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“Wordless and Far Away”: Race in William Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay*

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Abstract

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This thesis is concerned with the profound and unique ways in which race and interracial dynamics mold William Faulkner’s first novel, *Soldiers’ Pay*. At first glance, race and racial matters do not seem to occupy a particularly prominent position in *Soldiers’ Pay*. Overall, the novel seems to be chiefly preoccupied with interactions among members of the white cast of the book. However, a closer examination reveals that the African-American characters of *Soldiers’ Pay* play an indirect but essential role in heightening and constructing the themes of freedom, disillusionment, intersexual dynamics, and identity in the novel. In this sense, racial interplay and racial difference serve obscured but key functions in *Soldiers’ Pay*. These oblique functions operate chiefly through a complex and subtle web of contrast, insinuation, and antithesis. This dynamic is unique among Faulkner’s other novels. Generally, when they contain substantial African-American populations, Faulkner’s books tend to treat matters of race openly and thoroughly. These novels, such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Go Down, Moses*, and *Light in August* all situate race on the surface of their respective narratives. *Soldiers’ Pay*, however, banishes racial issues to the margins of its text, despite the fact that its thematic structure relies heavily on its internal interracial landscape. In this sense, race serves both a pivotal and an idiosyncratic purpose in William Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay*.

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“Wordless and Far Away”:
Race in William Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay*

Introduction

William Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay* primarily concerns the homecoming of Donald Mahon, a recently discharged veteran whose war wounds have rendered him profoundly “sick” (22). After a raucous journey, Mahon and several companions eventually arrive in Donald’s fictional home of “Charlestown,” a fairly typical town “like numberless other towns throughout the south” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 108). Mahon’s relatives and friends attempt to resettle the disabled soldier, but Donald’s injuries often preclude him from recovering his former life. For instance, Cecily Saunders, who is scheduled to be “married” to Mahon, cannot prevent herself from “screaming” when she sees her disfigured fiancé (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 89, 90). To make matters worse, Cecily has been conducting a romance with George Farr in Donald’s absence; she even makes plans to continue the affair after Mahon’s arrival, since she is “not married–yet” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 84). As the novel progresses, the debilitating effects of Donald’s injuries grow steadily more apparent. For example, at a dance towards the middle of the novel, the narrator reveals that that “you could not tell whether or not” Mahon could hear the sounds of a jazz band (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 128). Eventually Cecily becomes “Mrs. George Farr,” and Margaret Powers, perhaps the most mysterious character in the entire novel, becomes “the new Mrs. Mahon” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 302, 274). Mahon’s anticipated death brings the novel to a close; the final chapter opens with a discussion of Donald’s funeral parade, which includes “a uniformed self-constituted guard” and a “young Baptist minister” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 291).

On first impression, race does not seem to play a particularly prominent role in this story. Indeed, *Soldiers’ Pay* contains few obvious discussions of racial issues, and most of its substantial thematic content seems to derive exclusively from interactions among its white

characters. Paradoxically, however, African-American characters are present throughout much of the novel. Indeed, from its second page, which features a crude story regarding “some trouble with a nigger,” to its last, which resonates with “the crooning submerged passion” of African-American sacred music, African-American characters and culture pervade *Soldiers’ Pay* (4, 315). This ubiquity suggests that African-Americans comprise a significant element of the book’s underlying structure. Indeed, despite its seemingly peripheral position in the plot of the novel, the African-American community of *Soldiers’ Pay* plays an essential role in the themes of autonomy, disillusionment, intersexual relations, and identity. Although almost hidden from view, the African-American characters of *Soldiers’ Pay* heighten, cohere, and establish the thematic substance of the novel through contrast, insinuation, and subtle antithesis. This dynamic is highly atypical of Faulkner’s works, which generally tend to treat race forthrightly and thoroughly. Many of Faulkner’s more widely read works, for example, incorporate explicit discussions of race and overtly allegorical treatments of racial questions. In these texts, race exerts its influence openly and plainly. By contrast, *Soldiers’ Pay* conceals race and racial issues well below the surface of its narrative. Although race serves a powerful function in *Soldiers’ Pay*, it does so from the margins of the text. Consequently, *Soldiers’ Pay* differs notably from Faulkner’s other novels, which tend to present, explore, and employ race and racial questions blatantly and straightforwardly. In this sense, race operates in a singular manner in *Soldiers’ Pay*.

The apparent narrative marginalization of the African-American population of *Soldiers’ Pay* is largely a consequence of the distance separating the African-American characters of the novel from its thematic material. The themes of freedom and independence, for example, seem at first to center mostly on the white persona of the novel. After meeting “the rector,” for instance, Januarius Jones, perhaps the most bizarrely frivolous and laughably misguided character in the

entire novel, engages in a series of pseudo-philosophical and inexplicably out-of-place musings on “the sovereign people” and “anarchism” that appear to be wholly removed from the obviously disenfranchised African-American constituents of *Soldiers’ Pay* (52, 59). Both Jones and the rector are presumably white, and Jones’s ruminations appear to ignore the relative lack of freedom that stifles his African-American neighbors. The African-American community of *Soldiers’ Pay* therefore does not seem to be involved with Jones’s conversation and consequently does not play a role in producing or furthering the thematic significance of his statements.

The same can easily be said of the theme of disillusionment. While inhabiting the same postwar society as their white counterparts, the African-American characters of *Soldiers’ Pay* apparently cannot participate in the disenchantment that debilitates their neighbors. A meeting between Donald, one of the main characters of the book, and Loosh, Donald’s African-American friend who has known the disabled soldier since “before the world went crazy,” is a noteworthy illustration (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 167). Incapacitated by war wounds to the point that “no one could tell whether or not the words” being read to him “meant anything at all to him,” Donald essentially serves as an almost inanimate symbol of the physical and psychological ravages of combat (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 165). On the other hand, Loosh, who is described as “a strapping young negro in a private’s uniform,” seems to be wholly unaffected by the war (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 166). The only visible behavioral residues of Loosh’s military career are the stance and “saluting” with which he greets his martial companion (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 167). In this sense, Loosh does not partake of the crippling postwar disillusionment that pervades the scene.

Masculinity and intersexual relationships in *Soldiers' Pay* appear to be configured in a similar way. For example, although Tobe, an African-American attendant employed by the Saunders family, appears during the Saunders' conversation over the possibility of Cecily "marrying that Mahon boy," he is usually mute (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 95). In this scene, Mrs. Saunders, Cecily's mother, charges her husband, Mr. Saunders, with "driving your own daughter into marriage with a man who has nothing and who may be half dead" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 95). This accusation constitutes a key moment in the overall presentation of intersexual relations and manhood in *Soldiers' Pay*. Tobe, however, is not involved in this thematic statement; as a servant to the Saunders family, he simply assists his employers and refrains from intervening in their conversation. He does not verbally contribute to the thematically charged discussion and therefore seems to have nothing to do with it.

Despite their apparent marginalization, however, the African-American presences of *Soldiers' Pay* do inhabit a considerable number of pages. Although Loosh does not seem to be affected by the malaise that arrests his white counterparts, he does in fact interact with the war-torn Mahon; the same is true of Callie, Loosh's grandmother and Donald's "mammy" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 166). While he does not openly engage in Mr. and Mrs. Saunders's discussion, Tobe's presence permeates the scene of the conversation; as Mrs. and Mr. Saunders leave, "the twilight behind them" is "filled with Tobe's mellow voice calling across the dusk" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 96). Despite the fact that his puerile ruminations seem largely unconcerned with African-Americans, Januarius Jones's speech includes a contrast between "we, the self-styled civilized peoples" and what he repulsively terms "our more primitive contemporaries" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 60). Although they may appear to revolve exclusively around white characters, each one of these passages, like a significant number of scenes in *Soldiers' Pay*, contains

prominent African-American presences. In this way, while they may never occupy center stage in the novel, African-American characters are present throughout much of *Soldiers' Pay*.

Considering the fact that the plot of *Soldiers' Pay* largely orbits around the actions of white individuals, this permeation is rather surprising.

The seemingly submerged position of the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* has not gone unnoticed. In *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context*, for instance, Thadious M. Davis numbers *Soldiers' Pay* among Faulkner's novels in which "the Negro as character or theme is not the central focus" (15). For Davis, the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* "remain in the background of both plot and structure" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 65). According to Blyden Jackson, the African-American community of *Soldiers' Pay* "barely escapes the nebulosity of shadows" (60). From Jackson's point of view, the "action" of the novel derives "not one whit of either its impetus or its direction to a single word or deed originated by a Negro" (60). For both of these critics, as well as others, the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* does not serve any particularly apparent or significant function within the novel.

A number of commentators have also ascribed purposes and explanations to the abundant African-American population of the novel. Thadious M. Davis, for instance, claims that in *Soldiers' Pay* African-Americans "function as a lyrical counterpoint to Faulkner's main tonal composition" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 34). In her view, the African-American characters in the novel serve "as a reflection of the psychological state of whites and as a counterpoint to the sterility of contemporary life" (Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 45). For Davis, the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* construct this "counterpoint" by embodying "the basic rhythm of life that has been lost to the modern, postwar world" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 45, 58). In this sense,

according to Davis, Faulkner's "Charlestown blacks" primarily serve to furnish "a backdrop for the action" of the novel (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 58). Along similar lines, Erskine Peters envisions the African-American community in *Soldiers' Pay* "as a chorus to the disillusionments of the white world" (29). For these critics, the African-American characters in the novel primarily offer an oblique commentary on the woes of their white counterparts through the vaguely primitivist aura that emanates from them.

On a deeper level, however, these characters supply much more than idle remarks; from their peripheral and marginalized textual positions, the African-American constituents of *Soldiers' Pay* paradoxically establish, orient, and cohere the same thematic structure that at first appears to disregard them. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison claims, generally speaking, that: "Even, and especially, when American texts are not 'about' Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication" (46-47). For Morrison, "Africanism," which she defines as "as 'the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify,'" has had a profound effect on the American psyche; for example, in her words, "Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself not as enslaved, but free" (52, 6, 52). According to Morrison, the impact of "the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States" has extended into America's literature as well (5). She further claims that many of "the major and championed characteristics of our national literature," including "the thematics of innocence," "masculinity," and "freedom," may be "in fact responses to" an "Africanist presence" (Morrison 5). "These themes," in Morrison's opinion, are "made possible by, shaped by, activated by a complex awareness and employment of a constituted Africanism" (44). Therefore, according to Morrison,

even the themes of books that seem at first to be exclusively concerned with white characters may be obliquely constructed through interracial dynamics.

Viewed through the lens of these postulations, the African-American characters and cultural intimations of *Soldiers' Pay* appear to serve far more significant thematic and structural purposes than the text of the novel initially suggests. The thematic landscape of *Soldiers' Pay* exists within a fictional universe replete with African-American characters, cultural symbols, and stereotypes; therefore, the assumption that any of the themes of *Soldiers' Pay* could subsist wholly irrespectively of the African-American presences of the novel is patently naive. Although African-Americans may not speak very loudly on the surface of the text, in between its lines they catalyze, facilitate, and formulate the thematic framework that makes *Soldiers' Pay* possible, often through the same marginal position that at first seems to silence them. In other words, the subjugation, marginalization, and exclusion that stifles nearly every one the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* simultaneously contrasts with and thereby amplifies and coheres the thematic statements on and assertions of freedom, manhood, disillusionment, and identity made by the white cast of the book.

This dynamic exists in nearly every thematically significant scene in *Soldiers' Pay*. Tobe's passive silence throughout the argument over "driving" Cecily "into marriage," for example, suffuses the debate with a combination of seriousness and entitlement that signals its importance in establishing the themes of personal assertion and intersexual relationships (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 95). Despite his reticence, Tobe serves a critical role in establishing the thematic import of the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Saunders. At least one strand of Januarius Jones's diatribe on freedom and "the race" hinges on his understanding of racial difference (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 60). Jones's discussion of individual liberty is therefore

inextricable from his belief in the essential inferiority of other racial groups. In this sense, the presentation of autonomy in this passage is intimately tied to and partly predicated on assumptions of racial difference. The almost comic distance implied by Loosh's loss of "military bearing" draws attention to and accentuates the postwar disillusionment experienced by his white counterparts (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 167). As a result, the emotional and thematic weight of the section in which Loosh and Donald meet is partially dependent on Loosh's exclusion from the conflicts of the moment. While these passages may seem at first to revolve exclusively around white characters, each one depends heavily on the African-American cast of the novel.

The African-American presences of *Soldiers' Pay* thus obliquely assemble, develop, and establish crucial themes in the novel. The indirect strategies through which the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* serves these purposes are unique in Faulkner's writing. Most of Faulkner's novels that contain substantial African-American presences are at least at some level explicit meditations on race. In other words, the treatments of race and racial issues in many of Faulkner's other novels are usually central to the narratives with which they are associated. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, for example, Frederick R. Karl asserts that "race itself" is "the tragic ingredient" (210). Along similar lines, Thadious M. Davis argues that "a synopsis of the Sutpen legend without the inclusion of the Negro is a story without motivation or significant meaning" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 182). In Davis's view, comparable conditions occur in *Light in August*. "Faulkner's concern" in *Light in August*, in her words, "lies with the meanings of 'Negro' which shape the lives of various characters, primarily Joe Christmas" (Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 130). Critics have made similar statements about the centrality of race in *Intruder in the Dust*. Charles D. Peavy, for example, maintains that *Intruder in the Dust* "is doubtlessly Faulkner's most important fictional treatment of the Negro problem" (46). These examples,

although disparate, describe the usual ways in which Faulkner's novels treat race; specifically, they generally consider racial issues openly, plainly, and extensively. Race shapes and organizes their plots and themes overtly and visibly.

The same simply cannot be said of *Soldiers' Pay*. Race may be one of the chief formative forces of the novel, but its impacts originate outside of the narrative spotlight of the book. Rather than play out their full significance openly, racial dynamics in *Soldiers' Pay* operate almost in secret, through implication, antithesis, and contrast. This distinction marks *Soldiers' Pay* as a highly idiosyncratic text in comparison with Faulkner's other work. Absent from *Soldiers' Pay* are both the candid racial polemics of *Requiem for a Nun*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *Go Down, Moses* and the conspicuous racial parables of *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* Race and racial issues therefore impact *Soldiers' Pay* in both a profound and an individual way.

Naturally, this idiosyncrasy is noteworthy in its own right. Perhaps more significantly, however, the singularity of *Soldiers' Pay* also implies a developmental trajectory in Faulkner's fictional treatments of race. Differing substantially from most subsequent presentations of race in Faulkner's work, the racial landscape of *Soldiers' Pay* demonstrates that Faulkner's approach to treating race and racial issues must have undergone at least some level of transformation early in his writing career, since *Soldiers' Pay* is Faulkner's "first novel" (Gray 102). Further, since the presentation of race in *Soldiers' Pay* lacks the nuanced complexities present in his later novels, the individuality of *Soldiers' Pay* also illustrates that Faulkner's fictional approaches to race not only changed but also matured with the progress of time. An understanding of the deeply significant and idiosyncratic ways that race operates in *Soldiers' Pay* therefore helps to

illuminate both the position of *Soldiers' Pay* within the Faulkner catalogue as well as Faulkner's evolution as a writer and a commentator on American race relations.

Chapter One

“It Was Nothing, It Was Everything”: The Submerged Interracial Geography of *Soldiers’ Pay*

The racial topography of *Soldiers’ Pay* emerges quickly; the first two sections of the book contain a fairly coherent summary of the overall interracial dynamics of the novel. Significantly, these early passages contain several profound explorations of both autonomy and disillusionment. These sections revolve mostly around the homecoming trips of several soldiers. These recently discharged servicemen, however, do not exhibit much military discipline. In these first passages, which take place mostly on trains that, as far as Gilligan is concerned, could just as easily be bound for “San Francisco” as “St. Paul or Omyhaw,” several men display profoundly infantile behavior (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 19).

For example, when told that he “can’t drink in this car,” Private Gilligan reacts with a ludicrous degree of indignation (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 20). He asserts that “this thing has got to be a point of honor,” since “we got to protect our uniform from insult” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 21, 22). Apparently, for whatever reason, Gilligan simply cannot tolerate receiving commands. Cadet Lowe elicits a similar reaction from “Yaphank” when he “grabs” one of Yaphank’s comrades “by the brief skirt of his blouse” and instructs him not to jump out of a window (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 10). Lowe, apparently concerned for the serviceman’s safety, declares that he “can’t do that” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 10). Startlingly, Yaphank protests, saying, “why, sure he can” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 10). In Yaphank’s view, evidently, Lowe should “let him jump if he wants” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 10). Later, Yaphank even claims that he would “kind of like to see him do it, since he suggested it himself,” and eventually decides to “help him off” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 11). Even more appallingly, Yaphank encourages his

companion after “he had changed his mind,” commanding, “don’t loose your nerve now” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 11).

Each one of these pettish statements comprises an almost furious declaration of autonomy. By vociferously objecting to any sort of control or instruction, both Gilligan and Yaphank emphatically declare their own personal sovereignty, albeit in a rather extreme way. The first two sections of *Soldiers’ Pay* contain numerous similar proclamations of independence. Naturally, these pronouncements emphasize and therefore help to construct the themes of freedom and personal liberty. Partly because of their position at the opening of the book, these announcements of autonomy constitute some of the most significant expressions of personal freedom in *Soldiers’ Pay*.

These first few passages also help to outline and construct the presentation of disillusionment in *Soldiers’ Pay*. The intractability of the itinerant soldiers in these passages is likely at least in part a reaction to their recent martial experiences. Traumatized by the war, Yaphank and his comrades rebel out of a sense of bewilderment. Their recently terminated military careers have shattered their understandings of their lives and shaken their senses of propriety. The bizarre behavior exhibited by the soldiers in these early passages is thus also an expression of postwar disillusionment.

Yaphank and his comrades, however, are not alone in these early pages. The soldiers’ bizarre bacchanal is periodically interrupted by at least two presumably African-American servants. While these attendants may not directly participate in their white neighbors’ anarchic revelry, they do provide an antithesis against which the soldiers’ collective insistence on absolute freedom coheres and acquires weight. Predictably, the most salient trait that these porters display is subservience; almost every action that they undertake serves the needs and wants of their

privileged white foils. For example, when a white passenger summons Claude and instructs him to furnish “two glasses and a bottle of sassperiller or something,” his interaction with his summoner predictably does not extend far beyond the details of his task (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 20). Similarly, after materializing out of nowhere to help the “would-be” suicidal soldier, Henry’s only words, “Yas, suh, Cap’m,” are delivered in response to a series of commands (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 11, 12). Later, when summoned back into the chaos of the soldiers’ dizzying carousal, Claude once again has little to say that does not relate to the “drinking” that the passengers demand (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 22).

As a result, these retainers inject the early scenes of the novel with a sense of downtrodden bondage. Within these two sections, the lives of the African-American attendants seem to revolve completely around the juvenile whims of the white passengers. They do not seem to have wills of their own, especially when compared to the obstreperous and stridently independent patrons of the train. Their entire existence is ancillary to the will of their white counterparts; they are almost completely deferential, subdued, and submissive. The presence that they provide in the early pages of the novel consequently carries a distinct mood of obedience, capitulation, and subjugation.

The fact that the train porters seem to hold an unusually high respect for rules and protocol underscores this subservient atmosphere. Claude, one of the porters, seems particularly concerned with propriety and convention. Private Gilligan’s assertion that “we got to protect our uniform from insult” is a response to Claude’s insistence that he not drink in his current location (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 21). Initially, Claude, whom one soldier refers to as “Othello,” repeats his warning twice, saying, “You can’t drink in this car,” and “we don’t have no drinking in this car” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 20). The argument does not end there, however. Although he

leaves, Claude eventually reappears and subsequently feels compelled to remind his white patrons that there must be “no drinking in this car, I told you” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 21). Gilligan then apparently attempts to bribe Claude with “a bill,” but Claude is resolute, and once again asserts, “No, sir. Not in this car” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 22). Each one of these statements associates Claude with propriety and thereby deepens the subjugated mood that his presence carries.

When he becomes aware of the fact that one of the passengers “from Gawgia” is “sick,” Claude’s prohibitions suddenly change their tone, although not their basic content (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 22). When told that the “sick” soldier would like “a drink,” Claude, one of the porters, responds by saying, “But he ain’t got no business drinking. He’s sick” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 22). When the ill serviceman himself asks, Claude retorts, “But he oughtn’t to have no whisky, sir” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 22). When implored for a third time, Claude begins to say, “But he oughtn’t——,” but is interrupted by Gilligan (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 22). Later, when the “Cap’m” refuses a pillow, Claude protests, “But you’re sick, sir. Don’t drink too much” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 25). This adherence to rules and conventions augments the ambiance of downtrodden subservience that characterizes the African-American train porters. By displaying a strict reverence for order and dutifulness, these servants reveal a deep sense of deference and submissiveness that accumulates along with and underlines the powerlessness and obedience that defines the African-Americans of the early pages of *Soldiers’ Pay*.

This muted and servile aura is diametrically opposed to the absolute uncontrollability displayed by the white soldiers. Almost nothing could be further from the anarchic autonomy assumed by the recently discharged veterans’ behavior than the orderliness and almost total subservience embodied by the African-American train porters. This antithesis draws attention to

and consequently underscores, deepens, and coheres the autonomy exhibited by the peripatetic servicemen. In this way, the gravity of the soldiers' unconstrained and juvenile actions depends on the differentiation supplied by the porters' relative obedience and docility. Claude and Henry therefore play an essential role in fashioning the thematic significance of the first two sections of *Soldiers' Pay*.

This interracial interplay often operates through direct juxtaposition. Yaphank's demands regarding the conditions of his impending arrival in Buffalo are a particularly noteworthy example. On its own, Yaphank's insistence that he be received with "three bottles of whisky" and "a band" does indeed add a substantial amount of emphasis to his previous physical and verbal proclamations of total self-rule (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 11). The fact that this petition is delivered as an order to Henry, whom the narrator describes as "the porter" and "the negro," however, greatly escalates the force and import of his enjoinder (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 11). Not only are his childish assertions of absolute personal sovereignty taken to the point of absurdity, but also they presume the existence of and are juxtaposed with the porter's total subservience. The porter's existence is therefore essential to the thematic weight of Yaphank's statements.

A similar effect is apparent throughout the first two sections of *Soldiers' Pay*. The narration of these passages persistently collocates the soldiers' perpetually recalcitrant behavior with the African-American porters' unfailing subservience. As a result, the antithesis provided by the African-American train porters continuously emphasizes and structures the assertions and expressions of autonomy and personal sovereignty undertaken by the white passengers. Without the participation of the porters, the proclamations of autonomy made by the white soldiers towards the beginning of *Soldiers' Pay* would not carry the same weight that they do. Further,

since the soldiers' childish claims of total freedom are also expressions of postwar disillusionment, the obverse provided by the servility of the African-American porters also helps to orient the presentation of innocence and disenchantment in train scene. The African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* thus heavily underscore and help facilitate the thematic content of the first two sections of the novel.

A significant portion of the interracial interactions in *Soldiers' Pay* consists of abrupt ritornellos similar to the brief interruptions made by Claude and Henry. Significantly, these intrusions usually interpolate into thematically charged situations. Like the abbreviated appearances provided by Claude and Henry in the first and second sections of the book, these types of interjections often emanate tones that directly oppose the overall thematic atmosphere of the scenes into which they emerge. Therefore, also like the early interruptions delivered by the train porters, these later interjections also draw attention to thematically significant episodes and moments.

Tobe's "silent" interpolation into the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Saunders towards the middle of the novel is a fairly typical example of the type of brief interruption that underpins much of *Soldiers' Pay's* interracial geography (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 95). In this scene, Mr. and Mrs. Saunders are discussing Cecily's impending marriage to "that Mahon boy" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 95). Importantly, the conversation partners do not seem to be particularly concerned with Cecily's wishes. For example, Mr. Saunders decides that he "ain't going to back out" of Cecily's engagement before he even considers whether Cecily would "still want to" get married at all (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 94). Mrs. Saunders eventually decides that her husband is trying "to force" his "daughter into marriage" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 95). Later, Mr. Saunders unconvincingly asserts that he "ain't driving her" to marry Mahon, since his wife

“already taught me better than to try to drive a woman to do anything” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 95). Regardless of Mr. Saunders’s intentions, this passage clearly comprises a crucial moment in the presentation of independence, identity, and intersexual relations in *Soldiers’ Pay*. The discussion between Mr. and Mrs. Saunders relates to Cecily’s ability to determine her own destiny and therefore contributes to the development of her identity and personal sovereignty. Perhaps more obviously, this discussion also concerns Cecily’s marital future and therefore constitutes a milestone in her relationship to the male sex. Consequently, this debate plays a key role in the establishment of Cecily’s character.

Tobe’s contribution to this scene embodies the exact converse of these thematically laden conflicts. After Mr. Saunders calls him, Tobe materializes “in a white jacket with a bowl of ice, sugar, water, and a decanter” apparently unnoticed by his summoner, who is busy “staring at his wife” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 93). After serving Mr. and Mrs. Saunders, Tobe “withdrew” without a word (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 93). After a while, Tobe rejoins the couple “silently” in order to announce, “Supper served” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 95). Both the almost soundless nature of his interactions with Mr. and Mrs. Saunders and the fact that he repeatedly exits the scene emphasize Tobe’s marginal position in this passage. Later, after one of Cecily’s parents asks after Bob’s whereabouts and tells Tobe to “find him,” he “held the door for them and they passed into the house, leaving the twilight behind them filled with Tobe’s mellow voice calling across the dusk” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 96). Significantly, even though the narrator describes Tobe’s voice, exactly what he says is unknown. Although he obviously speaks, Tobe’s words are not allowed to disturb the text. Indeed, Tobe is almost completely mute throughout the scene of Mr. and Mrs. Saunders’s conversation. This fact underscores the peripheral space that Tobe

inhabits in this passage; Tobe does not participate in Mr. and Mrs. Saunders's conversation or the explorations of autonomy, identity, and intersexual relations in which it engages. Since he is unquestionably and totally dependent on and deferential to Mr. and Mrs. Saunders, his bondage is never disputed. He apparently has no identity outside of his servile position. He is not depicted as having any capacity for love or disillusionment. Although their conversation takes place in his presence, Tobe does not seem to have any stake at all in Cecily's parents' debates. His silence is the antithesis to the duo's disputes. In this way, Tobe highlights and accentuates the explorations of identity, romance, and freedom contained in this passage. His exclusion from Cecily's parents' debate suffuses the conflict with an air of privilege and significance, and his clearly subservient role underlines the struggles for autonomy implicit in the couple's conversation. His apparent preclusion from intersexual relationships accentuates the significance of Cecily's romantic fate, and his silence calls attention to the discord surrounding Cecily's choices. In this way, Tobe helps to deepen the themes of personal liberty, identity, and intersexual relations implicit within the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Saunders.

A similar dynamic heightens an earlier discussion between Margaret Powers and Joe Gilligan on Donald Mahon and Cecily Saunders's potentially imminent nuptials. While neither individual holds the power to approve or deny the prospective union, both Joe and Margaret are concerned with its fate. Joe expresses the belief that "she won't miss a chance to marry what she calls a hero—if only to keep somebody else from getting him" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 102). Naturally, both Joe and Margaret are aware that the "somebody else" that Joe mentions is in fact Margaret (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 102). Margaret, on the other hand, is skeptical; she teases Joe for imagining that "she'll marry him because she is letting him think she will and because she is

a ‘good’ woman” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 102). Clearly, this conversation revolves around the ways in which the war has affected the romantic possibilities of Charlestown’s residents, particularly in its mentioning of Cecily’s willingness to marry “what she calls a hero” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 102). Joe and Margaret’s talk therefore contributes to the depiction of postwar disillusionment in *Soldiers’ Pay*. Perhaps less obviously, because of its concern with marriage and the effects of history on fate and desire, Margaret and Joe’s talk also skirts issues of autonomy and sexuality. This brief conversation therefore touches on the themes of innocence, intersexual dynamics, and freedom.

The talk between Powers and Gilligan, however, is interrupted. Before Margaret can finish her discussion of “that girl fainting,” an intruder referred to as “Othello” by Gilligan and “the negro” by the narrator emerges onto the scene (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 103, 103, 104). This African-American interloper, presumably some sort of servant, arrives only to tell “Mr. Gillmum” that “Rev’un say fer you to come to de house” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 103). Like Tobe, this nameless encroacher’s most salient characteristic is his subservience to and dependence on the white characters of the novel; he apparently exists in the text of *Soldiers’ Pay* only to serve their needs. He is completely closed off from the dialectics of autonomy, romance, and disillusionment that define Margaret and Joe’s conversation. His presence in this scene consequently heightens the thematic gravity of the conversation by highlighting the privilege that it evidences.

Further, the narrative of this passage also implicitly associates this anonymous interloper with rules and propriety. His only purpose is to carry a message of instruction from Gilligan’s presumable social superior. Joe seems to be conscious of and slightly annoyed by this connection; when he sees the approaching servant, he complains, “But here comes Othello, like

he was looking for us” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 103). This association directly opposes the ethos of the conflicts surrounding freedom and autonomy implicit in Joe and Margaret’s recently impeded conversation. As a result, this anonymous intruder furnishes a stark contrast to and thereby underscores the assertions and explorations of personal liberty and identity that he truncates. This trespasser therefore plays a key role in ordering and contextualizing the discussions of autonomy and identity that he at first seems only to interrupt.

A comparable interruption colors another later conversation between Joe and Margaret. After leaving his bags with “a negro youth,” Joe apparently experiences a queasy feeling (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). After presumably escaping earshot of “the negro,” Joe complains to Margaret, “Damn ‘em, they do what you say, but they make you feel so—so——” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). Margaret then supplies an answer, suggesting, “Immature, don’t they?” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). Joe then agrees, “That’s it. Like you was a kid or something and that they’d look after you even if you don’t know exactly what you want” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). This vague impression of feeling “immature” harkens back to the pettishly recalcitrant behavior exhibited by the recently discharged soldiers in the first pages of the novel (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). Consequently, the “negro” attendants help imbue this scene with intimations of autonomy and personal assertion (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). The fact that Joe believes that his African-American counterparts would “look after him” strengthens this connection (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 298). Furthermore, on the previous page, the narrator comments on “freedom” and notes that Margaret “felt freer” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 297). Consequently, this passage already constitutes a key moment in the construction of liberty and

personal sovereignty in *Soldiers' Pay*. The uneasy feelings instilled in Joe and Margaret by their African-American attendants therefore deepen and highlight the concern with self-determination already present in this scene.

Many similar interruptions provided by the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* are entirely silent. For instance, a conversation towards the middle of the novel between Cecily Saunders and George Farr that circles around issues of identity and autonomy is inexplicably interrupted by “a negro driving in a wagon” who is described as “interminable as Time”; George even “thought the wagon would never pass, so he darted around it to overtake her” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 140). A similar passage a few pages later features “niggers and mules” and “negroes humped with sleep” interlaced with poignant descriptions of disillusionment (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 147). Here, the narrator claims that the “afternoon” is “in a coma on the street, like a woman recently loved” not long after a discussion of “Mahon’s scarred, oblivious brow” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 145). The languid “negroes” described in this section underline the implications of the torpid day (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 147). Other similar instances abound. For example, a few pages later, “the voices of the negroes raised in bursts of meaningless laughter or snatches of song in a sorrowful minor” set the stage for another scene in which Joe buries a presumably torrential skein of emotions beneath a staid conversation and foreshadow the rapturous musical climax at the end of the novel (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 153). Later, a scene in which Donald Mahon revealingly tells Joe to “carry on” is puzzlingly interrupted by “a negro, informal in an undershirt” taking a break from laboring with “his lawn mower” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 178).

While the thematic significance of these mute intrusions may not be as tangible or as substantial as the cameos in which African-American characters speak, they do strengthen the connection between the African-American characters and themes of autonomy, postwar disillusionment, identity, personal assertion, and intersexual relations in *Soldiers' Pay*. These seemingly insignificant, taciturn appearances therefore extend the dialogue among the themes of freedom, innocence, identity, and romance and the submerged African-American voices of *Soldiers' Pay*.

Ritornellos such as these even occur when no African-American characters are present. For instance, Januarius Jones's pseudo-philosophical musings towards the beginning of the novel, which touch on "anarchism," "the hand of Providence," the possibility that one "could be freed for a moment from the forces of gravity," and "the sovereign people," do not seem at first glance to refer to or include the African-American population of the novel (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 59, 59, 58-59, 59). Towards the end of his bizarre lecture, however, Jones mentions his view that "the race is weakening, degenerating; we cannot stand nearly as much sleep as our comparatively recent (geologically speaking, of course) forefathers could, not even as much as our more primitive contemporaries can" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 60). In Jones's view, "we, the self-styled civilized peoples" are in danger of sinking to the level "of our more uncompelled contemporaries" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 60). While Jones does not clarify exactly what he means by "our more primitive contemporaries" or "our more uncompelled contemporaries," the fact that he mentions them mostly to illustrate his belief that "the race is weakening" seems to indicate that they consist of some sort of nonwhite ethnic or racial group (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 60). Since African-Americans are by far the most visible nonwhite group in *Soldiers' Pay*, it is likely that Jones's "more primitive contemporaries" are in fact his

African-American neighbors (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 60). Jones's meditations on freedom and individuality therefore indirectly rest on his belief in the superiority of his race over African-Americans. Consequently, the presentation of autonomy in this scene is inextricably linked to the African-American presences of *Soldiers' Pay*.

A comparable effect emerges when, towards the middle of the novel, Mrs. Saunders complains to her daughter that "it keeps Tobe forever stopping whatever he is doing to answer the 'phone" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 134). Significantly, this grumble comes after Mrs. Saunders notes that "George Farr 'phoned again after you left" and asks, "How is Donald?" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 134). Naturally, both Donald Mahon's health and George Farr's pursuits are intimately tied both to Cecily's struggles for autonomy and personal assertion and her relationship with the male sex. The fact that Mrs. Saunders bemoans Toby's apparent inability to be quite as servile as she expects within the context of these struggles connects the marginalized position of the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* to these conflicts. Further, since Tobe's employers expect him "to answer the 'phone," at least on one level, Tobe is responsible for facilitating and mediating these conversations and conflicts (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 134). In this sense, Tobe's paradoxically absent presence is essential to this passage's construction of communication, self-determination, and intersexual dynamics.

In this same passage, a series of statements seem to destabilize Margaret Powers's racial identity by suggesting that she might be an African-American woman. Although this brief decentering might be disturbing, it likely does not carry enough force to upset Margaret's racial identity entirely. Even though the text of *Soldiers' Pay* is not completely clear on the matter,

Margaret Powers is probably best understood as a white woman. While this unsettling disruption is largely irrelevant to Tobe's vicarious appearance, no investigation of race in *Soldiers' Pay* could be complete without at least a brief discussion of the questions that Margaret Powers raises. A short investigation of these concerns may therefore be worthwhile, even though they relate only tangentially to the chief racial and thematic axes of *Soldiers' Pay*.

These issues appear to surface almost randomly during Cecily's talk with her parents. At first, Mr. and Mrs. Saunders have trouble prompting their daughter to speak. After her parents repeatedly ask her about her visit with Donald, however, Cecily finally reveals that "that black, ugly woman finally condescended to let me see him a few minutes. In her presence, of course" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135). While Cecily refuses to identify her any further, this "woman" is in fact "Mrs. Powers" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 136).

This divulgence is surprising. Until now, little evidence exists to suggest that Margaret Powers is African-American. She seems to associate freely with the novel's white community and appears to be as far removed from her African-American neighbors as any other white character. In fact, *Soldiers' Pay* repeatedly hints that Margaret Powers is in fact white. Not long after her first appearance in the novel, Gilligan and Cadet Lowe note Margaret's "pallid distinction" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 28). Soon afterward, the narrator emphasizes her "pallid face" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 38). After Margaret's marriage, Gilligan also notes Powers's "pallid face" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 275). Early on, the narrator asserts that "Beardsley would have sickened for her: he had drawn her so often dressed in peacock hues, white and slim and depraved" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 27). During the dancing scene towards the middle of the book, the narrator describes Margaret as having a "colorless face against the canopied darkness of the car, her black eyes and her mouth like a scar" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 198).

Even the specifics of the scene of Cecily's strange claim undermine the believability of her bizarre racial label. Cecily's parents, for example, seem to be deeply confused by their daughter's claim. After Cecily's bizarre declaration, Mrs. Saunders immediately asks, "what black, ugly woman, darling?" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135). Mr. Saunders, although he eventually catches on, is also initially baffled; his reaction reads, "Black woman? Oh, you mean Mrs. What's-her-name. Why, Sis, I thought you and she would like each other" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135). Mrs. Saunders, however, continues to be perplexed; she asks variants of her first question throughout the remainder of the passage. The section presumably closes without Mrs. Saunders ever reaching an understanding of her daughter's statement.

This confusion, when considered in conjunction with the repeated descriptions of Mrs. Powers as "white" and "pallid," seems to suggest that Margaret is not as "black" as Cecily claims, or at least not in the racial sense of the word (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 27, 28, 135). Rather, when Cecily says "black," she is more likely expressing her distaste for Mrs. Powers (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135). At the time that she calls her "black," Cecily is clearly upset with Donald's caretaker; in the same scene, she describes her as "ugly" and jealously bemoans the fact that she traveled "all the way from Chicago or whatever it was with him" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135). Therefore, Cecily may intend to use the word "black" as an insult (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135).

Some of Faulkner's critics have drawn similar conclusions. For example, in "The Passion of Margaret Powers: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Soldiers' Pay*," Michael Zeitlin conceives of Margaret as "a Persephone, a death-figure, a Taboo Object, a woman of dangerous if not fatal sexual power" whose "work" in the novel includes seeing "Mahon dead" (Zeitlin).

Correspondingly, Zeitlin understands Margaret's "dark and uncanny stylization" in other parts of the novel as fitting for her status as "the eventual bride of the death-in-life figure Mahon" (Zeitlin). Not surprisingly, Zeitlin accordingly explains Cecily's description of Margaret as a sort of clairvoyant presaging of Margaret's "inimical force" (Zeitlin). In this sense, Cecily's labeling has nothing to do with Margaret's race. Margaret, therefore, is likely a member of the white cast of *Soldiers' Pay*.

If this explanation seems unlikely, similar uses of the word "black" do exist in other Faulkner novels. For instance, in her fascinating "Who's Afraid of the Corncob Man?: Masculinity, Race, and Labor in the Preface to *Sanctuary*," Sondra Guttman notes that *Sanctuary*'s Popeye "is repeatedly referred to throughout the novel as 'that black man'" (Guttman). Despite this, for Guttman, "there is no doubt that he is white" (Guttman). Rather, in Guttman's view, Popeye paradoxically "affects the characters as if he is black" (Guttman). In this sense, "Popeye's blackness is not a sign of his race" (Guttman). Instead, for Guttman, "the fact that Popeye's skin coloring resists categorization into conventional racial divisions is" in fact "a product of his artificiality" (Guttman). Through this "artificiality," in Guttman's view, "Popeye represents the immoral industrial man as opposed to the agrarian Southern gentleman embodied by Horace Benbow" (Guttman). "Unlike Joe Christmas," therefore, "Popeye is not represented as racially ambiguous" (Guttman). Therefore, the notion that Cecily's use of the word "black" does not refer to Margaret's race is not without precedence (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 135). Accordingly, despite Cecily's strange statement, Margaret Powers is probably best understood as a white character.

Generally speaking, Margaret Powers holds a smaller amount of influence over the interracial dynamics of the novel than her less racially ambiguous counterparts. Callie, for

example, is almost certainly a recasting of Faulkner's own "Caroline Barr, 'Mammy Callie,'" whom Faulkner includes in several of his books (Gray 362). Callie's racial identity is consequently relatively secure within the text of *Soldiers' Pay*; she is consistently and unambiguously presented as an African-American character. Perhaps as a result, Callie generally exerts more influence over the racial dynamics of *Soldiers' Pay* than Margaret Powers. For example, in the same scene in which Loosh greets him in his "private's uniform," Donald Mahon engages in an emotional meeting with Callie (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 166). In this scene, Donald's injuries are so debilitating that "no one could tell whether or not the words" that he heard "meant anything at all to him" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 165). This level of disability holds deep implications for the themes of individual freedom, identity, and postwar disillusionment. Each of these matters surface repeatedly throughout and help to define this section.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this scene, however, is Callie's marginality. Clearly, Callie harbors a deep concern for Donald's wellbeing; she declares, without provocation, that she "prayed" for Donald "Ev'y day" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 167). The white characters of the scene, however, either presume that she has no business in or actively attempt to exclude her from Donald's affairs. For example, Gilligan instructs her not to "bother" Mahon (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 166). Later, Margaret Powers patronizingly calls her "Aunty" and says, "Of course, he wants to see you. When he is better you and Loosh must come every day" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 167). Later in the novel, when Mrs. Saunders informs her that Callie claimed "that the white folks had killed him," Cecily dismissively responds that, "You know nigger talk doesn't mean anything," implying that she believes that Donald's attendants consider Callie to be completely and fundamentally separated from Donald's troubles (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 255). Even Callie herself seems aware of her excluded position; she repeatedly refers to "de white

folks” and what they have done to “her baby” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 166). Considered together, these statements almost completely exclude Callie from the thematic substance of this scene, despite the fact that Callie is obviously deeply upset about Donald’s condition.

Callie’s exclusion from the issues surrounding Donald’s identity, personal freedom, and general disenchantment suffuses these matters with a sense of privilege and importance; if someone as deeply emotionally invested in Donald’s life as Callie cannot participate in the conflicts surrounding these topics, they must be of great consequence. Further, Callie’s deference and unquestioning subservience underline the precarious state of Donald’s identity and personal sovereignty. Donald’s poor health raises a number of uncomfortable questions regarding his personal character and his ability to determine his own future. Since Donald is handicapped to the point that “no one could tell whether or not” he could understand speech, these questions are close to the surface of the text (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 165). By exhibiting such a profound level of deference, Callie establishes herself as the antithesis to these questions. She does not seem to fight for any appreciable level of autonomy or personal assertion. She does not enter into the debates regarding Donald’s future. Rather, she suffuses the strife circumscribing Donald’s personal liberty with an air of submissiveness that counters and thereby underlines the struggles of Donald and his companions. Callie thus accentuates and advances the thematic underpinnings of this scene, even though she is almost wholly removed from the substance of its debates.

While this passage certainly numbers among the more thematically weighty segments of *Soldiers’ Pay*, one section in particular clearly carries more emotive momentum and thematic significance than any other passage in the novel. Situated towards the middle of the book, the “awfully nice dance,” as one character somewhat sarcastically terms it, carries deep implications for the themes of identity, intersexual relations, autonomy, and postwar disillusionment

(Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 201). The event proves to be a profoundly vertiginous affair, overflowing with “talk and laughter and movement” propelled by the “assault” of a band led by a “negro cornetist” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 188). In a conversation with Margaret, Joe aptly observes that it is “like a show, ain’t it?” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 193). Into the confusion, however, Faulkner manages to interweave salient explorations of romance, identity, autonomy, and innocence. While these investigations seem at first to subsist wholly irrespectively of the African-American cast of *Soldiers Pay*, the events of the party and consequently their thematic import are completely dependent on the participation of African-American characters. African-Americans pervade much of the dancing scene, and their hazy presence is essential to the development of the significance of the passage. Consequently, while the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* may not initially appear to add much to the dancing scene, their contributions form a key component of the overall gravity of the passage.

Predictably, the dancing party evolves into a dizzying battlefield on which the intersexual dynamics of *Soldiers' Pay* produce one of their most flamboyant displays. Naturally, the mere act of dancing entails sweeping and easily recognizable sexual implications. Faulkner is clearly aware of these implications and makes use of them throughout his work; for example, *The Sound and the Fury* compares sex to “dancing sitting down” (Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* 135). Faulkner explores these connotations openly in the dancing scene of *Soldiers' Pay* as well. In the narrator’s words, one couple dances while “losing the syncopation deliberately, seeking and finding it, losing it again . . . Her limbs eluded his, anticipated his: the breath of a touch and an escape, which he, too, was quick to assist. Touch and retreat: no satiety” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 193). This brief éclat alone thoroughly encapsulates the sexual atmosphere of *Soldiers' Pay*.

This passage extends well beyond mere descriptions of dancing, however. At the party, the latent sexual conflicts of *Soldiers' Pay* repeatedly manifest themselves. Predictably, these eruptions usually involve Cecily Saunders and her myriad lovers. For much of the dance, Cecily adopts a flirtatious tone with almost every man that she meets. For example, when she encounters Mr. Madden, Cecily taunts him furiously, saying, "I'm awfully flattered that you decided to speak to me—or did Lee have to drag you over? Ah, that's how it was. You were going to ignore me, I know you were" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 189). Later, after finally electing to dance with Mr. Lee, Cecily coquettishly teases, "So I guess I must dance, Lee. Unless you have changed your mind, too, and don't want me?" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 190). These brief episodes of teasing draw attention to the sexual undercurrents of the scene.

Cecily's romantic indiscretions also affect some of the more major male characters of the party section. Understandably, for example, Cecily's flirtations bother George Farr greatly; he "glowered at her, watching her slim body cut by a masculine arm, watching her head beside another head" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 191). He refuses to join the party and prefers to observe "from the outer darkness" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 191). Later, Cecily finally confronts Donald, addresses him as "sweetheart," and eventually prompts him to utter her name (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 203). To add to the confusion, Jones laughably continues his misguided pursuit of his rather unwilling paramour, "challenging the competition" and managing to secure dances "with her twice, once for six feet and then for nine feet" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 198). Although it confusingly diverges in a number of directions, this skein of sexual tensions clearly brings intersexual dynamics to the forefront of the dancing scene. In tandem with the narrator's descriptions of the carnal overtones of dancing, this collection of romantic undertakings aggregates to make the dancing passage one of the most sexually charged episodes of the novel.

Importantly, however, the romantic and sexual content of the dancing scene seems at first to involve only white characters. All of the dancing couples are presumably white. The same is likely true of Cecily's numerous lovers. The few African-American characters that the dancing passage includes do not directly participate in the romantic and sexual engagements that occupy their white counterparts. The contribution of the dancing scene to the sexual landscape of *Soldiers' Pay* therefore appears to revolve exclusively around white individuals.

The melee of activity that permeates the dancing scene also comprises one of the most prominent moments in the treatment of liberty and autonomy in *Soldiers' Pay*. Unsurprisingly, for instance, many of the sexually charged components of the scene also carry deep implications for the theme of freedom. For example, in addition to its sensual undertones, the act of dancing also entails a distinct expression of personal sovereignty. Further, in addition to their obvious involvement with the presentation of romance in *Soldiers' Pay*, Cecily's indiscriminate flirtations also constitute a resounding assertion of individual liberty. In this sense, the sexual dynamics of the dancing scene are deeply intertwined with the themes of autonomy and liberty.

This most notable contribution of this section to the themes of personal freedom and autonomy, however, arises from the tension between Donald Mahon's incapacitation and the flurry of activity that envelops the partygoers. As Margaret observes, Donald "can't dance" and therefore presumably cannot have sex, either (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 202). Instead, Margaret and her companions "brought him so he could hear the music" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 202). Indeed, as the narrator notes at the outset of the dancing section, Donald and his companions are in attendance entirely because of the fact that "Mahon liked music" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 183). This fact alone is enough to sever Donald from the delirious celebrations that surround him and the multitudinous expressions of autonomy and personal sovereignty that they imply.

Donald, however, may not even be able to hear the music that he presumably came to enjoy. In the midst of the party, when Margaret asks for Donald's opinion on the entertainment, Donald responds only by "raising his hand to his glasses" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 193). Later, when asked by Joe, Donald responds that he finds it to be "pretty good, Joe" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 194). Still later, the narrator confirms that "you could not tell whether or not he heard" the "music" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 128). Not only is Donald unable to engage in the activities of the party, but he also may be unable to hear what induces and incites them. This fact, coupled with the amount of textual space afforded to Donald's handicap during the dance, heavily emphasizes his disability. The tension between this level of focus and the unbound spirit of most of the partygoers establishes the dancing scene as one of the most affecting explorations of freedom and imprisonment in *Soldiers' Pay*.

This theme also seems to be developed wholly irrespectively of the African-American cast of the scene. Since the dancers are presumably all white, none of the statements of freedom produced by descriptions of dancing appear to be related to any African-American characters. The same holds true for Cecily's coquetry; neither she nor any of her lovers appear to be African-American, and therefore the affirmations of personal liberty implicit within her many romantic indiscretions seem to involve only the passage's white cast. More importantly, Donald Mahon and his companions are all white. Consequently, the painfully poignant explorations of personal autonomy generated by the tension between Donald's disability and the unbridled spirit of the partygoers only incorporates white characters. In this way, the oblique discussions of freedom in the dancing scene seem to exclude the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* entirely.

An air of disillusionment is also clearly discernable throughout the dancing passage. Many of the partygoers seem hyperaware of the changes that have occurred since the start of the war. For example, while observing a group of “ex-soldiers,” Margaret Powers cynically claims that “girls were nice to” the “poor kind dull boys” only “because they were going” off “to war” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 193). Later, when she finally manages to bring herself to speak to her recently disabled fiancé, Cecily pathetically begs him to place his “arm around me like you used to, Donald, dear heart” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 203). Further, Donald’s incapacitation is a sign both of the severity and the irrevocability of wartime destruction. Taken together, these components of the party section combine to form a powerful statement of postwar disillusionment. Since Margaret, Cecily, and Donald are presumably all white, this investigation of disillusionment and innocence also seems to center entirely upon the white cast of the book. With the possible exception of some of the anonymous ex-soldiers, none of the characters that openly participate in constructing the presentation of innocence in the dancing scene are African-American. As a result, the air of postwar disillusionment that pervades the dancing scene seems to be an exclusive privilege of the white partygoers.

While these varied thematic statements may seem at first to involve only white persons, the party scene almost overflows with African-American presences. Further, although no African-American individuals partake fully in the activities of the party, several African-American hired hands do play essential roles in making the party possible through the services that they provide. For example, Margaret Powers, Joe Gilligan, and Donald Mahon are all driven to the party by a “negro driver” (Faulkner, *Soldiers’ Pay* 183). Consequently, these characters would have been unable to share in the thematic excesses of the dance without the involvement of the African-American population of *Soldiers’ Pay*. Further, a nameless “negro cornetist” and

his band provide the music for the party (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 188). Of course, this music makes the dancing at the party possible. Many of the explorations of personal autonomy and intersexual relations included in the dancing passage therefore depend on the presence and participation of African-American individuals. In this way, several of the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* play essential roles in facilitating and constructing the thematic features of the dancing scene.

Further, like most of the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay*, both the musicians and the driver imbue the dancing scene with an air of subservience. This backdrop contrasts with and thereby emphasizes the assertions of freedom that occupy their white counterparts. Importantly, African-Americans never appear within the narrative of the dancing scene unless they are performing some sort of service for their white employers; all of the actions they undertake are part and parcel of their employment. They are not guests; they transport the guests. They do not dance; they make the dancing possible. They are completely excluded from the conflicts of the passage, but they make those same conflicts possible through their ancillary positions. In this way, as in other thematically significant scenes, African-American characters exist entirely to serve the wants and needs of their white counterparts. Through its dissimilarity to the attitude of the white partygoers, this completely downtrodden and secondary position highlights the struggles for freedom undertaken by the white persona of the scene. The African-American characters at the party therefore underscore and heighten the struggles for and presentation of autonomy and liberty in the party passage.

The subservience of these African-American characters is obvious throughout the dancing scene. A significant number of pages contain references to the African-American staff of the party. Donald and his companions, for example, ride in a car driven by a "negro driver"

(Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 183). Soon afterward, the narrator describes a “negro cornetist” who, “having learned in his thirty years a century of the white man’s lust,” ignores the chaos of the party and stoically commands “his crew in a fresh assault” without much regard for the tumult around him (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 188). Not long after this vision dissipates, Donald and his friends are once again depicted near “the negro driver” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 193). Later, at a lull in the celebration, “The negro cornetist” is said to have “restrained his men and removed them temporarily” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 197). A few pages later the music of the band is again in the foreground of the text, with “the negro cornetist” having “spurred his men to fiercer endeavor” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 200). Later, not long before Cecily and Donald’s meeting, the narrator mentions that “the negro driver’s head was round as a capped cannon-ball” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 203). Soon afterward, the music is once again in the spotlight; in the narrator’s words, “the negro cornetist unleashed his indefatigable pack anew and the veranda broke again into clasped couples” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 206). Both African-American characters and their obvious subservience are apparent throughout the dancing passage. This ubiquity allows the African-American cast to provide an antithesis to and thereby underscore their white counterparts’ struggles for freedom and autonomy for the whole of the scene.

Furthermore, the musicians in this passage are anonymous. This fact has not escaped critical attention. In her essay “Faulkner’s Development of Black Characterization,” Thadious M. Davis notes that “Faulkner de-emphasizes the individual musicians, who remain collectively ‘the pack’ or ‘the crew’ outside the spatial configuration of the dance floor yet simultaneously creating it” (70). This quotation also obliquely alludes to the concept that these anonymous African-American musicians help produce the field of recreation in which their white counterparts decadently engage in some of the most elaborate explorations of individual

freedom, identity, innocence, and romance in the novel. This interplay, however, does not appear to be within the rhetorical trajectory of Davis's argument, and she does not delineate this matter fully. Rather, Davis concentrates more on the fact that Faulkner does not give these African-American musicians a thorough artistic treatment and consequently leaves them flat, hollow, and nameless.

This phenomenon is present in other passages as well. For example, the porters of the first two sections do not possess especially dynamic identities. Davis notes this fact as well; in her words, "the several undifferentiated porters in the opening chapters function as a backdrop to the rowdy, returning white veterans" ("Faulkner's Development of Black Characterization" 80). Significantly, this quotation also gestures towards the fact that these African-American servants emphasize the headstrong behavior of the traveling soldiers throughout the bacchanalian spectacle of the first two sections. Again, however, this thematic interplay is mostly outside of the scope of Davis's argument. She points instead to the relative anonymity of these African-American bystanders. Indeed, all of the African-American porters described in the early pages of *Soldiers' Pay* are markedly underdeveloped. At least some of the passengers do address the servants by name, however. For example, one "superior porter" is repeatedly addressed by the white soldiers as "Claude" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 20). Earlier, both Yaphank and his train's conductor address a presumably different porter as "Henry" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 11). Of course, these names may not belong to the train attendants. The white passengers do, however, seem to apply them fairly consistently. Consequently, while the train porters are not very thoroughly developed, they do appear to have names and are therefore not quite as anonymous as the musicians in the dancing passage.

Most of the African-American characters in *Soldiers' Pay* are wholly nameless. For example, the “negro youth” with whom Joe leaves his bags is never identified, nor is the “negro driving in a wagon” who interrupts a conversation between Cecily Saunders and George Farr (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 298, 140). The only name given to “the negro” who interrupts Gilligan and Margaret’s conversation to inform Gilligan that “Rev’un say fer you to come to de house” is “Othello” (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 104, 103, 103). Not surprisingly, the sources of “the voices of the negroes raised in bursts of meaningless laughter or snatches of song in a sorrowful minor” that color a scene towards the middle of the book are entirely nameless (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 153).

Faulkner’s reasons for depicting the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* so hazily are unclear. He may be making a political statement. The anonymity and impotence that stifles so many of the fictional African-American constituents of *Soldiers' Pay* may suggest the disenfranchisement of African-Americans in general. By leaving so many of his African-American characters so sketchy, Faulkner may be calling attention to their position in American society. On the other hand, he may simply have been blindly conceding to this condition in describing the state of African-Americans as it in fact was. More likely, however, he may have simply been negligent. Since racial matters occupy such a peripheral position in *Soldiers' Pay*, the probability that Faulkner is deliberately trying to comment on the marginalization of African-Americans in society through the nebulosity of his African-American characters is low. *Soldiers' Pay* is largely a story of white individuals interacting with other white individuals, and Faulkner may not have even considered including any fully rounded African-American characters in his narrative. The general anonymity of the African-American population of

Soldiers' Pay is therefore most likely an unintended consequence of the overall trajectory of the book's plot.

The effects of this anonymity on the structure of *Soldiers' Pay* are much clearer. Overall, the pervasive namelessness of the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* is inseparable from the broader themes of identity and personal assertion. Certainly, many of the white characters of *Soldiers' Pay* spend much of their time shaping and asserting their identities against the opposing forces of modernization, postwar disillusionment, and romantic confusion. As anonymous individuals, however, most of the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* cannot participate in these struggles. Rather than endeavoring to establish their identities like their white neighbors, the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* remain cloaked within a shroud of anonymity and thereby are antithetical to their white counterparts who seek personal definition. This contrast heightens the conflicts of identity assumed by the white community of *Soldiers' Pay*. In this sense, the interracial dynamics of *Soldiers' Pay* play an essential role in developing the themes of identity and personal assertion in the novel.

By far the most important moment in the presentation of race in *Soldiers' Pay*, however, lies in the descriptions of African-American vocal music in the closing section of the novel. While walking through an area populated by "negro cabins," Gilligan is submerged into "slow unemphatic voices cheerful yet somehow filled with all the old despairs of time and breath" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 308). Not long afterward, the words "sweet chariot" emerge from the music (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 309). Later, in the last pages of the novel, Gilligan and the rector observe a group of African-Americans "holding services" while "bearing lighted lanterns that jetted vain little flames futilely into the moonlight" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 314). Soon they are

overcome by the group's "singing" of "Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 315). The narrator first describes the music as "wordless and far away" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 314). Later, as the singing comes into focus, the narrator reveals that it is marked by "the crooning submerged passion of the dark race," capable of "taking the white man's words as readily as it took his remote God and made a personal Father of Him" and containing "all the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something, somewhere" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 315). In the narrator's words, "it was nothing, it was everything" (*Soldiers' Pay* 315). Significantly, this singing pervades the final sentences of the novel. At the opening of the last paragraph of the book, the narrator describes how "the voices rose full and soft," and that "no organ was needed as above the harmonic passion of bass and baritone soared a clear soprano of women's voices like a flight of gold and heavenly birds" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 315). The closing sentence of the novel reads, "then the singing died, fading away along the mooned land inevitable with tomorrow and sweat, with sex and death and damnation; and they turned townward under the moon, feeling dust in their shoes" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 315). In this way, African-Americans have the last word in *Soldiers' Pay*.

Needless to say, the emphasis afforded to African-American music in these last pages is remarkable. Up until this point, African-Americans and African-American culture never take center stage in *Soldiers' Pay*. The few African-American characters included in the novel always occupy markedly peripheral positions, invariably left out of the narrative spotlight. In the final paragraphs of the novel, however, African-Americans emerge from beneath the surface of the text to furnish the ultimate image of the book. While a number of ways to account for this sudden change of perspective exist, two in particular stand out as particularly viable.

The most palatable explanation could be that the sudden attention afforded to African-American singing in the final pages of the novel signifies sympathy for and an indirect acknowledgement and criticism of racial subjugation. Perhaps predictably, the white characters of *Soldiers' Pay* never achieve the freedom that they chase so furiously. *Soldiers' Pay* begins and ends in tragedy. In the opening passages of the novel, Faulkner repeatedly emphasizes that Donald is "sick" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 22). The ninth and final chapter of the book opens with a discussion of "sex and death" that eventually evolves into an elliptical meditation on Donald Mahon's passing (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 291). None of the main characters of the novel consequently obtain a significant form of liberation from the postwar sorrow that characterizes much of the book. Likewise, none of the African-American characters of the novel acquire any appreciable level of freedom either.

The music that pervades the concluding moments of *Soldiers' Pay*, however, carries the sweet tones of deliverance. For example, the line "comin' fer to ca'y me home" suggests a belief in hope, imminent salvation, and liberation, even if freedom is only attainable in the afterlife (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 309). Further, the narrator describes how the "clear soprano of women's voices" gloriously "soared" over the lower parts "like a flight of gold and heavenly birds" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 315). This regal and celestial imagery looks to the release from worldly cares and deliverance to God, heaven, and a better place. The final section of the novel therefore shows that the African-American community of *Soldiers' Pay* retains a deep sense of hope. Despite having occupied the most subjugated spaces of the novel, only the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* hold on to a faith in future freedom, although that freedom may not come in a worldly form. By juxtaposing this hope with the despondent resignation of the white

cast, Faulkner implies that the emancipation of the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* may be a prerequisite for the autonomy of their white neighbors. The final scene of *Soldiers' Pay* may thus be a condemnation of racial subjugation and a call for racial justice.

Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* offers an alternative explanation. Morrison speaks of the ability of "race" to assert such a "powerful impact" on a literary work's "narrative" as to be able to provoke "a breakdown in the logic and machinery of plot construction" (25). The startling about-face of narrative attention at the close of *Soldiers' Pay* may be just one such "breakdown" (Morrison 25). While the chief plotlines of the novel may exclude the African-American presences of *Soldiers' Pay*, African-Americans do effect a considerable narrative disruption at the end of the book; their "crooning submerged passion" suddenly rises above the stifling marginalization of the plot and bursts forth in a song of hope and resurrection (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 315). In other words, in the last section of the novel, the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* suddenly and surprisingly indulge in expressions of feeling that the narrative normally reserves for white characters. This abrupt shift certainly goes against the grain of much of the book and therefore may constitute a sudden collapse of the plot engendered by the formerly submerged African-American population of the novel.

These two readings, however, are in no way mutually exclusive. Morrison's ideas do not preclude the possibility that formerly submerged African-American presences may suddenly find a voice within the narrative of a novel. Indeed, the structural collapses that she describes are in a sense a form of fleeting enfranchisement. On the other hand, the hypothesis that the musical images that conclude *Soldiers' Pay* imply a condemnation of racial subjugation does not preclude the idea that such a condemnation would upset the plot of the novel. On the contrary,

any open criticism of racial inequality in a book that ignores racial matters as consistently as does *Soldiers' Pay* must generate some level of confusion. These readings are therefore easily reconcilable. The final pages of *Soldiers' Pay* includes both a critique of racial injustice and what Morrison describes as “a breakdown in the logic and machinery of plot construction” (25). Both of these interpretations therefore may be viable.

This sudden change of focus, however, only triumphs over one scene. Before this final passage, during almost all of *Soldiers' Pay*, African-Americans remain exclusively in the margins of the novel. The presumption that the closing pages of *Soldiers' Pay* somehow overturn or cancel out the peripheralization that so thoroughly defines the position of African-Americans throughout novel is a completely insupportable overstatement; the African-American constituents of *Soldiers' Pay* only overcome their marginalization in one important but fairly brief section of the novel.

Submergence, rather, is an essential feature of the racial geography of *Soldiers' Pay*. Through their reliance on rules and their status as employees and servants of their white counterparts, the African-American constituents of *Soldiers' Pay* exemplify the antithesis of and thereby underline the importance and thematic gravity of their white neighbors' struggles for freedom and autonomy, even while denying their own. Through their relative anonymity, the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* embody the converse of and thereby highlight and heighten the gestures of personal assertion and self-identification articulated by members of the white community. In this way, the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* utilizes its various marginal positions to emphasize, intensify, orient, cohere, and construct the themes of freedom, disillusionment, identity, and intersexual relations. Through its marginalization,

therefore, race establishes itself as one of the primary formative forces of *Soldiers Pay*. In this sense, the same rhetorical strategy that seems to preclude the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* from serving any sort of important role within the text permits it to perform a key function in the thematic structure of the book. Indeed, this dynamic is the most salient feature of race in *Soldiers' Pay*. While they initially may seem to be buried beneath the surface of the text, the African-American presences of *Soldiers' Pay* in fact play an essential role in advancing and establishing the themes of identity, freedom, romance, and innocence through their submerged positions. Race and interracial dynamics thus perform a crucial role in William Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay*.

Chapter Two

“The Place of the Negro in It”: *Soldiers’ Pay* and Race in Faulkner’s Works

When compared with his treatments of race in other works, Faulkner’s presentation of interracial dynamics in *Soldiers’ Pay* is highly unusual. Generally, in his novels that feature African-American populations comparable in size to that of *Soldiers’ Pay*, Faulkner treats racial topics openly, obviously, and thoroughly. Unlike *Soldiers’ Pay*, Faulkner’s other novels usually situate race plainly on the surface of their narrative streams and position racial issues clearly within their thematic structures. Both Faulkner’s most widely read novels, such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*, and his less famous but equally racially-conscious books, such as *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, explore racial questions in a detailed and relatively explicit manner. The same simply cannot be said of *Soldiers’ Pay*. Although the interracial geography of *Soldiers’ Pay* serves a key function, it only does so from the margins of the novel, and therefore differs substantially from the racial landscapes of most of Faulkner’s other books.

Absalom, Absalom! exemplifies Faulkner’s usual approach to race, particularly in his novels that feature significant African-American populations. As in many of Faulkner’s other works, racial difference conspicuously serves as one of the chief propelling forces and thematic concerns of *Absalom, Absalom!* Indeed, race exerts such a profound influence over *Absalom, Absalom!* that the novel often seems to be a direct meditation on the subject. This influence is most apparent in the trajectory of the narrative, which accrues much of its momentum from the internal interracial dynamics of the book. Thomas Sutpen’s “design,” for example, the chief

impelling force behind the plot of *Absalom, Absalom!*, seems to derive much if not all of its horribly unrelenting impetus from the racially charged scene in which the African-American butler dressed “in his monkey clothes” instructs the young and white Sutpen “to go to the back” door of the plantation house (Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 209). If Shreve and Quentin’s reconstructions are trustworthy, Charles Bon’s claim to be “the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister” ultimately provokes Henry Sutpen’s murder of his half-brother, one of the central events in the novel (Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 286). Certainly, the cohesion and impact of the plot of *Absalom, Absalom!* are heavily and obviously dependant on racial difference.

The same holds true for many themes of *Absalom, Absalom!* The deceiving and destructive nature of racial essentialism, for instance, is clearly a central concept in the novel. Accordingly, the fundamentally tragic nature of interracial violence and the racial turmoil of postbellum America are also leading concerns of the thematic framework of the book. Further, through its relatively open exploration of these themes, *Absalom, Absalom!* incorporates numerous forthright discussions of race and racial issues into its storyline. In this sense, race generally serves as one of the chief and most easily recognizable thematic concerns of *Absalom, Absalom!*

The importance of race in *Absalom, Absalom!* receives frequent attention from Faulkner’s critics. Scholars have repeatedly acknowledged the numerous ways in which race occupies center stage in *Absalom, Absalom!* For example, in his “Race, History, and Technique in *Absalom, Absalom!*,” Frederick R. Karl claims that the “tragic ingredient” of the catastrophic series of calamities that defines *Absalom, Absalom!* “is not Sutpen’s *hubris*, but race itself: race as embedded in historical practice” (213). For Karl, assuming that “the play of events” in *Absalom, Absalom!* “is perceived as tragic and not melodramatic,” race is the ultimate source of

the tragedies of the book (212). In “Faulkner’s Ambiguous Negro,” Melvin Seiden posits that, “In Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, the violence and hysteria we associate with melodrama springs from the issue of miscegenation” (675). For Seiden, much of the narrative intensity of *Absalom, Absalom!* derives from racial dynamics. Along similar lines, in his book *Go Slow Now: Faulkner and the Race Question*, Charles D. Peavy notes that “in *Absalom, Absalom!*, miscegenation, or rather the attitude toward it, severs father from son, brother from brother, and lover from loved one” (36). For Peavy, interracial dynamics are the source of the most prominent social catastrophes of *Absalom, Absalom!* Thadious M. Davis, who claims that “recognition of the nature of Faulkner’s world is, in large measure, dependent upon recognition of the place of the Negro in it,” further opines that any “synopsis of the Sutpen legend without the inclusion of the Negro is a story without motivation or significant meaning” (*Faulkner’s “Negro”* 182). From Davis’s viewpoint, a complete understanding of *Absalom, Absalom!* requires an apprehension of its treatment of interracial dynamics. Each of these critics recognizes that the solidity and impact of *Absalom, Absalom!* as a work of fiction is heavily and clearly dependent on race and racial issues.

Further, many critics see *Absalom, Absalom!* as an apogee of Faulkner’s fictional approaches to racial issues. For example, in “The Silencing of Rosa Coldfield,” Minrose Gwin claims that “Rosa’s memory of herself and Clytie Sutpen on the stairs of Sutpen’s Hundred” constitutes “one of the most intense racial events in the Faulkner canon” (156). For Gwin, Rosa’s recollection of her meeting with Clytie embodies a culmination of Faulkner’s fictional treatments of race. Making a more general point, Thadious M. Davis says of *Absalom, Absalom!* that “a black presence dominates this work as it does perhaps no other Faulkner novel” (*Faulkner’s*

“*Negro*” 181). In Davis’s view, “Nowhere else is it so apparent that the Negro is an abstract force confounding southern life both past and present even while, paradoxically, stimulating much of that life and art” (*Faulkner’s “Negro”* 181). For Davis, race and racial issues affect *Absalom, Absalom!* more profoundly than any other Faulkner novel.

Unlike *Soldiers’ Pay*, *Absalom, Absalom!* is openly, crucially, and inescapably concerned with issues of race. Racial matters clearly drive both its plot and its thematic development. The integrity of the novel as a cogent piece of literature depends on race and racial questions. Race therefore clearly exists on the surface of *Absalom, Absalom!*’s text. Even a superficial reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* either as a work of art or as a piece of social or historical commentary is nearly impossible without considering how race operates in the novel. In this sense, the treatment of race in *Absalom, Absalom!*, like in most of Faulkner’s novels, is an almost direct inversion of that of *Soldiers’ Pay*. Whereas *Soldiers’ Pay* banishes race and racial questions to its margins, all but completely excluding its African-American characters from its plot and totally submerging its internal racial dynamics below its narrative façade, *Absalom, Absalom!* deliberately positions race squarely in the middle of its structural and narrative lines of sight. While *Absalom, Absalom!* treats race and racial issues in an open and straightforward manner, the treatment of interracial dynamics in *Soldiers’ Pay* is obscure, covert, and easy to miss. In short, while, like most of Faulkner’s works, *Absalom, Absalom!* revolves around race and racial issues openly, *Soldiers’ Pay* does so in an almost surreptitious manner.

Light in August presents a similar case. As one of Faulkner’s most overtly polemical novels, *Light in August* does not shy away from racial matters. Racial difference, miscegenation, interracial violence, and racial essentialism are all unmistakably prime themes of *Light in August*. For example, Joe Christmas’s refusal or inability to toe racial lines propels much of the

plot, and the uncertainty generated by his multiracial background constitutes one of the chief mysteries of the novel. These facts are perhaps best illustrated in the climactic scene in which Percy Grimm murders Joe Christmas, discards a “bloody butcher knife,” and comments, “Now you’ll let white women alone, even in hell” (Faulkner, *Light in August* 464). Needless to say, this passage explores both interracial violence and the fear of miscegenation as well as the belief in racial essentialism that they both imply. The fact that these themes appear in the most crucial scene of the novel reveals just how central that they are to the overall construction of the narrative. Furthermore, Faulkner presents these themes conspicuously; murder and mutilation are hardly subtle topics. Race consequently occupies center stage in this climactic scene and in the novel in general.

Joe Christmas and Percy Grimm are not the only characters involved with the presentation of race in *Light in August*, however. For example, through the character of Joanna Burden, Faulkner openly explores interracial dynamics. As the daughter of a “Yankee” family who “came down here in the Reconstruction, to stir up the niggers” who continues to be “still mixed up with niggers” and supposedly “claims that niggers are the same as white folks,” Burden’s place in *Light in August* revolves almost solely around racial matters (Faulkner, *Light in August* 53). Accordingly, almost every interaction that Burden has with other characters involves race and racial questions. Even in death, for example, the townspeople chiefly remember her as the piteous “white woman” whom Joe Christmas outrageously murdered, despite the fact that those same townspeople formerly “called after her on the street, Nigger lover! Nigger lover!” (Faulkner, *Light in August* 291, 292). Through characters like Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, Faulkner affords race a prominent position in *Light in August*.

Naturally, Faulkner's critics have noted the centrality of race in *Light in August*. Thadious M. Davis, for example, claims in *Faulkner's "Negro"* that "Faulkner's concern lies with the meanings of 'Negro' which shape the lives of various characters, primarily Joe Christmas—a man who lives in a region demanding racial allegiance, but whose racial origins are unknown" (130). For Davis, the chief message of *Light in August* is explicitly racial. Perhaps even more importantly, Davis also sees *Light in August* as a milestone in the development of Faulkner's fictional approach to race. In her view, "*Light in August* is the first of Faulkner's novels to treat the Negro as an abstraction rather than merely a physical presence in the southern world" (Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 129). For Davis, *Light in August* marks the point in Faulkner's career in which his fiction became conscious of the lie of racial essentialism. In Davis's words, through "revealing Joe's history and destiny, Faulkner presents 'Negro' as a behavioral pattern," as well "as a subjective projection" and "a social construct" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 130). In Davis's opinion, the character of Joe Christmas reveals and explores the fundamentally constructed essence of race. Further, according to Davis, "Joe Christmas becomes aware of the psychological, emotional, and physical conflicts caused by racial distinctions" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 129). *Light in August* therefore uncovers not only the constructed nature of race, but also its inimical consequences.

Davis is not the only critic who holds this opinion. For example, Erskine Peters claims in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being* that "in the mind of the community in *Light in August*, Joanna Burden is not murdered by the individual Joe Christmas, but by 'Negro,' a composite image of black being" (88). In Peters's view, Christmas is not the culprit in Burden's murder, but rather a sort of surrogate representative of a racial designation

and its violent capabilities. For Peters, Joe Christmas not only reveals the fact that race is an abstract construction but also embodies that construction.

Light in August consequently discusses race in both an obvious and a sophisticated manner. Its explorations of racial questions are both immediately apparent and relatively thorough. Both of these facts separate *Light in August* from *Soldiers' Pay*. While *Light in August* openly gives central attention to race, *Soldiers' Pay* excludes issues of race from both its plot and its themes. As a result, unlike *Light in August*, *Soldiers' Pay* also does not investigate racial matters with any appreciable level of scrutiny. Therefore, generally speaking, while *Light in August* delves into race and racial issues openly and thoroughly, *Soldiers' Pay* approaches race covertly and without much attention to detail.

Although African-American characters do not appear in *The Sound and the Fury* as prominently as in *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Light in August*, *The Sound and the Fury* does consider racial matters critically and forthrightly. While many members of its cast of characters are white, *The Sound and the Fury* still features racial difference as a key and quite explicit component of its fictional structure. Any cogent reading of the novel must take this function into account. The operations of race in *The Sound and the Fury* therefore closely resemble that of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August* and differ significantly from the racial landscape of *Soldiers' Pay*.

The most conspicuous engagement with racial difference in *The Sound and the Fury* occurs in the last of its four sections. The focus of this concluding chapter is Dilsey Gibson, whose relative piety serves as a redemptive inversion of the depravity and degradation exhibited by the Compson family in the previous three sections. In Thadious M. Davis's words, the Gibson family embodies a sort of "opposition to the sterility and the decay evidenced by the white family," partly through their ability to "project a vital creativity" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 70). In

this sense, through their righteousness and religious piety, Dilsey and her family openly provide a spiritual rectification for the malaise that governs much of the book. Through his explorations of the “Negro’s Christianity, Faulkner finds a meaningful allegory of moral consciousness” (Davis, *Faulkner’s “Negro”* 100). The Biblical allusions that produce this analogy are not particularly subtle. For example, after the church service that forms the centerpiece of the last chapter, the already obviously Christlike Dilsey Gibson claims to have “seed de first en de last” as well as “de beginnin” and “de endin” (Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* 297). Earlier, Dilsey’s famous regal greeting of the “bleak and chill” morning dressed in “a maroon velvet cape” and “a dress of purple” also carries deep messianic undertones (Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* 265).

African-American characters thus perform both a vital and a readily apparent role in the ethical dialectics of *The Sound and The Fury*. Their presence erects a sturdy moral terrain around which the novel orients itself, especially in the last chapter. By both outlining and highlighting what may be the most obvious juxtaposition of good and evil in the novel, racial difference plays an essential and easily perceptible part in establishing the ethical framework of *The Sound and the Fury*. Race therefore plainly occupies a prominent position in the novel.

Further, the influence of African-American characters in *The Sound and the Fury* is not limited to the messianic imagery of the final chapter. According to Thadious M. Davis, the Gibsons “play strong supportive roles, and frequently dominate the action” (*Faulkner’s “Negro”* 70). Moreover, for her, members of Dilsey’s family also “function to foreshadow events, as well as to reiterate motifs” (Davis, *Faulkner’s “Negro”* 70). As a result, in Davis’s view, the Gibsons “are integral to Faulkner’s formal ordering principles” (Davis, *Faulkner’s “Negro”* 70).

Therefore, not only do the Gibsons help to structure *The Sound and the Fury* through their participation in the closing chapter of the book, but they also serve key roles in all sections of the novel.

These roles are also often remarkably complicated. For instance, the Gibsons' relationship to the Compsons is never one of absolute servility. As Thadious M. Davis points out, this fact is apparent in Luster's interactions with Benjy Compson; in Davis's view, "Luster is neither overly sympathetic nor solicitous" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 79). In particular, Luster's "repeated threat to whip Benjy openly defies the tradition of white supremacy" (Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 79). Luster's apparent willingness to inflict physical harm on Benjy clearly complicates the expected social hierarchy. Consequently, in Davis's words, "Luster inverts the relationship traditionally depicted between blacks and whites in the South" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 79). Luster is not the only African-American in *The Sound and the Fury* willing to defy social codes, however. Dilsey, for example, often behaves in an unexpectedly brazen manner towards her presumable social superiors, and in particular "is unafraid to stand up to Jason" (Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 89). These rebellions, although fairly minor, problematize and deepen the interracial geography of *The Sound and the Fury*.

Through the contributions of the Gibson family, race and racial issues play immediately apparent and thoroughly nuanced roles in *The Sound and the Fury*. These roles strongly distinguish *The Sound and the Fury* from *Soldiers' Pay*. Although race certainly serves key functions in *Soldiers' Pay*, none of these functions are as palpable or as thoroughly developed as the operations and treatments of race that define *The Sound and the Fury*. While race plays beneath the narrative surface of *Soldiers' Pay*, in *The Sound and the Fury* it clearly occupies a

prominent and plainly apparent position. Like *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury* treats race more openly, forthrightly, and thoroughly than *Soldiers' Pay*.

This disparity is even more obvious between *Soldiers' Pay* and *Go Down, Moses*. Doubtlessly *Go Down, Moses* positions race and racial issues closer to the forefront of its narrative and thematic framework than most of Faulkner's books. For instance, *Go Down, Moses* gives more attention to individual African-American characters and spends more energy on depicting the culture and socioeconomic situation of African-Americans than the average Faulkner novel. This fact has certainly garnered critical attention. In "Faulkner and the Vocational Liabilities of Black Characterization," for example, Michael Grimwood claims that *Go Down, Moses* "embodies a climax in the evolution of the characterization of black people—not just in Faulkner's fiction but in the writing of white Southerners in general" (257). Indeed, *Go Down, Moses* contains some of the most memorable African-American characters in Faulkner's entire oeuvre. For instance, Sam Fathers, the descendent of a "quadroon slave woman," is one of the most formidable characters of the book; his discussions of the lessons of "the old days" dominate the heart of the novel (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 160, 165). The presentation of Rider in "Pantaloons in Black," where Rider grieves so profoundly that he even questions "Efn He God," is one of Faulkner's most effective portraits (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 146). Lucas, the "vessel, durable, ancestrally, nonconductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another," is both one of the most infuriatingly problematic and irresistibly intricate characters in the entire Faulkner catalogue, largely because of his refusal to be defined and marginalized by racial codes (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 101). Through characters such as these, *Go Down, Moses* explores individual African-Americans with far more attention to detail than most of Faulkner's novels.

More importantly, however, *Go Down, Moses* affords interracial dynamics a remarkably central position in its internal thematic network. Although its formal structure can problematize the definitive identification of any one unifying message, *Go Down, Moses* quite clearly revolves around race relations more than any other theme. Racial intersections, for instance, constitute many of the most prominent episodes of the novel. For example, the fatal “blow” with which Rider cuts “the white man’s throat” and the events that follow are among the most shocking occurrences in the book (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 149). Isaac’s discovery of his family’s history of slave ownership in “the yellowed pages scrawled in fading ink” of his grandfather’s ledgers, for instance, also occupy a central position in the constellation of tragedies that underpin the narrative (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 250). Further, in serving as the primary axis of the book, race in *Go Down, Moses* is not a monolithic or otherwise uncomplicated epicenter. Rather, in *Go Down, Moses*, interracial relations are developed in an astoundingly complex and sophisticated manner.

The most perspicacious and exhaustive account of this development is Thadious M. Davis’s *Games of Property*. One key argument of *Games of Property* is that Faulkner’s investigations of racial issues in *Go Down, Moses* are inextricably tied to slavery and possession; in Davis’s words, “In writing *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner explored the explosive issues surrounding slavery as ownership of people and the literal domination of people as property” (27). For Davis, the main concern of *Go Down, Moses* lies with “the southern social order that developed out of a slave economy,” as well as how that “order” is linked to “the concept of property as it relates to human rights and to the rights of the individual” (*Games of Property* 27). For Davis, *Go Down, Moses* considers Southern race relations within the context of the capitalist systems that helped to produce them. By exploring them from a broader socioeconomic frame of

reference, *Go Down, Moses* provides a more thorough investigation of interracial politics than most of Faulkner's other works.

These facts outline a sharp contrast between *Go Down, Moses* and *Soldiers' Pay*. As one of the book's chief unifying themes, race is clearly a central focus of *Go Down, Moses*. The economic and historical background against which *Go Down, Moses* positions race relations and the amount of emphasis that it places on the circumstances of African-American social realities also allow the racial geography of the novel to accrue a remarkable level of detail, further underscoring the central position of race in *Go Down, Moses*. In contrast, the primary feature of the interracial interplay of *Soldiers' Pay* is its marginality. *Soldiers' Pay* affords comparatively little attention the socioeconomic position of African-Americans, and African-American characters and culture rarely enter into the narrative spotlight of the novel. The interracial dynamics of *Go Down, Moses* and *Soldiers' Pay* are thus inversions of each other. While *Soldiers' Pay* peripheralizes race and racial issues, *Go Down, Moses* situates race plainly at the heart of its plot and its themes.

Although *Go Down, Moses* is surely one of Faulkner's most racially-conscious novels, its preoccupation with race is almost certainly eclipsed by the level of focus that the topic receives in *Intruder in the Dust*, which revolves around open and explicit discussions of race more obviously than any other Faulkner novel. Although perhaps one of Faulkner's more minor novels, *Intruder in the Dust* may be the most openly racially-conscious and explicitly polemical of all of Faulkner's fictional works. Charles D. Peavy expresses a similar viewpoint in *Go Slow Now: Faulkner and the Race Question*, in which he claims that "*Intruder in the Dust* represents Faulkner's strongest statement in his fiction regarding the racial crisis in the South" and that "this novel is doubtlessly Faulkner's most important 'fictional' treatment of the Negro problem"

(50, 46). Indeed, *Intruder in the Dust* contains so many open discussions of racial issues that it seems at times to possess an almost expository tone; in Peavy's words, "*Intruder in the Dust* is both novel and tract" (46). The discussion in chapter seven on "the postulate that Sambo is a human being in a free country and hence must be free," for example, blurs the line between fiction and essay (Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* 151). At least in Peavy's view, "the novel suffers considerably from the polemics of the lawyer" (46). In other words, the expository character and sheer size of Gavin Stevens's preachy diatribes compromise the aesthetic integrity of the book. In this sense, racial issues play such a prominent role in *Intruder in the Dust* that they hijack the narrative of the novel.

Stevens is not the only prominent character in *Intruder in the Dust*, however. Lucas Beauchamp is also particularly memorable. In *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being*, Erskine Peters even designates Beauchamp as "the dominating presence in the story" (165). Indeed, *Intruder in the Dust* seems to pivot around Lucas's tale; the opening sentence of the book reveals that "the whole town (the whole country too for that matter) had known since the night before that Lucas had killed a white man," and its last line contains a quotation from Lucas revealing that he is expecting his "receipt" (Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* 3, 241). Lucas's centrality holds significant consequences for the overall presentation of race in *Intruder in the Dust*. By situating an African-American character at the heart of the novel, Faulkner strongly underscores the importance of racial difference and interracial dynamics in *Intruder in the Dust*. This emphasis, coupled with the scope and zeal of Gavin Stevens's ramblings, firmly establishes *Intruder in the Dust* as one of the most racially-conscious works in Faulkner's oeuvre.

In this sense, *Intruder in the Dust* is the exact foil of *Soldiers' Pay*. While *Soldiers' Pay* hides race and racial issues in the margins and shadows of its text, the treatment of race is barefaced almost to a fault in *Intruder in the Dust*. Race covertly, silently, and almost imperceptibly shapes and molds *Soldiers' Pay*, while in *Intruder in the Dust* open and straightforward discourses on racial matters and questions dominate. Because of the oblique operations and treatment of race and racial issues in *Soldiers' Pay*, racial matters remain nebulous. On the other hand, the straightforward and open approach to race in *Intruder in the Dust* features several resounding, immediately apparent, and comparatively sophisticated racial statements.

Not all of Faulkner's minor novels differ so radically from *Soldiers' Pay*, however. For example, neither *Flags in the Dust* nor *The Unvanquished* are quite as explicitly preoccupied with race as *Intruder in the Dust*. Neither of these books approach race in the same manner as *Soldiers' Pay*, however. Both *Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished* treat race and racial issues somewhat openly; neither novel submerges race and disguises interracial dynamics in the same manner as does *Soldiers' Pay*. When they do approach racial matters, both *Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished* consider them in a relatively nuanced and comparatively explicit manner.

For example, *Flags in the Dust* explores race and interracial dynamics much more openly than *Soldiers' Pay*. As Lothar Hönnighausen points out in "Black as White Metaphor: A European View of Faulkner's Fiction," "The groups of Negroes drawn in *Flags in the Dust* more concretely than in *Soldiers' Pay* authentically represent black Southern reality" (204). In other words, in *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner seems to be much more concerned with accurately

depicting African-Americans and African-American culture than in *Soldiers' Pay*. As a result, race and interracial dynamics occupy a more prominent position in *Flags in the Dust*.

A comparable gap separates *Soldiers' Pay* from *The Unvanquished*. Like *Flags in the Dust*, *The Unvanquished* emphasizes the racial realities of its setting more openly than *Soldiers' Pay*. For example, Bayard and Ringo's game in which Bayard "would be General Pemberton twice in succession and Ringo would be Grant, then I would have to be Grant once so Ringo could be Pemberton or he wouldn't play anymore" is obviously charged with a deep and powerful racial undercurrent (Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* 7). The scene that depicts "the tide of niggers dammed back from the entrance to the bridge by a detachment of cavalry" may be a metaphor for the history of race relations in America (Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* 104). Although these scenes do not dissolve into diatribes on the order of the polemics that dominate *Intruder in the Dust*, they do certainly afford interracial dynamics a far louder voice than *Soldiers' Pay* ever permits. Naked tirades are not the only method through which a novel can explore race; after all, as Charles D. Peavy discerns, "From a strictly literary standpoint, of course, it would have been an artistic failure to have Bayard launch into a discussion of Civil Rights amidst the recollections of his boyhood" (27). Although avoiding such rants, *The Unvanquished*, like *Flags in the Dust*, is still more openly concerned with racial issues than *Soldiers' Pay*. Both novels, unlike *Soldiers' Pay*, feature race prominently, approach racial issues openly, and appear to expend some effort in accurately depicting racial realities. In short, in contrast to *Soldiers' Pay*, both *The Unvanquished* and *Flags in the Dust* position race on their respective textual surfaces.

The same can be said of almost every Faulkner novel in which a sizable or otherwise prominent African-American presence exists. *Requiem for a Nun*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Light in August*, *Flags in the Dust*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Reivers*, *The Unvanquished*, and *Go Down, Moses*, for instance, all situate race, racial issues, and interracial dynamics at the forefront of their narratives. The treatment of race in these novels therefore differs consistently from the treatment of race in *Soldiers' Pay*.

Not all of Faulkner's novels feature casts with prominent African-American populations, however. These works present a different case. For example, neither *As I Lay Dying* nor the novels of the Snopes trilogy contain particularly visible African-American presences. At least partly as a result, these novels do not position race and interracial dynamics in the foreground of their narratives. This lack of racial diversity, however, does not mean that the operations of race in these works are identical or even similar to the mechanics of interracial relations in *Soldiers' Pay*. Unlike *As I Lay Dying*, *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, or *The Mansion*, a considerable number of the dramatis personae in *Soldiers' Pay* are in fact African-American. Consequently, unlike both *As I Lay Dying* and the volumes of the Snopes series, *Soldiers' Pay* is crucially ordered, constructed, and oriented by racial difference through the direct participation of present and visible African-American characters, even though those African-American characters do not occupy center stage in the plot of the novel. This dynamic is conspicuously absent from *As I Lay Dying*, *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, since these novels do not contain very many African-American characters.

Needless to say, African-American characters do not need to appear in a work of fiction for that work to have racial overtones. Indeed, some critics see *As I Lay Dying* and the novels of

the Snopes trilogy as even more thoroughly affected by race than the average Faulkner novel. For example, towards the end of *Games of Property*, Thadious M. Davis states that she understands “*As I Lay Dying*, *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion* as the most racialized of Faulkner’s work —those with no visible black presence at all” (255). For Davis, this opinion stems from her conception of Faulkner’s depiction of “what Melville represented as ‘the whiteness of whiteness’” as his most accomplished “achievement” in discussing “issues of race, racialization, racial constructions, and racial division” (*Games of Property* 254). Therefore, these novels do orbit partly around race.

This fact does not qualify the racial geographies of either *As I Lay Dying* or the Snopes novels to be equated with the interracial dynamics of *Soldiers’ Pay*, however. Although racial forces may impact these works in an oblique manner, these influences do not project themselves through African-American presences. In contrast, the impact of racial difference on *Soldiers’ Pay* derives largely from a covert but relatively systematic interplay of contrast and insinuation between the white and comparatively mute African-American populations of the novel. Almost nothing could be further from the racial landscapes of *As I Lay Dying*, *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, in which African-American characters are almost nonexistent; indeed, the operations of race in these novels depend on the racial homogeneity that characterizes them. As a result, the extensive interracial interchanges that define *Soldiers’ Pay* are all but absent from *As I Lay Dying* and the novels of the Snopes trilogy. These books simply do not contain enough African-American presences to facilitate the type of subtle interracial interplay that characterizes Faulkner’s first novel. The treatment of race in *Soldiers’ Pay* therefore differs substantially from both that of Faulkner’s novels which do not feature substantial African-American presences as well as those that do.

Conclusion

The treatment of race in *Soldiers' Pay* diverges substantially from that of nearly every other work in Faulkner's catalogue. Most conspicuously, the presentation of race in *Soldiers' Pay* differs radically from the typical approaches to race in Faulkner's novels that feature considerable African-American presences. These books, including *The Sound and the Fury*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Unvanquished*, *Go Down, Moses*, and others, all feature interracial dynamics that invert the general modality of the racial topography of Faulkner's first novel. Although, like *Soldiers' Pay*, each one of these novels revolves at least partially around interracial dynamics, these books also tend to treat race and racial matters openly, thoroughly, and with some attention to detail. Race and racial issues explicitly act as central concerns of these novels and often also provide a substantial and readily apparent percentage of the momentum in their plots. As a result, unlike *Soldiers' Pay*, each of these works plainly situates race and interracial dynamics on their textual surfaces.

On the other hand, the approaches to race in *Soldiers' Pay* are also profoundly dissimilar to the racial geographies that dominate Faulkner's novels which do not feature large African-American populations. While these books, such as *As I Lay Dying*, *The Mansion*, *The Town*, and *The Hamlet*, approach race and racial matters in an indirect manner, they do not contain prominent African-American presences. The influence of race on these novels therefore does not work through the direct participation of African-American characters. Instead, race molds these books largely through the construction of whiteness in the absence of African-Americans. Naturally, the internal racial dynamics of *Soldiers' Pay* do not function in this manner. Rather, racial difference structures *Soldiers' Pay* through a nebulous but extensive network of interactions between the white and African-American populations of the novel.

At first glance, the African-American constituents of *Soldiers' Pay* appear to add little to the development of the plot and themes of the novel. Although African-American characters populate numerous scenes, much of the literary substance of *Soldiers' Pay* seems to derive entirely from interactions between white characters. Claude's insistence that the soldiers "can't drink in this car," for example, does not seem to be at all related to the presentation of liberty and postwar disillusionment in the opening scene (20). The "negro cornetist" seems to be wholly detached from the thematic significance of the passage in which he appears (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 188). Jones's discussion of "anarchism" and "the sovereign people" does not appear to concern the African-American neighbors of the speaker at all (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 59). "Othello" does not seem to add much to Margaret and Gilligan's conversation (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 103). Mrs. Saunders's grievances regarding Tobe's apparent inability or unwillingness "to answer the 'phone" appear to be completely unrelated to the thematic implications of the discussion that they precede (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 134).

Racial unilaterality, however, especially in American literature, is often merely skin-deep. As Toni Morrison points out, "Even, and especially, when American texts are not 'about' Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication" (46-47). In Morrison's words, "Through significant and underscored omissions," "the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence," and "heavily nuanced conflicts," the fact that "a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness" is not difficult to discern (6). As a result, "the major and championed characteristics of our national literature," including "individualism, masculinity," and "the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell" may in fact be understood as

“responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence” (Morrison 5). According to Morrison, even texts that do not seem to be explicitly concerned with racial issues may rely crucially on submerged African-American presences.

In precisely this manner, the interracial dynamics of *Soldiers' Pay* are much more complicated and far more important than they initially appear. Despite the overall muted, marginalized, and subjugated spaces that they tend to occupy, the African-American constituents of *Soldiers' Pay* serve an indispensable role in the novel. Through implication, contrast, and antithesis, the African-American presences of *Soldiers' Pay* perform an obscured but essential role in orienting, heightening, structuring, cohering, and clarifying the thematic framework of the novel. Their existence is crucial to the development of the themes of masculinity, freedom, postwar disillusionment, personal assertion, identity, and intersexual relations.

The role and significance of the African-American population of *Soldiers' Pay* is evident throughout the novel. Claude's insistence that “we don't have no drinking in this car,” for instance, heightens the thematically laden struggles that simultaneously surround and exclude him (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 20). Without the marginalized work of the “negro cornetist,” neither the dancing scene nor its explorations of autonomy, sexuality, identity, and innocence would be possible (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 188). Jones's bizarre tirade pivots around his understanding of his personal superiority to his “more primitive contemporaries” (Faulkner, *Soldier' Pay* 60). “Othello” provides an antithetical balance that heightens and coheres Margaret and Gilligan's discussion (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 103). Mrs. Saunders's mention of how “it keeps Tobe forever stopping whatever he is doing to answer the 'phone” orients and structures the explorations of identity and freedom that follow it (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 134). In this way,

interracial dynamics play a key role in formulating *Soldiers' Pay*, despite the fact that, for much of the book, African-American presences exclusively occupy marginal and submerged spaces.

Further, not only do race and racial issues perform an immensely significant function in *Soldiers' Pay*, but that function is also unique among Faulkner's other works. Like *As I Lay Dying*, *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, *Soldiers' Pay* revolves around race and racial matters in an indirect and obscured manner. Unlike *As I Lay Dying* and the novels of the Snopes series, however, *Soldiers' Pay* relies on interactions between a white cast and a large, discernable, and fairly ubiquitous African-American population. The racial geography of *Soldiers' Pay* consequently differs radically from that of the Snopes novels and *As I Lay Dying*. This difference may align *Soldiers' Pay* with the collection of Faulkner's novels that contain substantial African-American populations, such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Go Down, Moses*, and *The Unvanquished*. In contrast, however, these books tend to approach race and racial matters openly and thoroughly. The same cannot be said for *Soldiers' Pay*, which marginalizes racial issues and confines its internal interracial dynamics to its periphery. Race therefore serves both an important and an idiosyncratic function in *Soldiers' Pay*.

The implications of this peculiarity are sweeping. Perhaps most obviously, this singularity demonstrates that Faulkner's fictional approaches to race changed dramatically in the earlier days of his career. Because of the disparity between his treatment of race in *Soldiers' Pay* and the workings of race in his subsequent novels, Faulkner's modus operandi in presenting race must have undergone a deep metamorphosis after the composition of *Soldiers' Pay*. This point may help to illuminate Faulkner's development as both a commentator on American race relations and as a writer in general, especially during the first years of his work as a writer.

The variation between the treatment of race in *Soldiers' Pay* and the operations of race in Faulkner's later books further show how the writer's understanding of and fictional approaches to race and race relations deepened and matured over time. Nearly every one of Faulkner's books that follows *Soldiers' Pay* treats race in a more nuanced and sophisticated manner than the author's first novel; *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Go Down, Moses*, and *Light in August* are particularly noteworthy examples. The author's views therefore apparently clarified, deepened, and became more enlightened after he wrote *Soldiers' Pay*. The relative lack of cultivation in *Soldiers' Pay* consequently implies a trajectory in Faulkner's career over which the author grew more adroit in depicting and criticizing American race relations. This trend sheds light on the progression of Faulkner's career as an observer of racial issues and a composer of literary writing.

Critics have noted a similar growth in the earlier portions of Faulkner's career. For example, in "Faulkner's Negroes Twain," Blyden Jackson claims that "the Negroes in Faulkner's fiction undergo a change" (60). For Jackson, "In Faulkner there are two fictive Negroes, the Negro before Yoknapatawpha and the Negro" that emerged "after Yoknapatawpha preempted Faulkner's art" (62). In Jackson's view, African-American characters in Faulkner's pre-Yoknapatawpha novels "are only faintly background figures" (60). In Blyden Jackson's words, These characters amount mostly to "hasty expedients jerry-built out of borrowings from people other than Faulkner" and "stereotypes, and rather racist stereotypes at that" (60). In Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels, however, according to Blyden Jackson, African-Americans "differ in color, size, age, disposition, mental ability, and moral character" and "suggest that, like the whites with whom they mingle, they are, at least, not stereotypes" (Jackson 62). By this

reasoning, the gulf between the interracial dynamics of *Soldiers' Pay* and the racial geographies of most of Faulkner's later novels is mostly a disparity in clarity. According to Jackson, *Soldiers' Pay*, as a pre-Yoknapatawpha novel, does not feature African-American characters endowed with the same levels of lucidity and believability that characterize the African-American constituents of Faulkner's later Yoknapatawpha works. In Jackson's view, the singularity of the approach to race in Faulkner's first novel is therefore a result of the shapelessness of its African-American characters.

This logic only tells part of the story, however. Amorphous African-American characters are not the only characteristic that distinguishes the racial landscape of *Soldiers' Pay*. Rather, the racial geography of *Soldiers' Pay* features an obscured but complex labyrinth of interracial interplay, contrast, and insinuation marked by a level of structural significance that is conspicuously absent from Faulkner's other works. While antithesis and indirect implication may certainly be present elsewhere in Faulkner's catalogue, they do not define Faulkner's other novels to the same level that they define *Soldiers' Pay*. Therefore, the African-American characters of *Soldiers' Pay* differ from those of Faulkner's other novels not only in their hazy nature but also in the character and significance of their overall structural functions.

The increase of Faulkner's interest in African-Americans that seems to have followed the transition of his fiction into Yoknapatawpha therefore cannot fully explain the gap between the treatment of race in *Soldiers' Pay* and the operations of race in his later novels. Faulkner did not suddenly become aware of the existence of African-Americans when he began to set his work in Yoknapatawpha; the sheer prevalence of African-Americans in *Soldiers' Pay* belies this assumption. Rather, over time Faulkner must have changed the overall ways in which African-

Americans figured into his works. After *Soldiers' Pay*, African-Americans began to inhabit an entirely different space in Faulkner's fiction; specifically, race and interracial dynamics started to move towards the center of his narratives. The idiosyncrasy with which race functions in *Soldiers' Pay* therefore shows that Faulkner's approach to presenting race and racial issues underwent a significant revision after the completion of his first novel.

The reasons for this change are unclear. Many factors could have prompted Faulkner to shift the position of race in his fiction. Perhaps some event in the public sphere brought the importance of race relations to his attention. Perhaps an episode in his personal life convinced him of the relevance of racial issues to his work. More likely, however, Faulkner simply matured, both as a person and an author. The gulf that separates *Soldiers' Pay* from Faulkner's subsequent novels may therefore represent the gap between immaturity and sophistication; the simple and uninvolved approach to interracial dynamics and the overall lack of attention paid to race in *Soldiers' Pay* certainly both seem to suggest a general lack of development, if not simply a focus elsewhere. While Faulkner grew as a person, he almost undoubtedly became more aware both of the significance and the complexities of race and interracial dynamics in his personal environment. Accordingly, as Faulkner progressed as a writer, he predictably became more adept in presenting the nuances of race and racial matters. Therefore, the shift in the role of race between *Soldiers' Pay* and Faulkner's later work is most likely attributable to Faulkner's overall artistic and personal growth.

Perhaps more importantly, an understanding of the idiosyncratic approach to race in *Soldiers' Pay* may provide a more balanced framework for interpreting the place of racial topics in Faulkner's work. Because of the amount of attention that William Faulkner often devotes to

racial topics, he may sometimes appear to be a completely progressive champion of reformist racial politics. The temptation to presume that his work is innocent of the less laudable interracial dynamics described in Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* can therefore be difficult to resist; after all, the comparatively enlightened liberal parables of *Light in August* are a much more exciting accomplishment to ascribe to an author than the oblique dynamics generated when an African-American "shadow hovers in implication" (Morrison 47). *Soldiers' Pay*, however, is replete with what Morrison calls "responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5). The assumption that Faulkner's novels are free from the sort of workings of race outlined in *Playing in the Dark* is therefore an illusion.

Significantly, however, the racial topography of *Soldiers' Pay* is highly unusual. Most of Faulkner's novels feature far more direct and praiseworthy approaches to racial issues and therefore are comparatively clear of the interracial structures that Morrison's book describes. Consequently, an apprehension of the presentation of race in *Soldiers' Pay* is not enough to overturn any broad conceptions of Faulkner's work. The racial landscape of *Soldiers' Pay* is too unusual to support any generalizations regarding the remainder of Faulkner's catalogue. As a result, the fact that more covert treatments of race may be present in *Soldiers' Pay* does not imply that such less admirable approaches to racial issues define or are even present in Faulkner's other novels. Rather, an understanding of the singularity of *Soldiers' Pay* simply enhances and clarifies what is already understood about Faulkner's fictional treatments of race and problematizes some hasty and rather naïve assumptions. An awareness of the approach to race in *Soldiers' Pay* and its singularity may therefore help to provide a more balanced understanding of Faulkner's work as a whole.

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