so obsessed with what Gavin Stevens may know about her, about how he may have already absorbed her into his narrative that she asks him eight separate times in varying configurations: “‘How much do you know?’” (50, 54), and “‘What is it you think you know? Never mind where you got it; just tell me what you think it is’”(55), “‘Because apparently I know something I haven’t told yet, or maybe you know something I haven’t told yet. What do you think you know? Alright. What do you know?’” (69), “‘What is it you think you know?... All right. Why do you think there is something I haven’t told yet’” (70), “‘Listen. How much do you know?’”(80). She suspects that her voice is being coopted and has been all along, (just as her body was) and that she is literally being framed around it. She subtly shifts her emphasis with an equally frightening question that she repeats four times, the first two times she is asking Stevens, the second two, the Governor: “‘How much will I have to tell?’” (82, 84, 102). It seems she will be heard after
all, but it will be as both she and the Governor identify it on “the witness stand” (101). A voice such as hers can only be heard as a confession, as only guilt can offer her a podium that society will recognize.

Which is also how Ellen Roxburgh is ‘heard’ after her rescue. “She felt herself perspiring intolerably. ‘What can I tell you, she gasped, if you already know?’ The Commandant was contained by patience. ‘It’s by hearing different versions of the same incident that we arrive at the truth, Mrs. Roxburgh, in any court.’ The Commandant was conducting the court martial of a woman” (Fringe, 362). White and Faulkner both make it abundantly clear that these women do not enter, cannot enter discourse freely; they are subpoenaed into it by masculine directive to testify against themselves. But in both novels the threatening courtroom allusions only heighten the sense of persecution that we as readers are meant to shrink away from. We are keenly aware of the manipulation of subjects over which their would-be judges have no rightful jurisdiction.

Faulkner is very particular about how he registers Temple’s guilt in relation to having “to tell”. It is obviously an aspect of Temple that Faulkner rearranged with great consideration as in these examples from early manuscript and typescript versions of Act II in Temple’s exchange with the Governor:

Temple: Sorry. You’ll have to excuse me. This is a little painful.

Governor: Death is. Injustice is a little more so. Shame most of all.

Temple: Mine? Oh, I have none. I decided to dispense with it -- a luxury I can no longer afford. (Manuscript, Vol I. 81)

The next version offers the same exchange thus:

Temple: Apparently this is going to be a little painful....
Governor: Death is. A shameful one, even more so, which is not too
euphonious even with glory at bat for shame.

Temple: At least you escape the shame. (*Manuscripts, Vol I. 83*)

Faulkner reworked this exchange over and over until we get the published version
which finally isolates the conclusion that Temple has been forced to: that her identity itself is
guilt and shame:

Temple: ...how much will I have to tell, to make it good and painful of
course....

Governor: Death is painful. A shameful one, even more so....

Temple: Oh, death. We’re not talking about death now. We’re talking about
shame. Nancy Mannigoe has no shame; all she has to do is die. (*Requiem,
109*)

But in the final scene wherein she identifies herself with the murderer going to her
execution saying “the blindfold again” (230), there is a crucial turnaround. Temple says,
“and now I’ve got to say ‘I forgive you, sister’ [emphasis mine] to the nigger who murdered
my baby. No: it’s worse: I’ve even got to transpose it, turn it around. I’ve got to start off my
new life being forgiven again. How can I say that? Tell me. How can I ?” (230). The
change is subtle, but it is not just semantic. Temple is no longer being asked just to tell, to
recount. She is following a personal directive to say, to speak from her heart to the other
individual with whom she has identified herself equally as victim and as guilty partner. As
Reames, once again, comments, she is in the process of figuring out “how to find a way out
of contained space, and not just into another already defined space” (47). She must access
her private self with volition and compassion, breaking through “disciplinary narratives”
(Reames, 51) to discover the “I” which is answerable to interior distinctions between guilt and innocence, to proclaim to someone that “this was myself.”

White and Faulkner close each of their novels on similar terms, colliding guilt and punishment with faith as the final appeal for the absorption of Temple and Ellens’ voices. Ellen is taken to a chaplain ill-equipped to fathom the dimensions of her character. “‘Mrs. Roxburgh,’ he announced, ‘I am going to ask you to join me in a short prayer. Let me but guide you, and you will find that Jesus is expecting you.’ Mrs. Roxburgh sat looking petrified. ‘I’ve forgotten the language!’ her stone lips finally ejected” (Fring, 386). But as they begin to pray she hears the screams of convicts being given the lash. The brutal proximity of guilt, punishment and forgiveness, which conditions the deep irony of faith, coalesces intolerably within her. “Suddenly it was the chaplain who found himself most grievously threatened: the other side of his devout eyelids the Cornishwoman had started to scream” (387).

Only when she has wandered later into a rough chapel hacked out of stone by the only other survivor of the shipwreck, does she encounter her God. “Ellurnnnn, she heard her name tolled, not by one, but several voices.... Above the altar a sky blue riband painted on the wall provided a background to the legend God is Love, in the wretchedest writing, in dribbled ochre. She did not attempt to interpret a peace of mind which had descended on her ... but let the silence enclose her” (391). She then returns to the room that White refers to as “Mrs. Roxburgh’s cell” (391). She had been forgiven in essence by the many aspects of herself, and like the spiritual epiphany she experienced in her act of cannibalism with the Aborigines, “the exquisite innocence of the forest morning, its quiet broken by a single flute-note -- endlessly repeated” (272), it is a forgiveness contingent on her silence.
In the final scene of *Requiem for a Nun*, as Temple and Gavin visit Nancy before her execution, Temple asks Nancy this formidable question: “Why didn’t you send me the word?” (*Requiem*, 233 emphasis mine). She is soliciting Nancy directly to join her voice, in fact, to give her a voice. Nancy answers, “Because that would have been hoping— ”(232). She has conceded that the articulation of their voices together or as singularities is not yet possible, as their construction within the judicial system alone has made abundantly clear.

So she advances herself to a higher court as she did in the beginning of the novel, dismissing the presence of the judge by saying in response to her sentence, “Yes, Lord” (45), and as Temple echoes it, “Yes, God, Guilty God” (47), the ‘I am here’ and ‘I am guilty’ being nothing but different iterations of the same thing for these women characters, the one declaration always-already demanding the other. And so, though Nancy does not give Temple the word, but admonishes her simply to “Believe” (243), a word itself distinctly unsatisfying in this context, the silenced possibilities of their union in guilt and victimization has itself cleared a profound textual space.

In *Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fringe of Leaves* Faulkner and White have manoeuvred inside dimensions of guilt that have skewed the reader’s view of the subjectivity of those repressed by patriarchal discourse. With modernist artistry, an artistry that both relishes its maverick independence yet somehow doubts its trajectory, they have recognized that at some level modernism’s revolution must be carried forward by a new elect - those that have been marginalized.
Notes

1. See the court reporter John Curtis’s *The Shipwreck of the Sterling Castle* (1838) whose book is acknowledged as the first ‘official’ report of Mrs. Fraser’s experiences.

2. See, for example, Arnold Bennett’s review in *Vanity Fair* June 1931 wherein he proclaims Faulkner a ‘genius ... who writes like an angel’ on the basis of *Sanctuary*. Also Philip Wheelwright’s article in *The Symposium*, 2 (April 1931), 276-81 where he refers to *Sanctuary* as an “important specimen of the nascent American novel ... worthy of enlightened, disciplined attention.” Also see Julia K. Baker’s “Literature and Less.” New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, April 26, 1931, p. 26, who ends her review by remarking that, “It would be possible to quote from *Sanctuary* ... some of the most effective interpretation of emotion in American fiction.”

3. It is interesting to note that *Requiem for a Nun* was being written just as Faulkner was to learn that he had received the 1949 Nobel Prize (which he wasn’t awarded until August of 1950) and five years after Malcom Cowley’s *Portable Faulkner* was published, so he was finally beginning to experience some economic ease. There is, however, an important discrepancy in dates as Noel Polk tells us that Faulkner began writing on February 11, 1949 as evidenced by his sending an outline to Joan Williams on that day (A Critical Study, 242). Joseph Blotner, who compiled *The Selected Letters*, gives the same day and month but the year as 1950. Though fiscal pressure had to some degree abated, the anxiety and, one suspects, the hostility at the disruptions Guttman refers to are still palpably present in the writer/rapist split, taken up this time by the inordinate fierceness of Gavin Stevens as he forces a ‘confession’ from Temple. Note that while Faulkner was writing *Sanctuary* he was also preparing for his marriage to Estelle Oldham, a commitment which would of course require more money and certainly aggravated the collision of fiscal issues with gender relations. For more on the stress in Faulkner’s life at the time Faulkner worked on *Sanctuary* see Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner*, p. 619; Judith Bryant Wittenberg, *Faulkner*, 91; David Minter *Faulkner*, p. 108.


5. For an interesting discussion Sidney Nolan’s paintings, see Jude Adams’ chapter in *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser’s Shipwreck*, pp. 99-113, where he compares Nolan’s interpretation of Mrs. Fraser to that of the Aboriginal artist, Fiona Foley.

6. See Marr, p. 553.

7. The whole idea of creating the work as a play was influenced by two factors: the actress Ruth Ford had always wanted a Faulkner vehicle, and the aforementioned desire to collaborate with Joan Williams. But it is the prose sections, some of which reach heights of
greatness found only infrequently after the Faulkner masterpieces of the 1930's, which lend the drama of Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe its unforgettable power, so much so that one wonders how a stage production could retain that resonance.

8. White's renaming the historical vessel *The Stirling Castle* as *The Bristol Maid* furnishes us with an easy metaphor between the experiences of Ellen Roxburgh and that of the sacrificial virgin.

9. During the writing of *A Fringe of Leaves* Australia was particularly caught up in recognizing the rights of Aborigines which was certainly retooling notions of what Australians, white and black, had been and what they were now. In 1975 the Race Discrimination Act was introduced and the Gurindji people win title to part of their traditional lands at Wattie Creek Northern Territory. In 1976 there is The Aboriginal Land Rights Territory Act and Sir Douglas Nicholls becomes the first Aboriginal State Governor (South Australia). In 1974 White helped to fund archaeological excavations on Fraser Island, as The Great Sandy Region had been renamed, which led to the discovery of important Aboriginal sites (See David Marr, 551).
Chapter Two: Modernism’s Flawed Courage: *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Voss*

‘To make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself. ... Every man has a genius, though it is not always discoverable ... but in this disturbing country it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and attempt the infinite.... What are you then?’ ‘I dunno what I am,’ said Harry and looked for help. Many disturbing and opaque thoughts began to move in his clear mind. What am I? What is it necessary to be? He was now faced with the terrifying problem of his own category. ‘You are perhaps subtler than you know.... Your future is what you make it,’ said Voss, ‘Future is will.’ *Voss*

...it was that innocence again, that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of a pie or cake and once you had measured them and mixed them and put them into the oven nothing but pie or cake could come out....[He] had long since given up hope of understanding it, but trying to explain to circumstance, to fate itself, the logical steps by which he had arrived at a result absolutely and forever incredible ... as if he were trying to explain it to an intractable and unpredictable child. ‘You see, I had a design in mind.’ *Absalom, Absalom!*

What happens to the moral landscape in a world from which the gods have fled and divine fate has relinquished its direction? *Voss* and *Absalom, Absalom!* together offer us generous insight into how the modernist perspective contends with moral necessity in a world from which moral design has been voided. By availing themselves of historical particularities relative to their respective cultural inheritances, William Faulkner and Patrick White succeed in examining their own contemporary modernist dilemmas through retrospective visions that look at once forward and back. The two novels’ strident central figures, Ulrich Voss and Thomas Sutpen, challenge our sense of moral balance by their reliance on amorality as the prerequisite of personal courage. We are presented with two characters who totally reject moral considerations in order to satisfy the very real need for a grand dream, the need to simultaneously substitute and
imitate and re-initiate that which has been lost or is passing away, and we must analyze the repercussions of guilt that proliferate in the wake of this conditioned ethical abandonment. We are forced to contemplate the uncomfortable implications of courage stripped of its virtue, or as Art Berman puts it in *A Preface to Modernism*,

...valor that is often nothing other than the forceful extraction of meaning from a world that repeatedly declines to yield it....The confidence in normal ethical criteria in the midst of chaos gives way to the exhilarating yet guilt-laden ethically relative and even ethically preposterous, where every possible action is the implementation of an error sensed but insufficiently apprehended.... The valiant pretend to ethical meaning, which thereby comes, miraculously to exist. (39)

Voss and Sutpen perform their own moral justification just so by inhabiting the very depths of what they instinctively recognize as grave moral error -- Sutpen ruthlessly and remorselessly engaging the rules of prejudice and ostracism that themselves refute his own social equality, Voss attempting to intellectually dominate a world from which he is an emotional and social outcast. White and Faulkner present Voss and Sutpen each as existing *inside* their formidable visions. Even the other characters who assess them must do so in the context of the ‘destinies’ that Voss and Sutpen have tried to manipulate for themselves. This forces a dislocation between the peripheral characters and their own sense of historical situatedness, divorcing them from access to independent moral conclusion.

The two main characters are validated solely by what they imagine as an unassailable internal logic. Their moral justification, which neither character would feel
the need to qualify as such, is founded on a willful psychic denial of external influence and social context even as these produce them and make their behavior intelligible. Each implements their defection with an inviolate sense of purpose. Of Voss, the omniscient narrator observes, “He fell straight, deeply into himself. It was not possible, really that anyone could damage the Idea, however much they scratched at it” (40). And Sutpen fanatically orchestrates his world from “the very dark forces of fate which he had evoked and dared, out of that wild braggart dream” (Absalom, 133).

They each persevere in defiance of the flaws that are in fact the essence of their personal myths. Each is brought down according to the terms of his ‘error’. With each it is the error of mentally canceling, negating the reality of human exchange. In the introduction to Hannah Arendt’s The Human Condition, Margaret Canovan paraphrases Arendt by stating that “the mistake made by all political philosophers since Plato has been to ignore the fundamental condition of politics: that it goes on among plural human beings, each of whom can act and start something new. The results that emerge are contingent and unpredictable” (ix). This is precisely the mistake made by both Sutpen and Voss, and to some extent we can register both novels as cautionary political tales insofar as they implicate gravely flawed social systems and the individual transgressions which capitalize on those system’s fatal weaknesses. Faulkner and White are pushing the limits of the white male (anti) hero to extremes in order to show that this version of heroism is flawed by its profound inability to deal with the Other.

In what today might glibly be called denial, Voss and Sutpen both refuse and invoke their own doom thereby. Though Faulkner did state “that the Greeks destroyed [Sutpen], the old Greek concept of tragedy” (Faulkner in the University, 35), Faulkner
and White both, as modernists, miss what might have been near-perfect Aristotelian realizations of the tragic hero who collaborates with destiny to bring about his own ruin, by positioning their characters like avatars of amorality within the very heart of moral questioning. That questioning is done nearly exclusively through the other characters, or through an omniscient narrator who is only occasionally present in Absalom, more consistently in Voss. Yet, as both Sutpen and Voss are presented as virtually dictating the emotional and psychological environments of those under their domination, we recognize them as the novels’ perverse, but unmistakably central moral catalysts. Voss, the more interior of the two characters, is himself sometimes given to examining his own motivations,

...to explore the depths of one’s own nature is more than irresistible, it is necessary. To peel down to the last layer, there is always another and yet another of more exquisite subtlety. Of course every man has his own obsession. [Mine] would be, it seems, to overcome distance, but in much the same way, of deeper layers of irresistible disaster. (163)

Though the disaster anticipated here is one of a psychological nature -- a willed interior doom -- it is with far greater foreboding that Voss, if only rarely, concedes his interdependence with others in a strange way that only serves to accentuate his isolation. “Blank faces, like so many paper kites, themselves earthbound, or at most twitching in the warm shallows of atmosphere, dangling a vertebral tail, could prevent his soaring towards the apotheosis for which he was reserved. To what extent others had entangled him in the string of human limitation, he had grown desperate in wondering” (174). People for Voss are abstractions and hindrances, as they are for Thomas Sutpen. This
represented psychic separation sets the stage in either novel for the ominous sense of
disconnection between the other characters, forcing a palpable distance of unknowability
between subjects that registers itself in their moral isolation. Patrick White drives home
how deeply internalized a tendency this is for Voss as he picks up the kite metaphor some
hundred pages later in describing Voss’s exposure to Aboriginal cave-drawings.

Voss remembered how as a boy he had flown kites with messages attached
to their tails. Sometimes the string would break and release the kite, if it
did not disintegrate in the air.... Now however looking at the kite-figures,
his heart was hopeful.... So that the walls of the cave were twangling with
the whispers of the tangled kites. The souls of men were only waiting to
come out. (270)

Voss is able to engage with other ‘souls’ only in the secrecy and containment of
the cave, a veritable womb in which “the man should have felt wet, and aching, and cold,
but the woman’s smooth instinctive soul caressed his stubborn struggling spirit” (271).
In the removed safety of the cave, a physical realization of the unconscious, the
preconscious, he takes the tracing of an other peoples’ story and uses it to substantiate his
own dream; he subsumes and integrates the difference of gender and race as part of his
own psychic reality. Here he can control, appropriate and engender meaning. Here his
abstractions are not challenged by living personalities and his neurosis can feed itself.

In the following passage which has intriguing similarities to the ones just quoted,
Faulkner keys us in to just how gravely Sutpen also objectifies people, specifically
blacks, (and how in turn, Quentin Compson, who narrates this section by retelling what
his father has told him, is drawn into the same abstractions).
He could even seem to see them: the torched disturbed darkness among the trees, the fierce hysterical faces of the white men, the balloon face of the nigger. Maybe the nigger's hands would be tied or held but that would be all right because they were not the hands with which the balloon face would struggle and writhe for freedom, not the balloon face: it was poised just among them, levitative and slick with paper-thin distention....

Looking down at him from within the half-closed door during that instant in which, before he knew it, something in him had escaped and -- he unable to close the eyes of it -- was looking out from within the balloon face... (187, 189)

It is worth noting that Richard Moreland asserts that Sutpen uses “the balloon-face [as a] distinction between abstract freedom and abstract slavery” (104), and must inhabit at least temporarily his own abstraction in order to identify with everything opposite to himself. Moreland also draws an interesting equation by applying the term “unrecognized, exploding balloon-face” (110) to Sutpen's eventual murderer, Wash Jones, the man who for all intents and purposes is the man Sutpen could have become -- the white man scarcely more free than the black man -- again underscoring what is here an abstract distinction between freedom and slavery. Moreland's paralleling of the balloon imagery is also suggestive of how Sutpen is, in fact, killed by his own abstraction.

Thadious Davis also has a compelling take on the same imagery stating that, “because of his action, the ‘monkey nigger’ balloons up larger than life; he becomes at once a visible metaphor for social reality and an allusive, invisible presence in the boy's
life” (Faulkner’s Negro, 184). We should also note that in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner’s balloon face registers itself alongside the threatening ‘dark laughter’ of the first black man the boy Sutpen encounters, elemental, derisive and superior and this time throwing Sutpen’s drunken father out the door.¹

In any case, at this point in the novel, Sutpen, like Voss, metaphorically retreats back into the womb, he “crawled back into the cave and sat with his back against the uptorn roots and thought” (188). It is interesting that Sutpen has even created such an environment for himself, complete with an iron griddle to cook on, where he can approximate the absent maternal matrix of enclosure and nourishment, a place where “what little experience he had” could, in fact, gestate. It is a never revisited psychological and physical space which suggests how thoroughly Sutpen represses the desire and need for the sustenance not only of female protection but of any relative self-introspection. And there, as it is imagined by Quentin, is the genesis of Sutpen’s design, the moment when abstraction displaces the real, and his life becomes a standoff with ‘them’.

As Daniel Singal points out, Sutpen “does not, as Faulkner has done, enter into a prolonged process of identity formation, first sorting out what might be valuable from his past, then testing various trial identities against experience and juggling the resulting fragments until they become a viable, if provisional whole. Instead, Sutpen chooses to jettison his original identity altogether” (197). In essence he ceases to develop at that moment and as he now ‘has no past’, which is reiterated over and over again in the novel, in a curious way he likewise has no future and all his vigorous action is so much running in place. He is “completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience -- of a need for
haste, of time fleeing beneath him" (24), because he knows he must double cross time itself; go forward to go back and catch up with a single moment in order to duplicate it and reverse the players. That there are other players is his disaster. Jason Compson notes of Sutpen with regard to the assumed racial impurity of his first wife that,

...that mistake which if he had acquiesced to it would not even have been an error, and which since he refused to accept it or be stopped by it, became his doom; that unsleeping care which must have known that it could permit itself but one mistake; that alertness for weighing event against eventuality, circumstance against human nature ... choosing and discarding, compromising with his dream and ambition. (41)

It is the nature of their flaws, or mistakes, and how they interpret them that qualifies the presentation of not only the courage available to Voss and Sutpen, but to those who must survive in their periphery (and not incidentally, of those who engage themselves with modernist literary myth-making). In their represented contexts which will be discussed in detail, Voss and Sutpen can be looked at as symbolic of modernist moral disenfranchisement. What needs to be addressed at this point are the temporal complexities in using historical novels as touchstones for the modernist dilemmas which necessarily engaged the authors far after the fact of their represented subjects’ own fictionally realized, but historically predicated moral challenges. What has to be remembered is precisely the fact that these works are fictional and that their authors surely chose their respective historical contexts with the intention of illuminating both the traumatic depth of past event and the psychological cause of its moral, emotional and intellectual descendants.
When we consider that Sutpen is a nineteenth century fabrication whose life is being reenacted by another fictional character struggling with his own historical legacy in 1910 and himself imagined by an author writing in 1935, we see how dependent the strength of the novel is on its own temporal displacement; that very disruption affords us a continuity of perspective that links contemporaneous dilemmas with both a real and an imagined past. As Faulkner himself stated, “Time is not a fixed condition, time is in a way the sum of all combined intelligences of all men who breathe at the moment” (FU, 139). And I would assert that it is the crisis of the self in modernity that anchors or destabilizes, depending on your perspective, both the novels in question.

The making and remaking of identities is both a philosophical task and a concretely historical one. The difficulty of the modern lies in living through this crisis in such a way that we glimpse these two phases of reflection and experience as a single process. The reading, and presumably the writing, of these two novels performs just such a unifying effort while it stresses the intense moral and psychological demands inherent in that double-edged activity. Faulkner, and to a lesser extent White, are deeply aware that the sundering and re-integration of identities is best grasped as enactments in context, rather than as philosophical abstractions treated in isolation from the real history of places and times. Hence both authors effect the displacement, or more properly the exchange, between contextual historical materialism and the more far ranging abstract philosophical concerns which agitate twentieth century modernist thought.

Voss and Sutpen are not simply anachronistic reflections of their authors, but rather give depth and charge to modernism’s need to re-evaluate itself from behind and beneath, and the telescopic back-looking with which each is created serves that purpose
well. Both characters exist in moral isolation, in a kind of mental quarantine rendered by their authors with a staged self-awareness that somehow operates as unaware of the ultimate relativity of moral/ethical reasoning and allows them to ignore the intrusion of context and consequence. Jason Compson’s description of Sutpen’s obliviousness could easily be of Voss’s, “while he was still playing the scene to the audience, behind him fate, destiny, retribution, irony -- the stage manager -- call him what you will -- was already striking the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes of the next scene” (Absalom, 57). This self-consciousness, this sense of an audience, subtly suggests that both characters are not, in fact, as divorced from moral awareness and concern as their defiance would indicate. The very need to be watched, to be assessed, is the driving motivation of each and, again, reiterates the interconnectedness that they cannot finally flout.

The repercussion of relationships is what the practice of any morality by its nature demands. As Paul Tillich so succintly states, “the self is a self only because it has a world” (The Courage to Be, 88). In trying to override that predetermined and inescapable belonging, Voss and Sutpen underwrite their own vulnerability. The young Bayard Sartoris in The Unvanquished says in awe of what he hears of Thomas Sutpen, “Nobody could have more of a dream than that” (223). But it is Drusilla Hawk’s answer which rivets us with a sense of Sutpen’s isolation and ultimate impotence: “Yes, but his dream is just Sutpen.... A dream is not a very safe thing to be near” (223).

In passing, it is an interesting choice that Faulkner makes use of here by having Drusilla make such a pithy evaluation of Sutpen, as she is very much a rebel in her own right, having far overstepped the traditional roles of southern womanhood. Also, her
observation of Sutpen is couched in a novel the writing of which interrupted Faulkner's work on *Absalom*, and is itself something of an antidote to the later novel as it relishes and glorifies the very things that *Absalom, Absalom!* condemns, while revealing Faulkner's own double agenda with respect to his historical legacy.

But in Sutpen and in Voss, Faulkner and White respectively have deposited a good measure of the modern neurotic subject as they were, as modernists, both immersed in what Steven Marcus has identified as the "culture of psychoanalysis". The features of that engulfing intellectual innovation are everywhere apparent in their fiction, and nowhere more so than in the portraits of Thomas Sutpen and Ulrich Voss. Tillich, again, captures both the irony and the pathos of the estranged modernist personality, and his thinking in this instance can be overlaid with precision on to either Voss or Thomas Sutpen. That I should want to do so is to illustrate how thoroughly modernism's own circumambient atmosphere is prevalent in the creation of these two literary subjects.

The neurotic personality [has] a greater sensitivity to non-being ... and settles down to a fixed, though limited and unrealistic self-affirmation. This is, so to speak, the castle to which he has retired and which he defends with all means of psychological resistance against attack. This resistance is not without some instinctive wisdom. The neurotic is aware of the danger of a situation in which his unrealistic self-affirmation is broken down. (*Courage*, 68)

In many senses this is also precisely the position of the modernist hero struggling to excavate some kind of moral reality in a godless world. In *Voss* and *Absalom*, *Absalom!*, Patrick White and William Faulkner engage the ethical and moral dimension
that frustrates modernism at its core: the sensed divorce from a divine essence that only deepens the modern subject's socio-historical contingency. This is often misrecognized as being of a psychological or aesthetic nature that modernism addresses according to its own self-involved logic; only infrequently is it acknowledged as being a problem of moral origin. This is not to suggest that modernists do not subscribe to ethical and social positions, but that the study of modernism has itself not undertaken to seriously examine how modernist authors negotiate with moral dilemmas, suggesting that in modernism the dimension of morality has become dismissible or even inadmissible.

I find that generally there is an acknowledgement only that moral assessments have become obsolete in a world that modernity has divested of any schematic of lasting 'truths'. Art Berman says that "the ground of ethics has disintegrated and ... that 'principles' of art are substituted for social and ethical principles ... for truth is now internal to the aesthetic" (77, 95). And John Jervis, in *Exploring the Modern*, also seems to limit modernism's access to moral interpretation on the basis of equations that no longer stand. He suggests that, "morality based on reason has been cancelled.... Gone are the objective certainties of science and morality as revealed by reason. The basis for ultimate claims to ... moral knowledge has been destroyed and morality and reason fly apart" (186, 241). In this climate he suggests "no project of projects" can be undertaken, tacitly implying that modernism's trajectory is thwarted by its inability to reunite these two functions.

Lionel Trilling in an earlier exploration of morality and modernism suggests that modernity has created a new kind of moral apathy or "inertia" to use his word, stating that, "this is the morality imposed by brute circumstance ... which is neither courage nor
choice, but necessity.... With this conception of morality goes almost the entire negation of any connection between morality and destiny” (The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent, 338). But in Voss and Absalom, Absalom! it is precisely this connection which is being investigated.

This is obviously not a comprehensive citing, yet it is indicative of a tendency to dismiss morality as a functioning part of modernism, or to include it only as something that functions in a kind of debunked negativity. I would argue, however, that modernism is deeply engaged with morality by the very fact of easy access having been withdrawn, and that the circuitous enlistment of the repressed other is its way of seeking a new moral grounding, as will be made clear in discussing the intertwined subjectivities in Absalom, Absalom! and Voss.

Modernism maps the topography of its wasteland by tracking interiority, focusing on subjects desperate to measure a new distance between the self and a lost sense of destiny. In its efforts to relocate what for all intents and purposes must be called religious, or at least spiritual affirmation, literary modernism plunders its fictional subjects for new reason, but rather than invoking a freshened moral order, the intense focus on the self somehow throws personal answerability into the shadows. What might have become a morally charged world registers itself instead in what appears to be an ethical vacuum. Or more properly, ethics and morality have themselves been isolated from those things which of necessity influence them: reason, action, aesthetic expression and the emotional life.2 However, consistent with its paradoxical turnabouts, modernism engages its own ethical deficit in the interest of locating what is missing ethically -- the inclusion of the repressed, the dominated, the denied -- in essence the resolution of the
individual subject with the collective.

Jonathan Friedman aptly notes in *Modernity and Identity* that, “it might be argued that the problem with Western modernity is that its individualism tends to erode the moral values that render the entire project of modernity a genuine possibility” (356). But, though modernism’s relentless investment in the individual seems to cancel that which it would enlist, precluding a moral ordering which may well be the property only of a collective, the emphasis on the individual subject’s evolution in environments of moral vacuity in fact invites the induction of new moral paradigms. The sensed failure of moral collectivity is what prefigures modernism; it is also what it must reenact.

By studying *Voss* and *Absalom, Absalom!* in the light of some thinking by the modernist philosopher, Hannah Arendt, and the already cited modernist theologian, Paul Tillich we can achieve a clearer understanding of what modernism’s self-impeded morality was gesturing from and towards and why the courage of its heroes (and anti-heroes) was necessarily flawed. Qualifying either of these thinkers as modernists is not, I think, a fallacious assertion. Though Arendt, and for that matter Tillich, are direct intellectual descendants of the holocaust, Tillich himself being thrown out of Germany in 1933, the same year that Arendt fled the country, the tenor of their thinking is deeply relevant to modernist perception and to discussions of modern identity in particular.

Seyla Benhabib’s work, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, effectively situates Arendt’s reciprocal influence and indebtedness to modernism. He says that,

The path leading from the anthropological plurality of the human condition to the moral and political equality of human beings in a community of reciprocal recognition remains philosophically
unthematized, precisely because it seems so historically contingent.... It is in [Arendt’s] reflections on action, identity, and plurality in the context of the development of her political thought as a whole that we note the persistence of the central tension in her work between her moral and political universalism in thinking through the issues of this century. It is this tension that makes Hannah Arendt a reluctant modernist. (197-198)

And it is precisely this tension that I have indicated previously as being both the crisis of the modern self and the conceptual nexus of the modernist author -- particularly when that author is fictionally treating historical subject matter. Examining the texts of Faulkner and White in light of non-literary thinking enables a deeper penetration of the larger moral framework within which all intellectual and social disciplines of the twentieth century were exercising themselves. This is not an attempt to overly abstract or reify authorial intention, but to locate it as part of a more encompassing collective moral destiny.

Note that the applicability of Tillich’s thought to Faulkner’s fiction has been demonstrated by John W. Hunt in his essay “The Theological Center of Absalom, Absalom!” in Religious Perspectives in Faulkner’s Fiction. Panthea Reid Broughton also aligns Tillich with Faulkner in William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual, suggesting that in Faulkner, “although man considers himself to be without God or any sure signposts of meaning and yet still declines just to sit in the sun and die is itself an affirmation of monumental stature” (178). This idea, which is repeatedly given life in Faulkner’s characters, is redolent with Tillich’s courage to be. Though perhaps more directly engaged with Christianity, nowhere have I found any work done on Patrick
White and his possible absorption of Tillich’s view of the modernist spiritual crisis.

However, Tillich’s conception of modernist courage in a time of moral chaos illuminates much of White’s religious orientation.¹

To return to the novels, Sutpen and Voss both strive to immortalize themselves, the former in his effort to “establish a dynasty, make himself a king and raise a line of princes” (FU, 98), the latter to transform his identity into legend itself. But these characters are, of course, created by modernists themselves called upon to articulate out of profound doubting human entitlement to a hope no longer grounded in the transcendence of immortality.

Arendt suggests that, “immortality has fled the world to find an uncertain abode in the darkness of the human heart that still has the capacity to say remember and forever.... Everything has become perishable, except perhaps the human heart; immortality is no longer the medium in which mortals move, but has taken its homeless refuge in the very heart of mortality” (Between Past and Future, 115). (Note that there are echoes of this idea in Faulkner’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech). In essence this widens both the internal and the external scope in which the modernist subject must realize his or her identity. The subject is forced to devise an infallible internal ordering to offset the suddenly limitless emptiness conditioning who he or she is. The sense of immortality has inverted itself to become the ultimate negation of remembrance; finitude now presses the modern subject from without. And in response, the interior self which may say I, too, then, am nothing, must translate that into therefore I can become anything. Courage must reframe itself to compete with this polar shift, which is a reordering of the natural as well as the moral universe.
White's choice of setting his novel in Australia's frontier, the great emptiness of the interior which metaphorically approximates the moral vacuum sensed by modernism, allows him to exercise his modernist enterprise in ways that lend themselves to his metaphysical intentions. Whereas Thomas Sutpen in his deeply historical context is interested in social power, Voss in the vacancy of the outback is searching for spiritual power. Both quests invoke the modernist struggle to resituate the subject in a position of centrality which overrules modernity's performative crisis wherein "invisible processes have engulfed every tangible thing" (Portable Hannah Arendt, 296). The cultural theorist, Patrick Williams, has observed that modernism "takes the triumphalist experience of imperialism into the extremes of self-consciousness, discontinuity, self-referentiality and corrosive irony, whose formal patterns we have come to recognize as the hallmarks of the modernist" (Modernism and Empire, 22). By doing so modernism is advancing a profound critique of both its origin and its destination. A passage from Voss distills this beautifully:

Had he been in fullest possession of himself, he would have consulted his neat journal and copied down their latest estimated position. He was not, however, at that moment, self-possessed. He was sitting in the middle of nowhere. Which, naturally, was of too fantastical a nature, too expressive of his nothingness. Yet out of nothing he did finally begin -- 'indeed, we are reduced almost to infinity.' (210)

As Arendt says, "wherever men pursue their purposes ... they cut across a movement which is purposeless and turning within itself ... evoking purposeful human activities which do violence to nature because they disturb what, in the absence of
mortals, would be the eternal quiet of being-forever that rests or swings within itself” (Portable, 279). This is the crux of the modern experience -- proclaiming ‘I am’ into a profound non-answering.

Modernism responds by initiating a kind of listening never exercised before, as not only interior consciousness is brought to the forefront of literary representation, but multiplicity of perspective is enlisted. And here the subtle distinctions between modernism and existentialism emerge, as modernism tries, whereas existentialism does not, to replace the missing dimension of the eternal by invoking new forms of internal and, ultimately, social attention. Even if the dominant voices are elite, white and male, the necessity of a fully representative chorus is in the process of being legitimimized, and each subject position splits itself almost as an opening in or response to the modernist author’s awareness of and need for the representation of difference. This occurs, as Michael Zeitlin puts it in his essay, “Returning to Freud and The Sound and the Fury”, “at the hypothetical point at which the integrated subject is shattered beyond singular identity into multiplicity and excess” (67). This is also where the courage available in the modernist worldview comes into play, where its would-be solipsism subtly reveals itself as relying on the inclusion of the other.

The process of assimilation is not an easy one, as it demands disintegration to occur first, hence, as John Jervis suggests, in modernism “the self examined is the self in pieces” (264). As we will see in both Absalom, Absalom! and Voss, it is the deconstructing of the two central characters that opens up the representational field and the possibility for new moral/ethical invention, while bringing to light the vital and overlooked moral dimension of modernism itself.
I am not trying to suggest here that modernism makes a clean jump into representational diversity, but that it anticipates and sets the stage for such representation. Its own internalized focus is of such a nature that it becomes an act of recognition, not just of the myriad perspectives available in interiority, but of the range of 'other' voices that condition any interior dimension. In some sense the representations of identity in modernist fiction are, as Angelika Bammer puts it in Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question, "displaced but not replaced, [and] remain a source of trouble, the shifting ground of signification that makes meanings tremble" (xiii). A look at George Marcus's discussion of the evolution of modern identity is also enlightening here. He states that,

...while modernist ethnography operates fully cognizant of the history of the political and economic circumstances in which identities have been formed, it is not built explicitly around the trope of power, but rather of ethics, that is the complex relationship of the observer to the observed, of the relevance of the observed's situation to the situation of the observer's own society.... But the risk of some readers not seeing anything in this but narcissism and handwringing is well worth taking, since the shaping of modernist strategies through a kind of ethical awareness ... is essential to pursuing the traditional ends of ethnographic realism in the late twentieth century. (Modernity and Identity, 328)

We begin to see how formidably an historically based ethical or moral sensitivity is to the modernist's construction of any social identity. But first there exists the formidable obstacle of rescuing some moral optimism, or even more simply, moral possibility, from a degraded moral universe. Both White and Faulkner experiment in
these novels with how different fictional temperaments might respond to the tyranny of characters who patently resist the incursion of moral influence, of love, of reason, even of circumstantial fact. Rebellions of various orders proliferate. Looked at in isolation emotional defeat and psychic liberation are hard to distinguish, personal enlightenment and moral despair seem to cancel one another. But in the collectivity of response we see the glimmerings of new ethically realized social possibilities in the opened doors through which marginalized voices may speak, must speak.

Though Faulkner and White themselves articulate these other voices in ways that materially exclude them from authoritativeness -- the women represented in submission and absence and obsession and silence (Judith and Laura and Rosa and Clytie) the racially other in inference, appropriation and convoluted supposition -- (Charles Bon, Clytie again, Jackie and Dugald, Charles Etienne St. Valery Bond), these subjects of obscurity and oppression are separately and in concert the novels' greatest catalysts. As Thadious Davis has commented in her book, *Faulkner's Negro: Art and the Southern Context*, "A synopsis of the Sutpen legend without the inclusion of the Negro is a story without motivation or significant meaning.... The addition of the Negro lifts the Sutpen legend from a flat canvas and transforms it into a powerful vehicle of individual will, of complex human motives and emotions, of personal, social, historical interaction" (182,183). This is equally true of *Voss*, but should extend itself in both novels to include the representation of women -- white and black. The racial, cultural and gendered other are directly, critically performative of the moral conclusions available to each character and to the reader.

Just as Quentin is unable to demystify Sutpen, but rather negotiates his own
identity in terms of the Sutpen tragedy, the dimensions of which are measured by
Sutpen's gross acts of marginalization, so does Le Mesurier, Voss's companion,
acknowledge that "Voss is the ugly rock upon which truth must batter itself to survive. If
I am to justify myself I must condemn the morality and love the man" (94). More
correctly, he is forced to subsume the morality in order to endure the man. And Laura
Trevalyan says of Voss that they share 'inevitability', and some 'guilty secret of
personality' (65). She thinks his life will qualify her destiny. "You are so vast and
ugly.... You are so isolated..... I am fascinated by you. You are my desert.... I am called
upon to consider my destroyer as my saviour. Now the question is can two such faulty
beings endure to face each other, almost as in a looking glass" (83, 181).

This particular confrontation is handled by White in a tellingly manipulative way
using Laura, who is, of course, conveniently absent from the actual expedition, to
accompany Voss as a metaphysically realized feminine principle -- in essence his alter
ego. The construction of the feminine becomes a product of his habit of mind, just as the
construction of the Aborigines are. Laura writes later in the novel, "to the one who
knows me scarcely at all, yet ... who has complete possession of the most secret part of
me. You have taken the important, essential core of the apple ... I am nowhere and
everywhere at once" (233). This last is a fascinating example of the displacement of the
marginalized subject in the contextualization of the dominant discourse, in this case the
woman who is both centralized and utterly dislocated precisely because of the process of
being to whatever degree "known," or more aptly appropriated. Laura's lack of control
over her own self-realization is a represented loss, or theft even, that the author subtly
lays at his own authoritatively endorsed doorstep as well as at that of his character Voss.
There are, though, intimations throughout the novel of Laura’s independence of mind and character, and even of the greater clarity of her perspective, yet her voice is absorbed into Voss’s own deep interiority as “the woman who was locked inside him permanently, and who would answer him through the ends of her dreaming hair” (270). Although Patrick White firmly controls, really denies, the female voice with this narrative tactic, he also permits the representation of her to speak against its own withholding. Voss’s determination to engage Laura only on his own terms is shown as preempting his ability for self-knowledge (the implied male-oriented, self-referential circle for the moment excused). Voss imagines that,

Once during the night she came to him, and held his head in her hands, but he would not look at her, although he was calling: Laura, Laura.... So Laura remained powerless in the man’s dream.... I shall not fail you, said Laura Trevalyan.... He would not look at her however, for he was not yet ready. In spite of his resistance, their stirrup irons grappled together as they rode. So they rode through hell that was scented with Tannenbaum.... ‘I will think of a way to convince you,’ she said, after a time, ‘to convince you that all is possible. If I can make the sacrifice’ Then he looked at her, and saw that they had cut off her hair, and below the surprising stubble that remained, they had pared the flesh from her face. She was now quite naked. And beautiful. (292, 358, 361)

Not only does Voss totally appropriate Laura’s voice, he devours her physically with his violent imagery, yet still it is in the appropriated idea of her that the potential for knowledge resides. She, like so many of the key players in either novel, is textually
considered as a facet of another's identity, which does not downplay any single character's significance, but rather stresses their interdependence. Singal has commented “one can almost posit an inverse correlation between the extent of a character’s ‘voice’ and that character’s significance” (*The Making of a Modernist*, 212). This is true in White as well; the indirectly and minimally represented are often the turnkeys to the novel.

Judith Sutpen can be viewed as a fictional correlative of Laura Trevalyan, as both are represented in the same understated way and both are characterized very similarly. Handled by their authors with a narrative gingerness that bespeaks a distrust or reluctance on either part for the frank representation of women and their moral condition, they are nevertheless qualified as discreet but powerful moral foci. Both women are manipulated utterly by the contingencies of male-driven fate, just as they are marginalized and silenced by narrative decision. Within that they manage to survive with a courage that even in its obscurity eclipses any heroism exhibited by their male counterparts.

Faulkner and White seem to genuinely intuit the courage necessary for these women to morally sustain themselves, but they register it almost exclusively behind the scenes and away from the action. The respect paid to them, even if significant, is contextually tangential. That positioning, however, is a subtle authorial suggestion that the greatest moral capacity abides outside the range of modernism's represented white and male elite just as it relegates it to the borders of action. Traditional positions of authoritative dominance in which Faulkner and White are themselves constructed are seriously and deliberately challenged by the off-stage courage of the marginalized female character. Their ability to accept circumstance which is freighted with moral doubt and
defined by emotional destitution and yet find in it personal moral cohesion, is a counterbalance of the first order.

Even while granting Faulkner and White a certain tentative progressiveness with regard to the female subject’s emotional and moral stamina, we cannot overlook what might amount simply to a stereotypical and ultimately repressive aggrandizement of would-be feminine fortitude in the face of grief and suffering. Even while invoking the consideration of feminine potentiality, there remains in either author’s representations suspicious implications that the female subject does not operate on as many psychic fronts as the male subject, hence their distance fromfiguring as active writers of ‘the story’. What they do instead is subsume and bear witness and survive in a psychic captivity that spells the terms of their endurance. Judith Sutpen says simply, “I love, I will accept no substitute; if happy I can be I will, if suffer I must I can” (96). And Laura, with equal simplicity, “I will suffer anything you care to inflict on me, of course, I too can endure.” (303). Elisabeth Muhlenfeld has observed that everything Judith does is “constructive”, she is filled “with an intense determination to experience rather than retreat from life” (Faulkner’s Absalom, 176). Laura Trevalyan fits in precisely the same mold.

It is critical to note that Faulkner gives to Judith in one of her only (indirectly presented) speeches, what is in essence a metaphoric distillation of the novel’s modernist center -- beings caught in time struggling between individual desire, collective activity and the intense moral confusion that results.

Because you make so little impression you see. You get born and you try this and don’t know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the
same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying
to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings
are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they
don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way
like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each
one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug. (100)

It is also Judith who produces the single piece of tangible evidence verifying a
relationship that elsewhere is only the most convoluted speculation. It is the letter from
Charles Bon, and she, the messenger for the unspoken. The letter is undated, unsigned
and without salutation, a strange anonymous declaration that resonates with what could
be qualified as the modern subjects' lonely cry which might be phrased as 'we are not
identified yet, we hardly know who we are, but we are they'. The timeless anonymity of
the letter furthers the disturbing implications that in the rudderless world of Absalom,
Absalom! each subject is everyone and no one, communication comes from everywhere
and nowhere, the past is both now and then and it is neither.

The narrative device of this letter also and again, subtly closes the distance
between the represented characters who are directly experiencing the confusion of the
Civil War's social disintegration, and those who decades later are trying to piece that
chaos back into some sensible whole, just as it enlists the contemporary reader in the
same (ongoing) integration process. And Judith's reason for giving the letter to
Quentin's grandmother, to anyone, is an elegant and poignant defense of the need for
continuity of love and the courage to be that registers itself even through the cold and
mysogynistic irony of Jason Compson who does the narrating of Judith's supposed
And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something -- a scrap of paper -- something, anything, if not to mean anything in itself, and them not to even read it or keep it, not even to bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday. (101).

The value of human connection that very nearly becomes forfeit in Absalom’s fictional world of moral isolation, is rescued by this quiet act of affirmation in that it expresses the persistent need, the desire and the possibility for some emotional continuity that can be grasped and exchanged. It is also Judith’s most eloquent action on her own behalf, an effort to insert herself in a narrative future that matters.

In the flexible, protean interchange of perspective that formulates the textual subject in Voss and even more so in Absalom, White and Faulkner are not only investigating the myriad possibilities of self-perception, but are experimenting with the strengths and weaknesses of collective imagining. Thus, as we have seen with Laura and Judith, an individual subject’s representation is often absorbed within the narrative voice of an other or even multiple other characters. In Absalom, Absalom! there are countless examples of this.

Sutpen and his daughter, Judith “were as two people become now and then, who seem to know one another so well or are so much alike that the power, the need to
communicate by speech atrophies from disuse and comprehending without need of the medium of ear or intellect, they no longer understand one another’s actual words” (96). They virtually occupy the same mind. Faulkner establishes this connection early on in a particularly disturbing and violent scene wherein Sutpen is fighting with his slaves as Judith and Clytie and Henry watch,

...not the two black beasts ... but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another’s eyes as if their skins should not only have been the same color but should have been covered with fur too. It seems that on certain occasions, perhaps at the end of the evening, the spectacle, as a grand finale or perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, [Sutpen] would enter the ring with one of the negroes himself. (20-21)

Henry is led from the scene crying and vomiting while Judith “looked on unmoved” (30). This fearsome tableau functions as a veritable vortex of the racial and social complexity that empowers the novel and is charged with astonishingly multiple perspectives: Judith the white daughter, hidden with Clytie the unacknowledged black slave daughter, a twinned observation that cannot borrow or trade on its doubled perception of father, of owner, of black or white, the son cowering in horror at the violent immediacy and physicality of a confrontation that shears away the order of station and placement, the plantation owner himself radically eschewing the ranking of formal command and distance, the ineffectual southern wife who even in her denial recognizes a fatal affinity between father and daughter, and “the scum and rifraff who could not have approached the house itself under any circumstances, not even from the rear” (20).
Sutpen achieves in this sordid display a singular and monumental social inversion which exposes and involves and implicates the interiority of all present by exploding the sense of culturally artificial difference.

And, regardless of their temperamental disparity, Judith and her brother, Henry, are likewise collided, “the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity, speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps” (139). Quentin and Shreve McCannon merge with one another as well as with Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon: “Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry ... not two of them there and then but four of them riding the two horses through the iron darkness” (267, 237).

Even Rosa Coldfield, perhaps the most self-obsessed of all, succumbs to a sense of the indeterminacy of identity when recounting her life with Judith and Clytie as being lived “not as two white women and a negress, not as three negroes or three whites, not even as three women, but merely as three creatures.... It was as though we were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate” (125). The most sinister and disturbing expression of this pervasive melding of identities is attributed to Quentin at the very outset of the novel, “his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts” (7).

Within the modernist narrative strategies utilized by White and Faulkner, the imagined subject becomes an amalgam, just as any potentially lasting properties of moral assessment are only seen as associatively approachable. The life trajectories of Voss and Sutpen as presented by their authors create an atmosphere of moral indeterminacy in the
midst of which the other characters wrestle with their own place in a world which they cannot command, but only subvert. It is in this aspect that evaluating these texts as exemplars of high modernism exposes the authors’ own emphasis on what is a modern crisis of the self. As Art Berman points out, it is extraordinarily difficult for the modernist subject to situate any “permanent ethical value in the midst of otherwise modifiable truths” (108). Within the context of modernist literary imagining the only way out is through the multiple identification of selves who must grant each other’s separate and distinct authority.

Though modernism’s self-referentiality and elitism seems itself to run the interference here, the self-questioning it engages nevertheless increasingly orients around a presentiment that any adequate moral structure is predicated on the collective assimilation of social and personal belief. Voss and Sutpen’s brute strength of will and the actual conditions they perpetuate, allow White and Faulkner to create a rich tapestry of represented human response that mimics the condition of the subject in the modern world by forcing each character into a personalized confrontation with a destiny wherein he or she only seems to figure as a contingent obsolescence, and where moral freedom and with it the ability to choose seems forfeit, where psychic or physical action is ineluctably predetermined by historical antecedent and the only control a subject has is to experience guilt as a compensation for their profound moral dislocation.

Tillich has generated a vision of this modern condition that deepens the implications of what we have thus far looked at of Hannah Arendt’s thinking, and provides a strong base from which to scaffold our understanding of Voss and Absalom, Absalom! . He says that, “under the condition of man’s estrangement from himself ... man
tries to transform the anxiety of guilt into moral action regardless of its imperfection and ambiguity.... The anxiety of guilt lies in the background and breaks again and again into the open producing the extreme situation of moral despair” (Courage, 52-53).

Within the terms of Absalom, Absalom!, reason cannot regain the distance that separates the self betrayed and divided by its own moral ambiguity. For a character like Quentin Compson, as Tillich has noted, only guilt erupts in the breach. Quentin, in his intense revision of “that might have been which is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality” (120), is trying to think his way clear of a moral complexity wherein he figures himself (unaccountably) as guilty. In Quentin’s case he is unable to ‘transform the anxiety of guilt into moral action’-- for he is unable to conceive of any action available to him, excepting an action of interpretation. Accordingly he searches everywhere in the action of Sutpen’s story for some moral configuration that will suddenly release him from the burden of a collective guilt within which his sense of destiny has become lost. Faulkner is quite explicit in letting the reader know that Quentin’s attempts at reasoning his way into a moral acceptance of the South and of himself can never, will never, occur as he sinks into greater and greater confusion even in the removed safety of his Harvard room,

...dedicated to the best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen’s morality and Miss Coldfield’s demonizing -- this room not only dedicated to it but set aside for it and suitably so since it would be here above any other place that it (the logic and morality) could do the least amount of harm; the two of them back to back as though at the last ditch, saying No to Quentin’s Mississippi shade who in life had acted and
reacted to the minimum of logic and morality, who dying had escaped it completely, who dead remained not only indifferent but impervious to it, somehow a thousand times more potent and alive. (225)

(It is interesting to note that here Faulkner negatively aligns “logic and morality”, indicating modernism’s previously mentioned and fundamental emphasis on the slippage between reason and morality, and he thereby isolates modernity’s great psychic disconnect.) Quentin is increasingly aware of the impotency of his position, yet he furiously turns everything over and over in his mind, mentally scribbling on what Moreland has called his “insomniac writing pad” on which his “repeated juxtapositions of an ultimately reified suffering like Bond’s and various efforts to deny, frame, or transfigure that suffering is a modernist aesthetic solution ... insufficient for helping Quentin past the suicide that Faulkner has already written into his future” (120).

Quentin is doomed because he cannot reunite morality with reason. He is unable to move past the cyclical vengeance of Sutpen’s story. He figures himself in it with an incestuous energy that binds him to brothers and sisters and fathers that become, each one, condemnatory aspects of his own psyche that he cannot love, cannot explain and whose actions he cannot morally contain. For Quentin, then, action and with it moral possibility, is doomed to an abstract repetition that never solves, “Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished.... Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us” (210).

As Faulkner said, “Quentin was still trying to get God to tell him why in Absalom, Absalom! as he was in The Sound and the Fury” (FU, 275).
Arendt has suggested that, "since everything that has actually happened in the realm of human affairs could just as well have been otherwise, the possibilities for lying are boundless; and this boundlessness makes for self-defeat" (The Portable Hannah Arendt, 569). So Quentin is destroyed by the very mutiplicity of human interpretation, the moral trajectories he can't arrest or even verify. He cannot arrive at any authoritative point, an absolute moral center where self-forgiveness might be found and within that the possibility for a fresh release of moral action. He, like Laura Trevalyan in Voss, is confounded by human history that cannot know the truth of itself. She says, "Mr. Voss is already history." Her companion answers, " 'But history is not acceptable until it has been sifted for the truth. Sometimes it can never be reached.' 'No, never,' she agreed. 'It is all lies. While there are men, there will always be lies'" (Voss, 407). There is in both Faulkner and White the sense that history reinventing itself as it in turn invents the individual subject constituted in its shifting matrices, forces an ongoing interpretive corruption that alternately obscures and illuminates that upon which it focuses, including the subjective orientation of those who are observing.

The modernist project continually searches for a method of reforging a collective perception that can establish itself as a unity of integrated parts -- as links in a chain -- one perspective essential to the next, and it does this with characteristic perversity by concentrating on the breaks in the chain which can be recognized as the malfunctioning psycho-social space of slanted personal evaluation informed by discriminatory practice. Faulkner had an exchange at the University of Virginia which attests to his belief in an historical veracity attainable only by multiple perspective:

Q: In Absalom, Absalom! do any of the people who talk about Sutpen have
the right view, or is it more or less a case of thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird with none of them right? A: That's it exactly. I think no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you... But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw, though nobody saw the truth intact... But the truth, I would like to think comes out, that when the reader has read all thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of the blackbird which I would like to find is the truth.

(FU 273-74)

So it is with the greatest care that we must participate in Faulkner's assemblage of 'what was', paying particularly close attention to the psychological orientation of any given character. One of the most critical changes that Faulkner made to the manuscript of Absalom was to switch the narrative point of view in the Quentin/Shreve sections from one dominated exclusively by Shreve to one that alternately plunges us into Quentin's first person interiority, or is abruptly handled by an omniscient narrator.

Check, for example, manuscript page 85 which is entirely in the control of Shreve against the final version on page 147, where there is now the inclusion of a passage that swings back and forth between Quentin being positioned in his own memory of events by an omniscient narrator, and the italicized internal dialogue that captures his mounting hysteria. This happens again in a switch from the original which appears on page 88 of the manuscript and is reflected on page 153 of the finished novel.5

This decision is a crucial one as it makes Quentin the moral bearer of the story. His are the only interior thought processes we are privy to. Thus, it is his assessment that matters and carries all the emotional weight. In his character, Faulkner has deposited the
whole burden of modernism, the self struggling to engage a world that refuses to morally substantiate its subjects.

Quentin is perforce enlisted in what Arendt qualifies as “a rebellion against human existence as it has been given,” yet he breaks beneath the pressure to assimilate modernity’s terrible contradictions, “that we are plural and mortal, a miraculous openness and a desperate contingency -- only forgiveness can break the chain of revenge -- however we are unable to forgive ourselves” (Condition, 188). Quentin will ultimately collapse because of the shadowy possibility that perhaps he does not even figure as a moral integer, that the equations stand without him, unbearable and unmodifiable. That negation for him is a far more desperate condition than being fundamentally guilty. Bearing these thoughts in mind, we turn to the structure of the novels to demonstrate how White and Faulkner, as modernists, furnish moral destitution with variations of ‘the courage to be’.

Both the novels are couched in extraordinary action: Voss, the explorer, attempting not only to discover the vast distances of Australia, but to lay spiritual claim to the indigenous peoples he in effect aims to conquer, and Sutpen who “dragged a house and gardens out of virgin swamp” (30) is described as a man “who had been through some solitary furnace experience which was more than just a fever, like an explorer say” (24), and who is himself laying siege to an entire culture. Their action is never meant to be cooperative or assimilative, but rather appropriative and conclusive in itself. Voss is intent on physically and psychologically owning a country, becoming its author, going so far as to carve his initials into the trees along his journey, which is something the actual explorer, Ludwig Leichhardt, did as documented in Alec Chisholm’s Strange New World
(170), an historical account of the expedition that White plundered for information.

Here, indeed, was a map of a kind, presumptuous where it was not blank.

‘The Map?’ said Voss. It was certainly a vast dream he had wakened.

‘The Map?’ repeated the German. ‘I will first make it,’ ... and himself rather drunken began to read off his documents, to chant almost, to invoke the first recorded names, the fly-spots of human settlement, the legend of rivers.... He himself would sit with the large notebook on his knees, recording in exquisite characters and figures, in black ink, the legend. (19, 190)

White’s imaginative portrait of his explorer meshes here with that of Leichhardt in that each sensed himself as ‘author’ or owner of a new world. Leichhardt wrote, “What people will say when I suddenly arise from the dead with my pockets full of new mountains, ranges, rivers and creeks remains to be seen” (The Letters of F.W. Ludwig Leichhardt, Vol. III, 845). Both White’s fictionalized explorer and the real one on whom he is based were intent on immortalizing themselves by being the original discoverers of a country -- both ignoring the impossibility of legitimizing such a status -- uniting them in the Empire’s great lie of psychological and physical possession. White, however, does subtly and consistently criticize the intentions of imperialism.

In the novel, his represented Australian society is more comfortable establishing Voss as an historical exhibit, than in trying to understand the psychology that justified such an enterprise. “What kind of man is he, wondered the public, who would never know. If he was already more of a statue than a man, they really did not care, for he would satisfy their longing to perch something on a column, in a square or gardens, as a
memorial to their own achievement. They did, moreover, prefer to cast him in bronze
than to investigate his soul” (105).

Though in fact engaged in usurpation, Voss with all the impudence inherent in
imperialism believes he is merely completing the physical particulars of a destiny already
in place. Sutpen’s design, though equally willful, operates differently. Singal remarks of
Sutpen that he represents “the creator, the founder who has in some fashion given the
South its very identity.... [He] stands as the founder not so much of the actual historical
South but of the southern psyche” (195). But Sutpen does not, precisely, want to create,
but to recreate. He wants not to write history (like Voss) but to rewrite it, giving us a
fictionalized example of a revisionist energy internally available and necessary to the
antebellum Southerner and, indeed, to American myth-making in general.

The collision of class and race that structured the South demanded the
suppression, omission and division of the very factors that perpetuated its reigning
mythology. On multiple levels the South becomes morally and socially equivocal in the
quite literal sense; its institutionalized practices and the ethical rationale which validated
them depended on deceptive and double meaning. Accordingly, Sutpen obliterates the
actual truths of his identity -- his poor white class background -- to become the
instrument of that class’s oppression, and he overrides his innately egalitarian ethics -- his
belief that no man is intrinsically any better than another (including the racially other) --
by elaborately insisting on divisions that judging from much textual suggestion make no
difference to him personally.

It is worth noting that in the manuscript version of Faulkner’s story, “Wash”,
which heavily prefigures the content of Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner experimented with
various opening sequences that emphasized the imminent showdown between Wash and Sutpen which appears in both the story and the later novel: Wash hiding in wait for Sutpen to come out of the house, Wash justifying his own absence from the war, and finally, Sutpen discovering that Milly’s child is a girl.\footnote{This would all seem to point to Faulkner’s intense concern with Sutpen’s ultimate re-engagement with his alter ego, Wash, emblematic of his own poor white past.}

Faulkner is aware from the inception of Sutpen’s character that such psychic repression will not stand and will eventually spell the terms of psychic destruction, Faulkner here invoking his own inadvertent variation on psychoanalysis’s construction of “deferred action”, which Zeitlin explains by citing Laplanche and Pontalis as, “the meaning of the past ... revised ‘in conformity with the [ego’s project].... [T]he subject revises past events at a later date and ... it is this revision which invests them with significance” (\textit{Returning}, 64). Wash’s murder of Sutpen is just such a deferred action, but carried out in the material world rather than through interior processes, although Sutpen encouraged it by figuring Wash virtually as his shadow self.

As John Irwin has commented, “Sutpen wants revenge not against the injustice of that mastery which the powerful have over the powerless, but against those artificial standards and circumstances that determine who are the powerful and who are the powerless, against the artificial standard of inherited wealth and the circumstances of one’s birth” (100). So, within a culture that he ultimately disrespects, cannot even measure against an internal ordering that eschews such skewed logic, Sutpen tirelessly pursues the dominant social position, and it is because of this inherently contradictory formula that his courage separates from any personal moral foundation.
But as Faulkner puts it, “He wanted more than that. He wanted revenge as he saw it, but he also wanted to establish the fact that man is immortal, that man, if he is a man, cannot be inferior to another man through artificial standards or circumstances.... And he violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion, and the fates took revenge on him” (*FU*, 35). As an interesting aside, again in *Faulkner in the University*, Faulkner is asked, “Could you tell me in your writing which character is the most nearly perfectly tragic?”, to which Faulkner answers, “It would be between Sutpen and Christmas and Dilsey” (119). This is rather an odd but telling combination for Faulkner to have chosen, as each of these characters is involved in the socio-racial configuration from totally different perspectives, with varying degrees of action and reaction available to them, and nonetheless seemingly their different ways of negotiating with it are for Faulkner equally tragic.

In fact, less even then the plight of individual characters, it is the preconditioned dimensions of inter-racial relationships themselves which in Faulkner’s South is the predicking always-already in place tragedy. The action of the individual subject is merely something of an arabesque upon that tragic base. Voss’s action, though, subtly separates him from Sutpen’s as he is interested in being the original creator, and White invests him with the god complex to substantiate it. Sutpen’s action, on the other hand, is all in the interest of being fanatically, obsessively imitative, which not incidentally links him with the fallen Satan jealous of Heaven.

How in the world could a man fight another man with dressed-up niggers and the fact that he could lie in a hammock all afternoon with his shoes off?... To combat them you have got to have what they have that made
them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see? and he said Yes again. He left that night.

(185, 192)

From that moment, with a purpose that never abandons him, Sutpen tries to scaffold his own immortality. It is essential to note, here, that both Faulkner and White inject these novels with a religious energy, which at least in the descriptive momentum of Voss and Sutpen themselves operates very similarly. More importantly, it fundamentally influences how the authors' stage their fictional moral terrain.

Both White and Faulkner had ambiguous relationships with the Christian religion, White slipping in and out of commitment to the Anglican church, Faulkner generally dismissive of the Puritan influence which dominated in the South. He says, “Remember, the writer must write out of his background. He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian’s background, especially the background of a country boy, a Southern country boy.... I grew up with that. I assimilated that, took that in without knowing it. It’s just there” (FU, 86). That the influence is present and active in both is evident. Both overlay their fiction with Christian symbolism in a way that criticizes as it synthesizes, their modernism putting pressure on the entrenched rigidity of moral code.

Robert J. Barth in his discussion of Faulkner in relation to the Calvinist tradition asserts that Faulkner absorbed an “intense moralism ... from the American Puritan past.... The strong thread of predestination that runs through his work, together with his preoccupation with guilt and man’s depravity, put the unmistakable Calvinist stamp on him” (14-15). Cleanth Brooks also makes the important point that “Faulkner seems to
share with Puritanism one cardinal belief: the sense of the importance of the human will”  
(The Yoknapatawpha Country, 45). In both White and Faulkner, the human subject has  
become the arbiter of moral destiny. Barth’s view that in Faulkner’s work, “the emphasis  
on depravity is so strong, while the freedom to overcome it is so generally withheld, that  
it must be more sharply defined; it must be reckoned closer to the Calvinist notion of  
depravity than to any other interpretation of the concept of original sin” (26). This  
evaluation aligns Faulkner with White in the idea both worked on in their fiction of  
man’s spiritual resolution being inherent within his debasement if the right plurality of  
moral perspective could be configured.

White stated that “the churches defeat their own aims, I feel, through the banality  
of their approach, and by rejecting so much that is sordid and shocking which can still be  
related to religious experience. This is what I am trying to do” (Letters, 363). Michael  
Giffin rightly suggests that, “White’s vision of humanity is first and foremost a  
thetical vision ... but in his critique of Christianity White focuses upon ... the nuclei of  
those myths that compete and coexist within the Western imagination. The Christian  
revelation of God in Christ was born into a pre-existing mythical matrix that was  
entially Primitive, Semitic and Hellenic. It is within the matrix of mythoi that White  
explores his Postmetaphysical enthusiasms” (The Religious Imagination of Patrick White,  
4, 170).

White and Faulkner necessarily stepped beyond the limitations of a Christianity  
that had in large measure failed to offer spiritual asylum to the modern subject. This  
necessity did not preclude, however, the continued assimilation of the Christian myth.  
Faulkner said, “And that Christ story is one of the best stories that man has invented....
Why, the Christian religion has never harmed me. I hope I have never harmed it. I have the sort of provincial Christian background which one takes for granted probably -- within my own rights I feel I am a good Christian -- whether it would please anybody else's standards or not I don't know" (*FU* 117, 203). White, more decisively, says, "I cannot see myself as a true Christian. My faith is put together out of bits and pieces. I am a believer, but not the kind that most 'Christians' would accept" (*Letters*, 604).

Even as the symbolism and influence of Christianity permeates the literature of Faulkner and White, it is rarely present without a modernist backlash that heartily resists its formulations as being insufficient to help the modern subject past his or her own sense of spiritual abandonment. Accordingly, as has been demonstrated, there is in the work of either author a formidable empowerment of those cast from the ranks of religion's would-be moral order. As David J. Tacey observes of Voss,

...he is the fiend of motion, a man of compulsive activity and movement.... Voss identifies with the destructive force within his psyche and it is this which gives him his god-like or demonic character. The German leader, surely a spiritual relation to the fascist Hitler, seduces ... others into joining him in an orgy of disintegration.... He acts as a satanic figure who brings to life their latent desires for self-annihilation. (69,71)

In the minds of his companions Voss is tossed between being a Christ figure and the devil himself. The narrator steps in to tell us, "they could expect anything of Voss. Or of God for that matter. In their confused state it was difficult to distinguish act from act, motive from motive, or to question why the supreme power should be divided in two.... There are plenty of things to believe in without depending on God who is the
devil" (252, 263).

In *Absalom* as well, Sutpen is repeatedly associated with demonic imagery. Rosa Coldfield qualifies him thus, "Because he was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow. He was the light-blinded bat-like image of his own torment cast by the fierce demoniac lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse; from abysmal and chaotic dark to eternal and abysmal dark completing his descending" (139). Shreve picks up the tale with the imagery intact, Quentin agreeing with his intermittent 'yes': "This Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub fled hiding from some momentary flashy glare of his Creditor's outraged face ... scuttling into respectability like a jackal into a rockpile.... This Faustus ... who hid horns and tail beneath human raiment and a beaver hat" (145). And finally, Faulkner, in one of his college addresses, creates a vision of the highest fallen angel which has in it a curious admiration, and which can also be transferred as a description of Sutpen.

...the angels merely looked on and watched -- the serene and blameless seraphim ... who were content ... merely to watch, uninvolved and not even caring.... Because they were white, immaculate, negative, without past, without thought or grief or hopes, except that one -- the splendid dark incorrigible one, who possessed the arrogance and pride to demand with, the temerity to object with, and the ambition to substitute with -- not only to decline to accept a condition just because it was a fact, but to want to substitute another condition in its place.... This one not only believed that man was incapable of anything but baseness, this one believed that baseness had been inculcated in man to be used for base personal
aggrandisement by them of a higher and more ruthless baseness. (*Essays, Speeches & Public Letters*, 136-37)

In *Faulkner in the University*, he refers again to “the dark, splendid, fallen angel” stating that “the good shining cherubim are not very interesting, it’s the dark, gallant, fallen one that is moving to me” (62). Again we see here the curious alignment between gallantry and insurrection, courage and moral abandonment. That both authors frame their characters with demonic and God-like imagery derived from the Christian tradition is significant because it qualifies not only the way in which Sutpen and Voss attempt to immortalize themselves, but gives their ‘designs’ a certain courage of insurrection, which in turn explains the psychic control Voss and Sutpen exert over the other characters. Voss and Sutpen become irresistible spiritual interlopers by virtue of their own moral rebellion. It is a suggestive perversion of the modernist need to reimpose a religious context the parameters of which have become fluid in a new era of modernist moral negotiating. Likewise, it allows for the penetration of a religiously based moral perspective which effects the texts from the outside, and the religious tension internal to the texts correspondingly functions on multiple levels.

The observed characters and the characters who themselves observe, fall into line in a quasi-religious ordering that is authorially endorsed by the potent religious imagery with which White and Faulkner invest the central characters of Ulrich Voss and Thomas Sutpen. In the atmosphere of moral decadence that infuses either novel, the characters have no recourse, it would seem, but to become involved in a perverted idolatry -- an idolatry predicated on guilt and desperation -- that stems from a collapse not only of a sense of Christian ethics but of any moral/philosophical certainty. So degraded morality
itself becomes the place of questioning and modernism's strange and unlikely altar.

John W. Hunt makes an interesting case for juxtaposing the Christian elements in *Absalom, Absalom!* with the Stoic tradition he posits as being the (misused) foundation of antebellum southern morality by noting that,

Through the entire performance of the novel, Faulkner implicitly judges from what must be called a Christian humanist point of view that both Sutpen and the tradition fail because they wrongly assess the nature of reality and especially the nature of man.... In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner goes behind Quentin by going through him, to the tradition itself and also to the springs of the modern sensibility. He evaluates them both not by embodying their Christian alternative in a main character but by setting them against each other in a Christian context that is wider than either. In this novel, Faulkner is at once clearer about the content of the tradition, harder upon it, and less willing to sell it short by letting it be presented only in its decadent phase. He brings the Christian and the Stoic alternatives together, tips the theological balance in favor of the Christian but does not break their essential tension. (169)\(^8\)

I think it is valid to assert that Faulkner qualifies any theological conditioning for the novel in terms of the South's would-be philosophical moral underpinning by exploring the collapses in each, and it is in the breach between wherein he strives to access some moral cohesion. In terms of the failure of Southern plantation ideology a look at Richard Moreland is useful as he categorizes the modernist, and by extension or inclusion, Faulknerian, response in more secular terms than Hunt does. He states that,
“The Southern, modernist post-war irony at the catastrophic failure of that ideal, instead of idealizing particular blind spots and contradictions of particular versions of it, tends to subsume it with all others in the category of innocence overruled by the opposed generalization of an inevitable (but still external) fate, misfortune or darkness” (106). There remain in Moreland’s analysis, however, intimations of a standoff or tension between a culturally internal moral codification and a supracultural judgement.

In Absalom, the mystification of Sutpen’s story is perpetuated by the roving narrative perspective. Each narrator’s respective take on Sutpen is tainted with a meaning that is forced by the psychic, moral and emotional necessity peculiar to the narrating character. Each expects to exact an explanation, discover an escape route from psychological and moral stalemate through the agency of Thomas Sutpen, as though he were an avatar of divine principle. In context, this technique serves to deconstruct the similarly compromised verifiability of Christian ‘truths’. In Voss, the characters qualify themselves with respect to a man in whom they have invested their trust as in God, registering their personal moral (and physical) destinies as dependent on Voss’s ascendancy and ultimate decline.

As Voss says to his ‘chief angel’, Mr. Judd, “I am reserved for further struggles, to wrestle with rocks, to bleed if necessary, to ascend. I do not intend to stop short of the throne for the pleasure of groveling on lacerated knees. As for yourself, take care, I will raise you up to the far more rational position at my side” (212). Even Jackie, the Aborigine who eventually murders Voss, is psychologically in thrall to him, “but of his own, the great spirit by which he was possessed, which would sometimes look in from the outside, through his eyes, but which more often would writhe inside him, like waning
life, or gush and throb like blood, he would never tell” (415). Like Laura, who in terms of the authoritative dialogue as represented by Voss is ‘everywhere and nowhere at once’, Jackie, too, is displaced by an appropriation or assimilation that constitutes him as the dislocated perception not of himself, but of Voss.

In one of the more disturbing images in *Voss*, we observe the title character through the eyes of Palfreyman as he steals the precious compass in a sleepwalking state and hides it in his saddlebag. “Ah, Christ is an evil dream, he feared, and all my life I have been deceived. After the bones of the naked Christ had been drawn through the fetid room by sheets of moonlight and out the doorway, the fully conscious witness continued to lie on his blanket, face to face with his own shortcomings and his greatest error” (173).

Here, in quite literal terms, we have the Christ-figure withdrawing all direction, an act which in the context of the expedition is the stealing back of any hope of salvation. The accusation and mistrust that White is leveling at Christianity is clear enough. In his created modernist environment, spiritual and moral certitude has been taken away and the modern subject left, betrayed, in a desert. White also makes it clear that his Christ-figure is not conscious of his actions. Divinity itself cannot own the moment of its own insurrection.

The compass does turn up again but is broken, and as the company’s demise is now imminent, its uselessness in any case is parodied by the ineffectual machinery. The metaphor of the modern condition again being very clear, “His attention was attracted by the glitter of some substance, that proved to be glass, and in it the needle of the stolen compass.... [They] stood silent, looking at the little arrow that was pointing and pointing
on the bare earth” (339). Direction itself, understood here in a full variety of metaphoric and metaphysical shades, has been divested of both reference and culmination point; it is an idle, empty, even ludicrous gesturing.

Voss and Sutpen’s imperviousness, the ultimate destruction of both notwithstanding, stands in for a divine absolute that has gone missing. And, mistaking this tyrannical willfulness as morally determinant of their own reality, the other characters devalue their ability for moral recourse. It is, though, precisely this psychological vulnerability that creates the possibility of a freshly invented courage and heroism -- the courage to be in spite of -- and it is the position of the modernist subject as much as it is of the fictionalized historical character. An ineluctable subtext in both novels is the necessity of targeting moral responsibility, the highest affirmation available to the self. By juxtaposing Christian symbolism with decayed moral character, White and Faulkner are able to both challenge and reinvent a whole system of beliefs. They dislocate and relocate with an energy commensurate with modernism’s hope, as Pericles Lewis qualifies it, that “the experience of life in a world abandoned by God would be redeemed and the world again made flesh” (Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel, 51).

But in modernism’s landscape that resurrection has to occur from the most unlikely soil. The modernist author tenders modalities of doubting and despair as though they were the very currency of faith itself. Tillich suggests that,

... in the anxiety of guilt and condemnation doubt has not yet undermined the certainty of an ultimate responsibility. We are threatened but we are not destroyed -- if doubt and meaninglessness prevail one experiences an abyss in which the meaning of life and the truth of ultimate responsibility
disappear ... Can faith resist meaninglessness? The answer must accept, as its precondition, the state of meaninglessness, asking for an answer within and not outside the situation of despair. It is not an answer if it demands the removal of this state.... There is only one possible answer, if one does not try to escape the question: namely that the acceptance of despair is in itself faith and on the boundary line of the courage to be. *(Courage, 174)*

Voss and Sutpen are both fully given over to a 'meaning' that they have willfully constructed from the tissue of social rejection, formulating all their actions along a singled trajectory that admits of no secondary interpretation. Both ‘meanings’, however, are in keeping with the reigning mythologies of their respective social contexts -- Sutpen invoking the “American dream” while repressing the fact that he is one of its moral casualties, Voss inhabiting the cause of Imperialism while beckoning his own psychic dissolution through its processes of appropriation.

It is not surprising that White and Faulkner support their texts with characters like Voss and Sutpen who disavow totally the kind of courage that Tillich sees as essential to the spiritual liberation of the modern subject, as their apprehension of ‘nonbeing’ measures itself with a far more simple and self-validating logic. Their rejection of moral terms eliminates any middle ground between them and their sense of destiny, and they can figure the distance between in a very direct equation. Their linear expectations also afford an unlikely, if negative, continuity, the trajectory of which acts as a zone of moral interpretation for both the other characters and the readers.

To use Tillich’s phrase, they serve as “the boundary line” between despair and courage, a paradoxical threshold for the moral discovery available in modernism’s
conflicted world. The other characters struggle, then, to exercise this courage in a climate that Arendt frames as being embedded in "the articulations and ramifications of doubting ... when being and appearance [have] parted company forever" (Condition, 274). Though this idea is formulated after the fact of either novel's creation, The Human Condition being published in 1958, the driving sentiment of it applies with full force to the psychological grounding of both White's and Faulkner's fictional subjects.

Voss and Sutpen are imagined as the direct antitheses of collective morality, forfeiting as part of their would-be sovereignty over fate, substantiation within any social plurality. They are alone in their assumed divinity. Their rampant individualism throws closed the door of human redemption as any collective morality is arrested in their person. Against this we may play Arendt's conception of the tyrant, "the impotence of the strong and superior man who does not know how to enlist the help, the co-acting of his fellow men. This ruler is alone, isolated against others by his force, just as the beginner is isolated through his initiative" (Condition, 189). There is available in this idea, again, a curious conjunction of the positive and the negative, and Voss and Sutpen are qualified equally by either resonance.

We are given powerful descriptions of Voss and Sutpen that situate them in this isolation by virtue of their 'will' and 'innocence' respectively. "My God is above humility." Voss declares to Laura Trevalyan. "It was clear.... She saw him standing in the glare of his own brilliant desert. Of course, He was Himself indestructible" (86). (Note the capitalized pronouns which directly equate Voss with God). Sutpen, too, when he first conceives of his design, in what must be characterized as his defining psychological moment, is presented as in the aftermath of "an explosion -- a bright glare
that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse: just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence rising from it like a monument” (192). This shocked freedom leaves him answerable to no one, including the self he has totally rejected. He moves with no moral inhibitions or restraints through personal relationships and the larger social structures which contain them. His rejection of moral obligation allows him to initiate his design as though conditioned by no precedents, later, as Rosa describes it, “creating the Sutpen’s Hundred, the Be Sutpen’s Hundred like the oldentime Be Light” (4).

David Paul Ragan, in his book-length study of Absalom, has observed that it is “awareness of his place within the social structure that wipes away all the young Sutpen’s moral debate.... He recognizes that Pettibone himself is not the issue, that the issue comprises all the forces that structure the society” (112). Hence, in order to survive, Sutpen divests his vengeance of any emotional directedness, viewing all obstacles -- individuals, social conglomerates or social mores -- with the same dispassionate eye. All that he feels he needs to retain of human virtues is being “courageous and shrewd” (201).

Note that Sutpen’s understanding of courage is a gross inversion of Tillich’s, and within the terms of Tillich’s thinking, is precisely what separates the modern subject from a sense of moral destiny. He says, “The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation” (Courage, 3). (Quentin Compson, in many ways Sutpen’s alter ego, is likewise unable to affirm his identity within Tillich’s formula.) Sutpen reneges on all connection to his ‘essential self’ and his courage becomes as General
Compson puts it, simply “unscrupulousness” with which he targets every aspect of society alike exercising no moral differentiation whatever.

That Sutpen is alone in the deepest sense is of no consequence to him, as his entire scheme is all in the interest of reinventing himself, and of ultimately perpetuating that reinvented self through a line of sons. In *Children of the Dark House*, Noel Polk makes the sound observation about “how specifically *Absalom* is a son’s story and not a father’s” (138). It is with perverse irony that Faulkner makes it clear that Sutpen’s design, finally, has far less to do with him than it does with all those who must take that design as the blueprint for their own moral destinies. Psychological legacy is what concerns Faulkner here, as he acknowledges that nothing operates in isolation but is made real only through repercussion. That idea can be stretched to suggest that modernism’s self-contained investigation of the moral parameters describing its subjects is in actuality a studied effort to bequeath new moral possibility. Modernism is intrinsically and fundamentally aware of its own creation of intellectual and moral descendants.

Sutpen’s bizarre scheme of appropriating social position with total disregard for the machinations of that society plays in every instance with Faulkner’s own positioning as a modernist, as modernism itself both resists and covets. Faulkner registers Sutpen’s singleness of purpose within the moral chaos it generates as two diametrically opposed dynamics. The interpenetration of marginalized voices becomes the background noise against which Sutpen’s moral perversion might possibly resolve into a coherent moral signal. Sutpen’s courage is presented as a defiance so total that his control over others is measured by their disbelief, their incredulity to use Faulkner’s word, that magnetizes them in his world of moral paradox and arrests their ability to resist him. Sutpen has
himself erected an ordering that by virtue of its imbalance can only bring him down. Arendt’s model of authoritarian hierarchy applies perfectly here,

The tyrant is the ruler who rules as one against all, and the ‘all’ he oppresses are all equal, namely equally powerless. If we stick to the image of the pyramid, it is as though all intervening layers between top and bottom were destroyed, so that the top remains suspended, supported only by the proverbial bayonets, over a mass of carefully isolated, disintegrated and completely equal individuals.... The [tyrants’] flaw is [in not recognizing] that their power is not only in their collectivity but in their individuality. (Portable, 468)

With respect to Faulkner’s modernism, to modernism in general, literally perpetuated marginalization becomes the under-recognized position of latent power. Sutpen’s tyranny has the effect of absolutely leveling the playing field. Black, white, male, female, low and high class subjects suddenly occupy the same psychological and emotional space in that the terrible moral vacancy Sutpen has initiated conversely makes moral courage of equal necessity and equal availability to all. Until Wash finally cuts him down, no one is able to initiate anything against him; Henry’s self-imposed exile and murder of Charles, Charles’s own waiting for recognition, Rosa’s indignant refusal, Quentin’s desperate interpreting, are all acts bound to and dependent on the terms set by Sutpen. Throughout the novel the certitude of his actions strives against the human impulse to make moral differentiations that will reorder the meaning of deed and consequence, but it constructs that impulse as of paramount importance.

As Jason Compson says, “Have you noticed how so often when we try to
reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from the old virtues? The thief who stole not for greed but for love, the murderer who kills not out of lust but pity? (96). And Laura Trevalyan, trying to separate her fascination with Voss from her revulsion, surmises that, “the human virtues, except in isolated, absolved, absurd or oblivious individuals are mythical” (324). Again, Faulkner and White as modernists have set up an environment wherein moral judgement is conditioned and demanded by its own absence.

In a fundamental episode in *Absalom*, we will see how Faulkner situates Sutpen as the unwitting arbiter between himself and a collective unconscious that will bring him down, his very power over others constitutive of his own dismantling. The scene also has an interesting correlative in *Voss*.

Sutpen sets about implementing his design by journeying to Haiti where he rises to some undisclosed position of authority on a Haitian sugar plantation. Faulkner describes Haiti as “a little island set in a fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea, which was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires, was ravished by violence and the cold known land to which it was doomed” (202). By context and rhetoric Faulkner is subtly constellating Sutpen himself as being the channel through which an ‘inscrutable’, uncontrollable element of black blood will be introduced into the Southern social world, upsetting the balance contingent on its precariously ‘controlled’ black blood. He becomes, thereby, the liaison between perceptions of chaos and order, the keeper of some
secret that destroys the distinctions between the two. He is himself the most radical factor of instability.

While in Haiti he is involved in a slave uprising, which, as Kevin Railey has noted in his article “Absalom, Absalom and the Ideology of Race”, “symbolized in vivid and gory detail Southern Plantocrats’ worst nightmare” (50). Railey goes on to suggest that Faulkner deliberately sets Sutpen’s early history in the midst of this rebellion so that he and his slaves will later be viewed by the citizens of Jefferson as constituting a similar threat to them -- with Sutpen, the white man, being of equal threat. “Anyone could look at those negroes of his and tell that they have come from a much older country than Virginia or Carolina but it wasn’t a quiet one” (Absalom, 11).

Sutpen is, from the moment of his arrival in Jefferson, associated with blacks in a way that upends views of the landed Southern white. The town’s collective suspicion that there “was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere” goes beyond just the speculation of Sutpen’s physical involvement with blacks to insinuate a psychological connection, which, of course, is infinitely more threatening. Though in Sutpen’s case, miscegenation, the very fear of it, will eventually prove his undoing (and everybody else’s), it is the moral challenge embedded in his psychic closeness with blacks that agitates against him with the greatest energy. What is particularly fascinating in the Haiti episode is how Faulkner foreshadows in the midst of this slave rebellion Sutpen’s nearly telepathic communication with the ‘wild band of niggers’ he brings to Mississippi,

...he just walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should (should, yes: that would be the terrible
thing: to find flesh to stand more than flesh should be asked to stand); maybe at last they themselves turning in horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and from which blood could be made to spurt and flow as it could from theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have...(205)

Later, on Sutpen’s Hundred, “Sutpen never raised his voice at them, instead he led them, caught them at the psychological instant by example, by some ascendancy of forbearance rather than brute fear ... holding his wild negroes with that one word” (27, 44). Thadious Davis has suggested that, “the ‘wild’ slaves as an imagined reality in the novel serve to create psychological atmosphere and mood similar to the function of natural landscape or setting in some nineteenth century novels” (190). They do indeed provide an element of hysteria against which the other black characters of the novel must contend. Charles Bon’s elegant and natural sophistication, his cool rationality, seems like a mystical aberration when played against the chaos they represent. Clytie’s stoicism and control comes across like a willed arrestment of that same chaos. Jim Bond’s howling is its final and lasting revisitation.

A look at Joel Williamson’s A Rage for Order: Black-White Relationships in the American South Since Emancipation is quite useful here, especially the chapter entitled “Black Images in Southern White Minds” (70-116). In this chapter he traces the distinctions between three Southern white ‘mentalities’: ‘Liberal’, ‘Conservative’ and ‘Radical’. His definitions of these categories are productive particularly in his assertions of how they competed with one another in the 1880’s and through the early twentieth
century, the period in which most of the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* were trying to make sense of the racial issues in the midst of which they lived.

In the terms of Faulkner's modernism, it is not far fetched to suggest that he was in the act of separating the coopted voice of the black subject from the deeply negative mythologizing that has constructed it in American literature and in American social fact. The 'one word' with which Sutpen determines the behavior of his 'wild niggers' will evolve into the inarticulate and wordless scream of Jim Bond that reverberates with all the unspeakable collapse of moral coherence. Sean Latham, in his article, "Jim Bond's America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in *Absalom, Absalom!*", has suggested that Jim's cry is the "voice of homelessness ... that evolves from more than just a loss of a house, for this mulatto descendant of Thomas Sutpen registers the pain and destruction of the coherent boundaries of self which ought to shape themselves around ideas of home, family and nation" (453). But it is also leveling an accusation. With his mixed blood, it is a devastating pronouncement on the destroyed moral vocabulary of the dominant white voice.

But Sutpen's command over his slaves is not simply dominance, but connection. And that connection is itself a kind of revolt as it flies in the face of violently guarded ideas of the difference between black and white. This is not meant to suggest that Sutpen was in anyway interested in defying the barbarism of slavery; his mastery over the blacks is if anything more morally terrifying because of his lack of an intrinsic belief in inequality. However, it is the psychic connection Faulkner evokes between them -- power and intuitive recognition of the other represented in a bizarre standoff -- that generates the polarized atmosphere within which Faulkner conducts his deeply moral
enterprise of extricating voice from voice in order to get at any sense of moral truth governing human relationships. Noting that Sutpen’s slaves were among the first to leave in the freedom conferred on them by the war is a detail that does not undercut the strength of his connection with them, but rather emphasizes how even that intuitive dominance was a fallacy supported only by circumstance and the power of physical proximity -- despite all his efforts, everything anchors Sutpen in resolutely historical terms.

Voss aspires to the same kind of control over the Aborigines, but is unable to carry it off, as White more directly represents the inefficacy of Voss’s presumptuousness and the blindness of his egomania. But first it must be noted that White has challenged himself in a way that separates him from Faulkner whose investment in historical event is paramount, in that he has chosen a nineteenth century historical figure, not, I believe, to expose the trenchant hypocrisies in Imperialist enterprise; rather, White was interested in invoking a setting that suited his interest in exploring the condition of modern man adrift without moral compass. The unexplored Australian interior was a perfect metaphor for the psychological wilderness he was interested in charting.

As Kay Schaffer has noted, “he imagines Australia as a fallen garden ... and [Voss] can slide into a persona for the mythical Patrick White imagined as Australia’s Prodigal Son.... His is a story of cultural decay, the search for the lost soul of a nation. It keeps the problem of national identity on the agenda -- but in terms of the search for one identity which denies internal contradictions as well as racial, class and gendered differences” (Constructions of Colonialism, 86). But it is White’s representation of Voss’s identity as fatally handicapped by his fierce marginalizing that itself argues for the
representation of difference.

White is, nonetheless, far less interested than Faulkner in factual historical dimension which he qualifies with respect to *Voss* as being "too difficult and too boring" (*Letters*, 107), though he is, as Schaffer again notes, "struggling against the restraints of a colonial Australian past" (*In the Wake of the First Contact*, 163). It is inevitable, then that his work ends up providing a powerful if inadvertent example of the appropriation of Aboriginal presence by Western interpretation. What saves *Voss* from the charge of gross misrepresentation is White’s firmly directed condemnation of his white characters’ presumptions about the Aborigines.

Where the two authors can be considered as working in concert is in the narrative distress that erupts between the representation of the white and the black, not necessarily with specific respect to a likeness of situation or character, though these occur, but in the anticipated need (sensed in both novels) for more liberal inclusiveness. It is modernism doubting, challenging its own barriers of representation. White is quite careful to show that Voss’s attempt to assimilate the Aboriginal perspective by some kind of intuitive osmosis will not answer. Like Faulkner, his use of the black presence provides an atmosphere if not of hysteria, than of a percolating violence which acts as the subtext of the modern subject’s moral dissolution.

White uses the Aborigines as signifiers of the unconscious, again leaving himself open to charges of modernist elitism by engaging only the most reductive correlatives with primitivism. There are, however, subtle and significant differences in White’s use of the primitive that separate him from modernism’s sometimes overly easy association of the primitive with the elemental, which in turn fostered the assumption that the
primitive had access to a clarity unavailable to the modern subject’s occluded sensibility. In *Voss*, White relies on the primitive subject as a manifestation of negative psychic forces in a manner that only serves to underscore Voss’s self-delusion in not recognizing them as independent individuals. White renders the Aborigines in terms of a psychological viewpoint that interprets these forces of emotional chaos as endemic and fundamental to an understanding of the modern psyche which, however, cannot fully conceive of itself.

*Voss* sets the primitive both within and against modernism’s flawed attempt at self-totalization, and though the rhetoric associated with Voss himself serves to assimilate the primitive in Western myth, it is done in a way that suggests that the white man is proportionally available for assimilation. Michael North’s discussion of primitivism in *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth Century Literature*, is a very useful reference and pertinent to a discussion of White. He suggests that, “the elemental sin of the European colonizers was their refusal to grant ‘opacity’ to the other peoples they encountered” (122). Voss, in thinking of the Aborigines as his natural subjects, and therefore always-already known, is engaged in precisely that refusal, and White acknowledges that as his most catastrophic mistake.

Jonathan Hart’s essay, “Translating and Resisting Empire: Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Studies”, is also worthwhile in that he expresses some ideas on the changing assessment of cultural appropriation that ties in well with what White is doing in *Voss*. Referencing the thinking of Homi K. Bhabha and Salman Rushdie, he suggests that there is merit in the idea of cross-cultural representation establishing an ‘in-between’ persona. He says that, “cultural hybridity and mediation, which involve an in-between
identity (not an essential one), oppose an essential view of cultures that are opposed in old oppositions and that appropriate and are appropriated.... The best way to look at cultural appropriation is as an interaction between changing cultures over time and not simply as a static transaction between two sides" (156,157).

However, Voss’s perspective dominates the novel so thoroughly that each character, regardless of race or gender, is in essence merely an adjunct to Voss’s interior psychological world, all contributing as various perspectives of the same psyche which is destined to overthrow itself. The Aborigines are just the most lethal example. Thus, Voss cannot benefit from, nor even interpret the perspective of the other; his impotence is total, his isolation complete. And in that isolation his word is without power.

Alone, he and the blacks would have communicated with one another by skin and silence, just as dust is not impenetrable and sticks can be interpreted after hours of intimacy.... In a native patch of scrub stood a native, singing, stamping and gesticulating with a spear.... ‘He is doubtless a poet,’ said Voss.... ‘I will ride over and speak with this poet’.... Voss rode across sustained by a belief that he must communicate intuitively with these black subjects, and finally rule them with a sympathy above words. In his limpid state of mind he had no doubt that the meaning of the song would be revealed, and provide the key to all future negotiations. But the blacks ran away. (166, 328)

Unlike Sutpen, whose power over his slaves is measured against the society which has constructed the terms of dominance, terms which he perverts but does not refute, Voss’s power is meant to be spiritual and is not conducted within the framework
of any social precedent. He expects to be understood and obeyed by the divine right with which he has invested himself. Surprisingly, it is the blacks whom Voss approaches with the greatest deference, assuming the attitude of a gentle god. White registers this vanity as the flawed and naive courage of both the imperial and the modern subject expecting to dissolve boundaries before he has negotiated the nature of them, and more importantly, expecting them to be constitutive of the self. What happens, then, is that the white man’s psychic boundaries become suddenly permeable; he is not able to create divisions or parameters with his language, and whereas Sutpen can communicate with his slaves in single, potent words of the hybrid French which is mistaken as some ‘dark and fatal tongue’ (*Absalom* 27), Voss is left open and vulnerable in a relationship of silence that effectively cancels his autonomy.

All, including the stranger himself, were gathered at the core of a mystery.... The blacks would soon begin to see inside the white man’s skin ... it was growing transparent, like clear water.... For ages everybody stood, and it seemed that nothing would ever happen beyond this commingling of silences.... Now the darkness was full of doubt and almost extinguished voices.... ‘Where do I belong if not here,’ Voss asked. ‘Tell your people we are necessary to one another. Black fellow white man friend together.’ ‘Friend?’ asked Jackie. The word was twangling in the air. They had forgotten its usage. (338, 359)

As in *Absalom, Absalom!* where the wildness with which Faulkner has contextualized Sutpen will break through the control of his ‘moral recipe’ to erupt in murder, hysteria, miscegenation and defeat, so does the wildness that Voss thinks to
subdue and dominate end up as the engine of his destruction. White represents the Aborigines in metaphorical terms that render them as incorporeal and evanescent, “Like all aboriginals they will blow with the wind, or turn into lizards when they are bored with their existing shapes” (165). As Simon During has commented, “the Aborigines represent a glimpse of that primordial, non-human order for which Voss is searching” (31). Dugald is rendered as “if dimly aware in himself of an answer to the white man’s mysticism. He could have been a thinking stick.... Inside the eyes moved some memory of myth or smoke” (170). Dugald is cut off from his own cultural legend as he is “lost between several worlds” (185), but “Voss, too was translated” (166).

White presents the white and the black as constructive of one another. Jackie, for instance, “was always speaking with the souls of those who had died in the land, and was ready to translate their wishes into dialect” (415), which includes, of course, the white man he was in service to and whom he killed. Just as Sutpen is eventually murdered by Wash Jones, a version of the self he had psychically banished (and that self predicated on systematic moral and physical violence to the class and racially other), so is Voss cut down by Jackie, a manifestation of his own interior self that has long since rendered the verdict on his psychological and moral crimes.

Everybody looked and saw a group of several blackfellows assembled in the middle distance. The light and feather of low lying mist made them appear to be standing in a cloud.... Everyone fell silent while the Aborigines of superior, godlike mien, waited upon their cloud to pass judgement, as it were.... Then the boy was stabbing, sawing and cutting, and breaking, with all of his increasing and confused manhood -- above all
breaking. He must break the terrible magic which bound him
remorselessly, endlessly to the white men. (388)

In both novels it is against this atmospheric background of a fundamental danger
informed by the presence of racial difference, that reality and perception become blurred.
As racial difference is conjured in both novels as a mood, a conjectural projection and
therefore an abstraction, despite the graphic realization of racialized social behavior, all
connections across the lines of racial difference are performed with a psychic uncertainty
even when connected with decisive action. Ideas of racial division have leapt from the
physical plain to dominate the psychological, and there each race becomes the other’s
(unwitting, unwilling) keeper. Class and gendered differences are similarly caught up in
the act of qualifying one another and we begin to recognize that modernism’s arduous
project is not, in fact, invested in the elite isolation of the individual subject, but in the
moral potentiality of the individual within collectivity. But modernism operates with
profound doubting as its moral foundation and identity itself is radicalized into something
no longer sufficiently substantiated by material reality. Intangibility has become the
basis for moral assessment, and thereby reason is divorced from moral instinct. At that
point we are plunged into the depths of the modern condition.

Modernism’s representation of moral courage is contingent on its own
engagement with the processes of cultural mystification that construct the terms of racial,
gender and class differences in conflict with one another. This is generously implied in
the texts of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Voss* where the characters’ moral confusion and
despair is shown as being a product of that mystification. In *Absalom*, there are multiple
instances of characters who are stonewalled by their own inability to pierce through
cultural prejudice. Thadious Davis has noted that "a white world is created in broad historical outline and sufficient psychological depth to subsume the myths of the Negro, but that world fails, and the vision creating it is reduced to an emotional paralysis" (180 emphasis mine). That Faulkner was deeply aware of that failure and goes to extremes to implicate the system of which he is a part, is the foundation of his novelistic vision.

In trying to understand Sutpen and the South's fallen world, the other characters become engaged in a mimicry of the degraded morality they are trying to make sense of, oppressed voices erupting and being suppressed over and over again as they all tie in to the carefully withheld and postponed knowledge of Charles Bon's racial identity, and that withholding itself performed as the pivotal crux of the novel. That deliberate non-disclosure also greatly adds to the novel's sense of the racial factor and all the moral contagion it spawns as being ultimately, devastatingly arbitrary. It renders it in its deadly functioning most particularly as a lethal social projection, in essence, the property of the imaginary. Thus we have Jason Compson's repeated descriptions of Charles Bon as 'shadowy', 'substanceless', a 'myth' or 'phantom'. Apparently unaware of the racial factor Charles represents, Compson cannot understand what the whole constellation of characters 'means'.

Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest ... you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, to make sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and nothing happens: just
the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (80)

Charles Bon hovers over the text as a deliberately withheld quotient then. Nothing makes sense until the suspicion of his blackness comes to light; then the corrupted morality which governs the novel is slammed into focus. While it is true that Faulkner nowhere makes it explicitly clear that Charles Bon does, in fact, have black blood, it is that conjecture that turns the novel and any arguing about the point is uselessly digressive. Daniel Singal has noted that Faulkner confirms Bon’s mixed identity by a comment he made to a Hollywood producer to whom he was trying to sell the film rights to Absalom. He said simply, “It’s about miscegenation” (202).

As Thadious Davis says, “he is the abstraction who is made ‘nigger’ in order to complete the pattern of the legend” (198). He is narratively most effective represented as such. The notion of him adjusts itself in the psyche of each character, and he influences every available moral qualification. We watch him move from one incarnation to the next: from a collective assumption, to a clue in a photograph, to a son lost between two worlds, to a disembodied voice that is his final and eloquent statement. Rosa says, “I never even saw him dead. I heard an echo, but not the shot; I saw a closed door, but did not enter it”; for Rosa he was just “the abstraction which we had nailed into a box....he was absent, and he was, he returned and he was not; three women put something into the earth and covered it, and he had never been” (123).

Charles’s replacement of Judith’s photograph with that of his octoroon mistress and son is the subtlest of signals that Muhlenfeld suggests “Judith seems to have accepted
... as a message, a commission to care for Bon’s quasi wife and son” (79). But even Judith’s noble character is undercut here by the fact that she shrinks from touching Charles Etienne, though she does eventually die from nursing him through a fever. And Clytie, in turn protecting her own suspicions, ensures Charles Etienne’s estrangement by watching over him like a prison guard, whisking him away whenever she sees him playing with other boys, black or white. He eventually plays his own trump card by marrying a coal-black woman. And in Jim Bond’s cry the full tragedy of Sutpen and Bon literally releases itself into the wind of the world, still an abstraction.

Noel Polk has suggested that we

...should be suspicious of the suddenness and the sufficiency with which the race card provides a solution for [Quentin and Shreve’s] narrative convolutions.... But in the novel which questions everything, it is curious that they do not question [this].... Sutpen’s race card must be understood as Quentin and Shreve’s narrative ace.... Race is in Absalom and in Faulkner generally, a mask for very serious matters of sexuality and gender. (Dark House, 138).

I think this position must be granted validity as it is the habit of modernism itself to deal with psychological and social issues as inversions of one another; it is the interference between them that gives rise to modernist interpretations of subjective psychic reality. This is borne out in both Absalom and Voss as Faulkner and White chart the course of male identity within female, and racial issues within both. In so doing they anticipate and engage the plurality of postmodern representations that will supposedly displace modernism; they are in fact its center. It is a center defined by moral
disturbance as the collation of identity issues and the voices that reveal them uncover multiple individual and social fractures. Personal courage in this modernist condition must generate itself from within the heart of moral flaw.

Although Sutpen and Voss are presented as being themselves psychologically unaffected by the moral chaos -- their control is dependent on it -- it is the medium in which every other character exists. Sutpen's and Voss's separation from moral answerability affords them the power of manipulating the moral environment. Personal relationships are available to them only through constructions of dominance, and it is within those that they try to coerce the moral collapse of others. Any challenging moral perspective contends against their willed designs. These power plays, however, are conducted against an unmistakably modernist background in which a real, externalized sense of authority has been taken away.

Arendt suggests that the loss of authority "is tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world, which indeed since then has begun to shift, to change and transform itself with ever-increasing rapidity from one shape into another, as though we were living and struggling with a Protean universe where everything at any moment can change into anything else" (Portable, 465). Both authors, to some extent, seem to agree that that very changeability should be engaged, or at least that to stabilize it, all possibilities of psychic change must be accommodated. The two main characters' amorality can be viewed as a misbegotten courage that strives to replace an unavailable authoritative moral direction; it is how they try to order the world. Their moral disenfranchisement is a psychic inevitability conditioned not only by historical specificity (Absalom) but by the moral vacuity of modernism's wasteland (Voss). Thus Sutpen must
invert his own innate recoiling from social injustice to become its instrument, and Voss subverts his intense fear of non-being by becoming himself the destructive force.

But it is their perversion of the courage to be which has turned their possibilities for self-recognition into an assault on the substantiation of any other morally independent self and which serves as an indictment of moral tyranny. It is a tyranny that Faulkner and White illustrate as being held in place by misrecognition, non-recognition of gender, racial and class difference. This discloses the special attention modernism pays to moral awakening. It is an awakening contingent on the discovery of collective morality which can be heard only in a plurality of voices.

In *Voss*, as they are forced to huddle in the Aboriginal caves, the explorer begins to resent Le Mesurier whom "he sensed was possessed of a gristly will, or daemon, not unlike his own" (244). He therefore sets out to psychically destroy him.

And now Voss began to go with him, never far distant, taunting him for his failures, for his inability to split open rock, and discover the final secret. Frank, I will tell you, said his mentor, you are filled with the hallucinations of intellectual power. I could assist you perhaps, who enjoy the knowledge that comes with sovereignty over every province of illusion, that is to say, spiritual power; indeed, as you may have suspected, I am I am I am... (246)

Obviously, we are not meant to be fooled by the totalitarian vision of these men who would sidestep the interlocking dependence of one self with another, but are compelled to join empathetically with those who in their wake "shriek ... their feeble I-am-I into the desert of chance and disaster" as Faulkner elsewhere describes it (*Pylon*,
119). We are forcefully inclined to recognize the centrality of moral considerations in modernism. As Faulkner says of Sutpen,

To me he is to be pitied. He was not a depraved -- he was amoral, he was ruthless, completely self-centered. To me he is to be pitied, as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family, of the human family, is to be pitied. Sutpen didn’t believe that. He was Sutpen. He was going to take what he wanted because he was big enough and strong enough, and I think that people like that are destroyed sooner or later, because one has got to belong to the human family, and to take a responsible part in the human family. (*FU, 80-81*)

So is Voss destroyed by separation from his fellow beings, his denial of the true courage involved in the acceptance of moral answerability, his inability to look directly at his own fears, which are like Sutpen’s, ultimately the fear of not belonging:

He himself realized that he had always been abominably frightened, even at the height of his divine powers, a frail god upon a rickety throne, afraid of opening letters, afraid of making decisions, afraid of the instinctive knowledge in the eyes of good men, of the elastic nature of the passions.... Now at least, reduced to the bones of manhood, he could admit to all this and listen to his teeth rattling in the darkness. Oh Jesus, he cried. Of this too, mortally frightened, of the arms or sticks reaching down from the eternal tree ... of the great legends becoming truth. (384)

Tillich has suggested that “the new in history always comes when people least
believe in it. But certainly it comes only in the moment when the old becomes visible as old and tragic and dying, and when no way out is seen. We live in such a moment; such a moment is our situation” (The Essential Paul Tillich, 4). This idea can be set alongside Arendt who says, “with the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but the thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a predetermined aspect of the past. It could be only now will the past open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things that no one has yet had the ears to hear” (Human, 464).

As modernism’s readers, we are meant to question all forms of moral ‘legends’ and to generate from that doubting a recognition of the modern subject’s flawed courage as he or she tries to posit a self in a world divided from moral certainty. Faulkner in 1936 and White in 1957 are together engaged in modernism’s long “day of listening” (Absalom, 23) that strains to hear the full register of its morality. That virtually the same enterprise is in play in the work of novelists separated by cultures and decades, speaks to the adamant insistence of modernism that moral discovery is to be found only through the concert of all voices; then shall we get at the true dialogue between man and himself.
NOTES

1. Note that Sherwood Anderson and Faulkner worked together on a novel with the title *Dark Laughter* (New York, 1925) which explores the idea of the black person’s deeper sensitivity to human nature. In white, southern thinking of that time it is an idea redolent with threat to the white subject.

2. For an interesting discussion of the changing terms of moral consciousness, see Jurgen Habermas’s *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 98-109. His idea that any attempt at “universalist morality has to make up for the loss of concrete ethical substance” (109) underscores the division that modernism has set itself up in between, and speaks to the difficulty of instituting what Max Weber has designated as an ‘ethics of responsibility.’


6. That White utilized Leichhardt’s letters and journals is substantiated by his biographer, David Marr. p.247, 316). Also, there are White’s own letters to M. Aurousseau, the translator of Leichhardt’s letters (*Letters 10, iii. 1958*).


8. For another argument concerning Faulkner’s position between Stocism and Christianity, see Cleanth Brooks, *The Yoknapatawpha Country*, (372-375.)

9. See Richard Godden *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South’s Long Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), wherein he devotes an entire chapter to the relationships between Haiti and *Absalom, Absalom!*
Chapter Three: The Single Line of Modernism’s Separate Roads: 
*Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot*

He shuddered to realize that there could never be an end to the rescue of men from the rubble of their own ideas. So the souls were crying and combing their smoked-out hair. They were already exhausted by the bells, prayers, orders and curses of the many fires at which, in the course of their tormented lives, it had been their misfortune to assist.... Always separate during the illusory life of men, now they touched, it seemed at the point of failure.... To touch to touch ... not so much in the hope of being rescued, as to drive the hatred out. *Riders in the Chariot*

...listening, he seems to hear ... the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable. *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?* *Light in August*

*Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot* are both scaffolded against a sense of socially condoned, religiously endorsed hatred which conditions the dislocation of modernist subjectivity.

In neither case is it an apology for a fallen order, nor is there an interest in absolution for modernism’s elite white, male subject. Rather, there is in each novel an insistence on registering the possible reasons for a collective moral failure. Faulkner and White track these through the life trajectories of ‘outsiders’ whose alienation is itself substantive of the represented social realities and their formative religious hypocrisies.

Faulkner’s novel is set in the depression-era South with Jim Crow laws intact, racist fever high and Calvinist severity surging as the thematic undercurrent. White sets his own novel in post World-War II Sydney, where the forces of a modernity he despises crush any and all individualism, where the ‘bloody reffo’ is viewed as the scourge of society, where anti-semitism
is profound, and where innate spirituality is brutally countered by a corrupt Anglicanism that operates just slightly north of social violence. As Simon During has noted of White’s role as cultural critic, “White’s spirituality ... may often represent ... a relay from religion to fiction, but it also relies on what can be called a critical theory of social origins whose main point can be stated quite simply: society starts and continues in violence, human beings group together only by excluding and murdering their own” (55). In both novels it is precisely this formula which metaphorically and literally dictates social behavior.

The disparity in setting, indeed in the publication dates of the two novels (1932 and 1961 respectively), facilitates the isolation of what I am arguing is a continuing modernist emphasis on the enlistment of those subjects who have traditionally been denied a voice. Again, as I have argued in the previous chapters, modernism cannot be held simply as a period easily bracketed by the two world wars, but must be looked at as a movement that continues to metamorphosize. Its intentional inherencies, particularly that of breaking with rigidified notions of subjectivity and thereby inviting an adversarial attitude towards society, stretch out, as well, to an anticipated representative assimilation that is deeply encouraged by modernism itself.

Patrick White has been called both a throwback to pre-war modernists, and more consistently a late modernist (see Simon During, *Patrick White*, 6), but modernist is a label for White that none dispute, though the majority of his work was published in the 1950's or after. It might also be well to bear in mind James Mellard’s observation that “unlike birth in the organic world, birth in the world of discursive objects such as ideologies does not always happen at a given moment nor, paradoxically, does it always occur in a time-present. Instead, the birth of discursive objects occurs retrospectively.... Modernism is one of those discursive objects constituted retrospectively” (460). White, like Faulkner, was operating intuitively through a form of artistic cultural analysis whose complexity is still being gauged. Long after ‘high
modernism’ is considered as over, White was as effectively immersed in its stylistic attributes as was Faulkner, suggesting that each artistic manifestation is, in essence, the movement continuing to invent itself as a discursive field. And it must be remarked that modernist literature reacts to retrospective analysis by releasing new insights which are increasingly (not decreasingly) applicable to contemporary modernity, particularly in the field of identity politics. Simply put: modernism remains in process.

It is also important to grasp it as an artistic, intellectual and political modality the complexity of which resists efforts, as Charles Altieri phrases it, “to find a level on which we can address modernism as a single set of interlocking pressures, projections and strategies” (127). Modernist literature has yet to be self-declarative, but must be analyzed in the ongoing sequence of discoveries that incrementally uncover its elusive schematic. Sanford Schwartz has observed that we may have to “abandon the unitary notion of modernism in favor of an irreducible variety of ‘modernisms’” (19). This idea engages an awareness of modernist literature’s active representational multiplicity that cannot be contained or dismissed by critical singularities. It also recognizes that modernism’s perpetual self-destabilization is itself reflective of contemporary cultural fragmentation. Faulkner and White’s cultural and chronological distance only fortifies the validity of their comparison as modernism’s progressive engagement with marginality is so evident in both.

Both authors choose to activate the stranger as social catalyst, dissociation as the augur of interdependence. And both authors seem to suggest that the totality of social moral identity is ultimately what is at stake in the practice of social elitism, an idea that extends the parameters of modernism renowned as it is for its myopic interest in the individual subject.

Daniel Singal has commented that “the best way to comprehend Faulkner’s intentions for *Light in August* is to view the saga of Joe Christmas as an attempt to test the human capacity to
achieve personal identity under the most extreme conditions a modernist author could possibly contrive” (The Making of a Modernist, 171). This Faulkner did by creating a character who, as he later described him, “didn’t know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race. That was his tragedy” (Faulkner in the University, 72).

Joe’s ‘deliberate eviction’, implemented by the willful and destructively opportunistic manipulation of his two possible racial identities, pulls in upon itself a whole system of carefully registered oppositions. Joe’s status as ‘nothing’ is anything but that. That the degree of his non-belonging is so violently encouraged by the character himself registers it as the isolated conceptual epicenter of social imagining. With the introduction of Joe Christmas, that system must now be re-calibrated to account for identity that has become indeterminate.

Joe Christmas profoundly alters strategies of social placement by an identity gaming that is aptly caught in this idea of Phillip Julien’s: “The wish is that the shape of my absent body be drawn in the 0 -- creating a hole ... what Freud calls Versagung, not frustration, but refusal, no-saying, perdi(c)tion. From this subtraction, the subject of the unconscious is born, born at the place where the said originates as signifier of negation, permitting the subject to refuse the symbolic order” (Jacques Lacan’s Return to Freud, 147). In the character of Joe Christmas, Faulkner has effected a tear in the collective social psyche. It is a psychic collapse registered not just as the ‘tragedy’ of a single subject, but as an aperture through which to enlarge modern society’s knowledge of itself.

As Donald Kartiganer has suggested in his essay, “What I Chose to Be: Freud, Faulkner, Joe Christmas, and the Abandonment of Design”, “this radical intrusion of an antideterminism into the center of the most deterministic of ... novelistic modes [is] a gesture of freedom.... Joe Christmas ... positions himself at the center of psychoanalysis and the modern imagination, both of which are characterized by a powerful determinism constantly striving to free itself from its
findings" (289, 301). So Faulkner plunges his racially unidentifiable character into the heart of his racially constructed community -- establishing him as its heart -- the unknown that conditions the ability to be known. And just so, Patrick White destabilizes his own fictionalized Australian world by the infiltration of racial and emotional outcasts that maneuver as society's free radicals, as it were, circulating independently and capriciously -- in essence, operating as its released unconscious.

As in any act of rebellion, Faulkner and White both recognize that the freedom from established orders of power can be gained only from a disruption of its internal mechanics. Again, as in any rebellion, it is the marginalized subjects who are in the best position to effect such a disruption. Though their oppressed position is the most rigorously determined, they are likewise invested with the greatest latent freedom in the very fact that the social codes which deny them power and privilege also allow them to, in fact, insist that they remain undiscovered. As undiscovered psychological quantities, then, the outcasts in Faulkner’s and White’s novels -- the women, the blacks, the Jews -- are both the freshest and the boldest resource for social evaluation. Their representation forces a psychological incursion into the social orders which themselves construct the authors and against which, as modernists, they rebel. The entrenched patterning of social brutality shows in the harshest relief when examined next to the exposed subjectivity of those it would deny.

Faulkner and White each organize their novels around a religious thematic epicenter that ironically and brutally conditions its internal coherence on separateness, on polarities that do not hold things apart in equivalent balance, but that divide and divorce. Faulkner is operating, of course, out of the Calvinist tradition with its harsh morality and belief in the fallen nature of man. Calvinism’s emphasis on the unredeemable depravity of sexuality, particularly female sexuality coupled with a belief in predestination underpins *Light in August* and sets the stage for
the characters’ ability to negotiate a sense of their moral identity.

White is interested in juxtaposing disparate traditions of Western religion, interweaving characters who are representative in turn of the Primitive or Pagan, Jewish and Christian. He tends to exalt the Primitive, and to some extent Judaism, reserving most of his condemnation for what he sees as the debased and hypocritical Australian Protestant as typified in the vicious characters Mrs. Flack and Mrs. Jolley. He represents Judaism and Christianity as being not only thoroughly intolerant and antagonistic to one another, but internally fraught with moral paradoxes that qualify each equally. Of the era preceding World War II, the omniscient narrator observes ironically, “All those emancipated Jews were ready to support him in the claim that the age of enlightenment and universal brotherhood had dawned at last in Western Europe. Jews and goyim were taking one another -- intermittently at least -- moist-eyed to their breasts” (Riders, 97). Himmelfarb later observes of his own religion, “We live inside a closed circle. That is our greatest weakness” (124).

White’s arguments are not so much against the precepts of the religions, per se (as they are in Faulkner) but with the institutional and social bastardizations of the spiritual message. Faulkner’s criticism of the unforgiving Calvinist doctrine is, perhaps, easier to track as it perpetuates and underwrites the divisionary principles upon which his fictional Southern world rests, and likewise conditions the characters’ interior dualities. White, on the other hand, while certainly condemnatory of the easy and deadly judgementalism he associates with the protestant bourgeoisie, insinuates a certain brand of idealized spirituality that serves as the middle ground, the battle ground actually, between the violent divisiveness which results when religious principles collide with social hierarchy. In the world of Light in August, Calvinism provides a doctrine which justifies the dominant social practices; in Riders in the Chariot the innate depravity and cruelty of human nature (an idea itself consistent with Calvinist beliefs) is what
corrupts the potential for religious purity. In White’s novel, the socializing process itself acts as
the antagonist to religious freedom and enlightenment.

In both novels the collision of religion and society scapegoats particular types of
individuals who cannot conform to the doubled ideals. The act of distinguishing becomes itself
an act of violence -- not to recognize, to distinguish -- but to forever set apart. And therefore, in
either work we are engaged in fictional worlds divested of moral equilibrium. The polarities
operative within them -- fate vs. free will, female vs. male, white vs. black, the collective vs. the
individual, etc. -- register not the strength of natural forces which harmonize and adjust, but
rather the manipulated, disastrously contrived terms of exclusion. In both works, there is a
strong supposition that the modern subject has been aggressively separated from a natural
confluence with the world, “the theme of man strained away from nature”, as Cleanth Brooks
puts it of *Light in August* (*Yoknapatawpha*, 47). This in turn blocks the characters’ ability to
assess the nature of the self.

The interruption in what is the socially accepted ‘natural’ scheme is exemplified by the
fact that most of the pivotal characters in either novel are actually or metaphorically motherless,
fatherless, or both. Joe Christmas’s father was killed by his grandfather, Doc Hines. His mother
died (unnecessarily) in childbirth. His foster mother, Mrs. McEachern, is the ineffectual shadow
of her husband, “with something queer about her eyes, as if whatever she saw or heard, she saw
or heard through a more immediate manshape or manvoice, as if she were the medium and the
vigorous and ruthless husband the control” (*Light*, 148). (The subsumption of the female into the
male and visa versa is an issue that I will address in some detail later.) Gail Hightower
remembers his invalid mother and his father as phantoms rather than as influential human beings,
latching instead on to fantasies of his grandfather who is himself described as a ‘ghost’. Joanna
Burden’s mother dies while she is young, as does Lena Grove’s. In Joanna’s long recounting of
her life history she ‘remembers’ her mother in only one sentence (Light, 249).

*Riders in the Chariot* operates in the same vein. The Aborigine Alf Dubbo is an orphan, “the bastard of an old black gin out at the reserve” (*Riders*, 314). His foster parents, like Joe’s, inculcate him with the unwanted precepts of their religion, “which the rector had tried to wind around a mind that found them strange, suffocating, superfluous” (333). Ruth Godbold, like Lena, is asked by her mother on her deathbed to be a mother to her own father. Mary Hare is despised and ignored by her mother and witnesses the suicide of her father. Though Mordecai Himmelfarb has a strong connection with his parents, his father’s apostasy and his mother’s consequent death orphans him spiritually. With the exclusion of Lena Grove and Ruth Godbold, all the main characters are childless. All are cut off from the prescribed social order of normative familial structure, even Lena and Ruth who metaphorically embody the maternal aspect of it.

The characters struggle instead under the would-be moral order exemplified by unforgiving religious tenets and divisionary rules of social conduct that result almost exclusively in individual and collective psychological chaos. Yet both novels leave the reader busy reorganizing possibilities of faith in humankind and its availability for harmonious and peaceful connection with itself, a faith that can answer to the modulations and influences and *rights* of disparate subjectivities. This disruption of social mores reveals new dimensions in what is a thoroughly modernist skirmish for the reclamation of individual identity within a defeated social conglomerate, in that the investigation of the isolated modern subject is concerned less with its own reflection than with a reabsorption into the collective, the resolution of the one absolutely dependent on the rescue of the other. Cleanth Brooks has rightly noted that, “the community is the circumambient atmosphere, the essential ether, of Faulkner’s fiction” (62). And so it is with Patrick White. But with both authors it is the interpellation of the alienated subject that makes
that ‘atmosphere’ available for critique. (I refer to the represented social worlds of *Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot* as ‘defeated’, in so far as the moral dislocation of their subjects is presented as the direct product of societal flaws and not as a result of the willful deviance of its *outsiders* -- they are, in fact, the societies’ most constitutive *insiders*; they are in essence not its orphans but its natural children.)

Both novels are constructed with remarkable similarity, each offering multiple and unrelated life stories as the surprising, difficult novelistic unity. In *Light in August* we are compelled to consider Lena Grove, Gail Hightower and Joe Christmas as somehow complementary, deeply so, regardless of a seemingly insurmountable distance in experience. In *Riders in the Chariot* we are asked to recognize the mad but visionary social outcast Mary Hare, the broken Jew, Mordecai Himmelfarb, the half-caste Aborigine, Alf Dubbo, and the poverty stricken earth-mother, Ruth Godbold, as essential counterparts. The reader is subtly enlisted in trying to establish the emotional and psychological links between these divergent characters by a contrapuntal structure that flies in the face of even modernist experimentalism in that contextually they have very little actual interrelation.³

In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas, often served up by critics as a counterpoint to Lena Grove, never knows or even knows of her -- or Byron Bunch. She’s heard of Joe, but never meets him or Joanna Burden. Joe Christmas encounters Gail Hightower only in his death tableau as an extra in a play might bump into another actor. Hightower and Joanna Burden never know one another though they have lived in the same town for many years. Byron Bunch has remained a “man of mystery among his fellow workers for seven years” (49), and never encounters either Joanna or Joe. Yet we come to understand their story not as tangentially, or even coincidentally connected, but as a synthesis of the abstractions which are socially imagined precisely to prevent such connection. As Scott Romine has noted in his recent work on Southern
communities, "Light in August posits a grammar, or set of structural imperatives, that cannot be reduced to the level of the individual and that, to some extent is shared between individuals ... establishing the community’s continuous mind" (159). The novel’s disconnected outsiders are a communal psychic registration of the society which has produced them.

Likewise, in Riders in the Chariot, we are presented with characters linked, primarily, by virtue of their difference -- difference of sex and race, class, religion and experience. As in Faulkner, White chooses to keep their interaction minimal, emphasizing that it is their alienation that permits them a common vision strong enough to transcend the various barbarities they have suffered, and pure enough to articulate a faith untrammeled by the conventions of social hatred. The effect in both novels is to force the reader under the surface of the isolated lifestory to access the troubled dynamics that govern a common social setting, on to which we see the potential for grafting a new system of moral cohesion from its isolated strands.

In his essay, "Light in August: The Closed Society and Its Subjects", Andre Bleikasten suggests that,

One divides to oppose.... To enforce these divisions in society and ensure their maintenance, it is important that they should be guaranteed by solid barriers blocking off all circulation, all communication between what has been ordered to be kept apart.... Nothing is more detestable and more alarming to such a society than the in-between, the intermingled, the impure -- that which blurs its neat fictions and undermines its dogmatic certainties. (96)

By featuring the outcast as the moral bearer, in some sense the moral analyst, of society’s dysfunction, Faulkner and White both set about exposing the external variable -- the feared and rejected and marginalized subject -- as the kernel of a society’s interior identity and they thereby succeed (at least in the terms of fictional discovery), in breaching Bleikasten’s ‘closed society’.
It is a process of inversion that replicates itself; as the outsider moves in, everything else accordingly begins to turn itself inside out, which is what spawns the fear of the alien element in the first place. The polarized mechanisms that govern Faulkner's and White's respective fictional worlds are challenged by the penetration of subjects whose reality they are forced to encompass. The synthetic divisions of good and evil, guilty and innocent, stranger and citizen, indeed, white and black, become suddenly not stable, abstract cultural inherencies, but mutable fictions that must be looked at.

It is, in fact, in the represented act of looking that Faulkner and White are best able to disturb a system of dichotomies between which the alienated subject is unable to emotionally survive. By utilizing the outsider as the psychological viewpoint, the authors are forcing a tangent direction of novelistic social observation. Their attention to the marginalized person is vital here, their focus on the separated, the voiceless, the ones to whom traditionally it is not given to see or be seen except in terms of how their submission, their tacit agreement not to engage in society's "economy of looking," as Patricia McKee phrases it in her recent *Producing American Races* (128), maintains the status quo. And it is in this innovation that we can register Patrick White and William Faulkner as pushing the borders of modernist representation, anticipating the need for multiple and diverse perspective. They reconfigure the dynamics of observation still further by the textual emphasis apparent in both novels on strange equivalences between the observer and the observed that occur between the marginalized characters.

Patrick White attempts to unite the whole of his novel on the basis of a vision that is shared by his four protagonists -- the 'chariot' of the title, that appears to each of them individually, each of them one of its 'riders'. The symbol itself is of less importance than is the notion of a commonality of visual experience that unifies them above a society that is capable of seeing them only in the most limited sense. Here, White is, of course, copying common religious
precedent in the use of symbol to convey far wider metaphorical meaning as in his rather overt allusion to Blake's divine figures drawn by symbolic creatures. Yet he remains conscious of his social context and is quite careful to show that his visionaries are themselves still limited, acknowledging the painful slowness with which the vision of the marginalized will be encorporated into the full gaze of society.

Mordecai Himmelfarb, in one of his few conversations with Mary Hare cries, "But not the riders! I cannot visualize. I do not understand the riders!" Mary Hare answers, "Do you see everything at once? My own house is full of things waiting to be seen. Even quite common objects are shown to us only when it is time for them to be" (Riders, 155). Yoked together in a vision the import of which they cannot fully comprehend, the riders in White's chariot still cannot recognize one another except to understand that their roles as seers makes them existential equals. This is made clear in an exchange between Mary Hare and Himmelfarb: "Are Jews so very different? 'There is all the difference in the world.' 'Do you like it?' 'We have no alternative.' 'I understand,' she said, 'I, too, am different.' 'That would appear mathematically and morally to make us equal'" (94). In a world where acceptance is determined by likeness, than difference becomes its own measure of equality.

The author concedes, however, that not only is the empowered person, in this case the white, male author and omniscient narrator, himself situated by authority and tradition, incapable of fully seeing the Other, but neither are the black subject, the female, the Jew, able to fully look upon one another. As Alf Dubbo says, "That's how I want it. The faces must be halfturned away, but you still gotta understand what is in the part that is hidden. Now I think I see. I will get it all in time" (283). White nevertheless persistently reiterates how it is the vision of his outcasts that both assimilates and threatens as they gauge the terms of their existence and their inter-relationships. "Despite the difference of geography and race, they were, and had always
been, engaged on a similar mission. Approaching from opposite directions, it was the same
darkness and the same marsh which threatened to engulf their movements” (304).

Mary Hare’s ability to ‘see’ is a measure of the danger she poses to what comes across in
the novel as a virulent Australian complacency, a complacency the equilibrium of which is
maintained by patterns of social exclusion. Mary is utterly set apart from social convention,
totally disingenuous, representative of nature itself -- a force that White’s represented Australian
modernity cannot abide. She sees instantly through her father’s cultural pretensions and as
Geoffrey Dutton noted in his 1961 review of Riders is used by White to aim “a grand satirical
swipe at the buffeting that civilization has taken in its efforts to transplant in Australian soil” (2).

‘I shall go out now,’ said Mary at last, ‘and look.’.... He was looking at her, trying
to engulf her in a tragedy he was preparing. Looking and looking.... She could
not prevent herself from continuing to look, right into him, as he sat in his
uncomfortable chair, and although he had forgiven her for the crime of being, it
was doubtful if he could ever forgive her for that of seeing. (35,36)

Of Mary Hare’s observation of Alf Dubbo, White intimates her capacity not only for
disinterested judgement, but for empathy, assimilation and an instinctive recognition of those
who exist outside of modernity’s false vision and division.

So she would peer out at her dark man on those occasions when he walked
through the lanes which ran past Xanadu. Once she had entered through his eyes,
and at first glance recognized familiar furniture, and once again she had entered
in, and their souls had stroked each other with reassuring feathers, but very briefly
... from behind closed eyelids each would have recognized the other as an apostle
for truth. (62)

As Mary Hare is condemned by society and her family as simply mad, Mordecai
Himmelfarb, in his turn, is expected by his people to be a prophet: "You will see," his wife proclaims" (126). This simple declaration is Himmelfarb's gravest burden and a capacity that White implies can do nothing but set him aside as the perennial stranger on his 'journey to heaven', as his surname translates.

Later in the novel, as he escapes from Friedensdorf, the burning concentration camp (which White again names with heavy irony as it translates literally as 'peace village'), Himmelfarb simultaneously loses his glasses, literally the ability to see, just as he gains the role of a survivor. The conjunction of the two is certainly not coincidental as, at least in this instance, surviving is itself the greatest betrayal, the premier severing of connection and an inadvertent admission that the conditions of the world are tenable. Any vision that can pierce its lethal hypocrisies is irrelevant. Surviving earmarks the outsider who is able to persist in spite of every attempt to eliminate him or her from the social structure. Invoking the Holocaust as the apex of human intolerance, the violence of which recasts all possibilities of seeing, White temporarily leaves his visionary blind, his survivor metaphorically unborn. He writes, "The well-planned establishment which he had known as Friedensdorf was enclosed in a blood-red blur, or aura, at the center of which he lay, like a chrysalis swathed in some mysterious, supernatural cocoon.... It was then Himmelfarb realized he had lost his spectacles. The discovery was more terrible than fire" (Riders, 185).

Himmelfarb's victimization ultimately increases his ability to see, and like Mary Hare he effortlessly penetrates the minds of those he walks among, but to what end? It is a threat that is constituted by merely looking, the act of perceiving itself an injunction against a society which refuses collective introspection. Yet, as it is a facility reserved to those who remain on the periphery, so, too, does the knowledge gained by this looking remain outside the society's construction of public meaning.
Nor would they have guessed that the being, in grey topcoat, with stout stick, was not as solid as he appeared, that he had, in fact, reached a state of practical disembodiment, and would enter into the faces of those he passed. This became a habit with the obsessed Jew ... as all rivers must finally mingle with the shapeless sea, so he might receive into his own formlessness, the blind souls of men... But the unresponsive souls would rock, and shudder, and recoil from being drawn into the caverns of his eyes. And once somebody had screamed. (158)

Also, like Mary, Himmelfarb is able to recognize his fellow initiates, as in his curious relationship with Alf Dubbo, the integrity of which must be maintained by a mutual silence. By this convention White intimates that the two visionaries remark the similarity of their difference but are not capable of piercing the other’s interiority. Mordecai discovers Alf secretively reading Ezekiel one day and instinctively knows that they both participate in the vision of the prophetic chariot:

Yet with his fellow flotsam, the Jew had formed he now realized, an extraordinary non-relationship. If that could describe anything so solid, while unratified, so silent, while so eloquent. How he would sense the abo’s approach. How he went to meet his silence. How they would lay balm on the wounds every time they passed.... How they began to communicate the blackfellow could not have explained. But a state of trust became established subtler than any human means, so that he resented it when the Jew finally addressed him. (308, 371)

White makes it quite clear that the looking, the seeing, of his outsiders cannot itself conceive of, or even yet survive, active interpenetration, but rather figures as an alignment of a potentially inclusive future social vision. It is as though these marginalized and persecuted subjects are arrayed as a strange frontline for the advent of a new collective perception. And this
is suggestive of the modernist authors' prescience in creating affinities between subjects who are, in fact, prohibited from 'understanding' one another, as their empathetic connection initiates a force for social homogenization that undercuts all the tenets of social power structures.

But alienation remains the point as becomes acutely clear in the rendering of the Aborigine, Alf Dubbo. "There was nobody there, except the blackfellow, who could have been staring at himself in the glass, or else using the mirror as an opening through which to escape.... Alf Dubbo was stationed as if upon an eminence, watching what he alone was gifted or fated enough to see. Neither the actor nor the spectator, he was that most miserable of human beings, the artist. All aspects, all possibilities were already splintering, forming in him" (Riders, 217, 406). In the character of Dubbo, the faculty of looking is particularly freighted by the fact that he is a painter. As such, he is, in fact, the ultimate spectator, his looking invested with a genius that can arrest judgement in the permanence of art: "He would put into his picture all that he had ever known.... flowing from his hands in dreams that only he, or some inconceivable stranger might recognize and interpret" (326).

Again, White is careful to isolate Dubbo's vision. Though he is more than once qualified as the one "who saw the most" (406, 412), his vision is also rendered as the most inaccessible. On viewing his early painting, his foster mother, Mrs. Pask, asks, "'What are these peculiar objects, or fruit -- are they?' He did not say... 'They must mean something,' Mrs. Pask insisted. 'Those,' he said, then, 'are dreams.' He was ashamed though. 'Dreams! But there is nothing to indicate that they are any such thing. Just a shape.'... 'That is because they have not been dreamt yet,' he uttered slowly" (317). White seems well aware that the black subject's vision, even in the context of what is a boldly fronted characterization, will perforce be relegated to the margins. (There is also an implied but unmistakable suggestion that modernist artistry has itself not born its final fruits, but whose discoveries and intentions are still nascent.)
It should be noted that the writing of *Riders in the Chariot* was concurrent with what the politically liberal, and certainly the aborigines saw as several advancements in assimilationist policies, notably the founding of the FCAATSI -- The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines -- in 1958, and the extension of voting rights to the Aborigines in 1962. However, as might be expected, the slow political efforts at inclusion did little to ameliorate active social exclusion. White himself, however, was not interested in having his character accepted by Australian society. It is precisely his ostracism that White makes use of. That he does so at the expense of any conception of Dubbo’s ancestral legacy is an omission that cannot go by unobserved. As During has commented,

> Because Alf is a seer of the Chariot, too, his Aboriginality is much more a matter of his being the victim of everyday racism than of any core Aboriginal belief.... By being positioned as an ‘abo’ he can maintain and explore his difference privately; he can resist assimilation and join that tiny community of seers scapegoated by Australian society.... The important point is not so much that the novel’s structuration of characters mirrors an early postcolonial politics of ethnicity, but that nothing in Dubbo’s Aboriginality is affirmed as part of Australia’s future. (35).

I tend to grant White more leniency on this point, as I believe that there is implicit in his stance towards the marginalized subject a recognition of the incalculable damage done by traditions of exclusion, an attitude which itself must accept the worth of that which has been silenced, and which mandates the circulation of the oppressed voice. It might also be pertinent to include David J. Tacey’s interpretation of Dubbo’s painting that, according to him,

> ...encapsulates the primordial relation of every White mystic to the source.... The foetus-like forms are actually dangling on the tree, like fruits of the maternal
source. White’s entire oeuvre has pointed towards this single image and the various meanings it suggests.... The world-tree provides nourishment and shelter but keeps its child victim bound to its image, and entirely subordinate to its crushing embrace. (109)

It is essential to note the importance of White’s gesture in positioning the Aborigine, Alf Dubbo, as the seer who is able to access this central image, and to understand it not simply as a nod to his primitive sensibility, but as an intuited suggestion that in his complex subjectivity lies the possible source of cultural (re)awakening. Insofar as White cuts Dubbo off from his Aboriginal past, White indicates that he must learn to see in a totally new way that will synthesize what has become an exile from history as well as an exile from his contemporary world. What might appear as an intentional dismissal of cultural legacy, might also be qualified as a recognition of the blinded subject caught in the interval that erupts when one culture is preempted by another, even though that interval is only partially formed, and who can look neither backward or forward with any recognition: “He had little desire to learn from the achievement of other artists, just as he had no wish to profit by or collaborate in the experience of other men.... Dubbo was always the abo. Nor would he have wished it otherwise, for that way he could travel quicker, deeper, into the hunting grounds of his imagination” (342, 371).

Overlooking what is admittedly a clumsy and stereotypically trite metaphor, White does on more than one occasion indicate that Dubbo is operating on dual levels which inform or disrupt his vision equally. Michael Cotter has observed that White “deliberately conveys the relevance of the Aboriginal spiritual values to the European range of sensibilities.... Alf Dubbo is a half-caste and so a product of both Europe and Aboriginal Australia. Moreover, the bicultural sensibility within which his vision is at first happily conceived is clearly synthetic” (173). And although Dubbo is effectively removed from any substantiating historical past, White
consistently reveals him as culturally doubled: "His mind was another matter, because even he
could not calculate how it might become once it was set free. In the meantime, it would keep
jumping and struggling, like a fish left behind in a pool -- or two fish, since the white people his
guardians had dropped in another" (349). White, perhaps inevitably, buys into the idea of the
mixed race person as irrevocably caught between socio-cultural possibilities, particularly as the
Aboriginal represented as either degraded savage or noble shaman, a dichotomy that effectively
cancels itself at every stage when represented by the authoritative, white Other.

White says, "Dubbo does some very squalid things. One reason is that the Australian
Aboriginal in contact with civilization is a very squalid creature.... I wanted a contrast between
Dubbo's physical squalor and depravity and his devotion to his gift" (Letters, 196). White's
resistance to post-colonial ideology is still dogged by its prejudices. However, what I recognize
as an innate impulse of modernist authors to some extent overrides this ideological stagnation in
that, irrespective of modernism's own traditional encoding, they force the representational
emergence of overlooked subjectivities. The modernist author, in this case Patrick White, is
aware of the limitations of his own perspective and is sometimes the initiating rebel and
sometimes the unwitting aggressor against his own preconditioning. If Alf's interior Aboriginal
sensibility is one treated condescendingly as some sort of instinctual residue, its negativity pales
beside the rendering of western brutality; it is the two combined which are performative of his
ability to see: "All that he had ever suffered, all that he had ever failed to understand, rose to the
surface in Dubbo. Instinct and the white man's teaching no longer trampled on each other....
And love in its many kinds began to trouble him as he looked" (412). (It is worth noting that
Dubbo transforms his 'looking' into Western art.)

Dubbo maneuvers in an interior field of vision that in the contemporary Australian
context the Aborigine himself can not even yet dream. It is not surprising that after his death Alf
Dubbo’s paintings are auctioned off into obscurity, “anyway the paintings disappeared” (461). In essence, an unresponsive and unready society closes not only their eyes, but his. What is of paramount importance, here, is the fact that the marginalized subject’s ability to see is a private capacity predicated on exclusion, and what White wants to metaphorically establish as true vision remains just the silent act of outsiders looking in. The discriminatory practices which themselves give rise to these visionaries simultaneously withholds recognition of them as society refuses to relinquish the terms of observation which situate the dominant and the oppressed.

It should be mentioned that White in some respects sustains the very divorce that he is criticizing, by removing his visionaries to a rarified arena that in certain instances divests them of their potential as socially realistic figures. John Colmer sees this as a function of White’s hyperbolic style. He notes in his book, *Patrick White*, that the “gap between authentically realized experience and apocalyptic experience is often very wide; the element of contrivance in willed visionary encounters and climaxes shows through in the strained, over-affirmatory prose. There is also some discrepancy between the glad tidings announced by the grand, archetypal structures and the grim truths declared by the texture of the contorted feverish prose” (44).

Faulkner does not symbolically elevate the act of looking in the same manner as White, and yet seeing and not seeing are primary tropes in his novel which formulate the binaries of social power. And performing as such, the novel’s framework of looking reconsiders, even reinvents, how the presence of the marginalized subject informs society’s ability to perceive itself. Francois Pitavy’s interesting discussion of Faulkner’s use of the feature of eyes themselves in his classic study, *Faulkner’s Light in August*, is worth mentioning here. He suggests that Faulkner’s fascination with eyes is illustrative of the fact that “Faulkner’s characters are truly the projection, the expression of a mental image” (162). Pitavy’s ideas register how thoroughly Faulkner conflates the external visible world with the internal,
perceiving one.

It is also worth noting the use that both authors make of windows, again playing with norms of seeing. Both Lena Grove and Joe Christmas escape from the prescriptive oppression of their lives by climbing out of windows. Conversely, Gail Hightower is imprisoned by the window through which he ‘watches’ his nightly fantasy of his grandfather galloping through Jefferson. Ruth Godbold observes Himmelfarb engaged in religious ritual while watching him through a window, emphasizing what is both an intimacy and an intrusion, and registers the emotional and psychological distance between subjects that even seeing cannot lessen. Alf Dubbo, later standing unseen outside the same window, switches his role from Peter the betrayer, to that of John by bearing witness as Ruth and Mary Hare attend to Himmelfarb on his deathbed.

Like White, Faulkner utilizes modernism’s interest in the alienated person to dislocate a culture’s conceptual safeguards, namely the divisions which promote social inequality. Both authors seem to view their conditioning cultures as blurring the ability for any self individualization outside of the normative social code. So to interpret that society they must catapult the represented vision into its own extremities.

In one of the key passages of *Light in August*, the narrator speculates on what the boy Joe Christmas might have thought as he tries to understand the reasons for the orphanage janitor’s unnaturally intense observation of him. (We later find out that this man is Joe’s grandfather, Doc Hines): “He hates me and fears me. So much so that he cannot let me out of his sight.... That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time” (*Light*, 138, Faulkner’s italics). Faulkner suggests that Joe will come into being only when he is able to understand that he is a construction of society’s gaze, as he postulates this as what Christmas ‘perhaps’ would have thought ‘had he been older’. The underlying suggestion is that real sentience begins only with the induction into the act of identity formation as dictated by society’s
exchanging looks, which anticipates quite directly Althusser’s theory of interpellation.

The section continues with the speculative interpretation of what Joe might have thought had he been older, had he yet been able to figure himself as someone else’s projection: “He hates me enough to try to prevent something that is about to happen to me coming to pass” (138). Looking is here transmuted into hating, and is presented as an active intervention in the natural unfolding of event. The fact that Faulkner leaves the sentence without a period suggests that it is the opening of a ‘looking’ that will continue to disrupt the entire destiny of Joe’s life.

In her book-length study of *Light in August*’s revisions, Regina Fadiman points out that in the early drafts of the novel Joe Christmas is an almost incidental character. Even after his character had become increasingly dominant “Faulkner had written a nearly completed version of the novel’s narrative present before he composed the Christmas flashback” (194). The chapter that precedes the flashback ends with (in Faulkner’s italics), “Something is going to happen. Something is going to happen to me” (118). This sentence is also left without a period and can be carried over as the ominous relic, or predicate, of the watching that first disrupted Joe’s destiny. That ‘something’, of course, is going to be the murderous action that confirms what society, and finally he, needs to believe is the instinctual evidence of his difference -- his invisible blackness.

These few sentences establish the code of a fictional world wherein Joe’s identity formation is dependent on an odd and ominous sequence that begins with an act of looking that does not encorporate but designates as separate. This separateness, conditioned by an internal awareness of being observed, becomes itself an interior psychological disruption that must be continually recast to adjust to a whole system of looking; this begets a pattern of observation and response that determines the trajectory of an individual life. Being constituted in the very public realm of gazing becomes a mutual activity, a power game, precluding Joe’s ability for even the
illusion of independent self discovery, figuring him instead in a predetermined geometry of looking that measures the nature of social connection.

We first hear of Joe in chapter two which begins, “Byron Bunch knows this” (31). What Byron ‘knows’ is established by the crisscrossing of looks which is the activity of social evaluation: “And the group of men at work in the planer shed looked up, and saw the stranger standing there watching them” (31, italics mine). By the time the men look up, Joe has already initiated the process of alienation, his ‘watching’ is in essence a preemptive strike and from that moment Faulkner establishes Joe as lost: “ ‘We ought to run him through the planer,’ the foreman said. ‘Maybe that will take that look off his face’ ” (31,32).

Though at this point in the novel we do not even know about the ambiguity of Joe’s racial origin, Faulkner signals to us that something fundamental is disrupting the underlying statute that as McKee notes, “in Light in August, it is the white men who do the looking that constitutes public meaning” (124). Ironically, it is Joe’s own confusion over his apparent whiteness that might be black which causes him to operate antagonistically in a world wherein looking determines who you are.

Krister Friday makes the intriguing suggestion that as:

... miscegenation often eroded the effectiveness of visible difference as a means of subtending racial boundaries ... the miscegenated body becomes the product of spectral history -- lost below the level of appearance.... With the possibility of miscegenation, the visual presence cannot adumbrate its own history.... If Christmas acted like everyone else, but at the same time acted like neither black nor white, then everyone else acts neither black nor white. Instead of coming from the outside as contagion and event, the specter exposes the spectrality of the inside, as a condition that has always already existed -- e.g., in community,
tradition and identity. (50, 55)

Although Joe looks white, his suspicion of being black causes him to act like both and neither and so runs an active interference in a system of appearances that turns into a veritable gambit of exposure, Christmas sacrificing the safety vouchsafed by his own appearance at the expense of his society’s vision of itself. In what is probably his first real breakdown over the conflicting self-information he is trying to assimilate, Joe and a group of his ‘equals’—white boys—engage in a sexual rite of passage. But Joe is unable to copulate with the anonymous black girl with whom they are all taking turns, and proceeds to violently beat her instead.

This occurs when, in the darkness of the shed, he is finally able to see her and the look becomes a dark mirror, an inversion he can not tolerate: “then it seemed to him that he could see her -- something prone, abject; her eyes perhaps. Leaning he seemed to look into a black well and at the bottom saw two glints like reflections of dead stars” (156). That he might be being observed, for him a consummate relationship, by what were ‘perhaps eyes’ of the black and female subject corroborates all his greatest fears and links him with her in a lethal affinity. It affirms the associations of sexuality and race and death that constellate his identity. And so he beats her. Tellingly, in the chaotic aftermath, “None of them could see, tell who was who” (157).

In this episode, Faulkner constructs the black female presence as the dangerous and anonymous source of Joe’s racial terror. He is as afraid of the feminine sexuality which would engulf him as he is of the girl’s blackness. He is involved in what the sexual historians John d’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman have noted was the predominant social phenomenon of southern white males having their first sexual encounters with Negro girls. (See intimate Matters, 186). But in the encounter, which is quite clearly a gang rape regardless of the seeming cooperation of the girl, Christmas is compromised not only by a belonging that he cannot
validate -- his fraternity with the white boys -- but by a belonging that he senses he must reject, i.e., the black and the female that would accept and subsume him. The violence of his reaction is such that Faulkner dismisses the black girl by simply noting, "There was no She at all now" (157). But, in fact, after this incident Joe’s life is dominated by an omnipresent ‘She’, a feminine principle that persistently correlates Joe’s racial confusion with violence, and provides the arena wherein he largely conducts his identity rebellion. The eruption of Joe’s racial (and sexual) confusion quite literally erases the ability to judge the world at face-value, a diminished capacity that is transferred between characters; subjectivity is displaced and can be registered only in the invisibility with which Faulkner repeatedly associates Christmas throughout the novel.

After the boys disperse, Joe walks home only to receive a beating at the hands of his foster father Simon McEachern. In that masculine, though still violent connection, Joe is able to achieve some measure of equilibrium as he is now momentarily freed, even cleansed of the amorphous and “unpredictable” female energy (159). Faulkner accordingly adjusts the connotations of looking: “The boy’s body might have been wood or stone; a post or tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and self-crucifixion” (160). And later, as they have their showdown over Joe’s surreptitious selling of the cow McEachern has given him, Faulkner again interrupts the ability of his character’s to see one another: “They could not distinguish one another’s faces now. They were just shapes” (163).

McEachern’s gift of a cow to Joe, though ostensibly given as a reward for Joe’s hard work, is in fact just a raising of the bar in terms of the competition between them. As Joe thinks of it, “That is not a gift. It is not even a promise. It is a threat’ (182, Faulkner’s italics). Joe sees it as a deliberate bait, the taking of which will only force an encounter with McEachern activated on a higher level of punishment deserved, further enlisting him in his foster-father’s
Calvinist strategies. McEachern’s bestowal of ownership to Joe is conversely indicative of an increasing determination to spiritually and materially own him.

Lee Jenkins makes the interesting point that, “Joe and McEachern can count upon each other’s expectations of mutual conformity to their brutal rituals. The one finds the other at fault; the other expects to be punished for his failings, whether actual or not. Their rituals are ways to defend against true accountability and mutual recognition of human vulnerabilities” (Faulkner & Psychology, 192). This ritualization allows Joe to exist in an absence wherein his emotions can be denied. It is a rarefied place that stalls the conflicting energy of Calvinism’s and Southern society’s unforgiving oppositions. In another instance of Joe’s being beaten by McEachern which occurs just a few pages earlier, Joe is described as “looking straight ahead, with a rapt, calm expression like a monk in a picture” (149). Note that Joe’s killer, Percy Grimm, the agent of his punishment, is later described in very similar terms: “Above the blunt, cold rake of the automatic his face had that serene, unearthly luminousness of angles in church windows” (Light, 462), a surprising correlation that unites them in a carefully abstracted distance from their own social responses.

Within the terms of looking as represented in these episodes, Faulkner is able to conjure the twin obsessions of Calvinism: the unregenerative disaster of sexuality, and salvation through judgement and punishment. And he does it quite deliberately by detailing the fate of an insider who thinks he is an outsider. Joe’s whole life becomes a constant oscillation between what he sees as the cold and fair punishment from men and the sexual adventures with women which he uses to provoke the purgative masculine punishment. It is not incidental that it is a woman, the dietician who, as Alwyn Berland notes in his book on Light in August, disrupts “the child’s miniature Calvinist world of strict rewards and punishments” (37). As the betraying mother figure, she sets the stage for the replicating and escalating series of events that collate sexuality
with punishment and violence. Not surprisingly the episode is conveyed in a vocabulary of looking: “Spying on me! You little nigger bastard!” (*Light*, 122). Already the young Christmas is positioned as the disruptive, intrusive factor in a hierarchy that determines who is allowed to see what. Punishment alone removes Joe from his perpetual interior crisis and only then is he is able to gaze in peace, his vision unobstructed by polarities that have now been leveled. The violence not only stops him physically, but metaphorically dismisses the distinctions which construct him. Perversely, it is only in that defeat that he becomes momentarily one of the elect.

As Bleikasten points out, Christmas “is a racist, a sexist, and a Puritan. Mentally and emotionally, he is indeed a white Southern male -- or would be, did he not believe himself to be tainted with blackness” (84). (This correlates provocatively with Alf Dubbo who is, in fact, a Western artist, his Aboriginal spiritualism subsumed within the Christian myth that dominates his imagination and in whose terms he reconciles his vision of the social injustice he both experiences and witnesses.) When Christmas suffers punishment at the hands of those whom he can’t help but psychologically number himself among, he becomes an integral part of their social logic. His marginality is thenencorporated in the governing system he understands.

Joe’s life becomes in essence a punishment deferred as he tries to extricate himself from the terms of the Calvinist determinism which when coupled with Southern society’s absolute divisions leaves no room for a psyche framed in-between its dichotomies. Finally, he can only formulate the notes of a sensed predestination in the repeated thought: “*something is going to happen to me*” (118). And only when he is able to conceive of the murder of Joanna Burden, and shifts it with his syntax to a deed already committed, is the scheme of crime and punishment properly reordered. “*I had to do it* already in the past tense; *I had to do it*” (280). Like Alf Dubbo who “loved to listen to tales in which the action was finished” (346), where the outcome of subjectivity in contact with experience is already decided and where, figuratively speaking,
black and white can rest as such, Joe exists in the end of his story before he has performed it. Only then can he relax into the dualities which form and break him as he, “believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed he did not believe” (280).

The patterning for what comes across as the eventuality of Joe’s life is laid out early on, and the descriptive rendering of Joe’s gazing seems itself prophetic. On his falling out with his young paramour, Bobbie Allen, aggravated by her belief that he is a “nigger”, Christmas is beaten senseless. “But he was not out because his eyes were still open, looking quietly up at them. There was nothing in his eyes at all, no pain, no surprise.... He just lay there with a profoundly contemplative expression” (218). This passage is anticipatory of Joe’s death scene also formulated around a watching that is no longer constrained and determined by social competition:

For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes.... The man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (465).

Through the characterization of Joe Christmas, the gaze of the rejected and the destroyed has become not only a permanent, continuing influence which will ‘mirror’ itself in the children - - the society’s future -- but can exist now “of itself” and “alone”. It is a fictional instance of modernism’s inductive reasoning that society will have no choice but to both embrace and release the vision of those subjects which threaten its power structures. It is a prescience that
should not be underestimated, nor should it be consigned as belonging to movements which displace modernism, as the beckoning of the marginalized presence is quite possibly the hidden vortex of modernism’s strength and its longevity. Faulkner has created in Joe Christmas a fictional subject who taps into the possible experience of the racially other with remarkable sympathy for a white Southerner of his generation. Consider how closely his portrait of Joe Christmas echoes this passage from W.E. B. DuBois:

A Negro is a sort of seventh son born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.... One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Writings, 14)⁶

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We can see a difference emerging here between White and Faulkner, in that the former uses the vision of his marginalized characters to disrupt the continuous mind of the society that rejects them; the latter shows how the outsider comes to life and has definition taken or given to him or her through society’s gaze. It is a reversal, however, that works with equal efficiency from either side -- as whether the observer or the observed, the rejected subject has a very particular control of the focus and the operative social equations turn upon their subjectivity. The difficulty of that position is stressed by the power and determination with which the communities in question utilize the intuited strength of collective seeing to empower their social decisions of rage and accusation. As Berland has suggested, “one consequence is that there is a terrible disparity between [the characters’] rich and complicated inner lives and their outer lives -
- the ways in which they appear to live in the eyes of the ... community” (49). This observation holds true for the outcasts who people either novel, and is deliberately revelatory of the lethal dynamics of social stereotyping.

On first witnessing the fire at Joanna Burden’s place, Faulkner describes the crowd thus: “They were gathering now about the sheriff and the deputy and the negro, with avid eyes upon which the sheer prolongation of empty flames had begun to pall, with faces identical with one another. It was as if all their individual five senses had become one organ of looking, like an apotheosis” (Light, 291). The carefully tracked complexities of Joe Christmas’s inner life are negated utterly in this frightening singularity, a concentrated staring whose judgement begins and ends in its own framing. The strength of the collective gaze is what makes the objectification of any subject possible. Its unified way of interpreting the visual message makes abstractions and the social justifications which support them come easily. As in Light in August when the onlookers come to revel in the spectacle of murder and fire:

...among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward. The sheriff came up and looked himself once and then sent the body away, hiding the poor thing from the eyes. (288).

It should be noted that in this passage the community effectively returns the fallen Joanna Burden to her exalted place in the southern mythology by seeing her only within the feared/desired scenario of white woman sexually victimized by black man. As Richard Gray has noted in his biography of Faulkner, “black people were only incorporated in the legend to the extent that they could be what Louis Althusser has called (mis) recognized; that is, denied their
concrete individuality in the very process of being acknowledged and identified” (34). Faulkner makes a point here that the disparate makeup of the gathered crowd which includes Yankees and southerners exposed to northern ideology does not even momentarily disrupt the society’s evaluative processes which instantaneously aggregate accusingly (and victoriously) around the abstraction of Negro. In *Riders in the Chariot*, the intrusion of the Jew, Mordecai Himmelfarb, can only be assimilated by a gaze that likewise constructs him not as an individual but as an abstraction:

Now as the molten light poured into the office where Harry Rosetree sat, the two eyes which were watching him seemed to be at discrepant angles, which, together with the presentation of the facial planes, suggested that here were two, or even more distinct faces. Yet on closer examination, all the versions evolved, all the lines of vision that could be traced from the discrepant eyes, fell into focus. All those features which had appeared willfully distorted and unrelated, added up quite naturally to make the one great archetypal face.... Even his diversity did not alter the fact that there was only One Jew.... Go home! Go Home! Go home to Hell! With a joyful, brassy resonance, because the puppet in their lives had been replaced at last by a man of flesh and blood. (377, 409)

It is interesting that White couches this odd visual construction of Himmelfarb through the eyes of the apostate Jew, Harry Rosetree, who oversees the factory where Himmelfarb’s mock crucifixion takes place. In hiding his own ethnic identity, Harry Rosetree is even more invested in distancing himself from the ‘real’ presence of a Jew. Andrew McCann discusses in his 1997 article, “The Ethics of Abjection: Patrick White’s *Riders in the Chariot,*” the multi-layered method which White uses to direct attention to the marginalized (abject) subject. McCann suggests that White’s ‘normal’ Australian is a subject position achieved by active
psychological duplicity. He says,

The normal becomes pejorative, while identification with the abject takes on a deeply ethical resonance.... The utility of the abject in White’s work is that it elucidates the very oppositions that structure what we might call a fiction of the normal, revealing that the apparently normal subject comes into being through repression and displacement of his or her own inability to fully comply with the demands of a particular social order. By this reckoning the Australian racists of *Riders* are not so much representatives of actual Australians as they are representations of the performative normality and the violence which this can entail.... The Rosetrees can also be read as embodying a much more general drama of subjectivity in which they are constantly threatened by their precarious proximity to the abject. Insofar as they are complicit with forms of social existence that are presented in the novel as explicitly anti-semitic, we can say that they are implicated in a lifestyle that necessitates constant vigilance -- discipline with regard to their own ethnic identity, as a condition of their belonging in post-war Australia. They are threatened with the traumatic possibility of lapsing into their own alterity. (146, 152)

By the same token, then, the characters who do not disguise their alterity -- the four riders -- are those who necessarily threaten a society whose members are all engaged in the collective perpetuation of identity deception, a deception that is upheld only by the violent ostracization of those who do not participate in its construction. The racially other subject is, of course, seen by not being seen, as both White and Faulkner recognize even while operating within narrative mechanics that repeat this paradox. Their modernism, though itself qualified by the practices it resists, works to unfashion its own constructing prejudices. In their 1998 work on literary
theory, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan argue that:

...ethnicity would seem to be culturally rehearsed and performed into imaginary ontological status; indeed, as the contrived (through constant and repeated endogamous marriage) repetition of traits such as facial characteristics that are merely external, representational graphics without meaning or signifiers that signify nothing more than themselves, ethnic identity consists of the performance into imaginary being of something which has no existence outside of the repetition of these traits. The belief that physical traits refer to or express an ethnic interiority, an identity or substance of genetic being that provides the external traits with meaning is one of the last remaining uncriticized ideologies.

(855).

First, I would mention that this analysis also applies to women who are likewise (mis)recognized as always-already knowable totalities purely on the basis of physicality; their interiority has been appropriated in precisely the same manner as the ethnically marginalized. Second, I would suggest that modernism is deeply invested in fictionally disrupting this ideology (and, incidentally, all ideologies that predetermine the individual’s construction in society). Literary modernism invents itself in the represented breach between external appearance and interior reality and in so doing its voices emerge as the dialogue of the hidden. This dialogue which begins as an exposition of hidden aspects of the psyche, the examination of which is still controlled by the dominant white and male elite, continues and gathers momentum as a foray into the unguessed subjectivity of the Other. It should be noted that this is both typically arrogant and potentially destructive of the ruling ideologies which surround representations of the Other. Of Alf Dubbo, White writes, “... if nobody commented on his appearance, not even those who were most disgusted by the presence of sickness or blacks -- antithesis in its extremist
form -- it is because he had become by now the abstraction of a man.... To some it is always unendurable to watch the antithesis of themselves" (402).

So, in *Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot* the community watches only to ensure that the abstractions with which they replace a recognition of the individual are held in place, and the predicking social structure left unchallenged. When the community’s stereotypical expectations are disrupted it can turn from a form of ennui as in *Riders* where, “it soon became obvious that the black was going to disappoint, by his decency, his silence, his almost non-existence” (342), to the staging of horrific violence as in the rage that erupts as a result of Joe Christmas who, “never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad” (350). Or again, in the mock crucifixion of Himmelfarb whose passive submission to his torture registers with those watching as the final affront to their righteousness: “For the Jew did not resist. His expression remained one almost of contentment.... Some of the men would have taken a hammer, or plunged a knife. Into the Jew, of course. Nor would the latter have protested. That was what maddened the crowd” (409, 410).

To counter the social determinism as demonstrated through the collective gaze, a gaze which both manufactures and is produced by divisive reasoning, Faulkner and White, as modernists, question what happens in the divide itself. What has to be asked is why does the modernist writer wish to find a credible purchase in and signify a subjective terrain that is both physically and psychologically remote? Or as Toni Morrison questions, “...what prompts and makes possible this process of entering what one is estranged from and in what disables the foray, for purposes of fiction, into corners of the consciousness held off and away from the writer’s imagination?... imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is for the purposes of the work becoming” *(Playing in the Dark*, 4).

Morrison answers her own question yet doesn’t explore the full potential available in the
trajectory of that ‘becoming’. In imagining the other, the modernist author in particular is invested in liberating subjectivity from all forms of social conditioning. Even the self becomes the stranger -- an identity displacement that is virtually a convention of modernist literature. In the process of becoming, not only is the modernist author identifying with the other, but is advancing the awareness that in order for modern society to fully recognize itself, the marginalized other must independently become. Even if this imagining is arguably being done in the service of a white, male aristocracy interested in repositioning themselves and extending their freedom, textual space for the self-representation of the marginalized subject is being cleared.

Morrison later says that, “the fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity” (Playing, 17). This mirroring is inevitably, powerfully there, however it is qualified by modernism’s deepseated and fundamental recognition of the fallacy of its own solipsism. In Light in August and Riders in the Chariot, then, both turning not only on the imaginative guesswork involved in imagining the racially other, but also on the stressed interdependence of disparate subjectivities in general, we see that modernism reckons moral survival as capable of being conceived only by a collectivity.

And neither Faulkner nor White are content to render their outsiders definitively. They are presented as amalgams of qualities seen and qualities presupposed by what is seen. Interior identity is subordinated and at odds with social projection. The characters themselves function in the split in a process of continual and painful adjustment to cope with the larger dualities which coerce that interior unrest. We are presented with blacks who are of racially mixed blood in whatever ratio as in the case of Alf Dubbo, who is himself never sure, and with the far more exaggerated, and never resolved, racial ambiguity of Joe Christmas. The men are feminized, the
women masculinized. Indeterminacy itself becomes the subject. It performs as the disturbed
countant that is best able to psychologically locate the subject. Both Faulkner and White
metaphorically heighten this aspect by emphasizing the rootlessness of their characters. This is
apparent even in the intensely sedentary life of Gail Hightower who lives, it seems, solely for his
nightly fantasy of galloping through the Jefferson streets of seventy years ago, an unending
repetition of flight. Homelessness is even an identity marker (more happily conceived) for Lena
Grove. Himmelfarb is quite literally the wandering Jew. Mary Hare’s residence in the decaying,
collapsing mansion of Xanadu underscores the impermanence that continually threatens
conceptions of ‘home’. In the case of Joe Christmas and Alf Dubbo, this rootlessness is
presented in remarkably similar terms. Consider Joe who:

...stepped from the dark porch, into the moonlight, with his bloody head and
empty stomach hot, savage and courageous with whiskey, he entered a street
which was to run for fifteen years.... and always sooner or later the street ran
through cities, through an identical and wellnigh interchangeable section of cities
without remembered names. (223, 224)

Joe’s homelessness, his identity as a lone runner, formulates him as an element of
randomness which qualifies and destabilizes social stasis. Just as Alf Dubbo:

...now went bush, figuratively, at least, and as far as other human beings were
concerned. Never communicative he retired into the scrub of half-thoughts....
Later he learned to prefer the city, that moist savage and impenetrable terrain, for
the opportunity it gave him of confusing anyone who might attempt to track him
down in his personal hinterland. He never stayed anywhere long. (340)

In passing, note that homelessness resonates on multiple levels in the representation of
Alf Dubbo as his characterization is perforce saturated in issues of the Empire. As Bill Ashcroft
and John Salter note in "Modernism's Empire: Australia and the Cultural Imperialism of Style," "The unresolved problem of Aboriginal land is not simply a problem of racial and cultural exclusion; it is a failure of inherited discourses to conceive adequately the nature of Australian place" (Modernism and Empire, 293). White, while maneuvering in these inherited discourses, does so in the interest of criticizing the continuous displacement they effect as part of their self-maintenance. Alf Dubbo's abandonment on the streets of Australian cities while conforming to modernist conventions of the perennial stranger is likewise a harsh indictment of the disenfranchisement of the Aborigine. Patrick Williams rightly observes that "modernists in general have little time for the idea that 'empire equals progress', which was so central to imperialism's self-justification" ("Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities", 20). This is strongly evident in the writing strategies of White, as he takes issue with this idea in particular. I think we can say that modernism's inherent resistance to the ideological practices which impact and inform it is able to provide an edge against the racial exclusion of empire and colonialism.

So homelessness becomes a central motif of White's modernism as personified not only by Alf Dubbo but in the character of Himmelfarb who, "had taken at weekends to wandering around the fringes of the city", and Mary Hare who "burrowed deep but uselessly, along the tunnels of escape which radiated from Xanadu" (199, 371). With each instance of this roaming there is a sense of a strange return to a more animal life, as though these representatives of the alien element are in some way circling and stalking society. They cannot be of their social world but they patrol its borders and their mobility is a measure of society's instability. They, in essence, are that instability made incarnate.

For Christmas and Dubbo, abandoning the safety of the periphery inevitably entails a merging with women which explodes their racial confusion with an equally threatening gender confusion. Joe's sexuality is the currency he uses to exploit the terms of his racial identity. Alf
Dubbo’s is the coin of his own spiritual and physical betrayal. There is a confluence here which exchanges the perceived damage of the racially marginalized subject with the empowerment of sexual activity and dominance over the other marginalized subject: women. But it is a game in which neither Joe nor Alf can maintain the upper hand, as each is eventually overcome by a reversal in the traditional roles played by men and women. In this arena, too, or particularly, they cannot control their own identity, but are constructed in terms of the feminine self, an absorption which further reduces their already deeply subordinated social status.

The terms are so disastrous that the objection to racial politics which dominates both novels is considerably deflected by a suspicious animosity towards female sexuality, as though it were in that vortex where personal and social moral collapse is most particularly implemented. (This strongly interacts with Joe Christmas’s exposure to Calvinist interpretations of sexuality).

Were it not for the condemnation that both authors’ level at their respective governing social practices in the totality of their effects, this would be a point about which extreme objections should be raised, but in some measure the negative decision registered with regard to their societies as a whole suggests that this targeting of women is ill-conceived and is symptomatic of a more generally flawed social perception.

Picking up directly from when Faulkner first places Joe on his endless street, we are given a catalogue of how he operates sexually, “where beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it bedded anyway and then told them that he was a negro” (224). How invested he is in this sexualized identity game is made stunningly clear in the episode wherein he tells a prostitute he is a negro and she simply doesn’t care: “‘What about it? You look all right. You should see the shine I turned out just before your turn came’.... Then she quit talking. She was watching his face and she began to move backward, her mouth open to
scream. It took two policeman to subdue him” (225). Faulkner presents Joe Christmas’s psychic balance as being utterly dependent on being able to manipulate his racial dividedness.

As thoroughly as any white Southerner, he needs the suspected taint of black blood to matter. As Romine has noticed, “it was his unique ability to contaminate that made the Negroe’s place possible, even necessary under the bizarre logic of segregation.... Light in August demonstrates the deep interdependence between social cohesion and the contamination associated with black blood” (149). Without that acknowledgement Christmas is weaponless, and the free will which he has spent a lifetime proving that he has by choosing not to choose is instantly levelled. In that vacancy he faces an anonymity so total that all his carefully arranged dichotomies collapse as meaningless and with them his own tenuous identity.

We next hear that after “being sick for two years”, he lived “as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving ... trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being” (225,226). Again, it is an experiment that he doubles with sexual connection as though it is only through an appropriated female sense that he can access his own racial identity, where he can reenter a psychic womb that prefigures his being as either/or. Finally, in encountering Joanna Burden he matches up with another person in whose history all the variables which have destroyed his own life are dangerously present but now operative in a female counterpart.

In his relationship with Joanna, Joe’s doubled identity takes an ominous turn as the psychic manoeuvring of his competing racial selves is itself deeply compromised by a forced switchback in gender valuation. In Joanna he has met not a lover but a competitor: “There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last. It was as if he struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for
which they struggled on principle alone.... *Under her clothes she cant even be made so that it could have happened*” (235, Faulkner’s italics). The fight for Joe’s identity has been returned to a masculinized stage of power play, much as it was with his foster father Simon McEachern, and yet now, so to speak, the father has come home to roost in the mother. Tellingly, it is always Joanna who sets the terms for their sexual encounters.

After a silent standoff between Joanna and Joe that lasts for six months, he returns to the abandoned slave cabin in which he lives to find Joanna waiting for him. There is no question of Joe turning her out, for it is just as if she were an old time slave master and he the shadow mistress at the behest of the master’s desire. Thadious Davis’s treatment of Joe’s subordination to Joanna is particularly acute. She remarks that “the Negro has been castrated by his subservient role in southern life. Unable to express his manhood, he has assumed external behavioral patterns which the dominant culture associates with the female. Joe reveals that ‘at first sight’ of Joanna ‘there had opened before him instantaneous ... a horizon of physical security and pleasure.’ Joe’s revelation places him in one of the traditional conceptions of the psychology of women: that their search for security and comfort is to be provided by the male. Included, too, is a scene symbolic of the reversal of traditional male and female roles: Joe lies on his cot in an old slave shack provided by Joanna, while Joanna sits at her desk attending to business” (*Faulkner’s Negro*, 139). With this we can add Daniel Singal’s interpretation wherein he suggests that “in the ongoing drama [Joanna] stages [Joe] is cast in a series of black roles -- as the docile servant living in a slave cabin, eating the traditional field hand’s meal of peas and molasses, and the stereotypical ‘nigger rapist’ who steals into her house through an open window -- supplying him with the chance to develop and solidify his previously suppressed black self” (178).

What should be added, here, is that the solidification of that black self cannot be
redemptive for Joe Christmas as his emotional survival has been effected as long as it has only by the constant vacillation between his white and his black 'selves'. With the added dimension of assumed or imposed female roles, the perverse duality which Joe relied upon collapses. As Beth Weidmaier points out,

Joe is coded as feminine throughout the text, from his slight build to his final castration. His body accrues traces of the abject from the bodily absence of black women and from the textual fragments of his sexual encounters. Joe recognizes and reacts against this insecurity of his racial and sexual identity.... By responding with repulsion to blacks and white women, Joe reveals an internal fear of oppression and his confusion over sexual identity. (36)

Joanna is herself determined by the equally powerful psychic divisions the nature of which combine variations on the same themes of race, religion and sex that trouble Joe. The mirroring is too formidable and all the elements in Joe's psyche that he has willfully held apart from one another now merge as one “fluid Otherness” (Weidmaier, 36).

It is, appropriately enough, in this slave cabin that Joanna tells her convoluted life history to Joe. What is remarkable is that he listens, though he thinks, “She is like all the rest of them. Whether they are seventeen or fortyseven, when they finally come to surrender completely, its going to be in words” (241). But it is not her surrender; it is his. And it is precisely because it is done with words and not with action that Joe’s resistance is so low. As she details her own religiously and racially determined chronicle, we are presented with a very different Joe Christmas: “They had not moved for over an hour.... He seemed to swing faintly, as though in a drifting boat, upon the sound of her voice as upon some immeasurable and drowning peace evocative of nothing of any moment” (248).

The womblike suggestions here are unmistakable. They are sitting, appropriately, in the
dark. Joe is presented as man/woman, black/white and is momentarily all of them and none, and in this brief reprieve he interrupts Joanna to ask just two questions with a totally uncharacteristic lack of guardedness. The first one is, at bottom, the fundamental question of Joe’s life, but one so obscured by his own response to it that he can only frame it in this single instance when he has himself surrendered (non-sexually) to a female presence: “Just when do men that have different blood in them stop hating one another?” (249). Faulkner implies that it is only in the secretive dialogue of these doubled, marginalized subjectivities that the asking of the crucial social questions can even be broached.

The other question he asks is: “Why your father never killed that fellow -- what’s his name? Sartoris”, (the man who had killed Joanna’s grandfather and brother) (254). Joanna here asks Joe whether he would have done so, “‘Yes’, he said, at once immediately” (254). She insightfully goes on from this answer to suggest that Joe has no idea who his parents are, displaying an intuitive understanding that he is cut off from the natural order and can, therefore, not fully grasp his region’s social logic. When he says that all he knows is “that one of them was part nigger”, she asks, “‘How do you know that?’ He didn’t answer for some time. Then he said: ‘I don’t know it.’... Then he spoke again, moving: his voice now had an overtone, unmirthful, yet quizzical, at once humorless and sardonic: ‘If I’m not, damned if I haven’t wasted a lot of time’”(254). Joanna then belatedly responds to Joe’s question regarding her father’s lack of retaliation by suggesting that her father’s partial French blood, which marked him as a foreigner, also helped him to “understand that a man would have to act as the land where he was born had trained him to act” (255). The effect of all this close layering historicizes the context of Christmas’s story in a very particular way by embedding it in the retold violence that is the meeting point between the social perceptions of north and south, men and women, white and black and the religion that mediates in between, while also suggesting that he is both
of it and disconnected from it. He can articulate questions of hatred and revenge, but only from a
distance. Yet he, too, can only “act as the land has trained him to act.”

That action is put into the final stages of play, its mechanisms completely engaged, by
Joe’s alignment with Joanna. The rearrangement of male and female roles challenges all the
dualities which Joe has come, perversely, to trust. He is consumed by what amounts to a sexual
purgatory, as the very first lines of the next chapter express: “In this way the second phase
began. It was as though he had fallen into a sewer” (256). Joe can no longer pit himself
independently against the system which constructs him, but is drawn into a psychic cohabitation
from which he cannot free himself: “All day long he would imagine her” (257). He internalizes
her as the feminine self-reincarnation he has always resisted, and in her desperate sexuality he
observes the violence of his own doubleness. Sensing that his identification with her will prove
lethal, “he began to be afraid” (260).

Her sexual abandon stands in for a whole array of social moral failure, the fury of her
depravity its own rebellion. Joe is transfixed as he witnesses and participates in the clash of
oppositional forces: “the abject fury of the New England glacier exposed suddenly to the fire of
the New England biblical hell” (258). By emphasizing Joe’s mounting fear, Faulkner is alerting
us to the fact that at some level Joe recognizes that it is his own indeterminacy which is the
negotiating agent between colliding ideological and religious principles. His displaced
subjectivity is the nucleus about which the social hatred he marvels at revolves, and in that center
it will detonate.

All the torment of suppression and opposition are activated by the “Negro! Negro!
Negro!” which the now wild Joanna exclaims in the throes of sex. And Joe is a captive
participating in his own psychic rape. He is no longer capable of following “the savage and
lonely street which he had chosen of his own will” (258), but must abandon that masculine
independence in favor of a locked-in, *female* submission to a dominant sexual (and psychological) partner. “Anyway, he stayed, watching the two creatures that struggled in the one body like two moongleamed shapes struggling drowning in alternate throes upon the surface of a black thick pool beneath the last moon.... Now and then they would come to the surface, locked like sisters; the black waters would drain away” (260, 261).

But when she begins to pray over Joe, Joanna Burden revisits upon him the remembered and overthrown dominance of the father, a mergence of the masculine with the feminine too overloaded for Christmas to bear. The racialized subject bound to the female sets in motion the irrevocable destiny that Faulkner presents with a consistent symbolism of Calvinist foreordination. It is finally less the destiny of a single character than a fated trajectory mapped out for a social world and determined by the tragedy of its rejected subjects. Disrupting the text is the presupposition that until the oppressed individual is released from the coded binaries of social hatred, all subjectivity can only psychologically exercise itself within the tiny increments available to pawns on the chess table. Faulkner, as a modernist, is overturning that table, by declaring the game a stalemate which has gridlocked his fictional society’s potential for moral evolution.

Patrick White also inscribes the identity of his own half-caste black character within female constructions that demonstratively corrupt any personal freedom he might have. Alf Dubbo steps out on to his own road immediately after having been molested by his foster father, the Rector Mr. Calderon, an incident which naturally confuses issues of religion with those of sexuality and male/female relationships. The submission with which he accepts that event are duplicated in a passivity, or sense of powerlessness, which closely echoes the represented stance of Joe Christmas: “At no time in life was Alf Dubbo able to resist what must happen.... All which had happened had to happen sooner or later.... Again he realized that fate was in action, in
the locked mechanism of his will” (330, 336).

Like Joe, Alf evades this fatalism by a determined homelessness, an aimless roaming he uses to allay “a fear of capture ... wandering along the banks of a river, which on the outskirts of most towns is the lifeflame of all outcasts, goats and aboriginals” (334). His fear of “capture”, in light of the fact that he has committed no crime, should be looked at as an unwillingness to be constituted within the crushing preconceptions with which society inevitably invests him. He refuses to be captured, appropriated, within those dictates. There is much to textually suggest that White is interested in and aware of the limited, controlled scope available to the racially marginalized subject. Like Faulkner, he accentuates this by the deliberately ironic choice of further disempowering his character by embedding Alf Dubbo in degraded female roles, which can, perhaps, be regarded as a stereotypical representational backsliding. Nevertheless, the doubled implications of marginalized subjectivity are all the more powerful in that they are represented (unconsciously or not) as reflected from a common terrain of exclusion.

The most important of these takes place in the brothel where he temporarily sets up residence, as Hannah, the madam, has given him a little room in the back. In one evening of drunken inhibition, Alf is persuaded to bring out his paintings, and by his agreement is transformed into one of Hannah’s whores. Dubbo is presented as performing a frenzied act of prostitution: “What can you do, Dubbo? Tear off your clothes and show your bottom like everybody else.... He began to walk, or run along the dark passage to his room.... Nothing could control his passion now. He brought paintings and paintings. They lit a bonfire in the mediocre room, the walls of which retreated from the blaze of color” (359). Dubbo is increasingly aware of his defilement, himself the most laughable of the drunken prostitutes, until he “who had laid himself open at several moments during the evening was no longer vulnerable.... ‘Paintings which nobody looks at might never have been painted,’ the patron argued. ‘I will look at them’
Dubbo said, ‘Goodnight’ And shut the door” (361).

But metaphorically speaking, Alf Dubbo has lost control of the ‘door’ to himself, or is violated into an awareness that the control has never been his. He has been forced open and his private, interior self has been ravished. The incident so affects Dubbo that his own system of careful emotional separation breaks down:

The dusk was splitting into little particles. There was nothing, almost nothing left except the movement of disintegration. Now Dubbo was aching in the chest, now that all goodness was to break. All the solid forms that he could answer for.... But Alf Dubbo was going. He could scarcely control a longing to look once more at those few paintings in which his innocence remained unimpaired, in which the Lord still permitted a solidity of shape, a continuity of life, even error. So he butted the darkness with his head, and the breath rattled behind his ribs, and the street made way before him. (364)

When he discovers, several days later, that Hannah has secretly sold two of his paintings to one of the clients who had been present, Alf’s prostitution is complete. In his rage he attacks Hannah and later destroys his remaining paintings, re-violating his sexually exposed and exploited inner self, and thereby self-destructively reclaiming his masculinity: “The abo was tearing mad, and white, beneath his yellow skin. All his desperate hate breath hopelessness future all of him and more was streaming into his pair of hands.... He had, she saw, brought the axe from the yard -- it was still standing in his room -- and split his old pictures up. Nothing else. All those bloody boards of pictures” (367, 370). (Note that the last image is suggestive of the blood of the violated virgin.) He regains his sexual agency only through a rape of his own -- a rape against himself -- as though the minority subject can only have authority over itself when reacting in a self-directed mimicry of its own cultural denigration.
The exposure of their own feminine interiority pushes Christmas and Dubbo back onto the road, but the dynamics of it have now changed. It is no longer emblematic of motion and the limitless stretch of masculinized independence that makes separation an active, mobile choice, but registers as a fixed circle which encloses self-generating conclusions. There is in both cases a deepened sense of abuse and exclusion captured in the narratorial tone. Christmas and Dubbo both evaluate themselves not with a represented critical introspection, but with a wandering and a looking that an omniscient narrator interprets for the reader as presaging a final breakdown. The road has become the instrument of subjugation, leading directly back into the heart of the abject. The descriptive choices made by White and Faulkner are, again, remarkably similar.

Like Dubbo, Christmas is overcome by a sense of fragmentation as he peers from the road into the interior of Freedman Town, the segregated black community:

> Then he found himself. Without his being aware the street began to slope.... As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosenelit so that the streetlamps themselves seemed to be further spaced, as if the black life, the black breathing compounded the substance of breath so not only the voices but moving bodies and light itself must become fluid and accrete slowly from particle to particle, of and with the now ponderable night inseparable and one.... It was as though he and all other manshaped life had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive female. (114, 115)

We see how thoroughly Faulkner constructs Joe’s racial confusion in the terms of an engulfing female presence. Under the force of it, the sustenance of division upon which Joe has depended psychologically visually disintegrates. So, like Dubbo, he is mesmerized by looking into the homes of the white people he envies, desires, hates and fears, caught by what he sees as the extreme focus of their world: “Now and then he could see them: heads in a silhouette, a white
blurred garmented shape; on a lighted veranda four people sat about a card table, the white faces intent and sharp in the low light, the bare arms of the women glaring smooth and white above the trivial cards. ‘That’s all I wanted,’ he thought. ‘That don’t seem like so much to ask’” (115).

But from his position of invisibility Joe can only look at the peaceful, untouchable diorama of white life, just as he can finally only look at the other world of Freedman Town: “It just lay there, black impenetrable, in its garland of Augusttremulous [sic] lights. It might have been the original quarry, abyss itself’’ (116). As in our first description of Joe, a silenced looking is the transmuted vocabulary of his connection and disconnection, and in the final analysis it is registered by Faulkner as no dialogue at all. Similarly, Alf is compelled to follow his own night road which can only leave him abandoned on the margins:

Almost always he would leave his room when the light had gone. As he hurried along in his sand shoes, beneath the tubes of ectoplasm, the solitary blackfellow might have been escaping from some crime, the frenzy of which was still reflected in his eyeballs and the plate glass. It drove him past the courts of lights where the judges were about to take their places on the blazing furniture, and past the darkened caves.... So he would arrive at outer darkness, crunching the last few hundred yards along a strip of clinker, which could have been the residue of all those night thoughts that have ever tortured dark minds. (454)

In their portrayals of the racially and sexually doubled subject, Faulkner and White have effected a standoff between permanence and motion. Their “street” in actuality goes nowhere. And the social outcast who travels it is forever arriving at the same predetermined junction of immobilized subjectivity. It is an instance not of modernism locking into its own patriarchal patterns, but exploding them. So Joe Christmas and Joanna, for all the wild perversions of their socially conditioned roles, end up standing together in the half-dark which is their element.
mutually deciding, "that there's just one thing to do" (281). These characters who have been
created by socio-historical divisions which cannot psychically contain or sustain them must die,
or more accurately, must kill each other off. The street has become for Joe simply a static
continuity bridging the "dark [that is] filled with voices, myriad, out of all time he had known, as
though the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be part
of the flat pattern going on. He thought of that with quiet astonishment: going on, myriad,
familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and
had-been would be the same" (281). This is the first and only time that Joe is represented as
imagining a continuum that might connect past with future with some evidence of evolvement,
but that fluidity is arrested in his perception that nothing in his world would even momentarily
have admitted change.

Faulkner introduces Joe’s flashback sections with word choices that should install
Christmas in the natural human engagement with time: "Memory believes before knowing
remembers.... And memory knows this; twenty years later memory is still to believe On this day
I became a man.... Knowing not grieving remembers a thousand savage and lonely streets" (119,
146, 220). But each phrase is structured in such a way that Joe -- the one who should be doing
the remembering, believing and knowing -- is irretrievably distanced from the sense of his own
unfolding interior sequence. He is separated from an inclusion in the psychological faculties
which enable a placement in the passage of time. The capacity to adjust personal experience
from one psychological frame to another in a necessary process of emotional differentiation, and
thereby being able to establish a continuous identity, is withheld from Joe. That which should be
mutable is frozen. Regardless of the constant flickering of his conflicting racial identities, Joe is
registered in a steady-state of interior denial. Faulkner is aware of how predicated this tragic
condition is on massively functioning repressive forces. With his paradoxical construction of Joe
Christmas, Faulkner is representing the marginalized subject’s psychic immobilization as the consequence of a larger social paralysis. As a result, both are blinded to the possibility of change.

The capacity for looking which has set the stage for what is a modernist act of social criticism in either novel is energized particularly in the disrupted polarities of permanence and motion. Vision is itself the perfect model for such a disruption as it is immobile and intangible, while registering all that moves. It is both an external capacity and the internal process of imagining. It constructs without itself being seen, yet the manifestation of the social gaze is apparent in the acquiescence to racial and gender stratification and in the represented internal evaluation of the self. In both novels, looking is the substantiating, measured distance between the outcast subject and society. In the fictional worlds of *Light in August* and *Riders in the Chariot*, things accordingly begin to blend and move. That which should rest does not; that which should circulate is stagnant.

This is a reversal critical to modernism which gauges its social interpretations in terms of oppositions. Opposition is, in fact, the modality by which modernism both identifies and resists. As Pericles Lewis notes, “modernist experiments implied that our perceptions of the outside world and of each other are so tainted by culturally specific or individually idiosyncratic values that there might be no fair way of arbitrating fairly between the competing claims of various individuals or groups -- no eternal facts, no absolute truth, hence no absolute justice” (*Modernism, Nationalism & the Novel*, 5). But by utilizing the vision of the outsider, Faulkner and White are delineating the contours of injustice.

The injustice they chronicle is indisputably laid at the doorstep of divisive social practice which has denied the marginalized subject the right to see and be seen. It is an exercise indicative of modernism’s deeply moral project of recalculating the effects of appropriation and
exclusion. It is conducted in the terms of white men looking back on to their own socially formative historical processes. White and Faulkner, as modernists, are both unafraid to engage their own social hypocrisy. White and Faulkner ask the question, as Jonathan Hart has phrased it, “How do we advocate historical change that recognizes the difference between then and now, the very historicity of experience, and maintain a moral view that has a transhistorical standard that allows such ethical judgment” (Translating and Resisting Empire: Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Studies, 148). They attempt an answer to a question that situates modernism’s overlooked investment in historical answerability by the merging vision of their outcasts.

Both novels are replete with imagery that suggests the ongoing oscillation between permanence and motion, in the terms of which personal identity is negotiated and modernism itself reckons with the confluence of past with present and future. Consider White’s representation of Mordecai Himmelfarb as he is described hovering in terror before the perceived disintegration of what had been a world of permanence: “It did seem for the first time that his own brilliantly inviolable destiny was threatened, by an increasing shrivelling of the spirit in himself, as well as by the actions of those whom he had considered almost as statues in a familiar park. Now the statues had begun to move. Great fissures were beginning to appear, besides, in what he had assumed to be the solid mass of history. Time was no longer congealed but flowing” (116).

As the novel proceeds, Mordecai’s visionary capacity increases proportionally to the enormity of the social injustice he experiences. The severity of separation is conceived by Patrick White as being redeemable only by a supremely assimilative vision. And Himmelfarb, the racial outcast, performs what is, in essence, the directive of White’s modernist sensibility -- to reject the hateful and superficial fallacies of social distinction, and to recognize that we all evolve in the same condition of impermanence:
Then his own wife came and took his hand, and together they stood looking down into the pit of darkness, at the bottom of which was the very faintest phosphorescence of faces. He longed most intolerably to look once more on the face of Reha Himm, but it was as though she was directing his vision towards the other, the unknown faces and might even have become unrecognizable herself.... So the thousands waited for him along the banks of the interminable river. Sometimes the faces were those of Jews, sometimes they were gentile faces, but no matter; the change could be effected from one to the other simply by twitching a little shutter. (166, 437)

This last is profoundly similar to Faulkner's description of the epiphany experienced by Gail Hightower as he negotiates his moral re-entry into human life. And, again, we are given a vision that strains against permanence and motion, understanding striving for a coherence extrapolated from in between as “the wheel of thinking slows, it slows like a wheel beginning to run in sand” (488). Hightower, for all his long “immunity ... bought and paid for” (309), is drawn back into the flexing struggle of the human race by the fate of the white/black Joe Christmas, marginalized subjectivity again the catalyst for what is finally a modernist synthesis of deep social recognition:

He seems to watch himself among the faces, always among, enclosed and surrounded by faces.... The halo is full of faces. The faces are not shaped with suffering, not shaped with anything: not horror, pain, not even reproach. They are peaceful as if they have escaped into apotheosis: his own is among them. In fact, they all look a little alike, composite of all the faces he has ever seen. But he can distinguish them one from another ... [but] that of the man called Christmas. This face alone is not clear. It is confused more than any other, as though in the now
peaceful throes of a more recent, a more inexplicable, compositeness. Then he can see that it is two faces which seem to strive (but not of themselves striving or desiring it: he knows that, but because of the motion and desire of the wheel) in turn to free themselves from one from the other, then fade and blend again.... Why, it’s that ... boy ... the one who killed, who fired the -- Then it seemed to him that some ultimate dammed flood within him breaks and rushes away. (491,492)

Hightower’s confusion of Joe Christmas with Percy Grimm is of paramount importance as the image of the racial executioner is indistinguishable from that of his victim. Social hatred has one face. The assignation of guilt or innocence is a reciprocating charge that implicates the whole of a society that cannot negotiate with examined and included difference. Like Himmelfarb, Hightower experiences a vision over which social divisiveness no longer has any influence. The faces of the world are constituted alike as individual and collective, rearticulating Hightower’s earlier pronouncement, “Poor man. Poor mankind” (100). The modernism invoked by Patrick White and William Faulkner hands down a verdict that we cannot survive in the terrorized and violently upheld isolation that seals one subject’s vision away from another’s. As White has Himmelfarb declare, “We can never escape a collective judgement. We are one. No particle may fall away without damaging the whole” (150).
NOTES

1. See Michael Giffin's *Arthur's Dream: The Religious Imagination in the Fiction of Patrick White*, chapters 3 & 4, for a discussion of White's repeated alignment of Primitivism, Judaism and Christianity. There is in *Riders in the Chariot* an even greater emphasis than in Faulkner on the natural depravity of man, but White often likes to correlate this with the emergence of religious enlightenment.

2. Lena Grove, and to a lesser extent, Byron Bunch, being the notable exceptions here, though, in Faulkner at least, there is the formidable suggestion of a social stratum that is healthy and functional as exemplified in particular by the nameless furniture dealer at the end of the novel who might be considered incidental, or even contrived, were it not for the hope and stability that he represents.

3. It is interesting to note that Patrick White very deliberately chose a contrapuntal structure for his novel emulating the music of Bach, see *Letters*, 170. Faulkner, though certainly not attempting any musically imitative style, inadvertently counters the chord-based structure of protestant hymns with his interweaving voices, achieving a metaphoric escape from “the organ strains [which] come rich and resonant through the summer night, blended sonorous, as if the freed voices themselves were assuming the shapes and attitudes of crucifixions, ecstatic, solemn, and profound in gathering volume ... demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon.” *Light*, 367.

4. See also Regina Fadiman who notes that in his revisions Faulkner carefully increased the ambiguity of Joe’s race, eliminating in the later versions of the novel more concrete physical descriptions of Christmas and more “overt statements of [his] dilemma” (111).

5. See Beth Weidmaier’s essay, “Black Female Absence and the Construction of White Womanhood in Faulkner’s *Light in August,*” for an analysis of how “Faulkner’s text reveals the cultural construction of sexuality and white womanhood that was enabled by the use of black female bodies” (37).

6. Note that Eric Sundquist has suggested that, “Faulkner’s novel is informed by two other literary treatments of lynching from the surrounding decades, Lillian Smith’s *Strange Fruit* (1944) and Jean Toomer’s “Blood Burning Moon” in *Cane* (1923).... Toomer’s ... story of white murder and black lynching ... borrows from Du Bois’s “Of the Coming of John” (as indeed the whole of *Cane* borrows from *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Darkwater* [Faulkner and Race, 16].) Faulkner’s treatment of the racially other in *Light in August* is to some degree explained by his time’s limited availability of the black subject’s imagination. See also John B. Cullen’s and Floyd Watkin’s *Old Time in the Faulkner Country* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1961) 90-91, wherein they detail the story that was circulating in Oxford when Faulkner was a boy of the white woman, Mattie McMillan, who was decapitated with a razor by Nelse Patton, a black man. The image obviously resonated deeply with Faulkner as we also get a version of it in *Sanctuary* and “Dry September”.
7. Note that according to Regina Fadiman, "the manuscript shows how Faulkner later inserted the Burden flashback into the Christmas flashback" (196); suggesting that what was at one point seen as an independent trajectory is reformulated by Faulkner as an integral part of an understanding of Joe's own history.

8. See David J. Tacey for an interesting extrapolation on this episode. He suggests that, "Psychologically, [Calderon's] seduction of Dubbo and the boy's subsequent departure is another expression of the ineffectual father-image in White, and its inability to assimilate or contain the energies of the instinctual world. Culturally, it is further evidence that the imported patriarchal structures fail to fulfill their task in upholding the exalted values of the Christian world. Timothy Calderon's Church of England is as readily undermined by the primitive spirit of Australia as is Norbert Hare's elaborate Xanadu by the native scrub" (107). In White's metaphysics, Dubbo, as a character instinctively bound to the primitive, however disrupted by the Christian framework imposed on him, is aligned with a primordial maternal force. But it is ultimately a malignant force -- fundamental to creativity but lethal to subjectivity.

9. White created a similar scene in the earlier novel The Tree of Man in which the postmistress, displays and sells the paintings of her husband, Mr. Gage, who like all of White's artists is a perennial outcast. The episode, like that in Riders, has a sordid, exhibitionist feeling to it, the paintings representative of forced sexual exposure. In White's fiction art is itself represented as a sexualized commodity -- something that is exploited, repressed, denied and prostituted. It is the coin of emotional and sexual betrayal as in the case of Mr. Gage and Alf Dubbo. It is used as sexual power by the artist Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector.
Conclusion

There is only one truth and endurance and pity and courage. *The Selected Letters of William Faulkner*

Men are the same before they are born. They are the same at birth, perhaps you will agree. It is only the coat they are told to put on that makes them all different.... Then are the poor souls at rest, and all naked again, as they were in the beginning. *Riders in the Chariot*

Voices if only in whispers must break in. *Voss*

The modern subject struggles to comprehend and own the dimensions of its interiority, yet is pinioned by the problem of external categorization in a world that insists on conformity as much as it demands the imperative for individuality. The condition of social belonging has become significantly more complicated as we register identity in increasingly narrow terms and as social factions wish to be recognized by ever more minute particularities of difference. Division and unity are laid against one another more closely than they perhaps have ever been. We can recognize in the temper of our current world what John Jervis has classified as “modernism’s dialect of abstraction and particularity, [the] freedom and subjection central to the politics of modernity” (43). This idea isolates modernism’s intrinsic, almost organic investment in the structures of dominance and repression that continue to articulate the terms of human interconnection as well as determining how the modern subject is able to assess the parameters of interior identity.

Modernism’s tireless dismantling and reconstruction of its constitutive identity paradigms is an innovation which speaks to us with ever-deepening relevance as the minority issues of today continue to fragment and frustrate our sense of collective unity, just as they make that eventual
unity at least a theoretical possibility. By availing ourselves even of modernism's often biased deconstruction of its own prejudices perhaps we can begin to see that schism and integration are each other's irrefutable counterparts. Minority and marginalization are themselves not to be understood simply as the fallout of social power structures, but as an intrinsic function of every subject's relationship to the constant reconditioning of socio-historical factors.

Separateness has become the template of belonging, an idea that serves as the sad foundation of modernism's evaluation of its fractured internal and external world. In terms of the representation of the marginalized, Pericles Lewis has suggested that this begets "an almost tragic conception of the nature of identity in modern society, namely that a lie, a renunciation of one's own intimate life, is necessary to permit the minority group to belong to the nation of equal citizens with their increasingly homogenous social systems" (165).

The tragedy of inequality is, of course, the one constant that has raged through history as its veritable definition, and is seemingly the inescapable self-verdict that the human race has initiated against itself. Yet, it is equally in our nature to bend and overturn our own constructions of injustice as we search for the remnants of a lost moral coherence, which while generally resulting only in a redistribution of power structures also illuminates the social schisms which divide us. Modernism in its own intense engagement with social and psychic disenfranchisement is particularly invested in the nature of those schisms as it scans the terrain of interior and 'intimate' psychic worlds with a generous attention to all the processes of co-optation.

Lewis makes an observation earlier in his work that locates what I recognize as modernism's ultimate interest in a collective grounding. He says, "If the beautiful differs for each race, than paradoxically the way to reach the universal in human nature may be to submerge oneself in the particularities of one's own race. Only by embodying the racially specific
perspective as perfectly as possible can one arrive at an embodiment of the shared human condition of belonging to a particular race” (47). I would add that this shared condition extends beyond race to the examination of difference in general, as difference is itself the only real common denominator in a world where sameness is always an imaginary product of those in control of social power. The problem is, and has always been, making material conditions -- and with it physical and spiritual freedom -- conform to what should be recognized as a self-evident truth. Yet we are fettered and described by the history we create, forever imposing dynamics of freedom and subjection by insisting on a world model defined as center and periphery.

The modernists, as I have shown by utilizing the texts of William Faulkner and Patrick White as examplars, are fundamentally concerned with the dimensions of marginality. By disclosing an innate interior tendency to force aspects of the self to its own margins and thereby creating an internally realized apparatus of repression and domination, as well as establishing Otherness as the principle correlative of the self, they begin to unravel and expose the external social patterns of a very similar exclusion. In so doing they have opened a very particular window, one that can never again be closed, by admitting that multiplicity is the condition of singularity. And this is not registered as merely an interior psychological property but as a deeply necessitated historical mandate.

In the final analysis, I think Faulkner is to be regarded as the more successful writer with regard to the engagement of minority identity as Patrick White’s multiple fictional studies of the alienated modernist subject are themselves co-opted within his fierce and blinding cultural resentments. Simon During has commented that,

...for White, modern society is not unity: it is fundamentally divided, especially into class and gender groups which indelibly mark most (but not all individuals). As a
field of essential differences, society cannot ground individual lives; an individual’s
class and gender position overrides more widely shared cultural traits or
resources.... What White is ridiculing, damning, black-magicking away is most of
all the Australian ordinariness of his time. The problem is ... that the ordinariness
itself was a myth as became clearer in the 1960's when differences within the
ordinary -- ethnicity, gender, sexuality -- were slowly recognized. (43, 99).

This curious stalemating of his own efforts to vaunt the legitimacy of the disenfranchised
modern subject is probably the reason why many of White’s novels are no longer published and
why he remains an under-read author. Nevertheless, and to some extent despite himself, there is
in White’s work a prescience about the gravity of withholding minority voices that should not be
underestimated. He tends to represent the marginalized in such a way that he pays quite direct
homage to the silencing with which he recognizes himself as partially complicit. Consider this
qualification of Alf Dubbo: “He would not speak now, or ever. His mouth could never offer
passage to all that he knew to be inside him.... The blackfellow would run after him to tell what he
had seen and understood. But could not. Unless it burst from his fingertips. Never from his
mouth” (Riders in the Chariot, 417). White can only direct us to a yearning and an urgency that
he presents as a formidable potentiality, but one censored by the very creative sensibility that
would elicit it. With Faulkner that same foresightedness is even more available, and the failings in
the one accentuate and clarify the triumphs in the other.

John T. Matthews in Faulkner at 100 says that “the interplay of dialects in Faulkner’s
writing marks how Faulkner’s modernist voice comes to life as he accepts the obligation to tell
about the South. Minority voices and subjects are not incidental to Faulkner’s achievement; they
are its foundation” (80). And as Phillip Weinstein also suggests in A Cosmos No One Owns,
"[this] reveals a narratorial subjectivity profoundly at odds with its conventional options. The self-ratifying he and his white male protagonists require collides with and shatters against the alterities that make up both his inner and his outer world" (2). This is, I think, not to be judged as a failure but as indicative of modernism's "shattering of all eggshell shibboleths", to use Faulkner's own words, and serves as modernism's greatest ratification of its own cultural failings.

Weinstein goes on to say that "Faulkner's major novels are the ones in which this desire (imperial or beleagured) for self-ratifying clashes most urgently with the differential forces shaped by politics, race and gender that would unseat the coherence of the struggling male subject. In theme and form these novels enact the invasion of the unknown into the precincts of the familiar ... [and produce] a subjectivity irrevocably shattered" (2). But this shattering should be remarked less for its self-destructive energy than for its simultaneous effort at being healed, and healed at the cost of its own integrity.

What this thesis has set out to establish is that modernism interrogates its own dialogue for the very absence in its vocabulary which gives it resonance, and this can be recognized as the issuing silence of a waiting and constitutive minority presence whose articulation alone can complete modernism's representation of subjective isolation. In so doing, modernism is reckoning isolation itself as the shared communion which might succeed in interlocking the disparate trajectories of subjects alienated in the wasteland of modernity. This should not be misconstrued as modernism's habituated fatalism or opportunism, but rather reoriented to unveil its instruction for a far more liberal freedom for the modern subject in all incarnations of race, gender, class, etc.

In essence, the modernist extends an invitation to the 'unknown' subject to become a visible, audible presence in social and psychic myths that have lost a sense of familiarity with their own dimensions -- that can no longer sustain themselves without the stranger.
The question now is what to make of modernism's occluded but formidable evocation of minority voices. I think that the answer is that we must register as thoroughly as possible the fact that that particular recognition was occurring from within the heart of patriarchal identity orientations that were themselves seemingly the least likely to invoke those very voices which would irrevocably disturb their authoritative control. The risk was immense as was the necessity. That very risk is also what can and should be rescued from the ever-changing evaluation of modernism's self-destabilization. Not only should it be registered as a vital element of modernism, it should be utilized as we continue to move in times that frustrate and bar interpersonal identification at every turn, for there is available in that risk-taking the potential genesis of a real freedom. And as Daniel Singal has suggested in his discussion of Faulkner, "accepting the formidable risks of freedom is the only true choice we have" (243). It is the freedom which might allow the intimate, interior life of every subject, any subject, to be realized and heard as it engages with history and claims a personal station within it, for the lost and denied voices to conjoin as part of a collective dialogue heard together and separately and no longer translated by the other, but demonstrated for the other.

In the work of William Faulkner and Patrick White we have observed with what subtle arduousness that freedom is beckoned by the pain with which the voices of their marginalized characters struggle to reach the surface, and the stress with which the authoritative dialogue permits the breakthrough. But the breakthrough is there, and through it we hear a concert of voices striving for a unanimity which even in dissent we are still striving to realize. So we must linger over the texts of modernism until the full register of their dissonant voices claims us in an imagined sentence that can include us each with the other. Like Joe Christmas isolated in his own doubleness, in an aloneness that is itself separated, we may learn to accept multiplicity through the
singled nerve of the self.

Then it seemed to him sitting on the cot in a dark room, that he was hearing a myriad of sounds of no greater volume -- voices, murmurs, whispers: of trees, darkness, earth; people: his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places -- which he had been conscious of his whole life without knowing it, which were his life thinking God perhaps and me not knowing that too. He could see it like a printed sentence, fullblown and already dead God loves me too like the faded and weathered letters of last year's billboard God loves me too. (Light in August 105)
Works Cited


Wheelwright, Philip E. “Sanctuary.” *The Symposium,* 2 April 1931, 276-281.


