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Recalling the West Indies: From Yoknapatawpha to Haiti and Back

John T. Matthews

In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Thomas Sutpen relates how, as the overseer of a sugar plantation in Haiti, he put down a rebellion at the outset of his career as a new-world planter. He explains that at first he did not register his danger; a US Southerner in the West Indies, Sutpen failed to "know, comprehend, what he must have been seeing every day because of [his] innocence" (203). As Sutpen never looks more deeply into the circumstances of his original insult at the door of Pettibone's Tidewater Virginia mansion, so he shows little interest in understanding the place where he set out to make his fortune. In going to sea, the 14-year-old Sutpen acted solely on his teacher's assertion that the West Indies were where "poor men went in ships and became rich" (195). He knew nothing about where the West Indies were, how he would get there, or what he would do there—only that he would make money—"it didn't matter how" (195). Sutpen launches his design with that obliviousness that is American innocence. Once on Haiti, Sutpen disregards the manifest evidence of impending "slave" revolt and hybrid racial ancestries. Sutpen's famously preserved innocence amounts to the habit of looking without seeing. The *noir* rebels themselves mock the American overseer's blind spot: when Sutpen searches for a missing house servant, the body shows up several days later "where he could not possibly have missed it during the first hour of the first day if it had been there" (203). When a voodoo warning appears on the planter's pillow one morning—a pig bone, some chicken feathers, a rag with pebbles tied in a sack—Sutpen does not even understand it as a sign, let alone recognize its stain as "neither dirt nor grease but blood" (203). The fetish object epitomizes the reality Sutpen disregards, "overseeing what he oversaw and not knowing that he was overseeing it" (203). For Sutpen, to look is to overlook.

When a voodoo warning appears on the planter's pillow one morning—a pig bone, some chicken feathers, a rag with pebbles tied in a sack—Sutpen does not even understand it as a sign, let alone recognize its stain as "neither dirt nor grease but blood" . . . For Sutpen, to look is to overlook.

Tellingly, the Caribbean has suffered similar disregard for half a century in critical considerations of Faulkner's great novel of the

plantation South. Only during the 1990s did the presence of the West Indies in the novel “achieve” visibility.¹ It is sobering to acknowledge how assumptions of US exceptionalism, imperial indifference to prenational colonial origins, the peculiarization of the slaveholding South by the rest of the country, and other forms of self-conceptual insularity carried over into the neglect of what Faulkner’s South shares more broadly with new-world histories and experiences.² My preliminary point is that such obliviousness may correspond to the colonial representational technology of *fetish*. Sutpen’s “innocent” “mistakes” about his West Indian situation exemplify an extensive cultural apparatus dedicated to preserving masterly innocence in new-world colonial Souths, and US imperial innocence in the postcolonial world. Like its narrators, readers of *Absalom*, I shall contend, have always had before their eyes Faulkner’s evidence that the plantation South derives its design from new-world models, owes a founding debt to West Indian slave-based agriculture, extracted labor and profit from African-Caribbean slave trade, and practiced forms of racial and sexual control common to other hemispheric colonial regimes. But there is a kind of knowledge that can be held while being ignored, a kind of vision that looks but does not see. Such knowledge does not disappear into the depths of its repression—the prevailing model for the work of Faulknerian evasion or deferral. Instead, such knowledge goes into open hiding on the surface of the Faulknerian text, where, like Edgar Allan Poe’s purloined letter, it is perhaps too obvious to be seen.

1. Fetishized Knowledge

Homi Bhabha has described the operation of cultural fetish in his well-known essay on stereotype, “The Other Question,” in *The Location of Culture*. Although I will not be discussing the specific forms of colonial fetish Bhabha treats—stereotype, skin, blood—I do wish to use his general account of disavowed knowledge to anchor my discussion of Faulkner’s representation of the US South’s Caribbean horizon. Faulkner’s mindfulness of Latin bearings culminates in his explicit engagement with new-world colonialism in *Absalom*, but scattered throughout Faulkner’s earlier writing—including his work for Hollywood in the 1930s—are evasive admissions of the relations between his South and other new-world Souths. Faulkner’s writing in the 1920s follows the white planter South’s colonial-style habits of disavowal and then, in the 1930s, begins to confront and expose their dangerously persistent workings. Faulkner’s impetus in taking up such matters amounts to more than firm historical revisionism by the South’s most critical loving son. It

arises as urgently, I believe, from anxiety that modern US imperialism was tending to revive and refurbish colonial plantation pasts in its plans for new territories of influence and development in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific. Painfully untangling the historical complicity of his nation, region, and class in what *Absalom* unblinkingly calls “the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage” (209), Faulkner’s plantation fiction resonates with alarm about the Southernizing designs of American empire.³

Bhabha traces the cultural work of fetishized knowledge such as stereotype to its psychological function: “Fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration” (74). Sigmund Freud locates the emergence of fetish in the male’s anxiety over sexual difference. Noticing that some bodies lack penises, boys interpret the female sex in terms of anxieties about castration. Jacques Lacan moves the moment of trauma back to an earlier stage, when the child first experiences differentiation from the world, that is, when he learns of his own non-self-sufficiency and reliance on the mother as another. In this process of the subject’s formation by splitting, the problem of sexual difference becomes a secondary manifestation for Lacan. The determination to manage the anxiety of difference as loss may generate the use of a fetish object. Such a device serves the double purpose of substituting for the absent member even as it signifies knowledge of its loss. The fetish object’s function is at once replacement and displacement, a structurally dynamic ambivalence that Bhabha makes much of in the matter of stereotype. Like sexual fetish, racial fetish mediates white anxiety that the black is a potentially mutilated version of oneself rather than an absolutely different other. Bhabha remarks that “the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack)” (74–75). It is from this standpoint that Bhabha can emphasize how fetishism “is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs” (80).

The fetish object (which functions as a fiction—the female phallus) consoles through a fantasy of restored wholeness and sameness. That is, the sexually and/or racially differentiated subject, who experiences the formation of his identity as a repudiation of the subjugated other, may fantasize through the fetish a return to primal oneness. In the case of the production of colonial subjects, wholeness would involve “the desire for an originality which is . . . threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture” (75).⁴ Since entry into the symbolic order involves both racial and gender identity, Bhabha proposes that “the discourses of sexuality and race relate in a process of *functional overdetermination*” (74). Racial stereotype always

involves the expression and control of sexual desire along with the fantasy of nondifference.

One might see how the specific fetishes of a racialized colonial regime show up as the standard operating procedures of Yoknapatawpha. But the prominence of fetishized knowledge in the sort of world Faulkner occupied suggests another fundamental problem for writers descending from the master class. Observing that the fetish object works as symbolic mastery of non-self-sufficiency and difference, Lacan proposes that language itself is the initial form of fetish. If language “knows” that it replaces things or ideas that are unavailable outside language, it nevertheless acts as if it is only provisionally displacing them on the way to full representation. Like the fetish object, language rests on disavowed knowledge: I know the signifier does not deliver the signified; nevertheless I speak as though it does. The fetish requires that you see through it even as you see by means of it.

Given the specific conditions under which Faulkner undertakes the project of creating his “own little postage stamp of native soil” (“Interview” 255), he unavoidably encounters a problem with language. Any attempt by the author to use language to represent reality and create pleasure ultimately reveals that language to be haunted by the production of the split colonial subject. Language as fetish continues to mediate the initial clefts of racial and sexual division and is condemned to the perpetual negotiation of historical non-self-sufficiency. Faulkner associated the pleasure of writing with mastering the sense of loss. He once spoke of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) as a vase created for his own pleasure, to be set beside his bed and worn away with kissing (“Introduction” 415). In a culture produced by the history of new-world Souths, Faulkner found himself creating objects of pleasure whose cultural work could not be disengaged from the function of disavowing the anxieties of compromised mastery. Faulkner invariably discovered that the delight of creation was bound to the fetish-work of mediating social difference and injury.

2. Starting out in Rincon

A number of Faulkner’s early stories about artistic vocation are set in ports of the Latin New World, from the West Indies to New Orleans. Perhaps the most inscrutable of these short stories is the notorious “Carcassonne.” Considered all but unreadable by most critics,⁵ it seems to have had special significance to Faulkner. He placed it as the concluding piece in both the volume *These Thirteen* (1931) and the later *Collected Stories* (1950). The story comprises a dialogue between a dying poet and his own skeleton. They debate

the poet's failing ambition to create something magnificent, perhaps a poem commensurate with the exploits of the Crusaders who made their way through the medieval French town of Carcassonne: "*I want to perform something bold and tragical and austere* he repeated, shaping the soundless words in the pattering silence *me on a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire*" (*Collected Stories* 899). The story suffers from frequent eruptions of such grandiloquence. For example, rats in the poet's garret scurry "invisibly like an abrupt disintegration of dead leaves in a wind, in whispering arpeggios of minute sound, leaving a thin but definite effluvium of furtiveness and voracity" (898). Faulkner probably wrote this story in 1926, very early in his career, and it is easy to detect the strains of artistic self-dramatization. Perhaps we have the callow poet announcing his determination to thunder toward Olympus on the wings of style; or perhaps Faulkner presents a more skeptical portrait of a dreamy imagination isolated from the embodied world, fantasizing Prufrockian triumphs.⁶

What has been less remarked is that Faulkner locates such aesthetic effusions in the problematic of US neocolonial imperialism. The poet has taken refuge in a Latin seaport identified only as Rincon, Spanish for "corner," where he subsists on the patronage of a wealthy American woman with ties to the oil industry. The artist views himself as compromised by this dependence on Mrs. Widdrington: "Luis, who ran the cantina downstairs, allowed him to sleep in the garret. But the Standard Oil Company, who owned the garret and the roofing paper [his bed], owned the darkness too; it was Mrs Widdrington's, the Standard Oil Company's wife's, darkness he was using to sleep in. She'd make a poet of you too, if you did not work anywhere. . . . With her, if you were white and did not work, you were either a tramp or a poet" (897). Faulkner sees that US neocolonialism will subsidize twentieth-century US culture. The poet resents Mrs. Widdrington's ownership of everything, even the rats: "But wealthy people have to own so many things. Only she didn't expect the rats to pay for using her darkness and silence by writing poetry. Not that they could not have, and pretty fair verse probably" (898). The poet's exile from his country is doubled by his exile from his own body—the skeleton to which he talks from his disembodied imagination—as if the artist has been turned into a parasitical zombie by the neocolonial project. Faulkner must have felt the discomfort of such complicity himself, because in 1927, the year after he composed this portrait of the oil-dependent poet, his father sold two parcels of family land in Oxford—one became a gasoline station, the other the local office of the Standard Oil Company (Karl 313).⁷

To be white and a poet of the South in the New World also means to inhabit quarters haunted by skeletons in the corners. Garrets

in Rincon house revenants of colonial pasts: “The agony of wood was soothed by these latitudes; empty rooms did not creak and crack. Perhaps wood was like any other skeleton though, after a time, once reflexes of old compulsions had spent themselves. Bones might lie under seas, in the caverns of the sea, knocked together by the dying echoes of waves” (897). The bones strewn the bottoms of West Indian seas include the skeletons of explorers and slaves, of course—the perpetrators and victims of old compulsions perhaps now spent. But in 1926 new corporate compulsions were driving former colonial places into the custody of agents of American neo-colonialism like the Standard Oil Company.⁸ The poet cannot create beauty without encountering the deadly history of new-world oppression that supports him. The fustian of “Carcassonne” indicates Faulkner’s critical reflection on his own fetish of style as a dangerous flight of fancy. Baroque overwriting may sublimate anxiety about disavowed origins, about an historical and racial darkness from which the white US poet remains cut off and with which his very language longs to perform the fantasy of reunion. The last line of the story regards “an immensity of darkness and of silence within which, steadfast, fading, deepbreasted and grave of flank, muses the dark and tragic figure of the Earth, his mother” (900). One may glimpse here the first of Faulkner’s portraits of the South’s unacknowledged black mothers.

A second Rincon story, called “Black Music,” reveals modern US neocolonialism in the West Indies as descending from Southern plantation design. In “Black Music” the narrator wants to learn the history of the tramp and would-be poet of “Carcassonne.” The expatriate turns out to be one Wilfred Midgleston, who arrived in Rincon 25 years earlier in flight from a scandal in the US. The oil company workers who know Midgleston tell the narrator that the old man first sponged off them when he showed up, then off the natives, and finally was installed by Mrs. Widdrington in the company-owned garret. Faulkner emphasizes that the enclave of “Universal Oil Company” workers occupies a position of white mastery in the tiny seaport. The company’s interests so dwarf the natives’ that the tanker in port appears larger than the entire town. The oilmen despise Rincon as “a hole” (800) and cannot figure out why Midgleston is there without their profit motive. The company’s work requires a familiar colonial disposition toward race. The narrator describes “men a little soiled and usually unshaven, who were unavoidable in the cantinas and coffee shops, loud, violent, maintaining the superiority of the white race and their own sense of injustice and of outrage among the grave white teeth, the dark, courteous, fatal, speculative alien faces” (802). Faulkner paints a Conradian picture of white imperial power, but we must also note the peculiarly Southern inflection of Faulkner’s colonials.

The US workers speak in Southern dialect: they say things such as “to live and die without no reason” (801), “What else do you reckon,” “That’s a fact,” “he got it stole,” and “a durn fool” (800). More oddly, Midgleston, a native New Yorker, sounds the same: “I ain’t et nothing to speak of in a day or so. . . . I was always a right hearty eater back home” (802). In 25 years, we are told, Midgleston has not acquired more than 10 words of Spanish, but this Brooklynite has learned to talk like Wash Jones. The Caribbean, like many places with valuable resources inhabited by darker peoples, did indeed begin to hear Southern accents in the first quarter of the century. The US exported postslavery technologies of agricultural production, labor, and especially race relations as a blueprint for business, diplomatic, and military affairs. The very indefiniteness of the town’s location—there are Rincons in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Panama, and elsewhere—suggests that the superimposition of a Southern template threatens to turn all targets of US interest into generic corners of empire.

Faulkner’s implicating of the US South in neocolonial design works out even more intricately in the part of “Black Music” that recounts how the poet ends up in Rincon. Midgleston is a draftsman for a New York architectural firm. On an assignment to deliver drawings to an estate project in the Virginia countryside, Midgleston suffers the bizarre delusion that he is turning into a faun. Eventually he comes to believe that his metamorphosis constitutes a summons from a spirit allegedly guarding the sanctity of the place, which has passed through several failed development schemes. Satyr-inspired, Midgleston manages to threaten the mistress of the house with a sexual indecency. Midgleston flees the ensuing scandal, but not before accomplishing his mission, since the Van Dymings abandon their grandiose plans and sell the property.

The satyr sabotages a project with distinctly imperial trappings. Van Dyming is a New York bank and railroad magnate. He and his wife undertake the renovation of a former grape arbor intending to create a monument to their wealth; there will be a community house “built to look like the Coliseum” and a garage resembling the “Acropolis” (807). Guests will cruise a lake on a gas-driven Roman barge. Faulkner here connects Northern industrial finance with the Southern dream of neoclassical pastoralism. The arbor’s history of ownership—first by a New England investor then a foreign entrepreneur—suggests the US South’s own colonial ancestry as a site for the production of raw materials dependent on outside capital. The plantation South exhibited both the dependency of a semi-periphery on metropolitan capital and manufacturing and also mastery of a racially subjugated labor force. Imitation of plantation ways on the twentieth century’s neocolonial stage furnished a technology for new American lordship over the world’s “country folks” (807) (as the

story refers to the Virginia locals who witness the outlanders' project). Perhaps the real genius of the place is Thomas Jefferson, master architect of Virginia neoclassicism (not to mention grape arbors), early expander of US empire, and namesake of Faulkner's own fictional county seat.

Let me pursue this circuitous route toward the West Indies of *Absalom, Absalom!* by pausing before two interrelated short stories of 1928, both entitled "Once Aboard the Lugger." The stories recount the escapades of bootleggers out of New Orleans, who make runs to Louisiana Gulf islands where whiskey has been deposited for smuggling into the Southern port. Faulkner claimed that he got to know a family of such bootleggers during his stay in New Orleans during 1925 and that he had accompanied them on numerous night-time runs. The first story recounts the sickening voyage of the small craft and the hateful work of unearthing and loading the cache of liquor on a tropical, mosquito-infested island. The second adds a horrific tale of the lugger's being apprehended on its return trip; two members of the crew lose their lives in the forced boarding, including the black cook. Faulkner evidently once believed the material had considerable potential; he claimed that these episodes were the only surviving parts of an entire novel he had discarded (*Uncollected Stories* 699–700).

I propose that the manifest tale of whiskey smuggling from the islands hides on its surface a second tale that cannot be separated from it, one that indicates a more fatal commerce between the Deep South and the West Indies. In 1925, pleasure and profit could be gained from defying Prohibition, but such traffic in contraband stirred up a more remote historical nightmare. The narrator describes the tiny island approached in the dark as "a scar of sand" (*Uncollected Stories* 353); it is not long before we see what violence that scar marks. As the crew struggles across the beach toward the buried cache, suddenly "the treacherous darkness burst into mad shapes and a tense, soundless uproar" (355). The unrecognizable menace turns out to be feral cattle—"wildeyed and anonymous horned beasts" (355). Encountering them "was like a nightmare through which, pursued by demons, you run forever on a shifting surface that gives no purchase for the feet" (355). The wild cattle introduce a chain of associations with slaves—wild chattel—that have passed through the West Indies on their way to New Orleans and the Deep South. When Sutpen (illegally) imports his slaves into Yoknapatawpha, they are initially described as "a herd of wild beasts" (*Absalom* 10) and ever after are known as Sutpen's "wild" Negroes. More than just whiskey, cultural memories seem to be stored on the island. As the narrator helps lift the sacks out of "the black gullet," he hears the "dry whispering of that tomb" (*Uncollected*

Stories 357). In the “shifting sand that bartered each step for the price of four, surrounded always by a soundless and vicious needling which I could not brush even temporarily off, that sense of nightmare returned ten fold—a sense of hopeless enslavement to an obscure compulsion” (357). Economic expressions like “bartered” and “returned ten fold” point to the literal dealings of “enslavement.” “Compulsion” here echoes slavery’s “old compulsions,” which were audible in the garret (here “gullet”) in Rincon. Haunted by the confinement and transport of blacks, both chambers make tight quarters for whites. Rincon’s garret resembles the lugger’s “dark hold stinking of bilge and of fish and of what other nameless avatars through which the vessel had passed” (358).

Nightmarish ensnarement in shifting sands will carry through to Faulkner’s judgment in *Absalom* that the slaveholding South was founded on the “shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage” (209). The narrator in “Lugger” cannot get to sleep after this traumatic exertion; what continues to disturb him is the afterimage of the “sand that shifted and shifted under me” and the “dark high breath of the sea in the pines” (358). The island’s sigh will become in *Absalom* the sound of Haiti’s “trades, the same weary winds blowing back and forth across it and burdened still with the weary voices of murdered women and children homeless and graveless about the isolating and solitary sea” (204). The murdered cook in “Lugger (II)” is slain by an “Alabama voice” that takes exception to finding a Negro not in the fields: “Place for a nigger’s behind a plow” (362). The circumstances of the murder force the unsought connection between Deep South agriculture, the channels of new-world slave trade, and white pleasure.⁹ The bootleggers’ business arrangements eerily replicate slave commerce: the captain has earlier been in the “outside trade,” the sector that picks up green alcohol in the West Indies and packages it for resale out of the Tortugas. This captain is himself a New England teetotaling Prohibitionist, a symbolic descendant of the New England slave-trading abolitionist.

The story comprises a palimpsest of contemporary and historical traffic with the West Indies as it stages mighty struggles to see what is entirely visible. The lugger “lurk[s] neither wholly hidden nor wholly revealed against the perspective of the Sound and the ghostly and sourceless echo of starlight and the new moon” (354). Like a fetish object, the image negotiates, contrariwise, a visible echo that is at once ghostly and sourceless, both affirming that the present is haunted by the past as well as denying the present’s relation to it altogether. No wonder that the narrator finds it difficult to fathom his relation to things at hand: “The sand was white, faintly luminous in the starlight. Staring at it, it seemed to be within a hand’s breadth of the face. Then as you stared it seemed to shrink dizzily away until

equilibrium itself was lost" (354). White, dark; near, far: Faulkner peers at the traces that threaten his artistic equilibrium.

3. Stopping off in New Orleans

A number of characters from Faulkner's island stories appear in his second novel, *Mosquitoes*, a work that in this context clearly envisions New Orleans as the Deep South's Caribbean port. *Mosquitoes* is also Faulkner's most extensive meditation on what it means to be an artist, and the novel sharpens the point about the complicity of artistic practice and neocolonial dependency we have been exploring. The principal artist of *Mosquitoes* is a sculptor named Gordon, whose fierce devotion to work and taciturn scorn for would-be poets and wealthy patrons has been taken to reflect Faulkner's own vexations in New Orleans during his stay in 1925. Unlike the other artists of his circle, Gordon resists the economic and social patronage offered by Mrs. Maurier, who is known to be "rotten" "wealthy" from the "plantations or something" she owns (71). We do not learn exactly what or where those plantations are, although we do know she's a Northerner and has married a former overseer who bought land after the Civil War. Aptly, "Mrs. Maurier" was the name Faulkner first assigned to the "Standard Oil Company's wife" in "Carcassonne," a trace of the connections he continues to make between US and other new-world Souths. Mrs. Maurier conveys a hint of the tropics when she first appears "under full sail," with hands that "bloomed fatly" and a face with a "hothouse" expression (16); throughout the novel her yacht overflows with grapefruit for her guests. But the central effect of the party she arranges for her floating salon through the waters of Lake Pontchartrain is to turn the bayou into another point on the Caribbean archipelago.

The yacht bumps murkily from stop to stop, once grounding when sands have shifted. Two youngsters who escape the tedium of the talky holiday by fleeing to shore find themselves deep in a "jungle," ordering each other about like lost troops in the tropics. As the one carries his exhausted companion, he hears a beating in his head: "But remote, like a tramping of soldiers in red uniforms stepping endlessly across the door of a room where he was, where he crouched trying to look out the door. It was a dull, heavy sound, like a steamer's engines, and he found that he was thinking of water, of a blue monotony of seas" (205). In the center of town, Andrew Jackson Square strangely takes on the appearance of "an aquarium—a moist and motionless absinthe-cloudy green of all shades from ink black to a thin and rigid feathering of silver on pomegranate and mimosa—like coral in a tideless sea, amid which globular lights hung dull and

unstraying as jellyfish" (49). Circling New Orleans, Mrs. Maurier's yacht itself becomes an imaginary island of American wealth and power; she retires to her cabin, warmed by "the intimate familiarity of her possessions," in command of a vessel named "Nausikaa" that was an "island of security" (163). The wandering of this pleasure cruise obviously mimics the ocean traffic among islands that sustains US wealth. However, Faulkner's proxy artist is surrounded by more unsettling reminders of the relation between colonial spaces and artistic production.

Gordon's studio resembles the Rincon poet's garret. He works in a room on the upper floor of a warehouse on the docks: "Beneath it, within the somber gloom of the warehouse where men had sweated and labored, across the empty floor lately thunderous with trucks, amid the rich overripe odors of the ends of the earth—coffee and resin and tow and fruit—he walked, surrounded by ghosts, passing on" (47). Faulkner names the ghosts now, as if responding to the urgency of closing in on his own circumstances. Gordon's atelier "housed slaves long ago" (11), and it is within such haunted chambers that the sculptor works on his chief project: "motionless and passionately eternal—the virginal breastless torso of a girl" (11). Against such a background, Gordon's aesthetic proves all the more self-indicting. An admirer comments that his sculpture is "pure form untrammelled by any relation to a familiar or utilitarian object" (26). As if to refute such a notion of artistic autonomy, *Mosquitoes* ends with a return to the events of "Once Aboard a Lugger." The bootlegger Pete and his brothers show up at the conclusion of the novel as examples of American success; their "fortune, like most American ones, was built on the flouting of a statutory impediment" (296). Another erstwhile bootlegger—this one a would-be author—also makes a cameo. A woman on the yacht reports meeting a "funny" "little kind of black man" named Walker or Foster or something—not a Negro, as the auditor first assumes, but rather a sunburned shabby white man, whose name is finally remembered as "Faulkner" (144–45).

4. A Turn in Hollywood

The word "impediment" also tolls over Sutpen's dead design in *Absalom*—"his impediment... was innocence" (188). However, I am going to propose that Sutpen's "innocence" leads him to flout a specific statutory impediment in the building of his plantation as well, one already anticipated by Faulkner's tales of shady commerce with the West Indies. Faulkner's earliest conception of Sutpen's saga evidently dates from 1926, the same year in which he was composing

the Rincon stories. A short story entitled “Evangeline” begins as one of Faulkner’s New Orleans sketches. In 1931 he returned to the material and developed a fuller, though still preliminary account of the fall of the house of Sutpen. Faulkner focuses on the mystery of Henry’s opposition to his sister Judith’s marriage to Charles Bon. In “Evangeline,” though, this marriage actually takes place (as it does not in *Absalom*). Henry’s initial objection to the marriage arises from his discovery that Charles already has a wife in New Orleans. The additional revelation of her race comes melodramatically late in the story. “Evangeline” lacks key elements of *Absalom*, among them any mention of the West Indies in Thomas Sutpen’s career. Before Faulkner’s addition of Haiti, there was no place in the novel for Thomas Sutpen’s first marriage to Eulalia, their child, or Bon’s reputed mixed race.

Between 1931, when he circulated the never-to-be-published “Evangeline,” and 1936, when he completed *Absalom*, Faulkner encountered a number of circumstances that might have prompted him to recall the significance of the West Indies to the story of the plantation South. US military occupation of Haiti over the previous 20 years had stimulated efforts to describe the country for American audiences.¹⁰ In 1931 Faulkner accepted the first of numerous script-writing contracts in Hollywood, and at least one of the projects he worked on gave him the opportunity to consider a new angle on US relations to Latin-American history.¹¹ In 1937 Faulkner received story credit for a film entitled *Slave Ship*, directed by Tay Garnett. It was based on a novel by George S. King entitled *The Last Slaver*, which had appeared in 1933. The book tells the story of a decent, “typically American” sailor named Kane who signs on for duty as first mate on the cargo yacht *Wanderer* early in the 1850s (22). As the vessel’s outfitting and course soon suggest to the officer, however, the ship turns out to be engaged in illegal slave trade between Africa and Cuba. The *Wanderer* was an actual yacht of legendary speed built to race. It fell into the “depths of shame” in its misuse for “traffic in human life for gold,” as King puts it in the preface (17). The *Wanderer* made the last slave trade runs by an American ship to the New World decades after such commerce had been banned by the US and Britain in 1807. It is tempting to think of Faulkner reading this book as he began realizing the importance of the West Indies to Sutpen’s career.

For all its recycling of racial stereotypes, King’s novel also provides graphic descriptions of the brutality of the slave trade. The narrator almost obsessively returns to the stench of the ship’s hold, “a smell of something long dead” (58), and consistently characterizes the slave traders as filthy and physically repugnant. King includes a diagram of how slaves were stowed as cargo side by side in prone

position. *The Last Slaver* recounts in detail the typical circuit between slave acquisition ports on the West African coast and points of delivery in Cuba. The vessel's initial outfitting takes place in the states, at a Port Jefferson, so the novel also presumes the role of US investment, profit, and illegal domestic consumption in the slave trade. Such information might have deepened Faulkner's grasp of the position the West Indies occupied in the commerce in human flesh: in *Absalom*, Thomas Sutpen's island is "the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires, was ravished by violence, and the cold known land to which it was doomed, the civilized land and people" (202).

4. Sutpen Goes to Sea

If we attend closely in *Absalom* to the origins of Thomas Sutpen's design in the West Indies, I think we must conclude that Sutpen and his narrators ignore historical truths that they are in a position to admit plainly. To begin with, there is the question of where Sutpen's slaves come from. Quentin Compson, following his grandfather's account of what Sutpen presumably told him, asserts that these 20 slaves come from Haiti as part of Sutpen's divorce settlement with Eulalia. Quentin speculates that "he chose his twenty niggers out of whatever swapping there must have been when he repudiated that first wife and that child" (211). As a number of readers have noticed, however, someone seems to be confused about Haitian history in *Absalom*, since by 1804, more than 20 years before Sutpen arrived there, Haiti had overthrown French rule and become the first free black republic in the New World. No white French sugar planters remained on Haiti in 1827, and all slaves had been freed. Most readers who have noticed the problem assume that Faulkner's history is faulty, although two persuasive interpretations of it as intended anachronism have been proposed.¹²

It is Quentin, however, who reports as truth what Sutpen may have said about his slaves coming from the Negroes on the Haitian sugar plantation. It may be that Quentin knows better, but he, like Sutpen's contemporaries in Jefferson, does not look very hard into how the new planter got his slaves and furnishings for his mansion. The evidence in *Absalom* points to Sutpen's having acquired his Negroes through illegal West Indian slave trade. One of the unwritten chapters of Sutpen's career is the time he spent as a sailor. He set out from Virginia in 1820 at the age of 14, and shipped on a vessel bound for the West Indies no later than 1823 (193). We do not learn

when he settled in Haiti, but he does not put down the insurrection there and marry the planter's daughter until 1827. After he repudiates Eulalia in 1831, it takes him two more years to show up in Jefferson. Furthermore, as Maritza Stanchich has noticed, Sutpen's two major absences from Jefferson suggest return voyages to the West Indies ("Hidden"). The first occurs immediately after Sutpen pays for his plot of land in "gold Spanish coin" (26). Sutpen disappears for two months and comes back with an architect from Martinique and a "crew" (28) of "wild negroes" (27). It is nearly impossible to imagine 20 slaves being held in Haiti by Sutpen's former father-in-law for pickup two years after a divorce settlement.¹³ Nor would Sutpen have cash to buy slaves when he gets to the Caribbean. (General Compson believes Sutpen pays for his land with his last coin, and that he inveigles the architect to accompany him on the strength of a promise alone). But Sutpen might have had time to arrange a high-risk, high-yield speculative expedition and perhaps even to sail on such a voyage to Africa himself. "[F]elony" is one of the first words applied to Sutpen's profitable disappearances from Jefferson (33). Historically, planting and slave-trading were not mutually exclusive enterprises. The film *Slave Ship* depicts the slaver's captain as a reluctant trader and would-be planter who eventually reforms and buys a sugar plantation in Jamaica. The movie also mentions that it took six weeks to sail a slave cargo from Africa to Virginia; the West Indies might have been reached in less time.

In 1807, about the year Sutpen was born, the US and Great Britain banned international slave trade in the New World. From this point on, all legal slave trade within the US involved the sale of domestic chattel. The residents of Jefferson in 1833 consider Sutpen's "imported slaves" a worrisome anomaly; they find the slaves "wild," practically another species from the domestic slaves routinely acquired in Memphis or New Orleans (28). It may be the introduction of these illegal slaves that begins to turn the town against Sutpen. Smuggling slaves flouted statutory law and weakened the domestic market. It also jeopardized the myth of planter paternalism.

When Sutpen draws Goodhue Coldfield into his financial design, he openly compounds the town's complicity. Sutpen's second departure from Jefferson comes when he needs money to outfit his mansion. This time, Sutpen offers his future father-in-law a partnership in his venture. Coldfield furnishes a "bill of lading," an instrument of credit, for the unidentified speculation (208). Sutpen returns to Jefferson after three months, with wagonloads of expensive furniture, the vehicles having been hired and dispatched by Coldfield. During Sutpen's absence, however, Coldfield has grown conscience-stricken; he realizes he is part of the sort of scheme that, when it fails, forces you to "change your name and move to Texas" (208).

Although the townsfolk half-joke that Sutpen must be robbing riverboats, such an explanation ignores the length of Sutpen's absence and the need for Coldfield's credit. As before, the obvious source for such sizable, quick, but questionable profit would have been illegal slave speculation.

Quentin indicates Coldfield's serious moral qualms about his business deal with Sutpen, but no narrator reveals exactly what is going on. Quentin casts Coldfield's dilemma as a contradiction between conscience and financial opportunity: "his conscience and the land, the country which had created his conscience and then offered the opportunity to have made all that money to the conscience which it had created, which could do nothing but decline" (209). I do not see what else this could refer to but a conflict between Coldfield's moral disapproval of slavery and the opportunity to make money through slave trade. Coldfield comes from Tennessee, a state whose antislavery merchant class remained pro-Union until the brink of the Civil War. On an earlier occasion Coldfield encounters this very trouble of putting abolitionist conviction ahead of financial interest; he receives two slaves as payment for a debt, and, though his morality will not let him keep the slaves, he requires them to earn their market price before he frees them. Sutpen's familiarity with Caribbean seafaring, the length of his absences from Jefferson, the unexplained circumstances of his procuring African slaves and quick cash, and the indication of moral enormity in the reactions of his townsmen and his partner, all point to Sutpen's involvement in illegal slave trade. Understandably, the circumspection of the Compson narrators about planter commerce in human beings cloaks shame and guilt over the way their world has been paid for.

If Sutpen's slaves do not in fact come from Haiti, then one element of Faulkner's "mistake" turns out to be a matter of Southern oversight. Quentin overlooks the evidence that colonial slave trade sustained the South's domestic paternalism, that Sutpen's commerce makes sleeping partners out of all Jeffersonians, slaveowners or not. Throughout his transmission of his grandfather's version of Sutpen's story, Quentin betrays a deeper understanding of colonial history than he lets on. For example, although Quentin describes what seems to be a slave insurrection, neither he nor Sutpen uses the term *slave*. Instead, the black sugarcane workers are always called "the niggers." The distinction is not negligible. What appears to be an error at worst or an anachronism at best may prove instead to be a historically precise representation of a situation largely misperceived by one participant in it and perpetuated by tellers who know better. By referring to the cultivators as "niggers" and not slaves, the novel accurately reflects the racial terrain of Haiti in 1827.

The Haitian Constitution of 1804 had abolished slavery, outlawed white landownership, and confiscated the property of French colonists (Williams 333). Almost immediately mulatto offspring of former white landowners began to reclaim their land, violating the spirit of the measures and angering Emperor Dessalines. When Dessalines attempted to reinforce policies favoring Negroes, the mulatto class rebelled and Dessalines was assassinated. Meanwhile, agricultural failures stemming from the breakup of large plantations and the creation of small black-owned farms, especially in Haiti's southern region, led to reforms designed by President Jean Pierre Boyer to return peasants to laborer status on large farms. These measures constituted the notorious Rural Code, which, according to Eric Williams, "forbade the peasant, under penalty of imprisonment . . . to travel into the interior without a permit of the landowner or overseer on whose land he was employed; prescribed the number of hours of work; suppressed the labourer's right to leave the fields and migrate to the towns; prohibited workers' associations for the purchase of plantations; required the labourer to be submissive and respectful to the planter or his overseer" (334). Put into effect in 1826, the Rural Code amounted to the "restoration of slavery, minus the whip" (334). Furthermore, Boyer's reforms reversed Dessalines's outlawing of color distinctions in 1805. Williams writes, "Boyer's rural code revived and stimulated the colour distinctions by which the mulatto regarded himself as the superior of the black man" (334). The *jaunes*, the "yellow aristocracy," succeeded the white French aristocracy and presided over a subdivision between *noirs* and *mulatres* (Heinl and Heinl 175). The renewal of racial oppression led to a series of bloody revolts by blacks in Haiti, the worst in 1848.

"Innocent" that he is, Sutpen may not register that the black plantation workers he oversees are not technically slaves; he cares only that they may be treated that way. When Quentin reports that Sutpen subdued the "niggers" simply by displaying his white skin, he accurately reflects the re-establishment of racial hierarchy and power in Haiti in 1826, the year before Sutpen's actions. More significantly, the "misrepresentation" Sutpen accuses the planter of perpetrating more likely also derives from Sutpen's innocence of Haitian history (211). The half-breed house servants he recognizes as mulattos, distinct from Negro field hands, but the light-skinned descendants of French aristocrats, who considered themselves "French planters" (in the same way both the Martinican architect and Charles Bon are called "French"), constitute a social group Sutpen sees but does not recognize. Perhaps the yellow French planter assumes his family's Negro ancestry to be historically self-evident; to him, it would have been his wife's "Spanish" blood that might not have been obvious.¹⁴ Sutpen overlooks what he oversees. The

planter-in-training learns how not to pay attention, a skill Sutpen practiced in the classroom in Virginia when he missed out on the geography lessons that would have shown him where he was going and perhaps on the history lessons that might have told him about the Haitian Revolution.

Quentin at least pretends to the same indifference to colonial history. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin recalls daydreaming during class as a child. Called upon by his teacher, Quentin would “realise silence and the unwinking minds, and [he woul]d. . . say ‘Ma’am?’ ‘Your name is Quentin, isn’t it’ Miss Laura would say. Then more silence. . . . ‘Tell Quentin who discovered the Mississippi River, Henry.’ ‘DeSoto’” (100). And yet Quentin has acquired a good deal of history despite his daydreaming. Quentin appears at first to know little about Haiti: he mentions that Sutpen’s job was as “overseer or foreman or something to a French sugar planter” (*Absalom* 199) and that during the insurrection he must have watched the blaze destroy “the barns or granaries or whatever it is you harvest sugar into” (200). Of course, Quentin’s first guesses about sugar agriculture—overseer, barns—derive from his family knowledge of cotton agriculture; his “ignorance” produces a palimpsest in which one may detect Deep South cotton overlaying West Indian sugar. Some such knowledge must have informed Faulkner’s decision to make Sutpen’s career correspond so precisely with the historical pivot in the New World from sugar to cotton. Great Britain abolished slavery in 1833, reducing the profitability of its Caribbean sugar industry and preparing the way for the expansion of cotton production for English manufacturing. In 1831 Sutpen left his West Indian sugar plantation and two years later established a cotton plantation in Mississippi. If Quentin is indeed a “commonwealth” (*Absalom* 7) of voices, some of the stories he has grown up hearing must carry the knowledge of the South’s abandoned West Indian womb.

Quentin’s superficial fuzziness about Haiti belies his perfect command of its meaning to Southerners. Following his grandfather, but in his own words, Quentin refers to Haiti as “a little lost island,” its “soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation” (*Absalom* 202). Free Haiti came to be known to new-world slaveholders by the epithet “lost island” throughout the nineteenth century. Likewise, Quentin’s reference to the island as a “volcano” descends from the predominant metaphor US slave interests used to describe the menace of Haiti.¹⁵ When Quentin evokes the “doomed ships [that] had fled in vain, out of which the last tatter of sail had sunk into the blue sea, along which the last vain despairing cry of woman or child had blown away” (202), he demonstrates exact knowledge of the slaughter of fleeing

French planter families. Quentin even seems to allude to a native Haitian expression for sugarcane agriculture—"the farming of bones"—when he speaks of the black workers lost to colonial oppression: "the planting of men too: the yet intact bones and brains in which the old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth . . . still cried out for vengeance" (202).

Quentin and Shreve's most elaborate fiction—Eulalia Bon—embodies that cry for vengeance by the spurned first spouse of the new-world colonial planter. Quentin's father identifies the problem of bigamy in Charles Bon's plan to marry Judith. In delegitimizing his *placage* marriage, Bon echoes Thomas Sutpen's original repudiation of his West Indian wife. Shreve imagines the New Orleans lawyer contemplating a charge of "bigamy" (241) against Sutpen on Eulalia's behalf. Sutpen is a conqueror in Haiti, fathering a design out of the mixture of Spanish, French, and African blood. This mating gratifies the need for labor and the lust for wealth, then is set aside, forgotten when the sacraments of gentrification begin. Sutpen's white wife Ellen represents the respectability that is founded on obliviousness to material reality; her only responsibility is to etherealize money whose source does not bear recollection.

5. Yoknapatawpha as Carcassonne

Thomas Sutpen's material links to the West Indies tend to be obscured by *Absalom's* narrators. Rosa reports Sutpen's arrival but will not acknowledge his origins. As far as she is concerned, Sutpen "abrupt[s]" "[o]ut of a quiet thunderclap" "upon a scene peaceful and decorous" (4). She makes Quentin see Sutpen and his slaves "overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing" (4). But Rosa's own manner of expression suggests a *willful* refusal to see Sutpen's indebtedness to colonial opportunity and the South's complicity in its commerce and labor. Her style functions as self-deception, not repression. Rosa mentions that the architect is "French," and so it would be possible for her to grasp Mississippi's intercourse with New Orleans, the Caribbean, and founding colonial power. Rosa uses the term "conquest" for Sutpen's subduing of the local jungle—*conquest* ghosting Mississippi with the shades of earlier new-world *conquistadors* also adept at taking land from Indians. In the near century since Sutpen's arrival, Rosa learns to disregard the fuller narrative of planter design represented by her father's business partner, her sister's husband, her own fiancé. How to fetishize Sutpen's story even the young learn: "It was a part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing

his father talk about the man; a part of the town's—Jefferson's—eighty years' heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children" (7). Like Rosa, however, Quentin and Jefferson have learned a good deal more than this through those 80 years; General Compson hears Sutpen's story about Haiti the year after he arrives. What Quentin already knows has less to do with facts than what to *do* with unwanted facts.

Yet the West Indian traces of Sutpen's design are openly legible nonetheless; even before its architect arrives from Martinique, the newcomer Sutpen presents a face of "glazed clay," like that of an "explorer" who has endured a "furnace" (24). No wonder Sutpen's Hundred comes to seem both like and unlike another island in colonial sequence. Sutpen's children behave as if they "had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen's Hundred" (79)—a desert island, not tropical and so absent of plantation evidence. Yet, the two Suptens are "marooned," a word evoking the isolated communities of deserter slaves and prefiguring the return of a black half-sibling fugitive Sutpen.¹⁶ Rosa's voice makes its way down from the Sutpen saga carrying the hint of a long-disregarded relation of the US South to its island history: "the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand" (4).

In *Absalom* the sharpest complaints about the inadequacies of language accompany moments of potential recognition about the South's obscured origins. As Mr. Compson puzzles over Henry's murder of Judith's fiancé, and directly after he proposes the metaphor of Sutpen's Hundred as an island, he shrugs famously that "[i]t's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know" (80). Compson keeps staring at "the words, the symbols" but they remain "inscrutable" (80). Nonetheless, he resumes his narration in the face of the certainty that language cannot represent the past. Compson's complaint corresponds exactly to the structural condition of language as fetish. He sees through the deception of language's offer to represent truth and then acts as if it does not matter. I suggest that privileged Southerners of the Compson caste found refuge in such knowing not-knowing, in a language that displayed historical realities without granting them visibility. The "something" that "is missing" when Mr. Compson brings the words together, I contend he already knows: it is the whole history of the new-world plantation that makes Sutpen's career from Haiti to Jefferson entirely legible as a story of colonial

crime—Amerindian genocide, slave trade, human chattel, bigamy, rape, incest, the loveless outrage of the land.

Southern “innocence,” Faulkner suggests, was not a failure to know but an interested lack of attention. If any style challenges that cultural habit, it must certainly be Faulkner’s. What Quentin is left with at the end of *Absalom* signals a persistence of historical knowledge that survives even the effort to shut one’s eyes to it. As he fumbles toward the room where Henry Sutpen has come home to die, Quentin pauses in the pitch black corridor: “[H]e knew that he could not see, yet he found that his eyelids and muscles were aching with strain while merging and dissolving red spots wheeled and vanished across the retinae” (294). The red spots forecast the knowledge Henry will deliver about Bon’s mixed blood—a racial status once called “a little spot of negro blood” (247). The novel’s baroque palimpsest, however, carries us back farther, to the first colonial “mergings” and “dissolvings” with the New World. Ultimately, it is Haiti itself that is a spot of “blood—a spot of earth which might have been created and set aside by Heaven itself . . . as a theatre for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty” (202).

Reading Faulkner’s fiction from the vantage of new-world studies and postcolonial theory, one may appreciate a discernible if elliptical reflection on the US South’s relation to the West Indies. Caribbean places compromise the South’s dream of uncontaminated origins, of a benevolent pastoral paternalism unrelated to 200 years of colonial oppression. But Faulkner’s style makes the visible seen and leaves an afterimage that may continue to work in the moral imagination. Rosa hears such knowledge “visibly” echoing in the very structure Sutpen built: “*the house itself, talking that which sounded like the bombast of a madman who creates within his very coffin walls his fabulous immeasurable Camelots and Carcassonnes*” (129). That last word returns us to the dreamer’s dialogue with a skeleton in “Carcassonne.” Faulkner’s poet comes finally to meet his likeness in the planter, a fatal connection that threatens to confine both of them to bombast-filled coffins. Rosa lives “irrevocably husbanded” “with the abstract carcass of outrage and revenge” (147)—Rosa, poet laureate of Jefferson, to hear forever the carcass sound, that murdered son, “that durn French feller . . . dead as a beef” (106), that Charles Bon become the carcass-son, with not far behind the Compson son already an evening son.

Notes

1. Edouard Glissant makes the most comprehensive attempt to resituate Faulkner’s writing in new-world plantation contexts; he considers Faulkner’s

poetics as a function of the writer's engagement with the legacy of racialized chattel slavery in the Afro-Caribbean/Euro-American colonial web. Glissant turns Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha to face fully south, toward the Latin-American and West Indian cultures with which the US plantation South share so much. Deborah Cohn and George Handley read Faulkner (and other US writers) in conjunction with Latin new-world writing. Hortense Spillers discusses the misrepresentation of Haitian history in *Absalom* as an index of the US South's denial of relation to Atlantic slave trade. Ramon Saldivar understands Sutpen's Haitian episode as a missed opportunity to avoid reproducing the mentality responsible for his own oppression. Barbara Ladd addresses the question of Faulkner's double focus on antebellum Southern fears of the spread of slave revolution and post-Reconstruction fears of racial amalgamation as they are projected onto Haiti in *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. Maritza Stan-chich argues that despite his sympathies for the injustice suffered by Haitian slaves under European colonialism, Faulkner ends up reproducing principal racist American stereotypes about native behavior; like Ladd, she is also interested in the way the US occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 might have made Faulkner mindful of the island and its history. Richard Godden attributes Haiti's appearance in *Absalom* to the anxieties of US antebellum planters about slave insurrection. Vera Kutzinski returns to an early essay by Wilson Harris to reconsider the relation of the Caribbean to Faulkner's version of race in the US South. The essay by Harris proposes a link between Haitian voodoo and the status of the dead in Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (1948). Eiko Owado provides comprehensive documentation for Faulkner's mindfulness of Haiti in *Absalom* and elsewhere. Her study surveys the scant treatment of Haiti in criticism of Faulkner before the 1990s and thoroughly reviews the two major phases of Haitian history important to Faulkner: the antebellum significance of Haiti as the site of slave revolution resulting in an independent black republic by 1804, and the status of Haiti in the first three decades of the twentieth century as an object of American imperial "idealism" through military occupation from 1915 to 1934.

2. See Carolyn Porter's early call for a reconfiguration of American literary studies to include Caribbean and Latin American writing.

3. In the larger study from which this essay is drawn, "Raising the South: Plantation Culture and Modern U.S. Empire," I consider the resurgent popularity in the 1920s and 1930s of fiction about Southern plantations. Such works directly engaged questions of the South's "colonial" past and commercial future in the nation, at the same time they reflected indirectly on determinations about how foreign peoples and territories were to be "developed" along neocolonial models. For example, as Renda recounts, paternalism, sometimes with a distinctly Southern flavor owing to its plantation past, functioned as the prevailing mode of relations between US occupying forces and Haitian nationals.

4. Saldivar claims that the premise of interlocking colonial subject formation—of the subjugator and subjugated—is pertinent to Faulkner's account of the South: "The effect of colonialism on the colonized is all-encompassing, but there is another relation at stake in colonial situations, and it is also a subject of Faulkner's novel [*Absalom, Absalom!*]. The colonial relation exhibits psychological subjection quite apart from the subjections fostered by class and race distinctions. This additional relation, a dynamism that, in Albert Memmi's words, 'chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, molded their respective characters, dictated their conduct,' functions by instructing both colonizer and colonized not

only in the necessity but even in the desirability of their given relation so that the established hierarchies of colonial society come to be seen as freely conceived, chosen, and enacted" (103).

In his recent call for a new Southern studies, Houston Baker notes the fundamental effects on subject formation of a racist social order. Discussing Booker T. Washington's anxiety about outperforming his white patrons, Baker says: "we can assert that the *lack* of personhood (in the case of the black male, the *lack* of connection or suture between a mystical and mystified black *penis* and a white-powered *Phallus*) is the very 'veiled' condition of white American personhood in general" (71–72). The method of my essay seeks to trace the lines by which such traumatic dimensions of subject formation in an oppressive social regime produce cultural technologies for managing their continuing effects—both as individuals understand themselves and as they practice relations with others. In this respect I follow Bhabha and other poststructuralist postcolonial analysts. As I have argued in my earlier work on Faulkner, however, his writing occupies the discourses in which he works with intense deconstructive energy. I maintain in this essay and a related one on *Light in August* that Faulkner forces the habit of not-seeing into the open, depriving it of its "innocent" reproduction of the past.

5. Frederick Karl representatively calls it "a poetical vision, virtually unreadable except for our interest in Faulkner's attempt at a stream technique as early as 1926" (429).
6. Polk notes the echoes of T. S. Eliot (41–42) and also observes that the structure of *These Thirteen* depends on a migratory pattern, with settings that begin in England, move to Europe, and eventually end up in the Caribbean.
7. Don Doyle also recounts rumors of the discovery of oil deposits in Faulkner's hometown of Oxford, Mississippi (338–41).
8. Eric Williams recounts the growing domination of American companies in the organization of Caribbean agriculture. Concentrating on sugar production, American corporations insisted on assembling massive plantations and hiring seasonal wage laborers. Similar changes overtook other crops such as coffee and fruit. Oil was a prized natural resource but the Caribbean was less rich in it than Mexico, Trinidad, Tobago, and some South American countries. Williams entitles the chapter "Twentieth-Century Colonialism" that he devotes to the ruinous social problems ignored or exacerbated by foreign "development"—inadequate health care, education, wages, et cetera (443–62).
9. Our introduction to the black cook links him to Latin culture, and, in the same stroke, it dissociates him from recognition: "Now and then the nigger's disembodied face ducked into the port, without any expression at all, like a mask at carnival" (352).
10. See Renda for a comprehensive account of the many memoirs, plays, novels, and films that depicted Haiti during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Owada describes this cultural scene as well and discusses some of Faulkner's scriptwriting projects that evoke Haiti, including "Revolt in the Earth," which is based on *Absalom* (159–75).
11. One untitled script (eventually called "Mythical Latin American Story" by the studio) that was also set in a Rincon seems vaguely to reflect the Cuban freedom

movement of the 1920s, material Faulkner later encountered again in the 1940s when he helped adapt Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1937) for the screen.

12. Godden argues forcefully that the discrepancy actually works symbolically by expressing the US planter class's panicky fantasies that slave rebellion will spread to the South. In Godden's view, Sutpen and General Compson imagine Haiti anachronistically as the place that represents the perpetual menace of slave revolution. Handley suggests that the anachronism manifests "empire's objectifying gaze that symbolically orders time and marginalizes people" (137).

13. Cleanth Brooks noticed Faulkner's indecision about this issue 20 years after the novel was published. Asked how Sutpen gets the money for his plantation, Faulkner replied, "He very likely looted his Caribbean father-in-law's plantation when he married the daughter. I don't know that I ever decided myself just how he did it but very likely he looted and wrecked the whole place, took the girl because he didn't want her especially, he wanted a son, he wanted to establish his dynasty. And I imagine that he got that money to the States and then had to hide it here and there. There were no banks in those days, no safe place to put it. Probably was gold, something that was intrinsic of itself, and he would go off wherever he had buried it and dig up a little more when he needed it" (*Faulkner* 46–47). Faulkner's comment is a suggestive blend of speculation and forgetfulness. He's forgotten the bill of lading and Coldfield's involvement, as well as how long Sutpen is gone—surely longer than unearthing a cache elsewhere in the US would take. He refers to the looting as occurring at the marriage, when it could have been the result only of the divorce; and Quentin describes this scene as a businesslike settlement. I'd like to think that the effort to recall the "Caribbean" phase of Sutpen's experience continues to function as knowledge once possessed but now half-forgotten, an action highly purposeful but somehow never "decided."

14. Sutpen admits that he understands himself to be the one without "gentility" who is dealing with "gentleborn people" when he negotiates his marriage arrangements (212). He implies that he has informed the planter about his racial design, and that the planter deliberately withholds "the one fact which I have reason to know they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter" (212). But that phrase "I have reason to know" suggests that Sutpen may not have been explicit about the requirement of white purity in "explaining fully about myself and my progenitors." After his child's birth, Sutpen says he did not act rashly but "merely explained how this new fact rendered it impossible that this woman and child be incorporated in my design" (212). Such an explanation would seem redundant if the planter has deliberately withheld the one fact he knew to be essential to Sutpen. It is possible that the *jaune* aristocrats assume Sutpen himself to be of mixed ancestry—a swarthy sailor of obscure origin making his way in post-independence Haiti. Sutpen's face is later described as identical to that of his Negro driver's (16). Such a scenario would also explain the assignment of land to Sutpen on the basis of "signed testimonials" by his *jaune* employers (213). (Owada points out that Sutpen's travel to Haiti as a white man would have run counter to the flight of whites from Haiti after independence, though it would have been possible. On the other hand, US blacks were actually recruited by Boyer to emigrate to Haiti.)

15. See Hunt for a discussion of these metaphors for Haiti in the nineteenth century.

16. Owada also notes the image of the island and the pun on "maroon" (104).

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