UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
Edmond, Oklahoma
College of Graduate Studies

Water and Its Temporal Dimensions in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE

By

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Edmond, Oklahoma

2021

Water and Its Temoral Functions

in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

December 2, 2021

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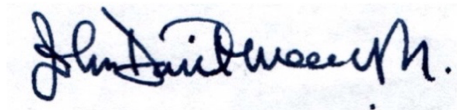

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Pawpaw, James E. Trent, for supporting me through years of college and for making my dreams possible. This is all for him.

ABSTRACT

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TITLE: Water and Its Temporal Dimensions in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison

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PAGES: 79

William Faulkner and Toni Morrison offer narrative insight into the experience and implications of human's experience of temporality. This thesis constructs a narrative relationship between the two authors, exploring the ways in which the thematic circumstances offered by Faulkner contribute to the literary experience created by Morrison. These authors' exploration of the functions of time showcases Morrison's adaptation and revision of Faulkner's literary structures. Both Faulkner and Morrison associate water with time in relation to its movement as well as to its varying forms. The temporal aspects of water inform this structural analysis of selected novels by Faulkner and Morrison, ultimately showcasing Morrison's reconfiguration of what it means to experience temporality in the face of bias and partiality.

The introduction to this thesis frames these ideas using Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative,* which provides the basis for this thesis's examination of Faulkner and Morrison. Ricoeur's discussion of the function of time within the human experience, as well as his idea that human truths are found through and potentially limited by the construction and understanding of narrative, provides an important context for the search for temporal knowledge described by Faulkner and Morrison. Ricoeur's reading of Augustine as a foil for Aristotle helps to clarify Morrison's and Faulkner's relationship. Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination,* in turn, provides a critical context for discussing the differences between

the two authors' novels. Morrison's assertion that an Africanist presence is crucial within Faulkner's construction of both self and place informs this study's discussion of temporality. Together, *Time and Narrative* and *Playing in the Dark* provide a framework for the thesis chapters that deal with specific works of Morrison and Faulkner and allows the two authors to serve as critical lenses for one another.

Moments of reintegration, revitalization, and rejuvenation recur throughout the novels discussed in this thesis, and water, for the characters within Morrison's novels, provides a temporal passageway to self-realization and agency. For Faulkner, water may seem to offer the same opportunity, but its ultimate function is to reinforce the sense of doom and fatality that encompasses his characters. Chapter One discusses Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, analyzing the temporal experiences of perceived history and the characters' journeys from conception to death. Morrison's Milkman achieves knowledge and freedom through the temporal agency of water, as he escapes from a sort of temporal alienation, whereas Faulkner's characters suffer repetitive entrapment within a closed temporal cycle.

Chapter Two discusses Morrison's *Beloved* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* exploring the presence of ghosts and the question of what it means to live with an unfinished history. These novels deal directly with the traumas of human enslavement and war, as well as with the effects of these traumas on the movement of time for forgotten peoples. Once again, Faulkner's characters occupy positions of greater privilege and freedom, but they have a fatalistic relationship with time, whereas the characters in Morrison's novel are saved from their personal histories through the acceptance of community.

Chapter Three pairs Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* in order to explore the production and materialization of temporality and its direct effects on what it

means to be natural or to live naturally. Water once again provides a route to freedom for Morrison's characters, who struggle with what it means to be self-reliant, whereas Faulkner's novel enacts the doom of the Compson family through the circular movement of time, closing off the passageway that is offered by water. These pairings of novels confirm the complex and nuanced relationship and tension between Faulkner and Morrison's understandings of temporality and its relationship to human experience and self-actualization.

The concluding chapter summarizes the thesis's exploration of water's role as a symbol for and medium of temporality by suggesting pathways for further research, opening up the possibility of a deeper analysis of temporality in other literary works, including the writings of Virginia Woolf and Octavia Butler, who likewise explore timeliness within narrative while also examining the effects that gender and race have on lived perceptions of time, as illustrated by Woolf's focus on bodies of water in her novel *To the Lighthouse* and Butler's temporal passageway from past to present through water in her novel *Kindred.* The conclusion also suggests an examination of the film adaptations of both Faulkner's and Morrison's novels that could expand and enrich the discussion of temporality in their works.

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Introduction

Meeting at the Watering Hole:

Time in the Works of Faulkner and Morrison

Nature composes itself to stillness as animals drink their fill at the cool watering hole. Predator and prey rely on the same source of sustenance, sharing the basic need for water, and every creature on earth has felt the pain and longing associated with its absence. To think, then, of the body and movement of water as a symbol of time is to acknowledge time as a fundamental element of being. Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the function and meaning of time within human existence helps to account for the association of water with time by suggesting that narrative is the representation and exploration of temporality.[1] The truth of temporality is located within narrative, which seeks to establish the impact of time upon humanity and upon history. Toni Morrison and William Faulkner explore consequences of measured time by creating characters and settings that both occupy and manufacture the spaces of temporality. Both authors employ the element of water as a pervasive symbol, associating water with temporality and identifying it as a direct pathway through time.

Time and Narrative's opening chapter discusses both Augustine and Aristotle, as Ricoeur searches for the temporal truth of their narratives, the *Confessions* and the *Poetics.* For Ricoeur, Augustine is exploring ultimate reality from within notions of temporality prescribed by Aristotle. *Poetics,* then, acts as a sort of base-text that establishes the function and configuration of time within narrative as set and predetermined by a structural and empirical way of knowing. Augustine's *Confessions*, on the other hand, attempts to understand that which is beyond

[1] See Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative,* vol. I

structure and which relies on the human experience of time and its consequences. Ricoeur argues that, "if Augustine seems to grant that time is the measurement of movement rather than the movement itself, this is not because, as was the case with Aristotle, he is thinking of the regular motion of celestial bodies but rather the movement of the human soul" (*Time and Narrative* 15). The unknown construction or makeup of the human soul drives the need to determine time, to make sense of the movement forward that creatures encounter as they venture through life. This conundrum of inescapable temporality moves beyond pre-determined structuralism when human experience intervenes. History defies structure, leaving some behind to live in the remnants of a past that has been destroyed by the perceived present, which lays the groundwork for the future. Ricoeur's analysis and application of Aristotle's and Augustine's ideas suggests the reasons why Faulkner and Morrison may fruitfully be discussed together in a study that focuses both on water and on time.

Faulkner's established status as a key figure in Southern American literature positions his novel as base texts when examining the works of Morrison. What sets the authors apart is Faulkner's reliance on structured temporal experiences, which may serve to renegotiate time briefly but that ultimately lead to the entrapment of his characters within their given circumstances. Morrison's exploration and usage of temporality within narrative negotiates a space for her characters within a history that has excluded or condemned them, giving them confidence for the future. While Morrison works within similar Southern settings and places her characters within the same historical timeframes as Faulkner's characters, her responsibility to the human soul deepens the agency gained by her characters within the given space. Morrison is able to encapsulate the phenomenon that Riceour believes Augustine was describing: the established meaning in straying from what is accepted and known to be true about time, which is

seen in Morrison's ability to stray from linearity in order to move through and confront the effects of living outside the boundaries of temporality. Water and time become both symbols and sources of freedom and revitalization form Morrison's characters; although Faulkner connects water to temporality, within his works water is associated with the fatality that entangles his characters in the complexities of time.

Toni Morrison's 1977 novel *Song of Solomon,* when analyzed alongside Faulkner's 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying,* uses the image of water to represent and configure the distinct temporality of each character who experiences its presence, and therefore its effects on the body. Both novels describe temporal journeys that are developed through the experience of death and are driven by the fluctuation of water. Milkman Dead of *Song of Solomon* is a displaced character who lives within a present moment in which he is regarded as useless by others and is impervious to his placement within history and his culture. Through his experience of water, Milkman directly confronts history and frees himself from temporal alienation, the river symbolizing his reconfiguration of time. The Bundren family of *As I Lay Dying* also experiences displacement and isolation, but their encounters with water and the consequent reconfiguration of time leaves them disoriented by novel's end, condemned to live within a disjointed reality from which their journey cannot free them.

Morrison's *Beloved* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* both also deal with the presence of ghosts who reside within and complicate the notions of time within the narratives. While both novels deal directly with the effects of a Civil War, the impact of that experience differs significantly for Faulkner's characters and Morrison's. Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved,* who lives as an escaped slave in a house that is haunted by her murdered infant, is confined by time and the traumas of history, unable to occupy a space within present human experience and

unable to locate a future for herself within her given situation. Thomas Sutpen of *Absalom, Absalom!* does possess the freedom to establish a space for himself given his privilege as a white man living in the American South, but he is unable to achieve the peacefulness or release from time that he seeks and expects, and this leaves him as a ghost and denies change to the characters he has affected throughout the novel. Beloved's ghost and her ultimate emergence from water, from unfinished history, allows for Sethe's forward motion, propelling the other characters through time rather than trapping them as Sutpen is trapped. These two novels call the relationship of time and history into question, as Morrison's *Beloved* exposes and interrogates the effects of an incomplete and compromised history.

The final pairing of novels, Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury,* examine water's relationship to time as a site of chance and vehicle for determining one's placement within temporality. Both works examine the effects of commodity upon the structure of humanity, mapping nature's infringement on human economies of value and exchange and the effects of this intrusion. Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* exists in a temporal limbo, as he refuses to participate in the commodification of time, but also sees nature as his resting place, a site of escape from time. Quentin's perception that his body will become inseparable from the stillness of water perpetuates the fatalistic tendencies of time for Faulkner's characters and reinforces their entrapment within the reality of the American South. For both Son and Jadine of Morrison's *Tar Baby,* nature, and especially water, offers a means of escape from commodified time and provides a space in which choice and self-assurance are possible. The trials suffered by characters within *Tar Baby* result from a need for and the reliance upon commodity, and the effects of both colonial and capitalist histories mold perceptions and ways of being for each character. Son's sudden appearance within Valerian

Street's home signals nature's capacity to undo and renovate the history of commodity and of human experience. Son poses both a threat and an opportunity for individualism for Jadine, as she struggles to find a space within temporality where she may truly know herself. Ultimately, water carries each of these characters to this determined space, the region for self-reliance, offering redemption from seasons of not knowing how to be within time or how to move progressively. Son and Jadine, set against characters like Quentin Compson, show Morrison's interest in exploring what in terms of race is left untouched by Faulkner but emerges as a key in Morrison's narrative exploration.

Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* becomes a key text in analyzing Morrison's work alongside Faulkner's. What is perhaps most striking about *Playing in the Dark* is its ability to relate to American literature as a whole and its exploration of the idea that the Africanist presence underwrites the basic understanding of what it is to live as an American, a relationship that remains crucial, even fundamental, in one's personal development.[2] An excerpt from *Playing in the Dark* helps to contextualize Morrison's interrogation and revision of the atmosphere created by William Faulkner:

> It seems both poignant and striking how avoided and unanalyzed is the effect of racism on those who perpetuate it. What I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability and availability on nonblacks who held, resisted, or altered these notions. (*Playing in the Dark* 11)

These notions of exclusion and availability are well within reach in the three novels of Faulkner, as is his pattern of both disregarding and at the same time utilizing blackness within his

[2] For more on the Africanist presence please see Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination*

narratives; this, in turn, underscores the need for an author such as Morrison to reconstruct the truth of Southern American history and literature. The accessibility of Morrison's texts and their reflections on the experience of living, perceiving, and existing as a human being reflect a genuineness though which empathy and reflection emerge. Morrison allows for her novels not only to interpret the effects of history but also to offer alternate understandings of temporality across those histories. Faulkner's relation to Morrison depends upon the establishment of structure, and the interrogation of that structure's unspoken underpinnings. While Faulkner's works may be regarded as constructional, Morrison's may be viewed as resourcefully inventive.

To view Faulkner and Morrison as meeting at the watering hole, as drawing narrative truth from the same vessel, is to establish a bridge across which Morrison constructs a reimagined hopefulness characterized by the progression of time as well as by the experiences of those who have been left behind. Each author shows the effects of time to be shaped by water and its movement, and the circumstances of each of their characters is determined by that which is natural, instinctive, and essential. The fatal and reckless nature of Faulkner's characters within the element contrasts to Morrison's characters, who are accompanied by and energized by water, and this communicates a difference in narrative reflection. The awakening that Morrison's work effects arises from the revitalization of her characters. Water, as a vessel for time in each of these novels, determines both time's form and its effects though its motion or lack of motion: freezing of water is shockingly frigid and cannot proceed or to advance; the rushing of water is unpredictable and correlates to human attempts to survive; the pouring of water from the sky suggests abundance and evokes its absence—each of water's forms reveals a narrative, temporal truth. Faulkner's and Morrison's lyricism, encompassing their ability to transcend and to discern the experiences of the human senses, achieves a metamorphosis through water, a reconciliation

of time through narrative. The strength of the novels is found within the search for meaning within time, illustrated by the function of water and the realities it permeates. The naturalness of the element, the necessity of water, corresponds to what Morrison is able achieve through her work, the value of her narrative considerations yield a new but fluid understanding of the constituents of human existence and experience.

Chapter 1

Led by Water: Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

Water is a natural human need and is essential for survival. The element of water surrounds humankind on all sides—a source of new growth but also a force of destruction in certain circumstances. Faulkner and Morrison draw upon these basic understandings of water and upon its complex symbolic values in order to reflect on time and community in their literary works. Water is not so much a site of convergence between their works, but rather a point of intersection that offers a deeper understanding of the human body and its relationship to time. Although Morrison and Faulkner differ greatly in their individual literary journeys and positionings, their usage of water as a temporal figure provides a point of departure for examining their accounts of the ways in which the human concept of time influences one's sense of being. Water functions as a temporal passageway in both *As I Lay Dying,* and *Song of Solomon.* The importance of pairing these two novels lies in the respective journeys to which each novel's primary characters are bound, which underscore the differences between Faulkner's and Morrison's understandings of time and community. Morrison's character Milkman Dead is on a journey of metamorphosis, in search of gold, and he is stunned by the history of himself that he finds instead. The deepest differences between the two novelists are rooted in their representation of race, gender, and community, and the symbolic functions of water in their novels provide a matrix for analysis, demonstrating the varied effects of time on both a lower-class white family living in northern Mississippi in the 1920s and a lower-class black family living in Michigan in the 1960s.

Water as a temporal metaphor informs the lives of the characters in both *As I Lay Dying* and *Song of Solomon.* There are distinctive moments within each novel in which water makes

possible a reconfiguration of time, allowing for a retelling of the current moment and a glimpse of what is past and what is future. Ricoeur's notion of the three-fold present, which describes how human beings both deal with and live inside of time, is helpful in specifying how water serves as a temporal connection for Faulkner and Morrison. The three-fold present is made up of the present of the present moment, the present of the past, and the present of the future; in a literary context and within the structure of a given narrative, it is up the author to determine which section, or which moment, within the three-fold present each character is experiencing or inhabiting. These moments are apt to change quickly, and one character's sense of being in time will not necessarily coincide with that of another, even within a shared conversation or shared experience.[3] Within the work of Faulkner and Morrison, the three-fold present is evident in characters' entrances to and exits from water, which mark an apparent change in their conception of reality and the relationship to the movement of time occurs. For Ricoeur, as well as for the characters of *As I Lay Dying* and *Song of Solomon*, "what can be measured is that which exists" (*Time and Narrative* 7). In the three-fold present, that which exists is the impression of the overall moment on the body, the impression of memory and of one's condition. For the Bundren and Dead families, the measurement of time exists in impressions of water, and the characters' being within the water having direct impact on their individual placement within the three-fold present that Ricoeur describes.

Key narrative differences presented in *As I Lay Dying* and *Song of Solomon* are important in tracking the temporal function of water, while the stark separation of the Bundrens' and the Deads' realities allows for an analysis of Morrison's impactful strengthening of Faulkner's temporal themes. The Bundren family lives in a period of repression and rebuilding. The societal

[3] For more on the three-fold present, see ch. 1, vol. 1 of Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative.*

contexts of Southern Mississippi, particularly within Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county, offers a meaningful counterpoint to the conditions of the Civil Rights era in which Milkman lives.[4] By placing his white cast of characters in the south, Faulkner creates an ambivalence toward and even directly erases black life in the area. Morrison's expression of the South, on the other hand, involves a deepened sense of communal awareness and shared, consciously understood history. The period of rebuilding has direct effects on the family, especially in Anse Bundren's insistence on using a broken bridge to get Addie's body to Jefferson more quickly; this moment directly links the temporal setting of both the novel and the characters to a passage across or through water. For Milkman, the era of the Civil Rights Movement is recalled through conversations concerning issues such as the death of Emmett Till and also through the potential foiling of Guitar and Milkman as surrogates for Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Milkman's ability to displace and reconfigure reality during conversations that convey the racial tensons of the time period inflects the temporality of Faulkner's South by demonstrating its direct impact on Milkman's Northern experience.

Catherine Carr Lee thoughtfully proposes in her essay on the South in *Song of Solomon* that the "hyper-individualism that grows out of the American culture of competition, capitalism, and racism" (Lee 5) serves as a potential answer to the brooding alienation that Milkman must overcome in order to interact with the history he avoids. Milkman's alienation serves as a response to the racism, and lack of attention to racism, that pervades the time when the Bundrens make their journey through Mississippi. Remembering Faulkner's broken bridge as both symbolic of the period and representative of the passage of time for the Bundren family, water emerges as the first accessible connection to Milkman and his temporal situation. Morrison

[4] For more on Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, see Cindy Gault's "The Two Addie's"

discusses this connection in *Playing in the Dark.* In this text, which examines the impacts of Africanism on white literature, Morrison offers insight to the sort of "literary journey" on which Milkman finds himself (*Playing in the Dark* 37). Morrison characterizes the temporal experience of Milkman as an insight into the "forbidden space of blackness" which Faulkner does not approach but which Morrison thoughtfully and importantly takes on; the journey toward this space can be structured as a passage through dark water, which Milkman will ultimately find himself swimming in, fitting in, and being in as his negotiation of the three-fold present allows him to find a centeredness, a connectedness that he can rationalize. [5]

It is important to note that the journeys in both novels revolve largely around death, specifically the death of a female character. It should be noted, before delving into the temporal notions of death and water, that the female body in both works is a function of or an extension of water—a determinant of both time and the perceptions of reality held by the male characters who surround them. This function of the female character is displayed mainly through the maternal qualities that they possess or lack. If water is the passageway for change in the three-fold present, the images of new life and of the finality of death represent flowing, temporal openings that are maternal in ways analogous to being birthed from and returning to the mother. The death of Addie Bundren, as well as the pregnancy of Dewey Dell Bundren, represents the flow of life within *As I Lay Dying,* and the corpse and the living body together suggest the dependence upon the mother of the male characters, who rely upon the expected maternity of both women. Women like Morrison's Hagar, Reba, and Pilate are likewise associated with the movement of water, their maternity linking life and death and driving Milkman through his journey; his dependence

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[5] For more on the 'forbidden space of blackness' which Morrison presents, read *Playing in the Dark*

on them, like that of the Bundren men, stems from the source of life, where water flows as one enters the world through the woman.

It is important, too, to note the deaths of the female character, whether actual or impending, and the way these deaths pertain to the movement of water and the protagonists' overall journey. The Bundren family's journey begins as their mother's life ends. Her husband Anse's insistence on getting Addie's body to Jefferson results in an unprepared and hasty journey across a South that is broken, not yet reconfigured. Milkman's initial misconfiguration of self, which leads him to start his journey, emerges from his established relationship with Pilate and the women in her household, while the impending deaths of both Pilate and Hagar result from and finalize the path that he takes. The events that lead to this journey reflect what Ricoeur describes as the issue or objectivity of history, the sort of relied-upon faith that produces the perceived, accepted aspects of historical fact.[6] The Bundren children find themselves at the mercy of the perceived faith of their father, as their mother's voice is not available to disclose or confirm the historical causes that move the family onward toward Jefferson in order to place her back in her native ground, the place of her people. Pilate is Milkman's connection to history, and her memory of perceived history propels him toward gold and also inflects his discourse as his interaction with the South begins to alter his perception of his connection to people, to roots. On the journey, water appears primarily as river or rainfall. The female presence is both transformative and transformed within the realms of death, the entrance to and exit from water, and the time of the three-fold present. The male characters' reliance on these shifting maternal

[6] For more on the thesis given by Ricoeur pertaining to the faith required of history, see pt. II, vol. I of *Time and Narrative.*

figures impels and accelerates their journeys, which recall death and are framed by time and the presence of water.

The reconfiguration of time by entering and exiting water informs the characters' exploration of body. Ricoeur's meditations on the human relationship with time and narrative suggest that,"time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (*Time and Narrative* 52). This insight underwrites an analysis of the characters of *As I Lay Dying* and *Song of Solomon* that emphasizes the forces of water on narrative, its effects on the condition of temporal existence, and its role within an intertextual matrix that links analysis of the two novels across categories of race and gender. The temporal meanings associated with the flow of water are configured within the "condition of temporal existence," and they highlight both the struggles and opportunities associated with human efforts to measure time. Loreta Ulvydiene's paper on the concepts of time in the writings of Faulkner and Woolf highlights the bodily condition and its dependence on water, Ulvydiene claims that movement of time is "closely related to the rhythms of the human organism and the cycles of nature" (Ulvydiene 26), an association directly applicable to the ebb and flow of time experienced on the journeys of both the Bundren family and Milkman Dead. As Darl Bundren contemplates the death of his mother and the function of time in his own perceived reality, he reflects,

> I used to lie on the pallet in the hall, waiting until I could hear them all asleep, so I could get up and go back to the bucket. It would be black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank. After that I was bigger, older. (*As I Lay Dying* 11)

Within this reflection of the present of the past, Darl recalls drinking water as a means of viewing and understanding what is out of his reach. The black surface lacks movement, as does Darl's current positioning within his home and within the family. The consumption of water is followed by feelings of growth, which are in turn the first signs of movement and which emerge from Darl's relationship to water and to temporality. The fact that drinking water comes to mind as he floats in a near dream-like state is important, as it recalls what Morrison writes about the dreamer in *Playing in the Dark*: "As a writer reading, I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (*Playing in the Dark* 17), an insight that informs this analysis of Faulkner's Darl and his dreaming of water—and of being moved by the element. Water's role as the subject of the dream reflects Darl's existence as a human instance of Ricoeur's temporality within narrative; his own perception and body are inextricably linked to his experience of water in the present moment.

The water scene involving the broken bridge is the crux of the Bundren family's movement in and out of temporality, as it offers quick access to their destination, Jefferson, Mississippi. At this point in the novel, Faulkner's use of individual and interchanging narration within chapters that present the journey to return Addie's body to her final resting place situates the characters within the same constructed, three-fold present. The affliction of both Addie's body and Dewey Dell's secret pregnancy have altered reality for the family in differing ways. The ultimate crashing of the wagon into flood waters represents this misconfiguration of time across characters, as it seems to the reader that the crash may be either a memory of what has happened, an occurrence that is happening in the narrative present, or an anticipation of what will happen across the differing fields of vision. A moment of narration states,

> The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice. Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. (*As I Lay Dying* 146).

Within the moment in which the horses drown and Addie's corpse floats downriver, the characters who depend upon the successful completion of the trip are already living outside of water, and the present moment has become a memory. For Cash, the brother attempting to steer and save the horses, the river is very much the present moment, while for Darl, the narrator of the chapter and a spectator of time, the crash anticipates events in the future. Following the ordeal and the retrieval of Addie's corpse, the family's individual afflictions seem to grow more pertinent: Cash's leg is harmed and Anse's insistence on making it to Jefferson only intensifies. Their movement through the flooded river results in the sort of loss that causes the body to suffer through the measurable effects of time and the cost of proceeding forward.

Milkman Dead also experiences bodily symptoms of temporal change through his interaction with the Southern river. As Milkman sets off in desperation to find gold left behind in childhood by his father and aunt in childhood in the bowels of a cave, which represents the bowels of his family's history, the river functions as a consistent boundary. The trip for Milkman is always strenuous; the movements of his body seem not to correspond to the movement of those who surround him, including the cycles and movements of nature. Milkman's journey through water to find his family's history coincides with the disconnection he feels from his culture and his roots, but it also signals his evolving willingness to participate in community. His

first attempt to cross the river is difficult and tiring, and he fails to make the critical observations that could make the journey easier. However, as Milkman finds his connections to the American South deepening and begins to understand the story of his people, his family, he finds himself coming back to water, relieved to be embraced by its force. The temporality of the river connects the present of the past, animating the memory that informs Milkman's current, lived moment. This is highlighted in Milkman's insistence on swimming after having learned the story of his family; in this moment, time is reconfigured, and he is allowed to return to the present of the present moment rather than relying on the memory of those around him or the anticipation he feels for himself: "The sea! I have to swim in the sea. Don't give me no itty bitty teeny tiny tub, girl. I need the whole entire complete deep blue sea!" (*Song* 327). The freedom Milkman feels as a result of overcoming of the temporal valley of water that once stood in the way of understanding his history is one key to understanding how Morrison's representation of time deepens Faulkner's thematic cues; what is bound to doom the family in Faulkner's work rejuvenates the family of Morrison's. The funeral procession of the Bundren family opens space for a discussion of Milkman's historical migration southward, which ultimately frees him for the alienation that Morrison and Faulkner both understand to be fatal. Milkman's acceptance of communal roots and his willingness to live with history leads to his freedom, which is facilitated and expressed by his bodily connection to the water that seems to eliminate the boundaries that once stood in his way.

Milkman's alienation and afflictions are also reflected in his body: "By the time Milkman was fourteen he had noticed that one of his legs was shorter than the other. When he stood barefoot and straight as a pole, his left foot was about half an inch off the floor. So he never stood straight; he slouched or leaned or stood with a hip thrown out, and he never told anybody

about it—ever" (*Song* 62). Milkman's legs and his leaning or slouched posture physically manifest his alienation and sense of incompleteness or inadequacy, but his uneven gait disappears when immersed in water and swimming. By journey's end, Milkman's legs seem no longer to affect his perception of where or what he is within the present moment, and his return to the water against which he struggled signals an end to his alienation, which is essential if the character is to prosper in time. Cash Bundren's leg, on the other hand, putrefies in the summer heat, covered in dried cement, unable to move. By the time the family reaches Jefferson, Cash's broken leg is can no longer be saved. The loss of his leg anticipates the loss of community by journey's end, whether it be one's sense of family or one's ability to rely on one's neighbor. This cultural and bodily failing of the Bundren family contrasts to the bodily freedom achieved by Milkman; both novels examine the trials of temporal alienation, which result from misunderstood history and disconnection from the self.

Although Milkman's character experiences a freeing sensation through water, it is important to also discuss the deaths of both Hagar and Addie Bundren to understand the relationship among body, water, and time within both novels. In the essay "Toni Morrison and William Faulkner's Verbose Ghosts," Solveig Dunkel interprets Addie Bundren as being "resistant to" the accepted definitions of the term, *corpse* (Dunkel 17), and the same resistance occurs in relation to the death of Hagar in *Song of Solomon.* Ricoeur's claim that what can be measured must exist suggests that both Addie and Hagar continue in some sense to exist following death, as notions of the past seem inseparable from the present moment. Their overall resistance to being dead, or ceasing to be measured, is evident within the scenes in each novel that recall or rely upon the element of water. When considering the resistant corpse of Addie Bundren, it is important to note that Addie lay in bed for ten days following her death; her

family's refusal to make the transition from the expectation of her death to an acknowledgment of the reality of that death delays the journey's beginning. By the time the family reaches the broken bridge, Addie's decaying corpse is in desperate need of a cleansing, a stripping off of the earthly weight that she bears, in death, as a result of the pretenses of her stubborn husband. Vardaman Bundren's association of his mother's body with that of the fish he killed the morning of her death is most helpful: "My mother is a fish" (*Dying* 84). This pairing of fish and a human body associates both with water, as well as with the need to dissolve earthly connections; Addie's corpse calls for this severance in the only chapter in which she is given voice, a chapter that highlights her resistance to giving up her body to the demands of being a wife and a mother, as she states, "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die" (*Dying* 176). Addie's corpse craves alienation—which was not allowed to her due to the conventions of Southern motherhood.[7] Were she the fish her youngest son imagines her corpse to be, Anse's refusal to let her body escape from temporality might perhaps cause her corpse to make an escape from the wagon as it attempts to cross the flooded river. This last act of resistance by a body that is also a fish and therefore aquatic represents escape from the journey her husband imposed both her body and on her children.

Where, then, is Addie is left within the three-fold present of the narrative? We have our last glimpse of her body as fish as Vardaman narrates, "I knew he had her because he came slow and I ran down into the water to help and I couldn't stop hollering because Darl was strong and steady holding her under the water even if she did fight he would not let her go he was seeing me

[7] For more on the alienation that Addie's corpse craves, see Brian Norman's *Dead Women Talking,* specifically the chapter on Addie Bundren's corpse.

and he would hold her and it was all right now it was all right now it was all right" (*Dying* 151). This scene depicts Addie's temporal resistance to the present moment. Vardaman's knows she should not be bound to the same present to which he is, but Darl's insists on keeping her there. Addie's resistant form is confined once again and she is fragmented and rotting, held fast by the family she believes has consumed and destroyed her earthly body. The Bundren family must now deal with the fragmentation that the river effects and that lives on through her body the rest of the way to Jefferson.

For Hagar, a woman desperately in love with the idea of what she wishes Milkman to be, death and its connection to water reflect the repercussions of his journey—Hagar's association with Milkman's alienation causes her to die as part of the process of his baptism into history and acceptance of community. Hagar's role as Pilate's granddaughter and Milkman's cousin creates a propensity for rebellion as their romantic relationship develops, despite Milkman's father's insistence that he stay away from Pilate and the other two women living in her household. The bodily connection Milkman creates with Hagar gives readers the first glimpse of how the women in the house exude the temporal characteristics of water against a keen association with air. When Milkman decides to end things with Hagar by means of a letter he sends by mail, the novel notes that,

> And he did sign it with love, but it was with the word 'gratitude' and the flat-out coldness of 'thank you' that sent Hagar spinning into a bright blue place where the air was thin and it was silent all the time, and where people spoke in whispers or did not make sounds at all, and where everything was frozen except for an occasional burst of fire insider her chest that crackled away until she ran out into the streets to find Milkman Dead. (*Song* 99)

This passage associates Hagar with anything but water and immediately disassociates her from the journey Milkman is to take. Hagar is the antithesis of the pathway set forth by water; she exists as the presence of air, an extension of Pilate's wind-like qualities. Milkman's feelings of hostility toward his immediate family, his parents and two older sisters, stems largely from the alienation he feels from his culture and history. Since Hagar represents a sort of rebellion on Milkman's part, she exists within the web of alienation he has created in his hometown—from her, from his family, and from his friend, Guitar. Her ascension into air as Milkman takes on water is symbolic of the break that causes Hagar to go mad, to seek desperate means to obtain the love she so desperately wishes to claim from Milkman. In Hagar's final scenes, readers see her attempts, by means of a shopping trip, to conform to the type of beauty she believes Milkman would crave. Here, her inability comfortably to inhabit the aqueous reality in which Milkman lives finally overtakes her. Leaving the store in possession of the sort of hosiery, makeup, and clothing she is hopeful will make Milkman love her, Hagar is hit by a downpour that leaves her lost, and her purchases destroyed:

> Finally she stood in Pilate's doorway, limp, wet, and confused, clutching her bundles in whatever way she could. Reba was so relieved to see her that she grabbed her, knocking Chantilly and Bandit to the floor. Hagar stiffened and pulled away from her mother. "'I have to hurry,'" she whispered. "'I have to hurry.'" (*Song of Solomon* 314)

This is Hagar's first real interaction with water in novel, and it results from the reality in which she wishes to live. Overtaken with fever, Hagar dies within days of the shopping trip that began in the air and ended soaked in the water of temporality, situating her body—the part of her that lives on and is to be called a corpse—within Milkman's anticipated future as well as his remembered past. Milkman's reliance on Pilate to connect with, find, and understand his history

means he must return to her to learn the impact of Hagar on his life now that she has passed through water. Hagar now functions in Milkman's history as a bodily reminder of love and community to which he always had access but had to journey to find. The washing of Hagar in the rain, resulting in her death, is proof of the fatality that results from the alienation Milkman fights, her body encompassed by the temporality of water, her love unable to save her from floating endlessly in the air.

These connections among body, water, and time inform the analysis of Morrison's presentation of community and reintegration as means to combat ideas of alienation. What Faulkner perhaps establishes is rhetorically strengthened by Morrison. The shifting three-fold present expressed in and through the movement of water, is demonstrated by the freedom Milkman's character finds at the end of the novel, as the functions of water within the narrative come full-circle and he makes the final leap in his journey. The leap that ends *Song of Solomon* differs from the end the Bundren family faces at the behest of the father figure, as water frees the Dead family but destroys the Bundrens. To understand the impact of these differing outcomes, one must go back to the beginning, to the presentation of the familial journey. An important moment in Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* addresses the impacts of racism on those who perpetuate it, illuminating the ways in which notions of Othering display themselves both intentionally and unintentionally in the writing of white authors (*Playing in the Dark* 11). This, in turn, suggests an approach to interpreting the lack of a black presence in *As I Lay Dying* and the strength of a novel such as *Song of Solomon,* which deals with these consequences head-on by telling of Milkman's journey through the South. In *Playing in the Dark,* Morrison's writes,

> Through significant and understood omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this

> presence—one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. And it shows. (*Playing in the Dark* 6).

This passage helps to account for the ways in which the associations of race allow for a successful journey in Morrison's novel. The impact of race and the conditions of Faulkner's South enable the Bundrens to deny a reality and thereby distorts their sense of temporality. The family experiences waster as the battered flow of events in their lives and their world, as Anse's refusal to deal with Addie's corpse makes the journey to Jefferson all the more impossible. The members of the Bundren family are unable to conjure any sense of community, and they lack any real grasp of events or other individuals who exits outside of the funeral procession. Considering their experience from the perspective of Morrison's argument about the "crucial" use of Africanism in order to showcase Americanness highlights the stark contrast between Milkman's journey and that of the Bundren family and demonstrates that an embrace of the Africanism which Morrison claims pervades all American writing, is the key to escaping the alienation and isolation that the Bundren family experiences. The Southern setting of the two novels further suggests how this phenomenon deepens the need for community. Milkman's movements, which reverse the Black Migration to the North, is a journey into history that depends on upholding one's roots and community (Lee 12). The Bundren family, having never lived outside of the American South, cannot take advantage of community, as Faulkner offers the possibility of changing reality through water but does not allow Anse to transcend the American identity that seeks to forget or deny the role of Africanism in American history and identity.

Interestingly, while discussing the Africanism evident in American writers, Morrison discusses her own interactions with the concept, writing, "Neither blackness nor 'people of color' stimulates in me notions of excessive, limitless, love, anarchy, or routine dread" (*Playing*

in the Dark xi); this passage allows for the reader to understand that the literary perceptions of blackness that are upheld through means of certain stereotypical notions do not determine the Africanism that is present in Morrison's own work; instead, she relies on her own, individualized experiential knowledge to shape narrative. Milkman's achievement, in contrast to the defeat of each member of the Bundren family connects Morrison's argument about writing blackness with the renewal that occurs both through the passage of water and through the ultimate acceptance of one's community. As mentioned before, Milkman overcomes alienation through his passage though the river—the stagnancy of both time and the water are broken as Milkman jumps into the river with Sweet following his epiphany about his family's history in the South. Milkman's last interactions with water find him swimming with a woman, allowing water to overtake his body in a way that is freeing and that places him in the present moment within the three-fold present, endowed a full of sense of memory, of the moment, and of anticipation for what is next next.[8] The Bundren family's last interaction with water, in contrast, occurs following Darl's attempts to burn his mother's body by setting fire to the neighbor's barn, in which they are housed for the night:

> The sound of it has become quite peaceful now, like the sound of the river did. We watch through the dissolving proscenium of the doorway as Jewel runs crouching to the far end of the coffin and stoops to it. For an instant he looks up and out through the rain of burning hay like a portiere of flaming beads, and I can see his mouth shape as he calls my name. (*As I Lay Dying* 222)

[8] For more on Milkman's redemptive qualities come novel's end, see Susan Willis's "Eruptions of Funk"

Darl, still living in the present moment of the past that occurred at the broken bridge, attempts to find his way back to the present moment using fire—an element that directly contrasts to the element of water, and the thing that will end Addie's earthly connection once and for all. The misconfiguration of time from character to character causes water to overcome fire, permitting Addie's corpse to continue rotting on the journey that Anse is intent upon completing. The temporal moments—Milkman's embracing of water and Darl's attempt to overcome it—exemplify the power perpetuated by both Faulkner's and Morrison's use of language and ability to portray both time and water as "distance and destructive elements" (Ulvydiene 13). The language of the narratives materializes in the ability of water to speak through the disruption of time, a moment suspended in temporality in which readers are allowed to navigate reality and discern the direction of the plot as the characters move into and out of the flow and ebb of the river. Ultimately, the pathway to water, the voice that calls Milkman and the men of the Bundren family and moves them forward, belongs to the women of the novels who are alive and those who are dead yet resistant. Morrison reaches a point of communal victory through Milkman's treading of water, a deepening of what Faulkner sets forth through isolation of his characters, and she is also able to establish the female connection to and reliance upon water, which propels the male characters forward toward the completion of the journey. Pilate and Hagar in this way serve as catalysts for reintegration of time, while Addie and Dewey Dell are instruments of further isolation in time.

The women in both *As I Lay Dying* and *Song of Solomon* exist as extensions of water, which makes them forces of temporal change and helps to determine the journey of the male characters. For Addie and Dewey Dell Bundren, the female body as corpse and the female body as pregnant effect tidal changes in reality for Darl, Anse, Vardaman, and the rest of the Bundren

men. Brian Norman writes about the influence of Addie Bundren's corpse in his book, *Dead Women Talking*, specifically discussing the notions of citizenship the corpse represents, as well as the temporality brought on by the corpse, which directly affects the men in the family. Beginning with the aspect of citizenship, which has been established as a part of the reintegration from alienation that Milkman experiences, Norman writes, "So, too, after death her rotting corpse offends the sensibilities of those around her—the scent lingering in nostrils akin to the welt rising on skin. Such bodily connections enact a morbid form of shared community" (Norman 210), an insight that reacts to Addie's rejections concerning motherhood and their implicit condemnation of what the Southern wife and mother is expected to be. She offends her neighbors through death, still confounding traditional expectations in her role as the resistant corpse. Addie Bundren, following her death and during her journey, is a flood in terms of her relationship to and connections with the idea of water. Her body's last attempted escape from her familial connections occurs while crossing of the broken bridge, which is a product of both of flood and of the lack of reconstruction occurring within the plot. Her son's retrieval of her body from the water is her last defeat, the last overtaking of body by the children she believes devoured her earthly agency.[9] The association of water and temporality is important to note in the way that Addie floods the minds of her sons and her husband. Norman offers helpful insight on Darl's descent into madness within the journey: "It is important to note that Darl's grammatical thought experiment creates the possibility of recognizing the presence of the past by putting the past tense in the present" (Norman 213); this directly relates both to the effects of Addie's afflictions on Darl's perceptions of time and to Ulvydiene's assertion that language, acting through water, is a force of change. Darl undergoes change alongside the rotting corpse of

[9] For more on Addie's children overtaking her body, see Norman's chapter on "Dead Women Talking."

his mother, and his act of burning in an attempt to stop Addie's flood pushes him into the consciousness of the three-fold present he lives in, as Norman's description of Darl's narrative language suggests.

Dewey Dell's pregnancy, her containing and holding of water in the place where life begins, also directly affects her brothers, especially Darl, who seems to have a keen knowledge of Dewey's accidental pregnancy. Cinda Gault's essay on Faulkner's novel offers an insight into Dewey Dell's initial positioning within Ricoeur's three-fold present: "For Dewey Dell, the future is a reply of the same physical maternity issues that besieged her mother" (Gault 22), pairing her immediately with the expected future that Addie's corpse represents in this perceived reality. The most important issue related to Dewey Dell's pregnancy is her lack of access to a safe abortion—a fact that plagues and drives her on the journey to bury her mother:

> He could so much for me if he just would. He could do everything for me. It's like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room for in it for anything else very important. He is a bug tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts and if there is not any room for anything else important in a big tub of guts, how can it be room in a little tub of guts. But I know it is there because God gave women a sign when something has happened. (*As I Lay Dying* 58)

This quotation highlights that Dewey Dell is not in a place to make her own bodily decisions, as the hands of men, which she sees as large and in her way, deny the rights of women. Her attempts and failures to receive the abortion are secret from her brothers and her father, though the narrative implies that Darl understands and disapproves of his sister's situation: "If you just knew. I am I and you are you and I know it and you dont know it and you could do so much for me if you just would and if you just would then I could tell you and then nobody would have to

know it except you and me and Darl" (*Dying* 51). In this moment, Darl directly locates Dewey Dell's expected future within his perceived present. Darl's perception intertwines the bodies of brother and sister, while also thwarting their differing interactions with reality and with water, as Darl experiences the temporal force entering and exiting, while Dewey Dell is decidedly connected to water through her pregnancy. When the Bundren family finally reaches Jefferson and Anse relies on the community he rejects to get his wife's corpse in the ground, the overall purpose of his individual journey becomes clear, as he immediately does two things—fixes his teeth and gets married. The final lines of the novel reads, "'It's Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell,' pa says, kind of hangdog and proud too, with his teeth and all, even if he wouldn't look at us. 'Meet Mrs Bundren,' he says," highlighting for the reader the picture of the family without Addie and minus Darl, who have both been lost in time over the days of the journey (*Dying* 261). The ending of the novel also negates any sort of communal or familial growth that may have occurred, as Anse proves to be untrustworthy in both his intentions and in his perception of the family's future and overall reality. The presence of the new wife, however, and Anse's rekindling of the Southern marriage imply a continuation of the temporality of water, the female form existing as the potential to continue Addie's type of oppressive and resistant flood as the past seems destined to repeat itself. Faulkner makes clear that the characters who remain are stagnant and have no intention to change and no desire to save themselves from the alienation that plagues them.

The female characters and their extensions of water in Milkman Dead's story vary greatly in their connections to community and to cultural history. This is the way Morrison deepens what Faulkner presents—the path from alienation guided by the temporal notions of body within the element of water. Milkman interacts with three distinct examples of the female body's extension

of water and reconfiguration of time, the first being the women in his own household: his mother, Ruth, and his older sisters, Lena, and Corinthians. Notably, Ruth Dead is associated with the water mark that seems to plague her, reminding her of the stagnant nature of her way of life living among the harsh critiques and judgments of Macon. A table centerpiece is the only means of change or release of creativity in Ruth's world, and it is telling that the most notable in her memory is the one made up of "driftwood and dried seaweed" (*Song* 13). The ocean represents a site of expansive freedom, but this centerpiece is ultimately rejected by her husband:

> Her husband looked at the driftwood with its lacey beige seaweed, and without moving his head, said, 'Your chicken is red at the bone. And there is probably a potato dish that is supposed to have lumps in it. Mashed ain't the dish.' Ruth let the seaweed disintegrate, and later, when its veins and stems dropped and curled into brown scabs on the table, she removed the bowl and brushed away the scabs. But the water mark, hidden by the bowl all these years, was exposed. (*Song of Solomon* 13)

This moment reveals Ruth's attempts at establishing a sort of felt freedom that is both rejected and planted in the present of her past and in the present of her future. Lena and Corinthians, two women in their forties who have been taught to reject any means of freedom that may be offered them, are seemingly connected to the permanence of Ruth's watermark, but in ways that represent the movement of the water that created the mark. In establishing this image, Corinthians's rebellious love affair, which is only made rebellious through the oppressive presence of her father and brother, is part of the ebb of the water that serves to make permanent the female oppression felt in the Dead house, as Milkman informs Macon, and it puts an end to any sort of mischievousness, or happiness, for Corinthians. Lena's confrontation with Milkman

following his disruption of his sister's love life makes clear their place as the body of water from which the men draw sustenance but to which they pay no attention:

> What do you know about somebody not being good enough for somebody else? And since when did you care whether Corinthians stood up or fell down? You've been laughing at us all your life. Corinthians. Mama. Me. Using us, ordering us, and judging us: how we cook your food; how week keep your house. But now, all of a sudden, you have Corinthians' welfare at heart and break her up from a man you don't approve of. (*Song of Solomon* 215)

Macon's and Milkman's treatment of the women in their house results in the women having no real connection to culture or to community, and it causes them to exist as a sort of permanent temporal stain of the water of which they are an extension. Following Lena's declarations, however, a movement occurs that pushes Milkman out and causes him to be in a place where he seems in need of the journey. The women of the Dead house are Milkman's the agents of his first pursuit of historical knowing, his first interaction with the changing perception of reality that results in the fragmentation of time and being.

The character Circe is also notable in illustrating both the female connection to water and the movement it causes within the affected male characters. In her essay on the "New Witch," Manuela Lopez Ramirez discusses Circe's character in relation to the witch in the story of Hansel and Gretel, especially in terms to her connections to time, children, and the destruction of the master's house.[10] Milkman's interaction with Circe marks a shift in the narrative perception of the South, as Milkman has had trivial boundaries up to the point where he reaches the place in

[10] For more on this idea, see the full paper "The New Witch in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and God Help the Child."

the woods where Circe resides and where he ultimately learns of the pathway that will connect him to the cave of his family's history. Circe is the mouth of the river that Milkman must cross to overcome his alienation. Her connections to Macon and Pilate as children alter Milkman's lived present, inserting moments of the present of the past into what must now be his anticipated future. This calls to question Circe's age, as the story she tells of connecting to Milkman's father occurs when she is an old woman but is nearly thirty years in the past. These distinctions seem unimportant, as Circe's body exists as purposeful in terms both of Milkman's history and of the preserved history of black life in the South. As the smell of ginger calls Milkman to the old mansion where Circe resides, immediate cultural connections to Africa are established, but the timely factor of Circe residing in the mansion of her long-past master shows she has overcome the oppression that once weighed her down. As Ramirez argues, there is an "appropriateness in Circe seeing the mansion crumble" (Ramirez 21). Milkman's character is drawn to Circe, "So, when he saw the woman at the top of the stairs there was no way for him to resist climbing up toward her outstretched hands, her fingers spread wide for him, her mouth gaping open for him, her eyes devouring him. In a dream you climb the stairs" (*Song* 239). The image of Circe as the mouth of the river that leads to Milkman's redemption becomes clear in her willingness to accept him and seeming to expect him to come. Circe shoes Milkman the direction he needs to take to validate the history he wishes to connect with and understand, and her purposeful body endows him with the ability to see things through to the end and reach a place of clarity. Circe is the beginning, the mouth of the river for Milkman. However, it is also important to discuss how Pilate's, Reba's, and Hagar's relationships with water affect the journey Milkman takes and how they shape his perception of reality.

As mentioned earlier, Hagar exists as the downpour that claimed her body—her mother Reba and grandmother Pilate are left to deal with the repercussions of Hagar leaving her body, leaving her place within the strong, three-woman household that has thrived without the presence or influence of a male body. Milkman's interactions with Hagar transform her from the quiet drizzle to the fatal downpour that she becomes, but the downpour ultimately serves to free Pilate from her feeling of earthly responsibility. The major symbolic trope of Pilate's lack of a naval is already representative of Pilate's overall lack of reliance upon or acquiescence to earthly expectations of the female body: her familial responsibility is the only real duty to which she is subject. Milkman first sets off to find Pilate's gold, and she is Milkman's sole connection to his family's history, as his father chooses to live in the present of the anticipated future, which forgets the past and rejects the present. The fact that Pilate bears such a responsibility to both family and history brings into question her role in the temporality of water. Her first real interaction involves crossing of the same river to which Milkman returns, and her last is the downpour by which she is overtaken following the death of Hagar. What makes Pilate's character so extraordinary, and what allows her to exist as an index of the temporality of water in the novel is her connection to air. After learning of Hagar's death, Milkman knows he must bring Pilate back to the river, to the place where roots and history began. This is the moment readers learn of Pilate's extreme fear of and refusal to fly in an airplane, to be conveyed through the air. This is related to Lorie Watkins Fulton's idea that Pilate's character rejects the novel's myth of the Flying African through her refusal to leave behind her history and her connections to family; in the process, Pilate's overall association with water is more fully established.[11] She is a guide who proves constant and full of reminders of home—the image of Pilate rejecting the notion of

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[11] For more on this idea, read the full essay, "William Faulkner Reprised."

flying reflects her character's status as the embodiment of the river, which has served as Milkman's means of passage out of cultural and individual alienation. Milkman's end, which follows Pilate's death, is represented through a leap he takes, a leap the end of which is up to the reader to determine; the final line of the novel reads: "For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it" (*Song* 337). After understanding the history of his family, after being witness to the death of Pilate, Milkman is released from the temporality of water into a continued sharing of history as he surrenders himself to whatever fate awaits him. He is no longer affected by the women in his familial home, having been guided by the historical body of Circe and altered by the women in Pilate's household. These extensions of water, the bodies that have seen Milkman through his journey are free to continue their ebb and flow as Milkman's maternal reliance grows smaller and his connections to the males in his family history and his understanding of family dynamics finally allow him to exist in a freer version of reality, one where he can fly.

The sort of temporal notions of water that condemn and destroy the Bundren family set Milkman Dead free of the alienation he suffered. This transformation suggests a connection between Faulkner and Morrison, not one in which Faulkner exists a lens through which to view or critique the work of Morrison, but one that highlights and appreciates what Morrison is able to achieve in revising our experience of books that have been considered part of canon, and that must, therefore, be examined in terms of Africanism and the effects minority cultures have had on white literature. Morrison's Milkman is representative of a temporal change, an understanding of an objective history that allow a person to feel connectedness to both culture and community. Characters like Darl Bundren, on the other hand, need this sort of representation but are never placed in a way that allows them to achieve any sort of change or knowledge that would produce

a connection to the community that surrounds them. The important distinctions in race across both novels makes Morrison's ability to overcome the issues presented by Faulkner compelling as she presents a narrative in which the impact of Africanism on the American community is used to propel a character into reintegration. The Bundren family, at novel's end, are set to repeat the cycle of the misconfiguration of temporality and therefore experience renewed displacement within their Southern setting. Milkman may face a wall of uncertainty, but this uncertainty allows him to escape the cycle the Bundrens are fated to repeat. The pathways of water serve as meaningful, maternal linkages for Milkman, but they represent failed attempts to escape for the women of the Bundren family. Water, which is vital for human survival, is a basic, understood need, and Milkman's means of overcoming alienation are aqueous in several senses, as the pool of time is accessible to every human being, but individual human experiences of and interactions with the medium differs greatly. Riceour's ideas about the possibility of living within a three-fold present suggest the possibility of entering and exiting temporality. An analysis of the interrelationship of water and the measured time in the works of Faulkner and Morrison shows how human differences become opportunities for deeper human empathy. The failure of the Bundren family and Milkman's achievement of freedom provide a roadmap and strategy for recovering community through the human relationship to time.

Chapter 2

Born from Water: Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Morrison's *Beloved*

In the act of remembering, one goes home. The home, the locus of nurtured memory, then, is constructed by individual experiences of being within time. Remembering is an action performed alone, skewed by the forces of trauma and misconception that human beings frequently encounter. As Ricoeur contends, history is a knowledge built on faith that not only sets forth an accepted narrative, but that also builds expectation of what is to come.[12] Faith in one's memory is at the foundation of the individual's ideal of what a nurturing home entails; it lays out the expectations of family and of human interaction within the family unit. The impacts of that abstract faith can be seen in Morrison's 2007 novel *Beloved* and Faulkner's 1936 novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* as the configuring of history is skewed by the presence of ghosts within the homes. The act of remembering is burdensome to characters in both novels, and what comes next is shrouded in uncertainty, demanding speculation about the future course of trauma that has not yet been finalized. The history of slavery in America contributes to the memories of the characters in both novels, although their individual positionings within that history vary greatly due to their race and gender. Morrison's characters deal directly with the memory of enslavement, while Faulkner's characters deal with the repercussions of the Civil War; both novels grant insight into the construction of memory, and therefore into the expectation of time, among two different groups of people. Looking at *Beloved* and *Absalom* together places emphasis on the creation of human expectation through lived time, an experience of building time and place for the future by relying on the past. Within the novels' historical settings,

[12] See Chapter 2 of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative,* vol. 1.

important distinctions emerge between the works, as Morrison's pushes forward on topics to which Faulkner seems content to allude. Morrison represents slavery as an institution that does not yet belong exclusively to history but that variously shapes a shared history, and her symbolic usage of a ghost represents that which is not unsettling in form but is frightening in its permanence.

In some ways, one might argue that Faulkner is the ghost who establishes expectations for writers like Morrison—a ghost whose verbose nature allows for both scrutiny and praise but who is overcome in works such as *Beloved.* Dunkel's paper on the relationship between Faulkner and Morrison highlights this feeling with a quotation from Morrison's Nobel Prize in Literature acceptance speech: "I entered this hall pleasantly haunted by those who have entered it before me," one of them being Faulkner (Dunkel 4). While the idea of authors "haunting" Morrison produces an image of Morrison following in the footsteps of Faulkner, her work helps to challenge critical approaches that have persistently praised the white, male writer. Faulkner makes clear through his own use of ghosts within narrative that history can remain unfinished, but his indirect approach to questions of both race and gender does no justice to those souls lost in the depths of time.[13] Morrison writes with a directness that is lacking in the works of her predecessors and that attributes the construction of current and perceived time to the most troubling and often elided moments of history, the times of trauma and enslavement and unrest. The characters in Morrison's novels take up some of the themes discussed by Faulkner but, unlike Faulkner's characters, they ultimately break free from the constraints that history has imposed on them. *Beloved* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are examples of this dynamic between the

[13] For more on the idea of idleness in Faulkner's work, see Erin Penner's "For Those Who Could Not Bear to Look Directly at the Slaughter."

authors: the ghost of Thomas Sutpen is doomed by societal failures repeated across time, while the ghost of Beloved reminds her community that the trauma that is bound up in their own construction of time has yet to be dealt with or resolved. Ricoeur's opening model in *Time and Narrative,* the contemplation of time by Augustine and Aristotle, clarifies how *Beloved* builds upon *Absalom, Absalom!,* suggesting a parallel between Augustine's temporal speculations and the writing of Morrison and a similar analogy between Aristotle's useful structural accomplishments and Faulkner's novel. For Ricoeur it is clear that "Augustine is seeking," a sort of speculation that is potentially answered through the act of narrative (*Time and Narrative* 6). If Augustine's seeking is the analogue to Aristotle's ideas of temporal measurement and structure, Morrison is ultimately ruminating on what Faulkner describes, but she is doing so in a way that attempts to establish a different means of framing time.

The recollection of past events and the acceptance of history within *Absalom, Absalom!* depend on the sense of sight and the concept that seeing is believing. To recall Ricoeur's note on historical knowledge, knowing is based on a faith rather than a science; the allusivity of Faulkner begins to take shape as the characters in the novel shape their notions of past, present, and future through what they have seen with their eyes, ignorant of the impact of time on those around them. The true seers of the novel, those characters who have overlooked and overseen not only the history of the land but also the history of the people within that land, are Rosa and Clytie, two central female characters who live in the background but who display the most knowledge of the effects of time on those who surround them. The opposition between Rosa and Clytie allows for a distinction of histories. Rosa is positioned as the aunt to Thomas Sutpen's children, while Clytie was born as the result of Sutpen's rape of a slave, two different manifestations of faith and history within the same lived experience. The effects of the Civil War on those living in the

Southern states are detailed through the stories of these two women and the events they encounter by living as the seers and the preservers of history for their family, which in turn produces a kind of faith that relies on the existence of ghosts. The setting of the novel is coated in a blanket of snow, the frozen form of water that conveys the stillness of time each of the characters experience. Thomas Sutpen acts as the central figure for the configuration of history in the novel, and his aspiration to create a place of peace where race is not seen or acknowledged lies at the core of his fatalistic tendencies and of his legacy as the ghost that haunts the land. It is the women who surround Sutpen, however, who allow for both his lived memory and his haunting presence to impact formulations of the perceived past, present, and future. Sutpen's involvement in the Civil War further illustrates the degree to which Faulkner fails—or refuses—fully to address or resolve the tensions around race and identity with which the novel engages both directly and obliquely, while also explaining the doomed positionings of those who keep his history intact: "Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts" (*Absalom* 12); this passage highlights the way the seers of the novel, Rosa and Clytie, also function as the bearers of the resulting tragedy and trauma. The history of slavery is at the core of Rosa's and Clytie's bearing the weight of history, of the War, and of the ultimately contradictory nature of Sutpen's character. This history recalls the dilemma of faith and personal memory when accounting for what is larger and more universal than oneself. As Peter Ramos argues in his essay on the ghosts in Faulkner and Morrison's work, *Absalom, Absalom!* addresses the "tragic dilemma of dependence and codependence which is slavery's legacy" (Ramos 7). Both recollected memory and perceived futurity are haunted by what has been seen and therefore known, and also by what has been purposefully omitted.

Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* speaks candidly of the sort omissions and contradictions present within the recalled history and recollected memories of Faulkner's characters, providing insight into his allusiveness and indirection about race by noting that through these "heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work and the signs and bodies of this presence—one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. And it shows" (*Playing in the Dark* 6). This is evident in the narration of Quentin and Shreve, the two hearers of *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin, the primary hearer who speaks with both Rosa and Clytie and who acts as a retainer of the past, as well as Shreve, the secondary hearer who learns through the details Quentin shares with him, are conductors of time and memory and of the partially obscured legacy of slavery. Their positions of privilege in the Southern setting implies that they can hold and share only a certain sort of knowledge or understanding of what they hear. Jenna Grace Sciuto argues in her paper on Charles Bon, that their accounting of history effects the "preservation of colonial ideologies in the twentieth century."[14] These factors, together with the fact that Clytie is not established as the primary seer until the end of the novel and that in the end she can find no sort of redemption, underscore the problem of time for the characters and their individual notions of past, present, and future. The Africanist presence mentioned by Morrison is ultimately lacking:

> Does Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, after its protracted search for the telling of African blood, leave us with just such image of snow and the eradication of race? Not quite. Shreve sees himself as the inheritor of the blood of African kings; the snow apparently is the wasteland of unmeaning, unfathomable whiteness. (*Playing in the Dark* 58)

[14] For more, see "Postcolonial Palimpsests: Entwined Colonialisms and Conflicted Representation of Charles Bon in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" by Jenna Grace Sciuto

Quentin and Shreve as narrators, as hearers, and as questioners of history and memory display a conquering whiteness that ultimately overcomes the ghost of Sutpen and the fall of the society he once envisioned for himself and his slaves. This whiteness covers the measurement of time and of the foreseeable future and embeds itself within the contradictions of Sutpen's character and his relationship to the legacy and preservation of slavery, reminiscent of the snow that marks the novel's temporal and climactic conditions. Expectations are set within the boundaries of whiteness, and at the center one finds Faulkner's character, Charles Bon.

For both the seers and hearers of history within the novel, Charles Bon is the carrier of time. Bon is the center upon which realities converge and the location of the kinds of contradictions and omissions mentioned by Morrison. Sciuto describes the characteristics of Bon clearly: he "embodies a fluidity that confronts the hierarchies of race, gender, class, and sexuality on which colonialism and neocolonialism depend on coherence and meeting" (Sciuto 2). Sciuto's characterization sums up the mystery surrounding Bon's origins and history, as well as his ability to shape the experiences of the other characters in the novel. In the case of Thomas Sutpen and his near-utopian vision of the future, Charles Bon is an example of the past, history, as unfinished and continuously circular, his presence on Sutpen's homestead repositioning both the present and the future circumstances for the family: "So that Christmas Henry brought him home, into the house, and the demon looked up and saw the face he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago" (*Absalom* 265). Although Charles Bon figures as an ideation of the past within the present moment, he also belongs to the future and present moments for different persons within the novel. For the women, the seers, Clytie and Rosa, and the vessels, Judith and Ellen, Bon represents future possibility owing to his potential engagement to Judith, complicating the notions of ghostly women as his mysterious and allusive nature does not

coincide with previous modes of seeing in order to establish history, memory, and therefore futurity. Perhaps most notable is Bon's temporal relation to Sutpen's only son, Henry, as the present moment for Henry's character is nearly consumed by Charles Bon and by the confusion he creates with respect to measured and accepted notions of time. Henry's insistence that Bon wait to marry his sister depends on mystery, the inability to confirm one's history, and, coincidentally, one's bloodline. The possibility that Bon possesses African blood, and the revelation that Bon was married and had a son with a black woman, is at the core of his own temporality, and his history and memory have effect those around him, who ultimately depend on him for the construction of their own realities. Ricoeur helps to clarify Bon's placement and role within the lives of the other, characters when he argues that, "What defines the beginning is not the absence of some antecedent but the absence of necessity in the succession. As for the end, it is indeed what comes after something else, but 'either as its necessary sequel or as its usual sequel.' Only the middle seems to be defined just by succession" (*Time and Narrative* 38). These claims offer insight into the function of the story of Charles Bon, which is molded by others based on what they have witnessed, and not by Bon's own, lived experiences. To view this story through the lens of expectation, depending on Bon's placement in time for any given character, the possibilities for his fate are laid out through the "multiple stories of colonialism" made possible through the recollected memories of the seers and through the detailed accounts of the hearers (Sciuto 15). The allusiveness surrounding Bon's racial status indicates a yearned-for knowledge to better frame his position societally. The whiteness that surrounds him is consistent, as is his inability to exist in a linear time frame.

It is also important to note the foil presented by Faulkner, which links the hearers, Quentin and Shreve, to Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon. In taking note of these potential foils, the

loss of Bon's African presence is made small, even minute, which eliminates the chance of any racial acknowledgement or any sort of conscious redemption for the white or the black characters. This construction separates the four male characters, positioning them within split timelines and split recollections of memory and perceptions of what is true. The association of Quentin with Henry and of Shreve with Bon relies on an image of shared history within differing recollected memories, especially pertaining to the legacy of the South in terms of race and war, "since he was bred in the deep South the same as she was—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople, in notlanguage, like this: *It seems this demon—his name was Sutpen—(Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen*" (*Absalom* 9). This sort of temporal connection plagues Quentin's language and knowledge in the present moment. In this equation, Charles Bon is allowed not only to be the carrier of time, but to be the speaker of history, reliant on the faith of his listeners, his hearers, and his seers in order to establish that which he wishes to be true and to be remembered. This goal, however, is achieved only through his association with Shreve—the underlying questions of race prevent Bon's actual character from holding such power. Bon's repetition of the phrase, "We have waited long enough," to Henry Sutpen (Faulkner 131) reveals the impact the past has on the present and future, as expectation is molded by what has already been lived and perceived. Bon's association with Shreve is the continuation of this same idea, the circular and continuous effects of colonial ideologies effacing the question of race from the established notions of time and history.

Expectations developed through the legacies of slavery and war, molded by what has occurred but is not yet finished, are evident throughout Morrison's novel *Beloved,* which makes redemption and escape from the isolation of history possible. In writing what is omitted in *Absalom, Absalom!*, by looking history in the eyes and seeing what is taking place, what lives on,

and what is to come, the characters in Morrison's novel seek to recuperate memory in similar ways, but in the process they dismantle the hold memory has on their expectations of the future. The ghost of this story, the ghost who contradicts Thomas Sutpen's ghost, is born from water: "A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against a mulberry tree" (*Beloved* 60). This is the first description readers are given of the ghost of Beloved, as she emerges from water, a seeming reverse baptism from death back to life that signifies the depth of her hunger and her need to return home. Beloved's first interaction brings about a second breaking of water for Sethe, the indication of birth and the coming of new life, highlighting what Mina Karavanta calls Morrison's keen interest "on the Before," a cultivation of the effects of what came before persisting in what is now.[15] Ricoeur's idea that "We recount things which we hold as true and we predict events as we foresaw them" (*Time and Narrative* 9) helps to explain the role of recollected memory in the established history and present timeframe for the characters in *Beloved*, as the impact of slavery shapes Sethe and Paul D's way of understanding their relationship to temporality. Unlike Faulkner's characters, Morrison's characters in *Beloved* deal directly with the trauma of having lived as slaves, the treatment they were dealt directly relating to the futures they see for themselves. Ricoeur goes a step further by asking, "Was it not when it 'was still present' that the past was so long?" (*Time and Narrative* 9), a reflection of how Beloved's reappearance in Sethe's life brings to the surface the unfinished nature both of her trauma and of the legacy of slavery on the community. Seeking to preserve one's history and to find one's place within the present entraps one in the act of remembering—an act that ultimately

[15] For more, see Mina Karavanta's, "Toni Morrison's 'A Mercy' and the Counterwriting of Negative Communities."

dictates the notions and the role of the home, impacting the measured realities and timeframes of the afflicted characters.

Beloved is known, at the beginning of the novel, as the ghost of an infant who haunts the house of Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Denver—the first establishment of the three-woman household within *Beloved.* For Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, the present moment is about color, "Her past had been like her present—intolerable—and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her for pondering color" (*Beloved* 6), and she is credited in the novel with having the wisest notions of living and dying due to this pondering of color as it relates to her placement in history. Baby Suggs is tolerant of the infant ghost, understanding of its wrath and the pain it seems to display. Only after death, at the arrival of Paul D, does empathy for the ghost seems to fade, or at the very least, to be called into question. Upon entering the home, Paul D is keenly aware the living are not the only ones present and that the dead are unfinished and still talking. His unease and rejection of the ghost's presence foreshadow Beloved's failure to overtake her mother; the male figure disrupts the three-woman household and the established ways of knowing, remembering, and living within 124.[16] There seems to be a struggle between Paul D and Beloved for interpretive control of temporality and of the present moment once her figure undergoes the reverse baptism and emerges as a woman, soaking wet, ultimately taken in by Sethe and Denver on the notion that she has no people. Paul D's conflict between past and present, as well as his task of overcoming his male dominance, complicates not only the intrusion of Beloved on present and future possibilities, but also the process in which Sethe is engaged of remembering and holding onto memories. For Sethe and Paul D, Sweet Home, the place they were held and enslaved, recalls opposing memories and conflicting

[16] For more, see Brian Norman's chapter on Beloved in his book *Dead Women Talking.*

representations of the past: “Paul D laughed. ‘True, true. She’s right, Sethe. It sure wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home.’ He shook his head. ‘But it’s where we were,’ said Sethe, ‘All together. Comes back whether we want it to or not,’” (*Beloved* 16). The sense of belonging and shared community seems to skew the remembered traumas recalled by Sethe, and her desperation to be reunited with a husband she knows she will never see again causes her sense of what is past to be washed with a senseless hope of redemption in the future. Paul D, on the other hand, is almost too aware of the tragedies of Sweet Home and the impacts that the legacy of what they have endured continues to have on their foreseeable future. For Paul D, Beloved is an encroaching danger, although she may not be known or even identifiable. She pulls Sethe back from her place in society, the spot she has earned through time and through the act of remembering. His recognition of Beloved’s insidious nature is reflected in his knowledge that what is past is not necessarily finished and that though one may wish to forget, the act of remembering is fluid but consistent.

The three-women household, which was once dominated by the strong figure of Baby Suggs, is overtaken by Beloved, which leads Paul D to conclude that for him and Sethe, the notions of time and the act of remembering are too skewed; he feels himself losing Sethe to the place Beloved offers, a place free of memory because memory has become a concrete object, a tangible thing that Sethe can reach out and touch. Ultimately, his declaration, “Your love is too thick,” leaves Sethe confined to the hunger of Beloved, the strong desire of the past to claim its hold on the future (*Beloved* 193). It is important to note within this equation that Denver, Sethe’s living daughter, is part of Sethe’s legacy of escape and freedom from Sweet Home. Within the confines of 124, Sethe holds a firm belief that Denver cannot be harmed by the grueling world that has plagued so many others: “Nothing bad can happen to her. Look at it. Everybody I knew

dead or gone or dead and gone. Not her. Not my Denver. Even when I was carrying her, when it got clear that I wasn't going to make it—which meant she wasn't going to make it either—she pulled a whitegirl out of the hill" (*Beloved* 50). This leaves Denver in an almost ignorant positioning within her own lived reality. Denver's sense of community, as well as any chance she has to branch out or leave home, is tampered with and dampened by the presence of Beloved. Denver's ultimate rejection of Paul D and her natural embracing of Beloved reflects Denver's character and the effects of her mother's remembering and recollected history. There is a feeling of near terror when Denver is away from Beloved or does not feel her presence, and her interactions with Paul D reflect a notable distaste for change or engagement within the community. Denver's reliance on her mother and ultimate attachment to Beloved displays how within her isolation, Sethe's history has become synonymous with her own. The act of being together, of residing in the same household, takes priority over moving forward in time. In other words, Sethe's disposition leaves Denver happily confined in a history of tragedy and trauma, the addition of Beloved only strengthening the depth of isolation to which Denver surrenders herself. Denver resides in a greenness that is overwatered and overwhelmed in the face of Beloved and the functions of water she represents. Only after the release of Beloved's spirit from 124 does Denver feel the opportunity to leave, an act appropriately set forth by the spirit of Baby Suggs, who has been released into the colors of the universe: "Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on" (*Beloved* 288). These words suggest a first-hand, faith-based knowledge that shapes what one knows to be true of the past and possible in the future. Baby Suggs's encouragement of Denver's to leave the yard allows for the spirit of redemption to overtake the ghost of one's tragedy.

For Sethe, Beloved's emergence from water and back into her home is a representation of needs she has repressed in order to isolate herself, in order to live within memory rather than

within possibility. Norman, in *Dead Women Talking*, dedicates a chapter to Beloved, a character he labels as a "dead woman wanting," who is perceived as "so inexcusable" because she "demands active participation in a community that might prefer her absence." Norman argues that, "Beloved speaks not only as the murdered daughter returned but also the sixty million and more who did not survive the Middle Passage" (Norman 134), which helps to explain why Beloved is able to further isolate Sethe from the community into which she wishes to integrate. Beloved is a representative of tragedy borne from slavery—the impact of which cannot be placed on Sethe alone, nor is Sethe, as one person, able to bear the weight of such an impactful and widespread hurting. Sethe's relationship with measured time is unreliable and is built on trauma. Sethe herself, says of time,

> It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in rememory, but out there, in the world. (*Beloved* 43)

These words document her recollected memories as a lived reality, a vivid image of the past living and revitalizing itself as both present and future moments. The introduction of Beloved through her emergence from water adds to the depth of Sethe's suffering, while also placing the act of remembering at the forefront of change within the community that has surrounded the house at 124.

A striking moment between Beloved and Sethe notably occurs within water, in the same stream and depths of nature where Baby Suggs, in another time, brought people to their knees in testimony to both their shared faith and history. Morrison writes,

> Beloved watched the work her thumbs were doing and must have loved what she saw because she leaned over and kissed the tenderness under Sethe's chin. They stayed that way for a while because neither Denver nor Sethe knew how not to: how to stop and not love the look or feel of the lips kissing. Then Sethe, grabbing Beloved's hair and blinking rapidly, separated herself. She later believed that it was because the girl's breath was exactly like new milk. (*Beloved* 115)

Sethe's reaction to this image of the pain of history delicately attaching itself to its victim is one of a stern mother scolding a child, her scorn masking the victimization she experiences when in the presence of Beloved. The occurrence takes place in water, the place of Beloved's first appearance following reverse baptism, and it associates water with memory as a site of revitalization and rest within measured time. Following this encounter and both Sethe and Denver's acceptance of that Beloved as a natural part of family, their lives, and home, Sethe realizes the identity of Beloved, the infant she murdered to save from a life of slavery—an instance of Ricoeur's notion that expectation derives from lived experience. The moment comes within the ultimate isolation of the three-woman household within the whiteness of winter snow. There are no shocking revelations, no pleas for forgiveness; rather Sethe delicately ascends her stairs in the image of a bride bound to be married to her own confining memories:

> There was no tremor in her voice as she instructed them to keep the fire—if not, come on upstairs. With that, she gathered her blanket her elbows and ascended the lily-white stairs like a bride. Outside, snow solidified itself into graceful forms. The peace of winter storms seemed permanent. (*Beloved* 208)

Morrison's diction highlights Sethe's quiet acceptance of her most unbearable traumas coming to live with her, offering a glimpse of the sort of life Sethe believe she deserves and positioning

Beloved not as something that has trapped her but as a being who has offers to her a release from the burden of memory.

Morrison's reliance on the community sets her apart from Faulkner, while also building on and enhancing his depictions of the South.[17] The ghostly presence within *Absalom, Absalom!,* Thomas Sutpen, serves as a reminder of pain within memory and within history, but his ultimate quest for a place free from the impact of race leaves him and those whom he haunts stuck within a circular narrative in which time does not, and cannot, resolve itself. As Ramos writes, "Sutpen's ghost avoids the time-bound constraints of history" (Ramos 15), as his radical plan for establishment of a home and of a family lives beyond his time through the seers and hearers, those upholding the ideas of colonialism within their ideology of a post-Civil War South. Beloved, on the other hand, in her quest to become the "uncanny citizen," is challenged by the community of women who band together to save Sethe from her isolation, from suffering the history of her past alone (Norman 64). The kind of redemption achieved by Sethe, as she frees herself from the confines of Beloved, can be represented in terms of Morrison's argument, in *Playing in the Dark*, that, "Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness *and* enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me" (*Playing in the Dark* 38) The creative possibilities that may have inspired both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved,* are enriched by the author's acknowledgement of the risks of history and of narrative. Norman reminds readers of the functions of ghosts in the works of Morrison and describes the encounters with those phantom figures such as Beloved as "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken," the legacy of

[17] For more on Morrison's ability to improve upon her predecessors, see Erin Penner's "For Those Who Could not Bear to Look Directly at the Slaughter."

slavery leaving countless words and stories unheard, the figure of the ghost giving voice to what is unheard (Norman 68). Because Beloved is overcome in her ghostliness, unlike Sutpen who remains present, *Beloved* concludes by affirming a strong sense of community and shared responsibility to the past. As Ramos aruges, "Like *Absalom, Beloved* concerns the exposure of a history that has been repressed in order to finish it" (Ramos 22), but the revelation to and acceptance by community allows for that same history to release its hold on Sethe. The end of Morrison's novel finds Sethe as the holder of the future rather than a capsule of remembrance, and it leaves her in a position to be the revitalized citizen.

Ricoeur asks readers to remember that, "The emancipation of one's mind is not inaccessible to historians. It even defines history as 'inquiry'" (Ricoeur 117). This statement seems to blanket the expectations of time in both novels. The characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* confront the impossibility of removing Sutpen from their history but remain fixated on his ghostly presence. Faulkner writes, "That is the substance of remembering—sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel—not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscle gropes for: no more, no less" (*Absalom* 143). The tangible nature of history on which the characters living beneath Sutpen depend replaces the need for individual acts of remembering and perceiving. Sethe's release from the act of remembering differs from the sort of recollecting done by Faulkner's character: "Sethe was excited to giddiness by the things she no longer had to remember" (*Beloved* 211). She no longer has to believe that accepting Beloved back into her home will free her from the burden of guilt for her infant's murder. Readers can understand that Sethe's lived experience of the trauma of the four horsemen, her expectation that her baby will be taken from her, and her experience of slavery drove her to commit the act, but she herself cannot bear the burden of the legacy and

history of slavery. The tensions between remembering and living within the movement of time and bounds of history permeate the three-woman household in both novels. Faulkner's homestead of Rosa, Clytie, and Judith, like that of Morrison's Beloved, Sethe, and Denver, is shrouded in the isolation and whiteness of winter and of snow, though the two households are radically different in terms of racial status. For the three women in Faulkner's novel, the need for togetherness and co-dependency derives from the legacy of Sutpen. They continue to experience the effects of a war that left ghosts in its wake, a re-embedding of the colonialism that was never erased (Sciuto 23). Even within the women's efforts to take in the black son of the deceased Charles Bon, the Othering of colonialism complicates the shaping of the present moment and the possibilities of their future, and the boy's confusion as to his place and identity takes shape in the opposing statuses of Judith and Clytie, who were both born from Sutpen but manage to live within the confines of a racial hierarchy: "You are not up here in this bed with me, where through no fault nor willing of your own you should be, and you are not down here on this pallet floor with me, where through no fault or willing of your own who would what we cannot" (*Absalom* 198). For Morrison's three-woman house, an image of false freedom misleads both Sethe and Denver: "When Sethe locked the door, the women inside were free at last to be what they liked, see whatever the saw and say whatever was on their mind" (*Beloved* 235). The presence of Beloved leads them to neglect their shared responsibility for the acts of remembering and preserving history, keeping Sethe and Denver within the confines of a personal, imagined debt to time. The community frees Sethe by the novel's end, allowing her to escape from the household, whereas the Sutpen homestead's rejection of shared community and history leaves Rosa and Clytie unable to perceive the movements of time. Shreve, a second-hand hearer, ultimately declares of the South: "The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves

by years and years and years" (*Absalom* 377), commenting on the circular motions of history presented by the embedded colonialisms of each character's lived history, as well as by Sutpen's, Bon's, and ultimately Quentin's failure to let the past reside in the past. This problem, stemming from the omissions of community within both the past and the present, sets up the ending of *Absalom, Absalom!* and is summarized in the final lines delivered by Shreve, which reflect the lack of historical knowledge in the legacy of Thomas Sutpen and Charles Bon. Jim Bond, the end of the Sutpen bloodline and the result of Sutpen's legacy of rape committed against his slaves, is all that is left, all that resides in the recollected memory, the tangible quality of the history which has been set forth: "But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings. Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?" (*Absalom* 378). This ending not only exemplifies the colonial thinking of Shreve and Quentin, but it disregards the legacy of slavery within the country's historical and future construction.

The ending of *Beloved* and, therefore, the freeing of Sethe, is situated within community and within the idea of water as temporal. Beloved's birth from the water and her encroachment on Sethe and Denver within water correlates with the image of Sethe breaking up ice as the women approach 124: "When the women assembled outside 124, Sethe was breaking a lump of ice into chunks. She dropped the ice pick into her apron pocket to scoop the pieces into a basin of water. When the music entered the window she was wringing the cool cloth to put on Beloved's forehead" (*Beloved* 307). Sethe's attention to Beloved and to the guilt of remembering expressed by the breaking down of the frozen water recall water's ability to revitalize and offer rest. Sethe's deliverance from Beloved, is accomplished as the women in the community band together to welcome Sethe back to her home. The last image the reader has of Beloved involves,

"Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe had been holding" (*Beloved* 319). Beloved's being overtaken by community do not, however, erase the pain she spoke for or the histories she represented—these will simply be distributed, shared by a community of people rather than by an individual hostage. The repetition at the novel's end, "This is not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324), relieves Sethe of the burden of guilt that came about through her expectation of time, her treatment as a slave, and her assurance that her children would never live as enslaved people. Sethe's individual trauma is now shared within a strengthened community who will bear the burden together—the story of the haunt is not what will be passed on; rather, the legacy of slavery and the community built to cope with and overcome that legacy will be recalled in the act of remembering and the establishment of home.

Looking at *Absalom, Absalom!* alongside *Beloved* conjures two potential constructions of history and exposes contradictory approaches to the act of remembering. Morrison's representation of life in the South following the Civil War is fueled by the sense of community in which her characters are given the chance to take part, whether through an individual search for reintegration or through a communal effort such as the one that brings Sethe back home. The ghostly figures of Thomas Sutpen and Beloved are used in order to explore the legacy that slavery holds on other characters and on the places where they reside; the inexplorable presence of Sutpen contrasts to Beloved's return to the water, which allows hope for a future that is not a circular repetition of colonial experience. Placing *Absalom, Absalom!* against *Beloved* reveals the importance of shared historical responsibility in order to combat the victimization of Othering and the legacy of racism in the South. The sense of isolation in Faulkner's setting creates within his characters a perception of history that re-embeds hierarchies of race, gender, and class, while

the group of women from Sethe's community overcomes the threat of such alienation. Sethe and Denver's re-entrance into community, and even Baby Suggs's invitation to Denver to venture away from 124 are redeemed portions of history, a rewriting of recollection and a repurposing of memory. The legacy of trauma and of tragedy do, in fact, drive the characters' perceptions of and interactions with time in both novels. Within a community of acceptance and remembrance, time and legacy function, move forward, and can be improved.

Chapter 3

Belonging to Water: Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Morrison's *Tar Baby*

Commodity's manipulation and control of the human body appears, at first glance, to link Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Morrison's *Tar Baby.* Commodity is expressed in terms of body, especially the female form, and has dramatic effects on historical knowledge and the enactment of a social hierarchy predicted on class status. Commodity, under these circumstances, may be understood as the materialization and production of timeliness that depends upon human labor and the hierarchy and sense Othering that regulates and constrains the labor. Nature's role in each novel complicates this thematic continuity, as water challenges and problematizes the body's relationship to commodity. Nature, in this context may be understood as the untouched and unblemished natural environment, which is made up of elements that originate outside of the human field of activity and that appear indifferent to that activity. The interference of human beings, who are commodities, manifests in both novels the process of and challenges inherent in living within time, including the ability to move forward within the context of received notions of past, present, and future. Nature, in this respect, embodies the experience of being fixed within time, frozen within the moment and unmoved by the societal timeframe that commodity creates. Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Morrison's character Son embody the struggle between commodity, on one hand, and nature and, ultimately, time, on the other hand. These characters remind readers of Morrison's ability to build upon and move beyond the doom and defeat that Faulkner's characters experience by offering a story of release from the struggle that she describes.

In both novels, water serves as the vessel of nature as it encroaches on commodity. Locating water within given perceptions of time reveals the possibility of escaping measured,

linear time; in terms of the actions of the characters, the dormant potential either sparks or is denied. As Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative,* "The mind performs three functions: expectation, attention, and memory" (*Time and Narrative* 15). These three functions for characters including Quentin and Son revolve around water and the encroachment of nature upon commodity. Quentin's contemplation of suicide by drowning and Son's deliverance via water orient bodily experiences and expectations toward the aqueous escape from time they both seek. Their inattention or resistance to the commodity that surrounds them, as well as their memory of the commodity that is encoded within the body's current relationship to water, directly informs their struggles. Morrison herself links this commodification to the "inextricable" quality of "Africanism" within literature (*Playing in the Dark* 65). Son and the characters who surround and impact him deal with the effects of commodity on race and its ability to nearly to solidify or excuse the history of enslavement. Not only does the novel tackle these aspects of commodity and time, but it identifies nature as a site not for only resistance, but for temporal escape and redemption.[18] While both novels describe the body and its connections to nature, Morrison's novel effects an escape from the temporal dimensions of being by allowing water to dissolve commodity.

Faulkner's account of commodity and nature in *The Sound and the Fury* begins with setting. For both Faulkner and Morrison, writing and interpreting the Southern United States is an essential element of depictions of time and history. Faulkner places his characters in Yoknapatawpha County, a place of his creation located in the state of Mississippi. Yoknapatawpha plays two roles with respect to the function of time in Faulkner's narrative; the

[18] For more on nature as a site of resistance, see Jean Wyatt's "The Economic Grotesque and the Critique of Capitalism in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*."

first has to do with the name of the county, which Biljana Oklopcic addresses in her paper on *The Sound and the Fury*: “Yoknapatawpha, meaning, water running slow through flat land” (Oklopcic 2). The perception of water as a means of escaping linear time situates Faulkner’s characters in a temporal setting of unhurried history and undemanding living conditions. This unhurried and undemanding setting creates tension for Quentin Compson—who is ultimately unable to submerge into his surroundings or absorb the ways of being expected within this given time and place. The creation of Yoknapatawpha also displaces Faulkner’s characters from reality, locating them as outside the timeframe of the world that surrounds them. Yoknapatawpha is the fatalistic setting where characters including Quentin are unable to overcome or adapt to their crises within the measurements of time, as commodity and nature isolate and complicate their struggles to exist as linear beings. For Quentin, the immediate connection to commodity is expressed by the pocket watch his father gave him, which once belonged to his grandfather. The passing on of the watch demonstrates for Quentin that the linearity of measured time and the expectations of commodity that accompany it are intrinsic elements of his lineage and legacy. Quentin finds himself struggling with the idea of what the watch symbolizes, and he is alone in his turmoil and unease, a prototypical individual who is unable to find a place within a commodified society: “The watch ticked on. I turned the face up, the blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better” (*Sound and the Fury* 80). For Quentin, the world’s ability to continue forward into a future that still relies on the measurements of time and of what can be accomplished in time is daunting, subversive, and all too similar to the present moment. The reminder of time moving forward, the sound of the watch, opens Quentin’s section of the novel, suggesting that this is Quentin’s greatest crisis and biggest struggle, the obstacle that Faulkner will not allow him to overcome: “When the shadow of the sash appeared

on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (*Sound and the Fury* 76). This quotation highlights the anxiety linearity induces in Quentin, and it exemplifies Faulkner's use of the bodily senses throughout the novel, Quentin's particular afflictions relating to the sound of the watch and the memories it evokes.

Quentin associates his sister Caddy, the central female figure of the novel, with nature, specifically water, and this aids in determining Caddy's role in the novel's economy of time and commodity. Benjy, in turn, is central in understanding Caddy's role within Quentin's trauma and its connections with water and temporality. Benjy's section of narration intertwines time, the past, present, and future, but Benjy does not have to battle for bodily placement and instead exists within his own temporal galaxy. Within Benjy's experience of reality, Caddy is strongly associated with his sense of smell, the memory of her body entwining the past and Benjy's present: "'Hello, Benjy.' Caddy said. She opened the gate and came in and stooped down. Caddy smelled like leaves" (*Sound and the Fury* 6). Caddy is an ethereal character, her feminine nature and the impression she leaves on her brothers conjured only in the abstract, in the intertwining of past, present and future. Caddy's obscure, nearly untouchable character is similar to the presence of time—a consistent yet mysterious existence that leaves an impression on those it touches. Benjy's section of narration demonstrates Caddy's temporal qualities through her ability to ignite sensory experiences for her brother, one of the most beautiful being the box Caddy understands that Benjy wants: "Caddy got the box and set it on the floor and opened it. It was full of stars. When I was still, they were still. When I moved, they glinted and sparkled. I hushed. Then I heard Caddy walking and I began again" (*Sound and the Fury* 41). This scene displays Benjy's dependence on Caddy for the present moment. Caddy is not the only character whom Benjy helps to centralize within Quentin's given struggles, as his relationship to Dilsey and her family,

primarily his dependence on them, allows the reader to understand the dynamics of race that exist in the timeframe of the novel.

A telling scene in Benjy's narration occurs between him and Versh, Dilsey's grandson, whose main job is to attend to Benjy. It is clear that Benjy does not communicate verbally, but rather relies on sounds and expressions in order to relay what he is feeling to those around him. Versh and Dilsey understand Benjy perfectly, knowing his needs and desires through each sound he utters, knowing him better even than his own family. The dynamic between Benjy and Versh, however, is still one built upon guidelines that promote the ideas of commodification and colonialism. Water's relationship to Yoknapatawpha and to temporality are also displayed in the scene, as Versh tries his best to keep Benjy out of the rain: "'You move back some, so I can dry my legs off.' He shoved me back a little. 'Don't you start bellering now. You can still see it. That's all you have to do. You aint had to be out in the rain like I is. You's born lucky and don't know it'" (*Sound and the Fury* 70). Versh is subjected to the downpour in compliance with Benjy's request to watch the rain fall. Their situation is one in which Benjy is able to dodge and deflect commodified measurements of time, while Versh has no escape and is bound to comply with the social roles and expectations that hold him in a subordinate place. To allow Versh and the rest of Dilsey's family a means of living outside the constructed realities of the Compson family would humanize them within the world of the novel to an extent that Faulkner is unwilling to conisder. Morrison, writing of Ernest Hemingway, another Modernist author of Faulkner's period, notes that if he were to humanize the few black characters he writes, the characters would ultimately "lack the complementarity of a figure who can assumed to be bound, fixed, unfree, and serviceable" (*Playing in the Dark* 73). Faulkner's writing of Versh and Dilsey,

too, reflects the imposition of a fixed identity that binds them to place and time within Yoknapatawpha and within the Compson household.

Quentin's inability to move forward within the timeframe that his family, through their relationship to commodity, has constructed creates a temporal dilemma. Caddy's absence within time and the memory of her that Quentin's senses evoke, as well as his conflicted struggle with the Compson legacy and the set beliefs it represents, set Quentin apart as the character closest to nature and to water and the character the most desperate to find a release from time. At the core of Quentin's rejection of commodity is his aloof attitude toward the Harvard education his family has sacrificed so much for him to have, an aspect of the novel that Jason Compson puts into perspective by relating that education to ideas of water: "at Harvard they teach you how to go on a swim at night without knowing how to swim and at Sewanee they dont even teach you what water is" (*Sound and the Fury* 196). Jason, who is arguably the character most plagued by commodity in the novel and also the character who is furthest from nature, does his best to present his brother's perceived ingratitude for his education as an example of the uselessness of a college education. Quentin, in Jason's eyes, exists aimlessly within time without understanding how to connect to temporality. Jason sees himself as so fixed within commodity and so committed to providing for his family that the ideas of nature and of the alteration of time are nearly moot points, a condition he has no time or occasion to contemplate. As he leaves the Harvard campus and contemplates suicide by drowning, Quentin leaves both his watch and the university behind in order to submit to the stillness of time that the river promises: "And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lovely inviolate sand" (*Sound and the Fury* 80). This passage reveals to the reader the peaceful future Quentin anticipates through

the release of water. Quentin's perception of the role water may play in this regard reflects what Ricoeur describes as the freeing of the aporia, "a poetical transfiguration alone, not only of the solution but of the question itself, will free the aporia from the meaninglessness it skirts" (*Time and Narrative* 7). Quentin's irresolvable internal battle over his placement within time appears open to resolution only through the possibilities offered by nature. For Quentin to end his journey by returning to Harvard and civilization would be to continue within the circularity of commodity, an act that he cannot commit. His body wishes for and returns to water, to the stillness he cannot find within memory and recollection. The future, for Quentin Compson, is nature. The future is very still.

Son, in *Tar Baby,* is delivered by sea into the story and is, at first, nearly the antithesis of commodity. Son's mysterious appearance in the home and lives of the Street family suggests that he is a creature born from nature, living outside the reality of characters like Valerian Street and Jadine. Although Son comes from water and seems connected to nature, it quickly becomes clear to the reader that he is, in fact, dealing with the internal battle of commodification versus nature with respect to his placement within time. His direct link to commodity is through Jadine and her placement within the Street household, and his struggle to love her and to get her to love him epitomizes the dilemma posed by nature's encroachment on commodity. In the novel as a whole, Morrison's use of figurative language proves helpful in examining Son, his impact on the characters within Valerian Street's home, and the role of the strongest natural symbols within *Tar Baby*: "metaphors, summonings; rhetorical gestures of triumph, despair, and closure dependent on the acceptance of the associative language of dread and love that accompanies blackness—were piling up in my file" (*Playing in the Dark* x). Of these symbols, the first to emerge clearly are the daisy trees and the rain: "Only the champion daisy trees were serene.

After all, they were part of a rain forest already two thousand years old and scheduled for eternity, so they ignored the men and continued to rock the diamondbacks that slept in their arms" (*Tar Baby* 8). The trees stand as survivors of the colonialism that wreaked havoc on the natural state of Haiti and its sugarcane supply. Tellingly, the rain in *Tar Baby* is described as "no longer equal" following the invasion of the forest by colonial entities (*Tar Baby* 9). The presence of the daisy trees and the diminished quality of the rain expresses the impact of racial inequality in terms of commodity, with water symbolizing the irretrievable losses brought about by colonialism. The image of Son, then, arriving by sea, a space of bountiful, plentiful water, suggests that he is free of temporal limitations and capable of dominance in his ability to inhabit and embody nature: "He believed he was safe. He stood at the railing of the H.M.S. *Stor Konigsgaarten* and sucked in great gulps of air, his heart pounding in sweet expectation as he stared at the harbor. Queen of France blushed a little in the lessening light and lowered her lashes before his gaze" (*Tar Baby* 1). This initiation of Son into colonial territories foreshadows the battle between nature and commodity that begins the moment Son enters the Street household, which nearly bends at the first sight of his manly, seemingly natural figure.

Valerian Street and his family's candy company are direct beneficiaries of the commodity created through the enslavement of Haitian people. The development of Valerian's character, however, suggests that he wishes to appease his natural side by living in Queen of France, concerning himself only in the production of his greenhouse rather than dealing with the commodity of sugar; what traps him within a cycle of temporality, however, is his inability to disconnect completely from the benefits he accrues from that commodity. This leaves both Valerian Street and his greenhouse in a state of linear entrapment, unable to move forward within a timeframe considered appropriate to the life the Streets once had in America. Only when Son is

found hiding in Margaret Street's closet does natural life seems to enter the household, marking not only the encroachment of nature upon the space but also the dislocation of structures reliant on commodity. Margaret, Valerian's wife, has a traumatic response to Son, and the very idea of blackness co-mingling without making itself known pushes her to the limits of sanity; she looks at Son as grotesque and immediately animalistic. Valerian, however, has the opposite reaction to Son's presence within his home, welcoming him to dinner, and ultimately, inviting him to reside there as a guest. What is most telling within these interactions is the perspective of Sydney and Ondine, the couple who have long worked for Valerian and who, in terms of commodity, depend upon the thing that impoverishes them in order to live comfortable lives: "'You're tired, honey. You didn't sleep hardly any at all with that gun in your lap, and carrying it around under your coat ain't making things better. You really ought to put it back where it belongs.' 'Long as he's in this house, it belongs with me'" (*Tar Baby* 100). Son embodies the dislocation and resistance to commodity that Ondine and Sydney have avoided through their dedication and loyalty to Valerian. When Valerian takes Son in and offers him access to parts of the house, seats at the table, and even commodities to which Ondine and Sydney have never had access within the household, the fixed structure that has maintained the couple begins to dismantle itself. As Jean Wyatt writes, "The philosophic principle operating here is that what people do for a living—their activity as economic agents—constructs their ways of being in the world" (Wyatt 12). Sydney and Ondine experience this tension as they navigate Son's disruption of their perceptions of linear, forward movement.

The presence of Son in the Streets' household has positive effects on Valerian in terms of the construction and maintenance of his greenhouse. A telling moment occurs close to Christmas, the ultimate holiday of commodity: "Christmas Eve's Eve and even the goddamn

hydrangeas had bloomed!" as a direct result of Son's interference within the greenhouse and his instructions to Valerian on how to promote growth and life (*Tar Baby* 187). Valerian is delighted to find in Son a natural knowledge that enhances the greenness within which Valerian Street imagines himself living. Valerian's notion of green growth and his inability to foster it separates him from the role that water takes on and from the means for escape it provides, which he looks for but ultimately cannot find. At the end of the novel, after Son and Jadine leave Queen of France, Valerian's mind begins to leave him, his perception of the present moment skewed by what is past and what is future. The figures of Ondine and Sydney, and their loyalty to the man and to the commodity outlast the fight for naturalness provoked by Son. Valerian's state of mind leaves him in a place of submissiveness to Sydney, and even within his confusion he knows and understands something has shifted, altering his placement within temporality, and he asks, "What's happening here. Something's happening here" (*Tar Baby* 287), acknowledging his loss of a power constructed and exercised through the structures of commodification created by human experience. Sydney's responds, "'Don't agitate yourself. Rest your mind. We'll give you the best of care. Just like we always done. That's something you ain't never got to worry about" (*Tar Baby* 287), allowing readers to infer that this change in positioning is being managed by Sydney in order to compensate for the years of commodified labor through which he and Ondine have suffered. Although Son's natural inclinations were a threat to the lives Sydney and Ondine wished to preserve, his presence leaves an impression of change and promises the alleviation of historical trauma.

The relationship between Son and Jadine is ultimately what is at stake in the struggle of temporality presented in *Tar Baby.* Jadine, Sydney and Ondine's niece, struggles with her placement in culture, heritage, and society. Her appearance as a lighter skinned African

American woman has opened up the world of commodity to her through modeling opportunities, and she finds herself living on the upper levels of the Street house rather than below with her aunt and uncle. Internally, Jadine's perceptions of commodity leave her isolated from familial connections, the materialistic nature of her personality directly displayed through the seal-skin coat sent to her from a lover in Paris. The coat is an intrusion on nature as it exists in the novel—Morrison allows for butterflies to be the conspirators against Jadine and the fur coat as they watch her from the window:

> The butterflies didn't believe it and went to see for themselves. Sure enough, there it was, swirling around the naked body of the woman called Jade, who opened the French windows and greeted the emperor butterflies with a smile, but the heavy one called Ondine said, 'Shoo! Shoo!' (*Tar Baby* 87)

This scene encapsulates both Jadine's interest in what is natural and Ondine's wish to shield her from it. Son's appearance confirms the hold commodity has on Jadine's character, though their relationship is built on what seem to the reader to be violence and fear. The mutual attraction Son and Jadine feel toward one another is embedded in each character's desire to dislocate the other, Son wishing to de-commodify Jadine and Jadine wishing to de-naturalize Son's wants and needs. A psssage in the novel gives insight into the toxic nature of their relationship: "He had jangled something in her that was so repulsive, so awful and he had managed to make her feel that the thing that repelled her was not in him, but in her" (*Tar Baby* 123). Primal notions of being move Jadine to the core as Son's annihilation of her body brings her to an intense, unwanted natural state. Because of this, as John M. Duvall writes in his paper on Morrison's *Tar Baby,* "whatever racialized identity Jadine may be able to construct is marked in its inception by rape," leaving the female form skewed in its redemption from the commodification of time (Duvall 21). Jadine's

link to the commodification of culture allows her to further her relationship with Son, even through the violence that it perpetuates and circulates. The reason for this can be found in what Jean Wyatt's argument that Jadine's sexual attraction to Son is fueled "by the logic of commodity" (Wyatt 5). Jadine reasons that Son, in terms of commodity, is her linkage to nature and her escape from the timeframe presented to her by the commodification of body and goods, and this keeps her with him, for a time.

The battle that takes place within Son's and Jadine's relationship and the question of whether commodity or nature will set the course for their future cannot be resolved so long as the two intrude upon one another's spaces and ways of being. Jadine takes Son from the expansive ocean from which he was delivered and attempts to conceal and restrain him in the bathtubs of New York City. Son cannot endure the confinement that comes along with Jadine's search for commodity, as he needs to locate his being within water and within time: "He took off his clothes and filled the tub, smiling to think of what the leaden waves of the Atlantic had become in the hands of civilization" (*Tar Baby* 221). To Son, civilization effects a reduction of meaning—his idea of having been shaped by a life he once had in the Southern United Sates, where women worked hard and readily for him and not for the commodities or material goods. Jadine's inability to fulfill Son's expectations about being creates an endless stream of violence between the two characters, a storm that never ceases and a battle that seemingly cannot be won by either side. At this center of this violence, however, and of this frenzied pursuit of dominance lies Jadine's feeling that, "He unorphaned her completely. Gave her a whole new childhood" (*Tar Baby* 229). The credit she gives to Son stems from the perceived naturalness of his character, as he initiates her into a nature that grows within himself—a dimension of naturalness that she may carry with her and display to the world when she finds herself doubting who she is

or what she represents. Son's rage at the lack of mobility within their relationship, however, dooms the couple and causes Jadine to leave him: "'You turn little black babies into little white ones; you turn your black brothers into white brothers; you turn your men into white men and when a black woman treats me like what I am, what I really am, you say she's spoiling me'" (*Tar Baby* 270). This declaration conflates the dichotomy of commodity and nature with that of white and black, a battle in which Jadine finds herself in the middle and for which she has no answer. It is also a declaration of Son's inability to accept Jadine, and it marks the moment at which she realizes she must leave. The two bids for temporality, one that relies on perceptions of naturalness and the other that relies on the perceived value of commodity, cancel one another out, and the behaviors that conduce to and exemplify each force Jadine and Son to separate in order to continue existing.

Ricoeur writes that, "It is the inverse relationship between concordance and discordance that seemed to me to constitute the major interest of confrontation between the *Confessions* and *Poetics*" (*Time and Narrative* 4). The exploration of time through narrative in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Tar Baby* dismantles and reconstructs received notions of race and gender, specifically when dealing directly with commodity and nature. The discordance of time that afflicts Quentin also serves to systematize his approach to water and his quest for release from linearity. This same discordance within temporality is harmonized when Jadine and Son are set free of one another at the end of *Tar Baby*, although it is unclear what lasting effects the trauma from their interaction will have on them. Within this moment of potential vindication and freedom, the strength of Morrison's narrative becomes clear. The allusive nature of Quentin's end is nearly insidious as it implies an inability to escape even through death, as his niece, also named Quentin, seems to haunt the places he left behind. Morrison speaks of the meaningfulness of

Son’s and Jadine’s potential to overcome their afflictions: “And there is quite a lot of justice to be extracted from plummy reminiscences of ‘individualism’ and ‘freedom’ if the tree upon which the fruit hangs is a black population forced to serve as freedom’s polar opposite” (*Playing in the Dark* 64). Morrison suggests that redemption can be found and felt by both Jadine and Son and even by Ondine and Sydney by novel’s end, since their individualized notions of both time and reality now allow them to exist freely, albeit in a way that is still constituted by commodity but that draws upon the potential of nature that surrounds them.

Distinct moments from both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Tar Baby* speak to the vindication of the characters in Morrison’s novel, in contrast to the fate of the characters created by Faulkner. In terms of commodity versus nature, and with respect to characters’ placement within perceived time, Jason’s narrative gives insight on Dilsey’s ultimate positioning within the family as the knowledgeable caregiver who is too valuable to let go, but in terms of status too far below the Compson family on the basis of race to ever to be appreciated. What is telling, perhaps, as Jason Compson is the last of his siblings to reside in the home and take care of his mother and niece, is the tone and action Disley is prone to take with him during disagreements: “‘Hit me, den,’ she says, ‘ef nothin else but hittin somebody wont do you. Hit me,’ she says” (*Sound and the Fury* 185). Dilsey is protective of Quentin, Caddy’s daughter, and knows the threat from Jason is insignificant. Her placement within time has been solidified through both Jason’s embrace and Quentin’s ultimate rejection of commodity. Faulkner does not situate Disley within temporality in order to qualify her for redemption, however, and instead binds her and her ability to move forward within everlasting qualities of loyalty and duty to the Compson family. These same notions of loyalty and duty are called into question in the Street house by Son at Christmas dinner, the ultimate locus of commodity that marks the structural breakdown of

the household. As the he climax of Valerian's and Son's tolerance of one another comes to a head, Son's internal narration reveals, "That was the sole lesson of their world: how to make waste, how to make machines that made more waste, how to make wasteful products, how to talk waste, how to study waste, how to design waste, how to cure people who were sickened by waste so they could be well enough to endure it" (*Tar Baby* 203). This passage makes clear Son's perspective on commodity's encroachment on the natural. Son dismantles the household, while Dilsey is made to maintain it. The proclamations made by Son at Valerian's dinner table are the small freedoms mentioned by Morrison, through which terms of justice can be found or solidified.

The sensation of alienation within time is projected through the characters' experience of the struggle between commodity and nature; Son and Quentin experience this conflict centrally, while the other characters within the novels also live outside of reality to varying degrees. Benjy certainly experiences alienation, and being nonverbal separates him from the present moment, which is built upon the need continuously to commodify. Benjy is often found in the kitchen with Disley or in the yard with Versh because of the structural elements at play, which place the alienated white man with the minority race, their connection being one of mutual understanding. The interaction between Benjy and Dilsey suggest a longing to connect: "Then Benjy wailed again, hopeless and prolonged. It was nothing. Just sound. It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets" *(Sound and the Fury* 288). In response, Dilsey acts as the sole interpreter of Benjy's distress, the figure who understands what he needs and what his pain represents not only for himself but for the time in which they both live. Dilsey is Benjy's source of comfort, and she provides a space where his intertwining realities can lie still. Her inability to seek a space for herself within the reassuring

notions of temporality that she builds for Benjy reflects her fate within the novel. Dilsey and Beny's relationship is further developed when she takes Benjy to an Easter church service near the end of the novel. Arguably, the church for Dilsey is the allotted space where she is allowed the small freedom of temporary escape from the Compson house and the immovable qualities of time within that house. Her choice to include Benjy in this act of solace and peace solidifies both her role as both his caregiver and his temporal ability to interact with the world around him, just as Caddy once did for her brother. The novel recounts the sensory experiences of being in church: "In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze. Dilsey sat bolt upright beside, crying rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of that remembered Lamb" (*Sound and the Fury* 297), an image which serves to highlight the serenity of the experience for Benjy, and also the nature of Dilsey's relationship to time, which ultimately relies on her faith. Leaving the church, the flow of water continues in Dilsey's tears, continues. When prompted by her daughter, Frony, Dilsey says, "Never you mind, I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin" (*Sound and the Fury* 287). The permanence of her placement within commodified time, the endless cycle of history that begins and ends with the labor forced on the Africanist presence by colonial ideals and capitalist structures, are implicit in Dilsey's mindful declaration. The possibility that Quentin would perhaps have done something more for Dilsey and Benjy through a Harvard education is negated by his need to (re)turn to water, to dislocate himself from the crisis of time by plumbing its depths. With only Jason left to establish structure within the household, Dilsey is left to be consumed by the commodification of body and the possibilities it holds. Morrison's characters, Sydney and Ondine grapple with the alienation that Son and Jadine overcome, and they construct pathways out the servant status with which they have lived in the Street household. Although Sydney holds an apparent disdain for Son, Son has

touched his character in some ways. The reliance Sydney and Ondine once had on Valerian's obtuse notion of nature is no longer relevant, as their residence in Queen of France is no longer up for debate at the novel's end. Valerian's loss of his mind marks the beginning of justice for Sydney and Ondine, and Jadine's potential to become self-sufficient leaves a hopeful promise for their future.

Quentin Compson's decision to escape his fatal relationship to time by committing suicide does little in terms of activating a sense of freedom or revitalization. Instead, Quentin's descent to the depths of the river locks each character within the novel in place, their struggles against temporality becoming meaningless once Quentin's reality becomes still and unmoving. This is an indecision, even a refusal, to deal with the trials of commodity and its relationship to nature. Quentin's inability to discover a decisive pathway imparts a permanence to his family, and to Dilsey and Versh.. Son's return to water and to nature in *Tar Baby,* however, holds out possibilities for characters such as Jadine, Sydney, and Ondine. After Jadine leaves Son and returns briefly to Queen of France, Ondine finally declares to her that, "Jadine, a girl has got to be a daughter first" (*Tar Baby* 281), offsetting the damage that Son did with respect to racial identity and allowing both Jadine and Ondine a means of future and self-reliance. Jadine does not necessarily break free from commodity, but she does revitalize herself through the realization that Son himself is not nature—that Jadine may seek what is natural about herself by being alone, by being a daughter. Son, in his desperate attempt to bring Jadine back to him, crosses the sea once again. This time, however, it is not the commodity of a woman that drives him further into Queen of France, but rather the allure of untouched nature, which lives in the depths of Son's being. The final lines of the novel read, "The pebbles made him stumble and so did the roots of the trees. He threw out his hands to guide and steady his going. By and by he walked

steadier, now steadier. The mist lifted and the trees stepped back as if to make the way easier for a certain kind of man. Then he ran" (*Tar Baby* 306). These lines disassociate Son's body from linearity and place him within a living history that breathes through nature and transcends itself through story and remembering.

In an essay that explores Morrison's use of body, Mina Karavanta writes, "Morrison dismantles the house of race to build the home of the human," something that is exemplified in the reading of *Tar Baby* (Karavanta 13). Jadine's struggle to design a place for herself within a society that has displaced her is a clear example of the sort of dismantling that Karavanta is discussing. Within Jadine's and Son's relationship, the struggles between commodity and nature is negotiated in terms of racialized identities—Jadine's skin color has always complicated this notion of identity, stalling her progress and her ability to move forward. Her struggle for naturalness is highlighted in the scene in which becomes entrapped within the trees, unable to free herself from the confines of greenery:

> There is an easy way to get out of this, she thought, and every Girl Scout knows what is but I don't. Movement was not possible. At least not sudden movement. Perhaps she was supposed to lie horizontally. She tightened her arms around the tree and it swayed as though it wished to dance with her. (*Tar Baby* 182)

For Jadine, simplistic ways of knowing are unattainable, and her struggle to belong, to be accepted and understood as a whole being is not resolved because she is still confined by her belief that Son embodies freedom. Son's perceived ideas of waste and the commodification of time do not allow Jadine to exist peacefully even within the environment he has always envisioned for them. Taking her back to his home, introducing her to his roots, ultimately making the attempt to dissuade her from her reliance on city and material things does not create

the qualities Son wishes for Jadine to take on. Her camera is the symbol of the discord between the two, as she takes pictures of his town and those whom he considers his people, preserving not what Son wishes her to see but rather her interpretations or impressions of them: “Son didn’t mean to snatch it. Just to end it somehow. Stop the crease, the sunlight, the click click click, And when he did she looked at him with confusion at first, then with evolved anger” (*Tar Baby* 251). This scene places Jadine directly in the production of waste and the commodification of time which Son despises. Jadine’s afflictions within the novel stem from both nature and commodity, but they do not prevent her from achieving a form of freedom following her detachment from Son. Ondine’s admission to her that she is in need of a daughter creates a space for Jadine through the realization that she can stand on her own and can even potentially stand for someone else. Her reconciliation with temporality at the end of the novel exemplifies the strength produced by Morrison’s narrative exploration of a pathway to reconstruct reality through the human body’s natural relation to time. Jadine is overwhelmed by nature and succumbs to commodity, which places her in a position of temporal potentials and pathways, while Son’s admittance into the depths of nature solidifies his role within her journey and allows him to reshape time and the future.

The Sound and the Fury deals with Quentin Compson’s inability to connect with commodity as well as his refusal to submit to nature. Had Quentin’s character possessed the ability to pursue the struggle against the temporality that oppresses him, redemption would have been possible. His suicide by water is a rejection of linearity and reconciliation, and it entraps both him and the other characters in the novel within their given realities, leaving Jason and Dilsey enmeshed in the very commodity to which Quentin could not submit, while Benjy and Caddy seem inevitably positioned as the aspects of nature with which he could not come to

terms. Son and Jadine, through a direct and merciless struggle to establish themselves within temporality, open doors for Sydney and Ondine as well as for themselves. While Jadine seems fated to the body as commodity at the beginning of the novel, her interactions with nature, with Son, allow her to grow as a character within temporal space. Son is a near-primal being at the start of the novel, but through his love for Jadine, he is able to make the decision to reside within nature. The love, passion, hate, and violence through which Jadine and Son achieve freedom for themselves enables them to sustain themselves in a manner consistent with their notions of being within time. Sydney and Ondine are left to deal with commodity, but their initial reliance on Valerian shifts as his mental state deteriorates, leaving Sydney and Ondine as the curators of commodity and the keepers of nature. Morrison rewrites the fatalistic interaction of Faulkner's characters in order to show what is possible within the temporality of the American South in terms of race and revitalization. Quentin's drowning reflects the entrapment of Faulkner's characters within the notions of time that exist in Yoknapatawpha, the present moment progressing slowly in terms of historical knowledge and societal progression. Son's delivery by water to Queen of France, both at his initial arrival and upon his final return, opens up a space for contemplation of body and of time and of the movement their relationship creates. By allowing nature and commodity to represent the search for the individual's placement within time and situating this search amid structural perceptions of race, Morrison's *Tar Baby* describes a process of redemption for the characters within a space defined by water's all-embracing temporality.

Conclusion

The Potential to Sail on Water: The Continuing Study of Water and Time

Research emerging from this study could pursue several potential pathways, sailing past the works of Morrison and Faulkner and extending its analysis to address other American authors and media. The phrase "American author" situates the importance of water and temporality as sites of exploration, as passageways into a colonial history dependent on the element of water as device both of movement and transformation and of commodity. The possibility of understanding water's function in terms of temporality and of accounting for the duality of Morrison's and Faulkner's usage of water with respect to notions of time could likewise inform readings of earlier American texts such as Herman Melville's 1851 classic, *Moby Dick.* While Melville obviously correlates water to human economics and travel, water might also shape our understanding the characters' temporality within the narrative. For characters such as Ishmael and Ahab, temporal notions of being on and within the body of water set up a contrast to Queequeg—a contrast that could be connected to the relationship between Morrison and Faulkner as they deal with race within their narratives.

Virigina Woolf's connection to both Faulkner and Morrison makes her another author who could be examined with respect to water's role as an aspect of timework; *To the Lighthouse*, for example, appears to invite and indeed to foreground such considerations. Woolf's positioning as an English Modernist writer links her to Faulkner in terms of overall strategy within narrative, yet her lyricism in describing the human experience which extends beyond her time period and allows Woolf to traverse the temporal plane as Morrison does. To include an analysis of *To the Lighthouse* and the means by which each character is affected by notions of temporality could help to illuminate the impacts of colonial time on American literature, her being an English

author positions the American novels within new terms of analysis. Woolf's Modernist narrative explores the potential of water as a temporal figure, while suggesting the need to examine Faulkner and Morrison together. A final author who might be considered is Octavia Butler, whose 1979 novel *Kindred* deals directly with the impact of time and the trauma associated with history. Butler's usage of water, as well as he characters' determination to confront historical trauma head on, links her to Morrison and Faulkner through her interest of the effects of temporality on body and experience. All three novelists explore human experience, emphasizing a continual seeking and a continued need to understand and empathize even more than has already been done.

The film renditions of some of these novels could also be included in an analysis of water as a symbol of time's function. The 1998 film rendition of *Beloved* starring Oprah Winfrey lends itself to an exploration not only of Morrison's usage of water, but also of the ways in which temporality functions within filmic as opposed to written narratives. Winfrey, alongside Danny Glover, works to portray Sethe and Paul D, as well as to convey the pain and anguish they experience in the face of the ghost and of their unfinished history. The presence of water and its role in mediating temporality is presented in the film through strong imagery, allowing the movie's audience to comprehend the characters' placement within time as well as the importance of water in the film's narrative. The film *Beloved* could also be juxtapose to the 2013 film adaptation of *As I Lay Dying*, which stars James Franco and Tim Blake Nelson; in this film, the dysfunction in temporality is showcased by the oddity of camera angles and the jumping from frame to frame, indicative of the persistently modulating timeframe for each of the characters. What distinguishes this film from the 1998 *Beloved* is the inattention to water as a direct correlative of temporality. While the river scene is portrayed within the film, the focus lies

mainly on character reaction rather than on the water itself. In other words, rather than equating shifts in perceived reality with the presence and movement of water, the film condemns the members of the Bundren family on the basis of personal character. Water is presented as a trial associated with journey rather than as the site or medium of reconciliation and redistribution of time, whereas the film version of *Beloved* deepens the association of temporality with the presence of water. This may reflect the influence of the Africanist presence with which Morrison's characters must deal directly, whereas Faulkner's characters engage with this presence either allusively or circumstantially.

The idea that water may function as a temporal pathway for characters within a given narrative contributes to our understanding of the timeliness of the human experience. Faulkner establishes this notion of water, especially in relation to the impact of history on the American South, and this allows his work to act as a basis upon which multiple pathways of exploration may be traced. Faulkner's novels are not a lens for reading Morrison, but rather a companion through which the power of her texts is persistently made clear, and both authors' employment of water as a direct correlative of time allows for an examination of individual experience as it interacts with and contexts historical legacies and discourses. Morrison's work as a Southern American author expands—and breaks—the boundaries that determine who and what may be the subjects—and the agents or authors—of history and of other discourses. Morrison infuses meaning into each form of temporality that human beings experience—permeating the remembered past, the perceived present, and the anticipated future in a river of richly transformative lived experience. Morrison uses water to reconstruct our understanding of history, the structures of racism, and our shared notions of temporality. The experience of water is the experience of time, a bridge to empathy, and the key to moving forward.

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