

Weapons of Male Destruction: Traumatized Masculinity and the
Instrumentation of Violence in Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and *Light in
August*

by
Kristina C. Graham

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies at
The University of Manitoba
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the disturbed and disturbing male characters in Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and *Light in August*, particularly Popeye and Joe Christmas. Published just one year apart, the two novels both explore constructions of white masculinity and the trauma that not only leads to but also follows in the wake of overtly ritualized performances of maleness. This thesis engages in an in-depth analysis of all of the male characters in both novels, who share a figurative, sometimes even literal, impotence that can be paradoxically attributed to theories of neurosis, anxiety and trauma.

Using Freud as a springboard, this thesis proposes that the instrumentation of violence in these novels is the traumatized male's response to the culture which has caused the trauma. Ultimately, this thesis provides a significant context for reading Joe Christmas and Popeye's violent traits as traumatized responses to the definitions and impositions of masculinity produced by a culture that valorizes assertions of aggressive power in men.

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Introduction

“In large part, it’s other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other.”

~ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*

At first glance, the writing style, themes and plotlines of William Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* (1931) and *Light in August* (1932) appear to have little in common. Yet, the central male characters, Popeye and Joe Christmas, are both born on Christmas day, both are abandoned by paternal figures, and both have complicated and violent relationships with women and with society as a whole – all of which ultimately contribute to their destruction. While a few scholars have acknowledged these similarities, none has engaged in an extended interpretation of these two male figures¹. Although *Sanctuary*’s Popeye is a flatter, more two-dimensional character than *Light in August*’s Joe, the characterization of both men revolves around precisely the same issue: that is, that violent masculinity is born out of anguish and rage. Published just one year apart, the two novels both explore constructions of white masculinity and the trauma that not only leads to but also follows in the wake of overtly ritualized performances of maleness.

In this thesis, I focus on the disturbed and disturbing male characters in *Sanctuary* and *Light in August*, particularly on Popeye and Joe Christmas, who both occur at the center of texts burgeoning with figures of male trauma and hostility. The overabundance of both aggressive and passive males that appear throughout both stories proves, as Robert Dale Parker notes, that “Faulkner feels queasier about the burdens on masculinity than about the more concretely threatening burdens on women [. . .] for men, he imagines sex and gender through a more frankly puzzled uneasiness about the broader possibilities

for masculinity” (74). In light of this observation, I address this “uneasiness” head on, analyzing the hyper-violent males within the novels and comparing them to other male characters whose trauma has resulted in equally disturbing yet opposite reactions. What I contend is that, as impotent figures of trauma, the men of Faulkner’s Jefferson are caught in an encircling vortex of shame and hostility – a force which they cannot escape from and which ultimately demands their complete surrender.

My thesis examines the trauma revolving around the construction of such complicated gender identities and considers traumatic moments as Freud defines them in, for instance, *Anxiety and Instinctual Life (Lecture XXXII)*. In this particular lecture, Freud states:

If we take in succession neurotic anxiety, realistic anxiety and the situation of danger, we arrive at this simple proposition: what is feared, what is the object of the anxiety, is invariably the emergence of a traumatic moment, which cannot be dealt with by the normal rules of the pleasure principle. (782)

This assertion paraphrases many of the claims Freud makes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a work in which he also notes that “loss of love and failure leave behind them a permanent injury to self-regard in the form of a narcissistic scar, which [...] contributes more than anything to the ‘sense of inferiority’ which is so common in neurotics” (603). In light of Freud’s observations, Faulkner’s Joe Christmas and Popeye can be read as traumatized males, born violently in to the world, destined to be just as violently removed. In fact, all of the male characters in *Sanctuary* and *Light in August* share a figurative, sometimes even literal, impotence that can be attributed to their neuroses, anxiety and trauma.

Furthermore, the masculine performances in both novels highlight the differing relationships with material objects that distinctly set one man apart from another, a disparity most evident in *Sanctuary*. Indeed, in Yoknapatawpha it is not a given that “the pen is mightier than the sword,” for Faulkner repeatedly mirrors passive men of learning with aggressive men of action; while some male characters use books as defensive shields, others use guns and razors. Ultimately, both books and guns are exposed by Faulkner as props that are utilized by the men of Jefferson to enhance their performative masculinity. Trapped by the expectations of Jefferson society, the male characters are not able to define themselves as individuals. Instead, the men are classified by their ability, or more often their inability, to enact and enforce their appropriate, socially prescribed gender identities.

As a result of these limitations, both the passive and aggressive male characters desperately employ gestures and props, using defensive shields and more overt offensive weapons in frantic attempts to mask their inadequacies. For example, *Sanctuary*’s lawyer, Horace Benbow, and *Light in August*’s former reverend, Gail Hightower, are identified as educated, book-learned men. However, this distinction protects neither man from Jefferson’s harsh, social edicts, as both are effeminized and relegated to positions of helpless observers. Characters like Popeye and Joe, on the other hand, are identified as violent, hostile men. Constantly spitting and smoking, these men seem to be polar opposites of their passive counterparts and are deemed potent, strong and threatening, traits for which they are also ultimately destroyed.

Throughout both novels, all of the male characters struggle to firmly establish their masculinity, attempting to manipulate the other males’ perceptions of them through

their various performances. In the end, Jefferson society's tolerance and acceptance of certain performances over others depends upon whether or not a character's facade is perceived as powerful and threatening or, on the other hand, gentle and not potent enough. In fact, the more ambiguous, middle-of-the-road males actually manage to negotiate their unimpressive mediocrity, deriving status and power through opportunistic transgressions rather than through an educated or physical superiority. For example, in *Sanctuary*, Faulkner presents readers with the character of Gowan Stevens, who is neither a brilliant scholar, though he attends university, nor a strong, valiant protector, though he drunkenly tries to assert himself as such. Faulkner also depicts the licentious Senator Snopes and the physically disabled District Attorney, Eustace Graham, two men who use their social acceptance to fuel their political ambition, which in turn further establishes their social standing. Allowed to compensate for physical and mental inadequacies, these men are not particularly intimidating or potent, but their position and acceptance within Jefferson society tips the scales of power directly in their favor.

Similarly, in *Light in August*, Faulkner offers characters such as Lucas Birch, a man who is potent enough to impregnate Lena Grove, but who cannot assume responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Like Gowan Stevens, he is somewhat of the town buffoon, believing himself to be clever and discreet when in reality the entire town sees right through his performance. In actuality, it is his very transparency that renders him non-threatening, and though the people he comes in contact with are often wary of him, none is fearful of him or his masculine posturing. Faulkner also portrays the likes of Percy Grimm, the uniform-obsessed military reject with a major inferiority complex that results in his morally superior performance and, ultimately, his vigilante

execution of Joe Christmas. Described as physically small and unsuccessful in school, his social acceptance stems from the power, respect and status to which, Grimm believes, his uniform entitles him. In the end, the town is duped, not by the uniform itself but by his own unwavering conviction in the power of his iconographic dress.

Taking all of these masculine performances into account, I explore the two male protagonists in each novel and discuss how their posturing and gestures are presented, like that of the other males, by men for men. In chapter one, I focus on *Sanctuary*, examining Popeye's gender construction in relation to those of the other males of Jefferson and demonstrating how compensation for his self-perceived inadequacies manifests in his violence towards animals and women. Traumatized beyond repair, Popeye's mechanized existence is inevitably snuffed out, though not until after he leaves his own stamp of violence and trauma on the town of Jefferson. In chapter two on *Light in August*, I further explore Faulkner's male characters' distinctive compositions, especially focusing on their various responses to their sustained traumas. Investigating the characters' impulsive and animalistic "fight-or-flight" reactions², I determine that Joe's trauma becomes such a powerfully encircling force that he is unable to continue to flee or fight. In the end, his decision to "freeze" is a final, futile attempt at survival, one which is rejected by the town of Jefferson and which results in his brutal and gory execution.

In this second chapter, I also address the most notable difference between the two novels, which is Faulkner's depiction of more fully developed female characters and their unsettling, ambiguous gender constructs. The masculine-femininity of Joanna Burden and Bobbie Allen contrasts sharply with *Sanctuary*'s overly feminized Temple Drake and

the failed mother-nurturer, Ruby Lamar. In *Light in August*, Faulkner once again incorporates a disturbing sexual confrontation, however in this novel, Joe Christmas's exchange with Joanna Burden is not as clearly defined as Popeye's violent rape of Temple Drake – a fact that even critics find discomfiting. However, unlike *Sanctuary*, *Light in August* offers readers hope in the figure of Lena Grove, a character able to negotiate both the feminine and masculine realms due to her purposeful refusal to be conveniently labeled and confined to the stereotype of the forsaken, unmarried, pregnant girl. Content with her fluid, unfixed self-identity, Lena is the only character in either novel that is not caught up in her trauma and does not allow her traumatic experiences to limit and define her. As such, she is forced to neither fight nor flee and moseys from state to state and town to town in a calm, unrushed manner that signifies her guaranteed survival. In the end, she is the salvation for Byron Bunch and not the other way around, a fact that he is aware of though his awareness doesn't stop him from fantasizing, like Horace Benbow, of being her hero and savior.

In examining Faulkner's repetitive themes and his construction of gender in both novels, my thesis provides a significant context for reading Joe Christmas and Popeye's violent traits as traumatized responses to the definitions and impositions of masculinity produced by a culture that valorizes assertions of aggressive power in men and yet rejects overly feminized constructions as well. As such, Jefferson society demands the destruction of figures such as Popeye, Joe and even the bootlegger, Lee Goodwin, while also relegating figures such as Benbow and Hightower to impotent positions of helpless observers.

Notes

¹ Critics such as Olga Vickery and T.H. Adamowski do mention in passing the notable parallels between Popeye and Joe Christmas, though none to my knowledge has recently compared these two protagonists. See Vickery's The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (1959) and Adamowski's "Faulkner's Popeye: The 'Other' As Self" (1977).

² Terms Walter Cannon defines as both fright responses and human survival instincts in Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage (1927).

Lacking a Sanctuary Within, Seeking a Temple Without: Masculinity and the Externalization of Self-Hatred in *Sanctuary*

“We all think we have reason to reproach Nature and our destiny for congenital and infantile disadvantages; we all demand reparation for early wounds to our narcissism, our self-love.”

~ Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Exceptions’”

All critics of *Sanctuary* agree that the novel, filled with excessive alcohol consumption, repetitive rape and cold, calculated murder, is one of Faulkner’s most morbid, grotesque and unsettling tales. However, because of its extreme violence and lack of a venerable hero (let alone any wholly sympathetic character), critics have continually disagreed over which character is the focus of the novel. Surprisingly, most scholars argue that *Sanctuary* is a tale solely about the rape and victimization of Temple Drake. In fact, a few years after its 1931 publication it was made into a movie entitled *The Story of Temple Drake*. In the introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Sanctuary*, J. Douglas Canfield contends that the many major revisions Faulkner made to the novel deemphasize the story of the lawyer, Horace Benbow, in order to emphasize that of Temple (4). Oddly, Canfield proceeds to view “the senseless evil” of Temple’s rapist, Popeye, as a type of side story and is apparently baffled by Faulkner’s inclusion of the final chapter which deals with Popeye’s childhood. Canfield ultimately concludes that the chapter is simply “an anecdotal parody of a typically modern, sociopsychological, environmental explanation” designed to prevent readers from “reducing Popeye to an allegorical symbol” (7). What Canfield fails to notice is that

Faulkner's restructuring of the novel creates a significant frame in which to view Temple's rape and Benbow's own problematic relations with women.

The story begins, not with Horace Benbow at the spring as Canfield notes, but with Popeye watching Horace as he bends over to drink. From the start, the lawyer is clearly paralleled with the creepy, little gangster dressed all in black. Just before he notices he is being watched, Horace briefly bends over his own "broken and myriad reflection" (4), only to find it replaced with Popeye's when he looks up. Here on the sandy bank, the two men squat "facing one another across the spring [...] for two hours," their bodies mirroring each other, foreshadowing more similarities to come (5). As Lawrence S. Kubie notes, Popeye's literal impotence is comparable to Benbow's own struggle with his powerlessness (28). The lawyer confesses his weakness, stating, "I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it won't run" (17). Contrary to Horace, who is apparently broken despite having all the right parts, Popeye's machinery is lacking and yet he looks, moves and speaks with a mechanical precision¹, performing "with a certain vicious petulance" an absence of fear – a false, pseudo-courage (137).

Both men are described as physically unattractive: the gangster, exceedingly small in stature with a "faintly aquiline" nose (5), and the lawyer, "a thin man in shapeless clothes" with "a head of thinning and ill-kempt hair" (16). However, unlike the self-proclaimed pusillanimous Benbow, Popeye compensates for his diminutive physique through repetitive, overtly masculine gestures, constantly spitting, smoking and cursing at everyone. His ultimate deterrent of ridicule is a gun, used as a means of generating the respect his physical inadequacies prevent him from socially attaining. Similarly, Horace

uses his education as a means of determining worth; books and learning are the lawyer's currency, his means of establishing credibility and value in society. Popeye assumes the bulge in Horace's pocket is a gun, as there is one under his own arm, but the lawyer replies that it is "just a book. The kind that people read," adding, "Some people do" as an intentional, exclusionary afterthought (5).

When Popeye arrives at the Old Frenchman place, he introduces Horace as a "professor" because "he's got a book with him" (9). When asked why Horace has come with him Popeye replies, "I don't know. I never thought to ask. Maybe to read the book." (9). Just before he assaults and kidnaps Temple, Popeye decides to quit the Old Frenchman place, once again noting Benbow's peculiar relationship to books, he declares, "Goofy House. [. . .] That's what it is. It's not four days ago I find a bastard squatting here, asking me if I read books. Like he would jump me with a book or something. Take me for a ride with a telephone directory" (96). The gangster's account of running into Horace varies greatly from that of the lawyer, who believes he is forced to follow Popeye to the bootlegger's house. Notably, both men are intimidated by the other's performance of power; Horace feels the threat of Popeye's pistol whereas the gangster is baffled by the lawyer's use of literacy as a shield – his futile attempt to make literal the notion that "the pen is mightier than the sword." An undeniable conflict arises between their respective attempts to perform a valid masculinity, and without a common currency both men are left confused by and vulnerable to their own sense of deficiency. Because they live in distinctly different spheres, Popeye and Horace subscribe to two different modes of societal acceptability – one repeatedly rebukes socially established formal laws and informal notions of propriety, while the other struggles to accept his

limited role within those very laws and notions. These contradictory coping mechanisms are both actually very similar symptomatic responses to an overwhelming fear of inadequacy brought on by a traumatic loss.

In his “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud discusses the shared traits between what he calls “melancholia” and the human process of mourning. The main difference between the two, according to Freud, is that in cases of mourning, such as the death of a loved one, an obsessive state of depression is brought on by self-blame – a sense of responsibility for the loss of the loved object that is eventually reconciled by the individual and thus results in closure. However, in melancholia, “the occasions which give rise to the illness extend [. . .] beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence” (588). Unlike mourning, melancholia “behaves like an open wound” (589), which makes it difficult for those afflicted to heal and thus gain any semblance of closure. Arguably, the gangster and the lawyer both suffer from unhealed wounds, an overwhelming sense of loss as the result of trauma – they blame themselves for their inadequacies, are traumatized by the shame that ensues and are ultimately defeated by their own notions of unattainable masculine ideals.

Popeye’s violent nature, when read in light of Freud, can be seen as a result of his emotional disorder: “The melancholic’s erotic [desire] in regard to his object has thus undergone a double vicissitude: part of it has regressed to identification, but the other part, under the influence of the conflict due to ambivalence, has been carried back to the stage of sadism which is nearer to that conflict” (588). In the chapter regarding his

childhood, the reader learns that Popeye is the product of all of Freud's noted triggers: death, neglect and disappointment. Popeye suffers the death of his grandmother (consumed by a fire her paranoia incites her to set); the neglect of his absent father compounded with the abandonment of a subsequent step-father; and the disappointment of a mother, who "with the hard work, and the lack of fresh air, diversion, and the disease, the legacy which her brief husband had left her [. . .] was not in any condition to stand shock," and thus often believed that Popeye had also perished in the fire his grandmother set (308). His traumatic childhood is further disturbed by the physical scars branded permanently on his body, externally and internally, as a result of his syphilitic birth – another one of his father's so-called legacies.

Born a eunuch, Popeye is apparently slow to learn to walk and talk and does not grow any hair until the age of five. Furthermore, he has a weak stomach that cannot tolerate any deviance from a strict, prescribed diet, preventing the consumption of alcohol. From birth, Popeye is unable to engage in the established mores of masculinity – he can neither brag of his sexual prowess nor of his great physical strength, and he can't even boast of his adept drinking skills. His medical diagnosis sums it up, as the doctor proclaims, "he will never be a man, properly speaking. With care, he will live some time longer. But he will never be any older than he is now" (308). As a representative of Jefferson society, the doctor establishes that maturity and manhood are apparently not determined by age but by physical and sexual capability. Soon after his grim clinical assessment, the five year-old Popeye murders two love-birds, mutilating them with scissors and leaving them to die. His repetition of the cruel act three months later on a small kitten establishes that even at a young age violence becomes his expression of

selfhood and he preys on things smaller and weaker than he (309). In a sense, the innocent, defenseless victims of Popeye's violent actions are merely stand-ins, used as an obverse means of self-torment and self-assertion, for as Freud puts it: "If the love for [an] object – a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up – takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (588). Popeye perceives himself to be weak and inferior, and his self-loathing transfers onto those he also determines to be substandard. Consequently, the animals and women (such as Temple) become substitutes, fillers for the open emotional wounds left by his tormented childhood. In torturing his lesser victims, he is able to symbolically punish those responsible for directly injuring him and the emotional trauma he sustains is thus physically reenacted and transferred onto his innocuous prey.

Like Popeye, Horace also uses substitutive projection as a means of gaining emotional levity. However, unlike the gangster, he does not resort to violence, but rather seeks to punish himself by choosing to feel emotionally responsible for the wrongs done to women, especially those on the outskirts of social acceptability. Horace's apparent need to rescue women, including his obsessive, incestuous desire for the sexual purity of his step-daughter, is his own feeble attempt to reinstate the manhood that has been figuratively stripped of him by the domineering women who have raised him.

Traumatized by his childhood emasculation, Horace seeks rectification through his future relations with women. Once grown, he marries a divorcee with a young daughter from a previous marriage, his first attempt to fulfill the knight-in-shining-armor fantasy and salvage her and her daughter from an unfortunate social situation. However noble his

intentions, Horace fails to establish himself as the heroic savior. Furthermore, his belief that the sanctity of marriage will somehow act as a salve for his wounded masculinity proves to be unfounded. He dejectedly proclaims, ““When you marry your own wife, you start off from scratch. . . . maybe scratching. When you marry somebody else’s wife, you start off maybe ten years behind, from somebody else’s scratch and scratching”” (16). Rather than accept that his fantasy of becoming the heroic savior is flawed, Horace maintains the role of the wounded male victim, finding fault with his unfortunate circumstance and blaming his problems on the man who married Belle before him rather than his own inability to assert himself.

He finds himself in a similar situation when he comes across Ruby Lamar, an ex-prostitute and the common-law wife of Lee Goodwin, the bootlegger. Once again, he is overwhelmed by a desire to help, protect and save a female in distress. Ironically, Ruby perceives him to be someone who needs taking care of, not someone capable of being the strong male protector he so desperately wants to be. Her initial assessment of him is based upon hearing “the voice of a man given to much talk and not much else,” and she mutters to herself, ““He better get on to where he’s going, where his women folks can take care of him”” (13). In a sense, Horace’s desire to fulfill the superman role is not thwarted by the women he seeks to rescue, but by his own inability to recognize that they are beyond the need for rescue and have adapted and survived where he has failed to adjust to and accept the horror of their reality. He refuses to seriously consider that the women in the novel are stronger and more resilient than he, which explains why he fails to really acknowledge that he can’t seem to exist without a female present in his life. At one point he notes,

‘I hadn’t intended to stay here, anyway. It wasn’t Narcissa I was running to. I haven’t quit one woman to run to the skirts of another.’

‘If you keep on telling yourself that you may believe it, someday, [. . .] Then what’ll you do?’

‘You’re right,’ Benbow said, ‘Then I’d have to stay at home.’ (107)

Horace’s inability to recognize the women’s autonomy and ability to survive without male guidance and protection blinds him to the fact that he is in more need of a savior than any of the females he believes need rescuing. His frustration with women culminates in the false testimony of Temple Drake, who identifies Lee Goodwin as her assailant and the murderer of her feeble protector, Tommy. In the end, rather than being rewarded for his charitable notions, Horace yet again proves to be an inept savior. He fails to save Ruby’s husband and barely escapes his own lynching. Defeated by the shock of Goodwin’s brutal death, Horace eventually returns home to his wife, dejected and relegated back to the position of the impotent observer.

Horace’s ineffective relationships with women clearly stem from his undermined position within his own family and, as Lawrence Kubie asserts, “He is unable to defy the women who cramp him on all sides” (28). As Faulkner demonstrates, this is attributable to Horace’s own desire to live up to mythical Southern notions of chivalrous masculinity and Southern conceptions of demure, genteel feminine graces. Despite being older and male, a constant power struggle emerges between Horace and his obdurate sister, Narcissa. Although she is aware of the social expectations of a Southern lady, Narcissa successfully separates her public image from her private undertakings. Consumed with outward appearances and social standing, she is exceptionally critical of her brother and

his life choices, especially because they are exposed to public condemnation. As Olga Vickery points out, where Horace lacks the capacity for action, his sister proves more than capable:

Narcissa is coolly indifferent to the methods she uses as long as they succeed in bringing her brother, who refuses to conform to Jefferson's preconceptions and prejudgments, back into the fold. [...] She attempts to frighten him with public opinion, shame him by an appeal to the Benbow past and tradition, bribe him with an offer of a better criminal lawyer than he is for Goodwin's defense, and when all these fail to disillusion him about Ruby's motives and her needs. [...] Horace, of course, refuses to be swayed; but while he is savoring his indignation and exploring the possibilities of action, Narcissa acts expediently and effectively to thwart justice with law and to return a humbled Horace to Belle. (132)

Further calling Horace's inabilities into question is Narcissa's deceased husband's great aunt, Miss Jenny, who also proves to be an opinionated woman capable of social survival and endurance. Upon learning of his decision to leave Belle, Miss Jenny chides, "It took you a long time to learn that, if a woman dont make a very good wife for one man, she aint likely to for another" (108). Though both women frequently interrupt him with condescending, dismissive statements, they are attempting to shelter Horace from his embarrassing, misdirected public displays of gallantry. When he offers to shelter Ruby in his parents' old house, both Narcissa and Miss Jenny disapprovingly weigh in:

"I dont want to think about her. I wish I had never heard of the whole thing.

To think that my brother – Dont you see that you are always having to clean up

after yourself? It's not that there's litter left; it's that you – that – But to bring a street-walker, a murderess, into the house where I was born.'

'Fiddlesticks,' Miss Jenny said. 'But, Horace, aint that what the lawyers call collusion? connivance?' Horace looked at her. 'It seems to me you've already had a little more to do with these folks than the lawyer in the case should have. You were out there where it happened yourself not long ago. Folks might begin to think you know more than you've told.' (118-9)

Although he appears to initially rebuff Miss Jenny's input, Horace ultimately opts to move Ruby and her sick infant to the Jefferson hotel, claiming, "'It's merely a matter of legal precaution, [. . .] Better to put everybody to a little temporary discomfort than to jeopardize our case'" (121). In the end, his attempts at chivalry are once again made impotent by the society that surrounds and debases him.

Paula Pinto Elyseu Mesquita attributes Horace's romantic notions of masculinity to his "aristocratic background and his father, Judge Benbow, a model of masculinity which is totally identified with the concept of order and authority" (161). Unable to engage in stereotypically negative male behaviors due to an antithetical sense of moral obligation and an adherence to stereotypically "heroic" male gestures, Horace is constantly mortified by the expectations different members of society place on him. He tries to avoid Senator Snopes and his repeated offers to take Horace "whoring" in Memphis, paradoxically clinging to unrealistic notions of female sexuality and the onus of feminine purity, while trying to suppress his own sexual longings. As Mesquita notes, "The image of an uninhibited female sexuality horrifies him," so much so that Horace attempts "to extricate himself from what he believes to be his greatest mistake: his

marriage to Belle, a woman of pulsating sexual energy and the living negation of the 'asexual' gentleman's wife" (162). Drawing upon Victorian standards of sexual propriety complete with moral restrictions of both a social and religious nature, the Southern gentlemen of Jefferson seek to preserve the chaste image of their wives and daughters at home, while seeking sexual gratification of a less wholesome nature elsewhere.

Of course, in the form of two bungling country bumpkins, Virgil Snopes and his friend, Fonzo, Faulkner provides a glimpse of this double-standard. In the big city of Memphis, the two unassuming johns stumble across Miss Reba's brothel, mistaking her for the proprietor of a hotel and the many prostitutes she employs for her daughters. Their situation is made all the more humorously pertinent when they return from another brothel and believe they must sneak in to avoid being evicted: "When they reached the home Fonzo stopped. 'We got to sneak in now,' he said. 'If she was to find out where we been and what we been doing, she might not let us stay in the house with all them ladies no more'" (196). The idea that they believe they must be respectful of Miss Reba and her "daughters" reveals the contradictory notion that there is a separation between the public performance of the polite Southern gentleman and the private execution of their sexual gratification. This scenario microcosmically highlights the opposed yet mirrored male behavior of both Jefferson and Memphis. As Senator Snopes points out, "When I'm here, in Jefferson, I'm one fellow; what I am up town with a bunch of good sports aint nobody's business but mine and theirs" (261). For the men of Jefferson, moral fortitude is something that can be confined within the town's physical parameters, conveniently shed when protected by the anonymity of the big city.

Unlike the Senator, Horace is unable to recognize and accept the social regulation of proper and improper sexual outlets. As Vickery observes, Horace is “a product of his culture and tradition, he begins by assuming that society is the repository of human values and that it will act humanely and rationally even though individuals within it may fail to do so” (128). This naïve belief leads to his overwhelming, debilitating desire to protect all women from ruination, becoming so obsessed with female sexuality that he parallels the involuntary defilement of Temple with the intentional sexual experimentation of Little Belle. The thought of both acts renders him physically ill and he convulses and vomits repeatedly. He is further horrified when Ruby infers he might expect sex as a means of payment for his legal services:

‘I know what you’re thinking.’ Horace watched her, her averted face.

‘You said tonight was the time to start paying you.’

For a while longer he looked at her. ‘Ah,’ he said. ‘O tempora! O mores! O hell! Can you stupid mammals never believe that any man, every man – You thought that was what I was coming for? You thought that if I had intended to, I’d have waited this long?’

[. . .] ‘I thought that was what you meant. I told you we didn’t have – If that aint enough to pay, I don’t know that I blame you.’

‘It’s not that. You know it’s not that. But cant you see that perhaps a man might do something just because he knew it was right, necessary to the harmony of things that it be done?’ [. . .] ‘Good God,’ he whispered. ‘What kind of men have you known?’ (275-6).

As a former prostitute who has been repeatedly exposed to the vulgar side of men, Ruby fails to comprehend Horace's heroic notions of masculinity. When they leave the jailhouse for court, Ruby broaches the subject of payment yet again. Benbow informs her that he doesn't require payment and assures her by claiming, "'God is foolish at times, but at least He's a gentleman. Don't you know that?'" to which she amusingly replies, "'I always thought of Him as a man'" (280). The irony here, of course, lies in Ruby's own definition of a "real" man, proving even the female characters create and perpetuate different myths of masculinity:

With her hands on her hips she looked at Temple with cold, blazing eyes. 'Man? You've never seen a real man. You dont know what it is to be wanted by a real man. And thank your stars you haven't and never will, for then you'd find just what that little putty face is worth, and all the rest of it you think you are jealous of when you're just scared of it. And if he is just man enough to call you whore, you'll say Yes Yes and you'll crawl naked in the dirt and mire for him to call you that. . . .' (59)

Ruby's depiction of a "real man" is directly at odds with Horace's genteel masculine ideal. Notably, as Mesquita observes, "the word 'gentleman' is spoken only by men who, in one way or another, have extremely narrow views of masculinity: Horace, Gowan Stevens, and Clarence Snopes" (164). Unlike the Senator, however, Horace's idealistic desire to actually epitomize the chivalrous gentleman and his disgust with his own potential for evil as a man cause him to repeatedly suffer a profound sense of disappointment.

Horace's insufficient gestures, combined with his awareness and perpetuation of exterior perceptions of social propriety, exemplify the underlying tension between desire and duty throughout the novel. His spontaneous decision to leave Belle and return to Jefferson is a desperate attempt by him to reject custom and order, represented by his weekly performance of retrieving a box of shrimp for his wife every Friday at noon:

'I have done it for ten years, since we were married. And I still don't like to smell shrimp. But I wouldn't mind the carrying it home so much. I could stand that. It's because the package drips. All the way home it drips and drips, until after a while I follow myself to the station and stand aside and watch Horace Benbow take that box off the train and start home with it, thinking Here lies Horace

Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk.' (17)

Horace's actual breaking point immediately follows a confrontation with his stepdaughter, Little Belle, during which she knowingly yells at him, "'You're a fine one to talk about finding things on the train! You're a fine one! Shrimp! Shrimp!'" (14). Here, he is literally compared to the saturated shrimp that metaphorically describe him – weak and drenched in female secretions, slowly leaking, leaving an insignificant trail (the remnants of his manhood) behind each and every step. In an attempt to reinstate his masculinity, Horace leaves, only to discover "that [his] sanctuary, his imaginative world of moral and aesthetic perfection, has been violated and destroyed by his one excursion into the world of concrete experience" (Vickery 136). Powerless and defeated, he returns to his life filled with its meaningless ceremonies and habits from which he can find no asylum.

Sanctuary is thus a novel obsessed with socially constructed habits and rituals and the ironic lack of refuge from them for individuals. Horace's ineffective performance of masculinity is one of many instances that permeate the novel, but perhaps the most darkly comic illustration of male performance is that of Temple's pathetic, drunk escort, Gowan Stevens. Like Benbow, he uses his schooling as a means to distinguish himself; rather than books, however, he brags about his attendance at Virginia where they "teach you how to drink" like a man (32). When the Jefferson boys witness him down alcohol in big gulps, one exclaims, "You sure do drink it," to which Gowan replies, "I learned in a good school" (33). His biggest fear is of shaming himself by not being able to hold his liquor like a Virginia gentleman should. Amusingly, in setting out to prove his so-called worth, he repetitively fails, consumes too much alcohol and behaves in a manner that is anything but gentlemanly. Tragically, his traumatic compulsion to repeatedly engage in scenarios that result in humiliation contributes less to his own defamation than to the traumatization and sexual abuse of Temple. In the end, it is a woman who suffers for the failure of his overt assertions of maleness.

Gowan's overwhelming fear of disgrace implies that his performance of masculinity is actually a resistance to the experience of shame. Unfortunately, he becomes trapped in a vicious cycle – the more shame he experiences the more determined he becomes to prove his worth as a man. As a result, he increases his childish performance of masculinity, which ultimately leads to failure and, inevitably, more shame. In his book *Masculinity, Identity Conflict and Transformation*, Warren Steinberg sheds light on this devastating paradox. He writes, "Men who suffer from a neurotic fear of failure still want to succeed. The anxiety attendant upon failure and the need for

achievement to be perfect can be so debilitating, however, that the normal effort to achieve is compromised. [. . .] Making a mistake becomes equivalent to having revealed something inferior and unacceptable” (106-7). Thus, there is a constant struggle for the insecure Stevens to compensate for his perceived lack of success and he reacts to rejection by seeking a substitute form of validation. For example, after Narcissa refuses his proposal of marriage, Miss Jenny overhears Gowan claim that he will ““go to Oxford, where there [is] a woman he [is] reasonably confident he would not appear ridiculous to”” (165). The melodramatic letter he writes to Narcissa reveals a man afraid of his own shame and it demonstrates his own ignorance of the trauma his actions have inflicted upon Temple:

‘Narcissa my dear...I will not see you again. I cannot write it, for I have gone through an experience which I cannot face. I have but one rift in the darkness, that is that I have injured no one save myself by my folly, and that the extent of that folly you will never learn. I need not say that the hope that you never learn it is the sole reason why I will not see you again. Think as well of me as you can. I wish I had the right to say, if you learn of my folly think not the less of me.’

(130)

Of course, the folly he writes about is his shameful inability to hold his liquor like a Virginia man should. The next morning, embarrassed by his behavior he opts to abandon Temple at the bootlegger’s house – a decision that inexorably leads to her rape, thus reflecting the negative side of the gentleman’s desire for drink.

Another contributor to Temple’s denigration is the bootlegger himself, Lee Goodwin. Ruby highlights his potential threat, asking Temple, ““Do you think Lee hasn’t

anything better to do than chase after everyone of you cheap little – ””(56). After informing Temple of her husband’s violent history, she inquires, ““And that’s the sort of man you think will care that much [. . .] what happens to you?”” (59). Although he at first appears to have a vested interest in Temple’s safety – kicking his associate, Van, out of the room for teasing her and demanding Popeye remove his hand from her breast – Goodwin still proves to be a dangerous presence. When he tells Ruby to leave the room she cynically proclaims, ““While you finish the trick Van started and you wouldn’t let him finish?”” (75). Ultimately, it is Popeye who reaches Temple first, but the drunken Goodwin appears to have similar, malicious intentions. When Ruby interferes with her partner’s latent plans, Goodwin responds by demonstrating the violence he is truly capable of:

With scarce any movement at all he flung her aside in a complete revolution that fetched her up against the table, her arm flung back for balance, her body bent and her hand fumbling behind her among the soiled dishes, watching him across the inert body of the child. He walked toward her. ‘Stand back,’ she said, lifting her hand slightly, bringing the butcher knife into view. ‘Stand back.’ He came steadily towards her [. . .] He caught her wrist. She began to struggle. He plucked the child from her and laid it on the table and caught her other hand as it flicked at his face, and holding both wrists in one hand, he slapped her. It made a dry, flat sound. He slapped her again, first on one cheek, then the other, rocking her head from side to side. (95)

Moments after beating the mother of his child, Goodwin looks conspicuously toward the barn – unaware that his silent contemplation inadvertently reveals to the creepy little

gangster Temple's precarious hiding place. It is the interchangeability of the two, Popeye and Goodwin, and the threat they simultaneously pose to Temple that makes her eventual perjury so remarkable; her refusal to decry Goodwin's innocence, whether intentional or not, incriminates not just one man but everything overtly violent and masculine².

Like Popeye, whose behaviors vary between that of a hard, cold gangster and a frightened man-child, Goodwin also appears to be a man of contradiction. Just as he is both the protector and potential defiler of Temple, as a soldier Goodwin demonstrates the existence of conflicting masculine identities within one individual. Incarcerated for murdering another soldier, he is released early from prison to serve in the war, earning two medals for bravery before returning to Leavenworth to resume serving his sentence. Paradoxically, his penchant for homicide is recognized by the military as *both* villainous and heroic, indicating there is a martially reinforced, socially acceptable time for men to exude and enact extremely violent gestures. However, despite his own aptitude for brutality, the tough, macho bootlegger who calls the shots out at the Old Frenchman place is supplanted by the resigned, defeated prisoner he later becomes. Fearful of the retaliation of the gangster and his Memphis connections, Goodwin refuses to incriminate Popeye in the assault – a choice that eventually leaves him at the mercy of the court and Jefferson's eager lynch mob. This seemingly contradictory behavior highlights the fear that lurks beneath the surface of such overt masculine gestures.

Ultimately, Goodwin is punished for living on the fringes of a society that adheres to tenuous laws – laws open to interpretation depending on the whims and wiles of the men who both create and execute them. Despite being an outsider, Goodwin opts to leave his judgment to the mercy of the court. Like Horace, he believes his innocence

alone will be enough to save him and, much to his lawyer's dismay, that his testimony against Popeye is unnecessary. Of course, Horace is beleaguered by the inequitable private appropriation of what should ideally be an unbiased public affair, idealistically believing that truth and justice will prevail³. The civility and the social responsibility he naively expects of the Jefferson residents are thwarted by that very society. In fact, it is his own sister who spear-heads the campaign against the Goodwins, contacting the District Attorney, Eustace Graham, to provide him with information, sabotaging her brother's case and knowingly violating the DA's oath of office. Narcissa proclaims, "'the quicker he loses, the better it would be . . . If they hung the man and got it over with'" (264). Apparently, expedience of the law is more important to Jefferson society than actual accuracy and a true sense of justice. In Yoknapatawpha, the appearance of justice is much like the appearance of masculinity: excessively performed when its absence is revealed.

In the character of Eustace Graham, the reader is provided with a success story of sorts, both within the land of law and men. In a sense, the District Attorney demonstrates that innovation and industry can also serve as a compensatory means of gaining power. Born with a club foot, Graham begins his career by working himself through the State University where, in his first year, he secures "the government contract for carrying the mail to and from the local post office at the arrival of each train" (262). Notably, it is his club foot that "elected him to the office he now held" (261) and presumably leads to special attention from the law professors who "groomed him like a race-horse" (262). When he fails to graduate with distinction, the professors declare, "'Because he was handicapped at the start . . . if he had the same start the others had . . .'" (262); for them,

his lack of perfection is a flaw, a birth wound for which he must compensate, implying there is an ideal corporeal masculinity that Graham can never embody. As a result, perhaps even from guilt, the other males feel the need to award him a sportsmanlike "handicap," which, unlike Popeye who rejects sympathetic gestures, Graham accepts and exploits to its full advantage. In his essay, "The Disabled Male Body Writes/Draws Back," Paul McIlvenny sheds light on this male desire for physical perfection. He writes, "contemporary hegemonic masculinity in relation to the male body often emphasizes ability, superhuman strength and stamina, physical violence, unemotionality, hardness, autonomy, potency, assertiveness, authority, the abjection of other bodies (the feminine, the homosexual, the grotesque), and the shame of failure" (103). Thus, in order to compensate for their lack, both Popeye and Graham disproportionately enact these respected male traits; while Popeye chooses to personify physical violence, Graham works hard to establish himself as an unemotional, autonomous and assertive authority figure, proven by his professional accomplishments and earning him his lofty position.

In contradiction to the doctor's assessment of Popeye, Graham, despite his own physical imperfections, masters the art of making his shortcomings work in his favor within Jefferson society. The town is pleased with his desire to climb the social and political ladder and "People were glad that he had saved through his industry to where he could give all his time to his studies" (262). It is only after he leaves school and is elected to the State legislature that his double life, as law-abiding law student on the one hand and productive gambler on the other, comes to light, demonstrating his ability to be profitably discreet. Rather than earn him disdainful reproaches, his reputation as a cheater-of-cards demonstrates his assertive ability to manipulate and better himself, thus

gaining him more respect within the legal community. In her essay, "Machines and Machinations: Controlling Desires in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*," Amy Lovell Strong makes note of the District Attorney's shady exploitation of the legal system:

Eustace Graham cheats when the stakes are high [. . .] Graham wanted to announce for Congress on his 'record of convictions,' so this case surely has a direct effect on his political aspirations. If we could only fill in the blanks when Graham doesn't finish his sentence to Narcissa: 'I hate to see a brother-in-arms, you might say, with a bad case.' She was watching him with a blank, enveloping look. 'After all, we've got to protect society, even when it does seem.'

Even when it does seem.*wrong? unjust? manipulative? to pin the murder on the wrong man? just to falsely quell the fears of society and further a political career?* While we cannot definitively fill in the ellipsis here, Faulkner gives enough hints about the motivations of Eustace Graham and the machinations of lawyers to show us that the words behind Temple's lifeless display in the court room serve other ends than her own. (78-9)

In a sense, the use of the court as a political platform renders the supposed "sanctuary" of the legal system, at least the one Horace believes in, obsolete.

Like Graham, Senator Snopes partakes in profitable discretion (though his is more obverse), selling Horace information regarding the whereabouts of Temple Drake, but only after threatening to "dicker with the other party" (206). When Horace goes to obtain Temple's testimony, he sees Snopes leaving Miss Reba's brothel where the politician exclaims, "Boys will be boys, wont they?" (207). Although he knows the lawyer has come to the brothel for professional reasons, Snopes continuously implies that

Horace is there for his own private indulgence: “I aint going to tell this at home [. . .] If us boys started telling what we know, caint none of us git off a train at Jefferson again, hey?” He implores Horace, “Don’t stay [. . .] See her and then leave. It’s a sucker place. Place for farm-boys [. . .] I’ll wait out hyer and I’ll show you a place where –” (208). While Horace’s uncomfortable and hasty exit does not allow Snopes to finish his sentence, he later gets the chance offering to show him a place “Where a man can do just whatever he is big enough to do” (261). Snopes’ insinuation that the solicitation of prostitutes somehow provides a stage on which to exercise one’s grandeur exemplifies what Warren Steinberg notes is the demonstration of sexual prowess, often used by men to distract other men from their possible inferiority. He writes:

Loss of power causes men to feel insecure in their masculinity, especially if they have failed adequately to fulfill other aspects of their gender role. [. . .]

Dominating women, devaluing women, accentuating differences with women, and believing they are better than women become ways to maintain their definition as men and their self-esteem. (141)

Although Eustace Graham and Senator Snopes do not commit blatant acts of violence, their quest for power and sexual gratification does lead to violent outcomes. The need for access to a stage, be it a brothel or a courtroom, provides a venue within which they can exhibit their supremacy over other males, setting the stage for other, more perverted displays of domination. In a sense, their performance as masculine figures of authority facilitates murder and rape. By allowing and encouraging the execution of innocent men and engaging prostitutes as a means of demonstrating and even parading their power,

they manipulate and corrupt the very laws they have been elected to maintain, establishing a new mode of decorum for the other men of their society to follow.

Of course with Popeye, the men of Jefferson are confronted by a man who refuses to confine his performance of masculinity to their socially ascribed stages. Instead, his grotesque behavior draws attention to their own despicable actions. Popeye goes beyond the need for a fraudulent public image, housing Temple, a respected Judge's daughter, in Miss Reba's establishment, blurring the line between the sanctified and the sanctimonious. Unlike the other men, the gangster's actions are not dictated by a hypocritical sense of propriety, but rather by a cold, calculated and unchecked need to satisfy his violent urge to possess and dominate. The other men fear Popeye because he is the very manifestation of their own savage and rapacious desires, and it is this realization that horrifies Horace and renders him physically ill.

Ultimately, Faulkner's introduction to Popeye in the brief first chapter of *Sanctuary* reveals a man whose presence is determined more by material possessions than by his physical appearance. In fact, as previously noted, he is described as short, pale and small, with a face that "just went away, like the face of a wax doll set too near a hot fire and forgotten" (5). As Strong persuasively insists, "Popeye functions as a technology, faceless, but able to exert power with his penetrating gaze" (71). This notion is supported by his physical description, more machine than man, Popeye's face is "a queer, bloodless color" (4) with eyes "like rubber knobs" (6) and an overall "vicious depthless quality of stamped tin" (4) with skin of "a dead, dark pallor" (5). His mechanized looks are further enhanced by the vivid curl of smoke that stems from his tilted cigarette, his tight black suit and his angled straw hat. Considering that the cigarette appears to slant

“from his chin” (4) and he apparently has “no chin at all” (5), it is easy to picture a man whose lower face is completely defined by the cigarette as opposed to any distinct physical features. In fact, the smoke from the cigarette cuts across Popeye’s face causing one side to squint, splitting his face “like a mask carved into two simultaneous expressions” (5).

Although the other characters fear his unyielding exterior demeanor, Popeye seems to be two things at once, like maleness itself – a technology more than a biology. His mannerisms, expressions and his material construction are all hyper-masculine, contributing to his threatening presence and instilling fear in those who encounter him. In contrast, his physical appearance is child-like: “a man of undersize” (4) with “doll-like hands” (7). Furthermore, his nervous response to the owl’s sudden flight in the brush is similar to that of a frightened child; crouching behind Benbow for protection, he demonstrates his own cowardice – a far cry from the seemingly vicious and impenetrable man he is determined to project. Immediately following the incident with the owl, Popeye returns to his overtly masculine self. Standing in a doorway with his hat slanted across his face, he places another cigarette in his mouth and snaps a match on his thumbnail (9). The performance of smoking becomes an act of masculinity, the phallic cigarette a substitute for his literal impotence. It is while smoking that he watches the former prostitute, Ruby Lamar, as she works in the kitchen. Without provocation he begins to taunt her, reminding her of her illicit past and drawing attention to her toilsome present, as if his domination of her in a domestic setting might somehow cancel out his childish, unmanly behavior in the woods.

It is later revealed that this is Popeye's established mode of behavior – brandishing his masculinity by torturing and even killing living things perceived to be weaker and without defense (especially if they frighten him or dare to stand up to him). In fact, Benbow learns that Popeye once shot an old dog which happened to scare him when it came up to sniff his heels (19). The story is told to Benbow by the dog's owner, Tommy, who works with the bootlegger and happens to be mentally slow. Eventually, Popeye also shoots the defenseless Tommy who makes the valiant yet feeble attempt to protect Temple from her soon-to-be rapist. The initial rape scene is the first one in which the reader actually gets a glimpse of Popeye's pistol as it is pulled from his pocket and subsequently put back. Prior to this, the gun is more of an unseen factor like a silent but menacing threat, for as Benbow proclaims, “You could feel the pistol on him just like you knew he had a navel” (109). The weapon becomes an extension of Popeye – a prosthetic part of his body. Within the novel, manliness itself is rendered artificial and the performance of gender traits becomes as tangible as their material manifestations (i.e. weapons, books, gavels).

The control and power that Popeye's hidden weapon provides him with is countered by his physical inadequacies, culminating in his inability to reproduce. Even in his sexual exploits, Popeye is rendered an ineffectual man-child:

Watching his face, she saw it beginning to twitch and jerk like that of a child about to cry, and she heard him begin to make a whimpering sound. He gripped the top of the gown...she saw him crouching beside the bed, his face wrung above his absent chin, his bluish lips protruding as though he were blowing upon hot soup, making a high whinnying sound like a horse. (159)

Although he is responsible for Temple's repeated rape, the reader must wait another seventy pages before discovering that Popeye has employed Red, a "real man" who has sex with Temple while he watches, "hanging over the bed, moaning and slobbering" (231). Temple's account of Popeye's voyeurism is further supported by the brothel owner, Miss Reba and her assistant, Minnie, who see Temple and Red "'nekkid as two snakes, and Popeye hanging over the foot of the bed without even his hat took off, making a kind of whinnying sound'" (258). It is ultimately revealed that Temple's initial, brutal violation by Popeye is performed with a corncob – another material substitute for his lacking manliness and a vicious externalization of self-hatred.

These material weapons are used by Popeye as a means of leveling the physical playing field. His apparent deficiencies become dominated and eventually overshadowed by his violent performance of masculinity. In his assessment of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Freud makes note of another misshapen character and his own particular performance. He cites the deformed Gloucester's opening soliloquy:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable,
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
[...] And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

(1.1.14-31, quoted in Freud, 592)

The malformed king's self-analysis could as easily describe Popeye with his "stamped tin" looks and his desperate pursuit of Temple - his unattainable "wanton ambling nymph." Freud's interpretation of this speech is as follows:

I think [. . .] that Richard's soliloquy does not say everything; it merely gives a hint, and leaves us to fill in what it hints at. When we do so [...] the appearance of frivolity vanishes, the bitterness and minuteness with which Richard has depicted his deformity make their full effect, and we clearly perceive the fellow-feeling which compels our sympathy even with a villain like him. What the soliloquy thus means is: 'Nature has done me a grievous wrong in denying me the beauty of form which wins human love. Life owes me reparation for this, and I will see that I get it. I have a right to be an exception, to disregard the scruples by which others let themselves be held back. I may do wrong myself, since wrong has been done to me.' (592-3)

Like Freud's interpretation of Richard III, T. H. Adamowski points out that Popeye "is conceived in a quasi-theatrical manner – and it is this conception that makes of him a machine-man – for he is a man of gestures and melodrama, encased in a 'role' so carefully defined that the man who gestures and acts is never seen" (33). Unlike the Shakespearean villain, Popeye does not provide the reader with any insight on his personal agenda, leaving his motives to mere speculation, a fact that many critics including Adamowski and Cleanth Brooks have observed. Where Shakespeare chooses to define his character's disposition right from the start, Faulkner withholds Popeye's childhood, the key to his entire character makeup, until the very last pages of the novel. As Adamowski argues, the final chapter demonstrates that "the adult man-of-the-gesture,

the melodramatic type of the modern, is a Popeye who has taken up that vulnerability and 'lived it' in such a way as (almost) to overcome it" ("Faulkner's Popeye", 35). By doing this, Faulkner re-humanizes Popeye, who devolves from the adult, robotic monster incapable of feeling to the traumatized child.

In a sense, Popeye's own dehumanization of his victims as a means of displaying power is shown to be the direct result of "an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale" (Freud 584). Like Horace, Popeye refuses to accept that which he can never be, and he acts out his anger, raging against his own shortcomings and limitations. In his book, *Castration and Male Rage*, Eugene Monick writes:

Male rage is an indication that a man is living in excruciating personal contact with profound injury, even nonbeing. One can receive or observe such rage and shrink from it, judging it with appropriate harshness, but without a modicum of understanding. Women do so, unaware that they are implicated in the damage against which the rage is drawn. Men do so, secure in their victory over a vanquished phallic competitor. Children, of course, cannot be expected to understand, for they are innocent of the trials faced by the hero who will never be a hero, the hopeless effort of a father to be what he is not and cannot be. (102)

Popeye, however, illustrates such a child grown into adulthood – an adult trapped in a childlike state by his traumatic experience (giving new meaning to the doctor's assessment that he "will never be a man, properly speaking") and doomed to perpetuate the vicious cycle of unrealized and unrealistic expectation. Although Popeye is not originally from Jefferson, his childhood experience divulged in the final chapter allows

readers a glimpse of the traumatized boy who later becomes the wounded man. His tragic story and the horrifying crimes he commits serve as a cautionary tale to the Jefferson society who, unfortunately, seem oblivious to the disturbing paradigm.

Despite the doctor's initial assessment of his physical limitations, Popeye does live to be a productive gangster. What he lacks in natural stature and potency, he makes up for in constructed image and attitude, aided by his use of material possessions: his hat that slants over one eye and jerks about defiantly when he walks; his dangling cigarette that he appears to light and smoke with minimal sound and gesture; his pistol that lies cold and waiting just below his arm pit. Although he is a gangster with ominous and unseen "connections," Popeye's condition relegates him to the position of a loner.

Oddly, he is vaguely paralleled with Jesus – born on Christmas day with no trace of a human father, executed by a jury for a crime he did not (technically) commit, destined to die for someone else's sin. Unlike Christ, Popeye is a career criminal, hanged with no friends to bear witness save his own personal apostles, consisting of twelve crushed cigarette butts lined up inside twelve neatly laid rows in his prison cell (315). The detailed account of Popeye's childhood, like the vague association with the sacrificial lamb, is arguably supplied, not merely as an explanation of his actions but as a means of humanizing him (not his behavior) – providing a glimpse of the small, isolated child that lurks inside his cold, hard, metallic facade. Denied access to any acceptable social existence and sacrificed at the expense of social norms, the framework for *Sanctuary* is Popeye's story. It is his performance that not only affects the other characters physically and emotionally, but also puts into context their own individual, encoded routines.

Faulkner once wrote: "This was the American Dream: a sanctuary on earth for individual man: a condition in which he could be free not only of the old established closed-corporation hierarchies, but free of that mass into which hierarchies of church and state had compressed and held him individually thrilled and individually impotent" (*Essays*, 62). It is here in this novel, enveloped within Popeye's story, that Faulkner explores that mass, in this case Jefferson society, which compresses and renders men thrilled and impotent. Faulkner is so preoccupied with this theme that he revisits the topic only one year later in his next novel, *Light in August*, through another enigmatic character, Joe Christmas, who is also a scarred male figure who survives his traumatic childhood only to become a threatening and violent man. Like Popeye, Joe seeks the American Dream, searching desperately for a sanctuary not just from society but from himself.

Notes

¹ Amy Lovell Strong examines in detail the mechanized actions that pervade the novel in her essay, "Machines and Machinations: Controlling Desires in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*" (1993), picking up on observations made by T.H. Adamowski, Cleanth Brooks and Eric Sundquist.

² In his essay, "The Profaned Temple" (1977), David Williams argues that there is a mythological reason for Goodwin's death, as it is his sexual desire for Temple, like that of Adam for Eve, that brings about his demise. Joseph Urgo also notes in "Temple Drake's Truthful Perjury: Rethinking Faulkner's *Sanctuary*" (1983) that it is Goodwin who Temple is hiding from when Popeye finds her. Furthermore, Elisabeth Muhlenfeld asserts, in her essay "Bewildered Witness: Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*" (1986), that while Temple's perjury is not premeditated, "deep within her subconscious, beyond reason, she will always associate the experience with Goodwin: Goodwin, whose house and barn this is; Goodwin, whom everyone obeys, who can make even Popeye take his hand from her breast; Goodwin, who has to her shame and horror watched her produce excrement and who knows thereby that she is impure; Goodwin, who is coming toward the barn" (50).

³ Jay Watson engages in an extensive look at Faulkner's lawyers in his book Forensic Fiction: The Lawyer Figure in Faulkner (1993). Watson argues that law in Faulkner is a vocation and, more importantly, a discursive practice rather than the idealistic upholding of truth that Benbow naively desires.

**Domination, Submission and Castration: Male Rage and Traumatized
Resistance in *Light in August***

“Points of resistance are present everywhere within the power network. [. . .] there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested; or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.”

~ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol.I

As in *Sanctuary*, *Light in August* fleshes out its violent, adult male protagonist before flashing back to his traumatic childhood. Thus, Faulkner similarly structures this novel in such a way that it highlights a trauma at the origin of an identity. Yet, in contrast to *Sanctuary*, which depicts Jefferson society framed by the story of Popeye, *Light in August* frames Joe’s tragic life-story by the greater Jefferson experience of him. In fact, it is almost as though Faulkner flips the script, this time examining the problems surrounding the trauma of masculine identity and performance from the inside out. Once again, hyper-masculine performances dominate Jefferson society as *Light in August* explores Joe’s trauma through his own failed relations with women. Angered by shame and resentment, Joe compulsively reenacts over-exaggerated rituals of gender, unaware that he has polarized feminine and masculine traits without allowing for their coexistence in one body. Entrapped by his own traumatic experiences, he repeatedly seeks out, is repulsed by and demands punishment for the “feminine” in both himself and others.

Like *Sanctuary*’s vicious gangster, Christmas arrives mysteriously in Jefferson and immediately assumes an overtly masculine pose, standing at the sawmill, “ruthless, lonely, and almost proud [. . .] with his dark, insufferable face and his whole air of cold

and quiet contempt” (31-2). Notably, it is the men he encounters who respond cautiously to his seemingly inauspicious potency, while the women take little or no notice of his attempts to assume a manly posture. In fact, most of the women Joe interacts with are either amused by or indifferent to him, and their lack of awe insults him, “as though some enemy upon whom he had wreaked his utmost of violence and contumely stood, unscathed and unscarred, and contemplated him with a musing and insufferable contempt” (237). Because Joe approaches what it means to be masculine from a completely male perspective, fashioning his behavior on that of other men, it is only the men of Jefferson he seems to understand and who, in turn, seem to understand him. As Jay Watson articulates:

Joe Christmas is literally made out of other men: their gestures, movements, and patterns of speech; the way they smoke, the way they drink, the way they wear their clothes, the way they talk about and to their women, and so on. A quintessential “man’s man” if ever there was one, Joe perfectly illustrates the unintentional irony that makes that phrase such a backhanded compliment: its inability to denote the truly masculine without also connoting the utterly derivative. (156)

Joe’s masculine performance is something only the men of Jefferson recognize and therefore fear. As a result, the physical victims of his violent shame are not other men but imprudent, unsuspecting women. Unable to dominate them with his affectations, he strikes out at that which he has never known and can never know: the mysterious female – a mysteriousness bound up with strange shifts between weakness and strength. Thus, whenever his masculinity is called into question by a confusing encounter with

femininity, Joe seeks comfort from the other end of the gender spectrum, finding solace in the violently physical, overtly masculine gestures that his childhood has programmed him to relate to and understand.

As a child, Joe is physically reprimanded by his adoptive father, Simon McEachern, who repeatedly beats the boy when he believes Joe has engaged in sinful activities. Rather than run from his punishment, Joe actually appears to find comfort in the predictability of it, even when he has done nothing to provoke it:

He seemed to recognize McEachern without surprise, as if the whole situation were perfectly logical and reasonable and inescapable. Perhaps he was thinking then how he and the man could always count upon one another, depend upon one another; that it was the woman alone who was unpredictable. Perhaps he saw no incongruity at all in the fact that he was about to be punished, who had refrained from what McEachern would consider the cardinal sin which he could commit, exactly the same as if he had committed it. (160)

In fact, the young Joe is most content when caught in this familiar, physical act, and he seems to derive a type of phallic power from the experience: "The boy's body might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and self-crucifixion" (160). Joe's pseudo-masochistic response¹ implies that he is somehow able to prove his maleness by engaging in such rituals of masculine authority and discipline.

Notably, Joe does not feel threatened by the physical and emotional abuse he sustains at the hands of McEachern, but he is suspicious of the vicarious emotions of the farmer's empathetic wife:

It was not the hard work which he hated, nor the punishment and injustice. He was used to that before he ever saw either of them. He expected no less, and so he was neither outraged nor surprised. It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men. (169)

For Joe, the masculine is predictable and thus associated with strength and pride, while the feminine is unknowable and therefore equated with weakness and shame. However, Joe perceives this impenetrability of the female realm as a kind of power which excludes and thus ultimately scares him. Valuing the violent strength of his father figure, Joe resents Mrs. McEachern's attempts to align himself with her, as if acknowledging their shared victimization would mean that he, too, was weak and womanish. His vicious opposition to the feminine is actualized when, after learning about female menstruation, he slaughters a sheep and places his hands "in the yet warm blood of the dying beast" (185). Disgusted by the mental pictures and smells he imagines, he only finds a perverse peace with his newfound knowledge after he expropriates power from the destruction of something helpless and weak; for Joe, the tangibility of the sheep's blood somehow makes the inexplicably feminine accessible, understandable and thus controllable.

This fear of the feminine and subsequent need for male domination is developed and reinforced by his violent and confusing infancy. Ripped from his dying mother and orphaned by his murderous grandfather, Joe's trauma is manifested at birth. As a result, he engages in behavior that constitutes what Freud terms the "compulsion to repeat," in which, "he is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of [. . .] *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" (*Beyond the Pleasure*

Principle, 602). Freud expounds on this observation: “These reproductions, which emerge with such unwished for exactitude, always have as their subject some portion of infantile sexual life – of the Oedipus complex, that is, and its derivatives” (602). Read in light of Freud, Faulkner’s carefully chosen phrase, “Memory believes before knowing remembers” (119), is wrought with profound significance, as it introduces the scene of his young protagonist’s first encounter with sex, shame, power and retribution.

When five-year-old Joe is caught stealing toothpaste while he unknowingly overhears the orphanage’s dietician having sex, he cannot fathom the power he has over her: “It never occurred to her that he believed that he was the one who had been taken in sin and was being tortured with punishment deferred and that he was putting himself in her way in order to get it over with, get his whipping and strike the balance and write it off” (123). Though the dietician does strive to have him removed from the orphanage, Joe is not aware that this is, in fact, a disciplinary action; rather, he nervously awaits a physical reprimand that he can associate with his own inappropriate behavior. As Irene Gammel contends,

Joe and the dietician are inseparably linked in a relationship of power, ‘modifying’ each other’s actions to an extreme, to use Foucault’s terminology. ‘I don’t want no more,’ says Joe looking at the dietician’s money bribe, and just as this rejection of her money gift is the act of a resisting victim, so her labeling him a ‘nigger bastard’ is her desperate act of resisting what she wrongly perceives to be Joe’s hold over her. Both acts of resistance only increase the intensity of this power relation, and so give the spiral of power another turn. (18)

This mutual resistance exemplifies the power of shame which entraps Joe and the dietician in a cyclical pattern of guilt and anger. In this case, his and her attemptive submission to what they perceive as their due punishment is, in reality, a means of maintaining control of the situation.

When Joe finally leaves the orphanage for the first time, kidnapped in the night by his crazy grandfather, he literally senses (with his nose) that his punishment is finally to be meted out: "He knew also by smell that the person who carried him was a man [. . .] He didn't know who was carrying him. He didn't bother about it because he believed that he knew where he was going. Or why, that is" (136). Although it is actually a different man who eventually penalizes Joe, even in his youth he expects his castigation to come at the hands of a male authority figure. When Mr. McEachern eventually arrives to adopt Joe, at the dietician's behest, he promises the matron he will put the fear of God into the boy and thus "the promissory note which [Joe] had signed with a tube of toothpaste on that afternoon two months ago was recalled" (143). While Joe avoids the dietician and forgets the toothpaste incident, the episode remains embedded in his subconscious and he continues to associate sexual intimacy with a desire for punishment into adulthood and thus throughout the entire novel.

In her efforts to have him removed from the orphanage, the dietician also uses Joe's unknown and unknowable race against him. Though race does play a key role in the novel, as numerous critics have investigated, Joe Christmas is certainly more than just a violent, racialized character. One such critic, Lisa K. Nelson, writes, "For *Light in August*, it is precisely the performative production of race through which bodies are written that Faulkner represents as in crisis. One is not black or white, but one acts black

or white, for race is not a biological fact but a social performance” (5). What Nelson fails to observe is that, while Joe’s power and control within Jefferson are undeniably compromised by his questionable heritage, it is his ambiguity that simultaneously effeminizes and enrages him. In the end, it is neither the black nor white race that Joe compulsively performs but rather a hyper-masculine gender. In his analysis of Joe Christmas, Richard Gray asserts, “Not knowing [his race] becomes a weapon for Joe as well as a wound: a way of exposing, to himself and others, the irrevocable connection between the distribution of meaning and the allocation of status” (185). Like his ambiguous origins, Joe’s indeterminate race further injures his wounded masculinity, once again denying him the power associated with knowing and knowledge. Thus traumatized by the social mandates of the white, patriarchal society of Jefferson and, uncomfortable in the liminal space he occupies, Joe constantly pushes himself to choose between the polarized realms of the strong/white/masculine and the weak/black/feminine.

Furthermore, in brandishing his questionable race, Joe inadvertently aligns himself with the mysterious and unknowable females he often rages against. His awareness of this unwanted parallel perpetuates his trauma, causing Joe to both lash out and seek comfort from these women in an unsuccessful attempt to fully encompass his own feminine impulses and reconcile them with his compulsive need to be solely masculine. This is why he endeavors to draw power from the “feminizing” shame that his indeterminate, “parchment color” flesh (34) evokes in not only himself but also in others, especially men, with whom he comes in close contact. In the south, he “tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten” and in the north, he “fought the negro who called him white” (225). Arguably, it

is this repetitive inclination to engage in violence with other men, more than his copulation with both black and white women, that signifies Joe's desperate need to prove his masculinity.

As M.J. Burgess points out, "Because of his maleness and apparent whiteness, Joe carries the initial authority of a member of the ruling class: placed in a position of antagonism to the community once it believes him to be black, he shares nonetheless its distaste for the blackness and femininity that he encounters, and that he perceives within himself" (110). This self-hatred leads the fourteen-year-old Joe to beat a "negro-girl"² whom he and four friends sexually engage. They arrange to use her body to avoid being "publicly convicted of virginity" (156), in an effort to force their way into realizing their manhood. Overcome with a sudden repugnance and rage, Joe attacks the girl and must be forcefully restrained by his peers. Though he does not have sex that night, he finds some sort of gratifying release from the physical confrontation with the other males. After the beating, Joe returns home satisfied and empowered in a particularly masculine way: "When he went to bed that night his mind was made up to run away. He felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. But that passed, though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage" (160). In a way, Joe comes of age not by an actual sex act but by his own physical domination of a woman and, as a result, by the submissive position he finds himself in at the hands of other males. In other words, sex, fear, domination and submission fuse and confuse his early manhood.³

In their adolescence, Joe and his friends are both repulsed and fascinated by the female body and its cryptic powers: "It moved them: the temporary and abject

helplessness of that which tantalised and frustrated desire; the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodic filth” (185). As Freud notes, upon discovering the existence of a separate, distinct genitalia in females, the young male’s initial instinct is to try and relate the foreign vagina to his own penis:

[The young boy] comes to the conclusion that [. . .] little girls too had a penis, but it was cut off and in its place was left a wound. This theoretical advance already makes use of personal experiences of a distressing kind: the boy in the meantime has heard the threat that the organ which is so dear to him will be taken away from him if he shows his interest in it too plainly. Under the influence of this threat of castration he now sees the notion he has gained of the female genitals in a new light; henceforth he will tremble for his masculinity, but at the same time he will despise the unhappy creatures on whom the cruel punishment has, as he supposed, already fallen. (“Leonardo” 460)

Weaving such Freudian concepts into Joe’s characterization, Faulkner forces Joe into a confrontation with that “wound” of womanhood, the natural right of passage reserved for females only.

As Cathy Peppers notes, citing the theorist Klaus Theweleit, Joe resists this unpredictable, “flowing” femininity:

According to Theweleit, the fascist male subject is constructed as a ‘fortified tower,’ an ‘armored body,’ standing erect in a cold, hard, clean resistance to all that ‘flows.’ His primary goal is to ‘hold himself together as an entity, a body with fixed boundaries.’ [. . .] In addition to resisting the external ‘flowing

feminine' (and feminized impurity), the fascist male also faces a threat from his own interior [. . .] The fascist male can drown in the flowing liquid of the feminine, whether the flow comes from his own interior (unconscious, blood, excrement, bodily fluids) or exterior (erotic, impure women and the racially impure); hence, he must resist the flood/flow at all costs, in order to maintain the coherence of his masculine identity. (128-9)

Fighting not to maintain but to actually establish a fixed masculine identity, Joe struggles with his own pubescent transition and, in an "illogical and desperately calm" moment of denial, solemnly vows not to be contaminated by the mysterious female phenomenon: "*It is so, then. But not to me. Not in my life and my love*" (186). At first glance, it appears the young Joe, like Horace Benbow, has romanticized notions of femininity and believes he will find the perfect, untainted Southern lady with whom he can fulfill his socially prescribed masculine obligations. Thus, hiding behind such chivalrous ideals, Joe's masculine desire for feminine purity masks a broader apprehension that a sexually potent woman would overpower and unman him. However, a closer examination also reveals that Joe is enraged by the fact that his very maleness denies him the transformation guaranteed by this powerfully feminine "wound" and he responds violently, slaughtering the sheep in a fit of menstrual envy.

This imbalance of fears, that of being effeminized and that of female potency, plays a key role in his first sexual encounter with Bobbie Allen. Too sheltered and inexperienced to realize that the restaurant in which he meets her is a poorly disguised brothel, seventeen-year-old Joe becomes enamoured with the waitress, a petite woman

with “a man’s name” and “bigknuckled hands”(179). Notably, it is her physical stature that first catches his eye:

It was because of her smallness that he ever attempted her, as if her smallness should have or might have protected her from the roving and predatory eyes of most men⁴, leaving his chances better. If she had been a big woman he would not have dared. He would have thought, ‘It wont be any use. She will already have a fellow, a man.’ (173)

While Bobbie’s size appeals to Joe, arguably because his own youthful stature appears tremendous and mighty next to her tiny frame, he ignores but is also drawn to her multiple associations with the masculine, including her name and her hands which, “in proportion to the height from which her voice came [. . .] could not be her hands at all” (180). This conflicting attraction mirrors Joe’s need to both dominate and be dominated. In order to enhance his own masculinity, he seeks out Bobbie whom he perceives to be a small, easy target. At the same time, the older and more experienced waitress wields the power of knowledge in their relationship, a power to which Joe willingly submits.

The semi-submissive, liminal space Joe occupies becomes compromised when Bobbie reveals that she is menstruating and thus cannot have sex like they had initially planned. When Joe strikes her, he is really striking out against her paradoxical femininity, as it threatens to expose the vulnerability of his own masculine construction. Once again, he resorts to physical violence in an attempt to regain authority just as he had when he slew the helpless, sacrificial lamb. Leaving the stunned waitress, he hurries to the woods where he becomes physically ill at the thought of her “liquid, deathcolored, and foul” menstrual blood (189). Compelled to return to the scene of his shame,

however, Joe approaches Bobbie the following Monday and forcefully drags her off, losing his virginity in the very same woods where he had vomited the week before.

When Joe tries to intimidate Bobbie with the revelation that he is part black, the waitress chooses not to believe him and patronizingly accuses him of lying, a resistant act that defies the power he believes his ambiguous race provides him. Similarly, upon discovering that she is a prostitute, Joe's initial reaction is one of violent repulsion and resistant denial. Though he once again strikes Bobbie, in the end it is Joe who breaks down crying with her in control, holding and comforting him. As a response to his uncertain gender role in his relationship with the waitress, Joe strives to perform a fixed, rigid maleness and begins smoking cigarettes two weeks later, "squinting his face against the smoke" with his hat cocked at an angle, speaking about Bobbie "in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore" (199). His pathetic duplication of the other male patrons' behaviors – the precedent of the arrogant mannerisms and indifferent posture that become his signature style in Jefferson – demonstrates Joe's need to publicly appear dominant and conveniently masks his private desire to be submissive, a desire that manifests itself in his attraction to his strong female counterparts.

In his final encounter with Bobbie, Joe reenacts the scene with the "negro-girl" in the barn; however, this time the waitress replaces Joe as the aggressor who must be restrained, with "someone holding her as she struggled and shrieked, her hair wild with the jerking and tossing of her head" (217). In a fit of anger and shock, he strikes out to defend his threatened manhood, but once again Joe directly confronts the men in the room and not the woman who has, in his eyes, insulted and enraged him:

with something of the exaltation of his adoptive father he sprang full and of his own accord into the stranger's fist. Perhaps he did not feel either blow, though the stranger struck him twice in the face before he reached the floor where [. . .] he lay upon his back, quite still. But he was not out because his eyes were still open, looking quietly up at them. There was nothing in his eyes at all, no pain, no surprise. But apparently he could not move; he just lay there with a profoundly contemplative expression, looking quietly up at the two men [. . .]. (218)

It is at the hands of these two large Memphis goons that Joe finds it acceptable to completely submit, like a child boldly accepting punishment for a choice he knew would eventually lead to castigation⁵. After the thrashing, Joe "lay peacefully, licking his lips now and then as a child does" (222), finding a morbid comfort in his repeated and sustained abuse. For Joe the beating doubles as a sort of penance both for committing the possible murder of his stepfather and for the premarital sex he engages in with Bobbie. Once again, violence and sex, along with shame and punishment, enclose his experiences within a framework of trauma.

Trapped in a state of continuous resistance, Joe compulsively alternates between violently aggressive and peacefully submissive behaviors; these two seemingly contradictory responses, however, are actually two sides of the same coin, as both signify his constant endeavor to assert control in futile situations. In his introduction to The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault explores the role of resistance within such power relationships:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. [. . .] [B]y

definition, [resistances] can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. (95-6)

As Foucault surmises, resistance to power should not necessarily be read as a passive, “feminine” response, but as an exertion of power in and of itself that, if successful, supersedes the oppressive, “masculine” representative of authority. Foucault further asks, “Should it be said that one is always ‘inside’ power, there is no ‘escaping’ it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case?” (95). Though Foucault’s query smacks of sarcasm, in the case of a traumatized figure such as Joe, the answer would actually be, “yes.” Unable to find a balance between strong and weak, white and black, or male and female, his resistances are hopeless and simply serve to perpetuate his trauma.

Ultimately, Joe’s past becomes furiously entwined with his present, and his two planes of existence collide in Jefferson – a collision brought on by his relationship with and subsequent murder of Joanna Burden. She is the female counterpart to Joe in every sense, from their similar first names to their ambiguous gender constructs, and it is in Joanna’s company that Joe is finally confronted with and forced to acknowledge his own sexual confusions. She is the culmination of all his previous encounters with women, at times embodying the “negro-girl”, the waitress, and both his adoptive mother and the biological mother he never knew. Moreover, in her self-righteous crusade to save him, Joanna inadvertently mirrors the behaviors of Simon McEachern and Joe’s fanatical grandfather, Doc Hines. She is, as Faulkner’s narrator notes, “a dual personality: the one

the woman [. . .] a horizon of physical security and adultery if not pleasure; the other the mantrained muscles and the mantrained habit of thinking born of heritage and environment with which he had to fight up to the final instant” (235). As such, Joanna and all her complexities force Joe to directly face what he has consistently run from for over twenty-five years – a quarter- of-a-century during which “he might have seen himself as in numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair; by the despair of courage whose opportunities had to be flagged and spurred” (226). A traumatized being, Joe runs both from and to Joanna, like wounded prey running in circles to avoid an inescapable predator that he, himself, must kill in order to survive. Ironically, in killing Joanna and choosing survival, Joe signs his own death warrant; for Joe, the self-defense of a doomed man is, in fact, his self-destruction.

In her work, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, Diane Roberts discusses in detail how Joanna assumes both masculine and feminine incarnations during her affair with Joe (175-7). From the moment they meet, Joanna’s movements and gestures contradict Joe’s notions of femininity – a contradiction that causes him to declare, “My God. How little I know about women, when I thought I knew so much” (235). Inexplicably drawn to each other, they become lovers and, before Joe starts working at the Jefferson mill, he finds himself living on Joanna’s land, in her cabin and eating her food, spending his days “lying on his back on the cot she had given him [. . .], smoking, his hands beneath his head,” thinking, “it was like I was the woman and she was the man” (235). Much like his attraction to Bobbie, Joe magnetically responds to Joanna’s

masculine femininity and eventually engages her sexually in a union which brings her complicated dualism to light:

She had resisted to the very last. But it was not woman resistance, that resistance, which, if really meant, cannot be overcome by any man for the reason that the woman observes no rules of physical combat. But she had resisted fair, by the rules that decreed that upon certain crisis one was defeated, whether the end of resistance had come or not. (235)

Since she does ultimately submit, by choice and not by force⁶, Joanna's resistance is deemed "fair"; however, her behavior is not "womanly" because she does not completely resist as an unmarried Southern lady properly should. Furthermore, her resistance is not a victim's resistance, and her active submission means Joanna never actually relinquishes control to Joe. From birth, Joanna has been raised and has continued to live in defiance of Jefferson's unspoken social laws. However, her seclusion does not mean she is unaware of or immune to societal pressures, and even she tries to perform the role of the proper Southern lady. This is why, when it comes to relinquishing her feminine purity, "it was as if [Joe] struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for which they struggled on principle alone" (235). This mock mating ritual of female resistance proves problematic for Joe as he struggles to perform mock rituals of masculine potency in response.

During their first sexual encounter – an episode that is neither tender nor tranquil – Joe attempts to exert power and establish dominance over Joanna: "though his hands were hard and urgent it was with rage alone. 'At least I have made a woman of her at last' he thought. 'Now she hates me. I have taught her that, at least'" (236). Like with

the “negro-girl”, Joe’s sexual response is tied to feelings of urgency and anger. In this instance, however, he attempts to brand Joanna with femininity, giving import to *his* realization of her as “woman” as opposed to *her* sexual acquiescence. In examining this exchange, Roberts asserts:

Joanna Burden refuses to be *only* a woman at the critical moment; she refuses to be ravished as Christmas, coming from a culture that cannot separate sexuality and violence, assumes women are ravished, that is, half-willingly, ritually. She *thinks* as well as fights (real women presumably simply feel and surrender) [. . .] The rape is uncomfortably viewed by Joe Christmas as a bonding ceremony, not an assertion of his alleged male superiority or even an erotic episode. In this passage, Joanna is virtually a man. She has become a *subject* fighting over “an object,” that is, the feminine itself. (175)

However, Roberts’ use of the term “rape” is problematic here⁷, as Joanna *is* engaging in ritualistic, stereotypically feminine behaviors, or rather in a manner that she perceives is socially acceptable and even required of her. In her criticism, Roberts inadvertently assumes the same view as Joe, who chooses to dismiss Joanna’s willing submission by believing he has raped her, identifying her as a victim in an attempt to deny her autonomy, essentially stripping Joanna of any masculine strength and confining her to the realm of the weak and feminine. In this instance, Joe *does* attempt to identify his power over Joanna not in spite of her ambiguity but because of it – a power that is only realized when he slits Joanna’s throat with a straight razor, recalling the image of the slaughtered sheep.

As this episode demonstrates, Joe is compelled to find potency in violent, destructive acts rather than productive or even reproductive ones. When Joanna fails to fear him or his wrath, Joe initially becomes frustrated and confused by her unemotional response. After avoiding her for a time, he begins to warily change his attitude towards her, thinking, “‘She’s trying to be a woman and she don’t know how’” (240). This sentiment, wrought with apprehension and anxiety about Joe’s own performance as a “man,” brings to light the fact that the gender roles of Jefferson society are completely caught up in and dependent upon one another. In other words, if the female does not know how to perform as a “woman,” how then does the male know and define his own “manliness”? For, it is through the behavioral responses of others that Joe recognizes his masculine prowess. When Joanna fails to react in the expected manner because, as a character on the fringes of Jefferson society in her own right, she does not know how to perform her prescribed gender role, she causes Joe to doubt his own performance and question his very potency.

Joe’s gradual realization that Joanna also struggles with gender constraints not only allows them to enter into a new phase in their relationship but also provides him with a cathartic respite from his voracious need to prove his masculinity. Though this short-lived phase “could not be called a honeymoon” (258), it proves to be the least volatile time for the lovers. It is in this phase that Joanna experiments with her sexuality, grappling to reconcile both her feminine and masculine characteristics:

Now it would be that still, cold, contained figure of the first phase who, even though lost and damned, remained somehow pervious and impregnable; then it would be the other, the second one, who in furious denial of that impregnability

strove to drown in the black abyss of its own creating that physical purity which had been preserved too long now even to be lost. (261)

In essence, Joanna strives to simultaneously defy and define her femininity, just as Joe wrestles with his acceptance and understanding of what it is and, consequently, what his own gender identity is. Notably, as Joe engages Joanna's masculine femininity, he is able, for a fleeting moment, to unlock his own feminine masculinity: "Now and then they would come to the black surface, locked like sisters; the black waters would drain away. Then the world would rush back" (261). In the end, it is the traumatized and traumatizing world of Jefferson society that makes a complete and lasting reconciliation with a mixture of gender roles impossible for either character.

During their brief affair, Joe and Joanna experience shifts in power, with each taking turns dominating over and submitting to the other. This odd paradigm is only achieved through their shared performativity – a joint performance that inevitably plays itself out: "That was all dead: the scenes, faultlessly played scenes of secret and monstrous delight and of jealousy. Though if she had but known it now, she had reason for jealousy. [. . .] She did not know that the business took him to Memphis, where he betrayed her with other women, women bought for a price" (263). Joe cannot function in the composed, nonviolent phase he finds himself in with Joanna because he does not know how to define himself if he is not threatened. As a result, he once again seeks out predictable, potentially turbulent encounters with prostitutes and, more importantly, trysts that have the potential to generate a violent response from Joanna. This leads to the third phase in their relationship in which Joanna returns to the masculine role she assumed in the first phase: "What he found was a stranger who put aside with the calm firmness of a

man his hand when at last and in a kind of baffled desperation he went and touched her” (268). Always lost in confused responses, Joe attributes the change in behavior to her supposed pregnancy, implying that her calm, masculine demeanor is the side effect of an exclusively feminine experience.

It is later revealed, however, that Joanna is actually, in Joe’s words, “old” and “worn out” (277-8). The revelation that she is “not any good anymore” is preceded by a violent confrontation between the two in which Joanna asks Joe to define his race and “tell niggers that [he is] a nigger too” (277). As Gammel notes, “The killing scene is presented as [. . .] the logical climax of an unrelenting and merciless power struggle, with Joe longing for Joanna’s surrender as a female, and she waiting for his surrender as a ‘Negro’” (19). Like Joe, who cannot escape his ambiguous race or gender, Joanna is trapped by both the sexual and social implications of menopause; already caught up in a tangled web of social imperatives, Joe and Joanna further entrap each other, adding to their wounds and contributing to their perpetual trauma. Just as Joe is doomed to be “that nigger Christmas” (442), Joanna’s loss of fertility condemns her, rendering her impotent and causing her to lash out at him. In response, Joe strikes her, as if making her bleed from another orifice might somehow restore her “dried up” femininity, triggering Joanna to declare through her bloodied mouth, “‘maybe it would be better if we both were dead’” (278). Once again, Joe uses violence and misogynist language in an attempt to regain control, and his relegation of Joanna to the realm of the grey, useless, menopausal female signals a shift in their relationship, trapping her in an identity from which neither of them can escape. As a result, Joe’s apprehensive fear of Joanna not only portends his demise, but is also symptomatic of his hyper-anxious state:

: He began to be afraid. He could not have said of what. But he began to see himself as from a distance, like a man being sucked down into a bottomless morass [. . .] he was thinking, saying aloud to himself sometimes, 'I better move. I better get away from here.' But something held him, as the fatalist can always be held: by curiosity, pessimism, by sheer inertia. (260)

While it is the fear of Joanna that holds Joe's interest, his anxiety towards her and his inability to flee from her indicate the depth of the vortex in which Joe's traumatized existence has him trapped.

Paradoxically, this overwhelming male anxiety about the female is both the cause and effect of Joe's wounded masculinity. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses such an anxiety, distinguishing it from other nervous responses:

'Fright', 'fear', and 'anxiety' are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. 'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. 'Fear' requires a definite object of which to be afraid. 'Fright', however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise [. . .] There is something about anxiety that protects its subject against fright [. . .]. (598)

In light of Freud's distinction, Joe's anxiety results in his "sheer inertia," which insulates him, allowing him to recognize the threat but rendering him unable to respond accordingly. In a sense, Joe's sustained trauma leads to an anxiety which is foreboding and yet eliminates the element of surprise. This is why, when finally confronted with the

reality of his premonition, Joe is neither surprised nor frightened – why, after killing Joanna after she unsuccessfully tries to kill him, “he believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe. He was saying to himself *I had to do it* already in the past tense; *I had to do it*” (280). This fatalist notion suggests Joe’s slaughter of Joanna is compulsory, much like that of his previous sacrificial lamb, caused by the very anxiety of his unhealable, masculine wounds which do not allow him to process the existence of a non-violent alternative.

Following the discovery of Joanna’s murder, Joe is unable to successfully flee Jefferson. Instead, he circles the town – literally acting out the final manifestation of his figurative entrapment. Eventually, Joe’s anxious existence comes full circle and signals his inevitable, tragic implosion:

The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on. He thought of that with astonishment: going on, myriad, familiar, since all that he had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and had-been would be the same. (281)

Caught in this circle of anxiety and trauma, after almost thirty years of running, Joe suddenly cannot run anymore; he can no longer elude his past or himself – a realization that anticipates his ultimate submission to the men of Jefferson.

In fact, Joe’s unyielding need to prove his masculinity causes him to respond to situations in ways that only exacerbate his trauma. When considering “fight-or-flight” reactions (terms Walter Cannon coined in 1915 as a means of understanding fright

responses in animals⁸), Joe exhibits an extreme and perverse propensity to engage in both behaviors throughout the novel. Like Lucas Burch, who desperately flees from the woman he has impregnated, Joe spends most of his life running from his past. His constant flight, however, is a frantic attempt to escape not from a woman but from a possibly feminine self; however, he simultaneously runs towards that self and the reprieve it offers him from his violent, masculine existence. This is why Joe is both drawn to and repelled by strong, almost masculine women, finding temporary solace in relinquishing control only to become violently enraged by his fears of femininity and a perceived impotence. Ultimately, he exhausts himself struggling to reconcile his desire for submission with his compulsive need to dominate – a vicious closed-circuit trauma that culminates with his literal castration.

Throughout the novel, Joe is paralleled with other male characters who also struggle to define their masculinity and who respond to various social situations with similar “fight-or-flight” reactions. It is as if Jefferson society forces these men to enact roles of either predator or prey, and they must constantly choose between reinforcing this social order and fleeing from it. For example, when Burch escapes Lena Grove for the final time, he runs with

the snarling and malevolent breathing of a fleeing animal: while he stands looking both ways along the empty track his face, his expression, is that of an animal fleeing alone, desiring no fellowaid, clinging to its solitary dependence upon its own muscles alone and which, in the pause to renew breath, hates every tree and grassblade in sight as if it were a live enemy, hates the very earth it rests upon, the very air it needs to renew breathing. (433)

Though he does not physically attack Lena as Joe might have, Burch's reaction is wrought with "rage and impotence" (435). Markedly, it is this same impotent rage that causes Byron Bunch to hopelessly assault Burch, as he thinks, "'You're bigger than me [. . .] But I don't care. You've had every other advantage of me. And I don't care about that neither. You've done throwed away twice inside of nine months what I aint had in thirtyfive years. And now I'm going to get the hell beat out of me and I don't care about that, neither'" (439). The confrontation leaves Byron "bleeding and quiet," and he "feels no particular pain [. . .] but better than that, he feels no haste, no urgency, to do anything or go anywhere" (439). In his submission to another man, Byron, like Joe, finds comfort and, more importantly, a cathartic reprieve from the pressure to prove his worth in terms of masculine strength.

In much the same way, Joe is referred to as and treated like an animal, identified in terms that devastate his sense of self and ultimately trigger his compensatory, hyper-masculine responses. When the dietician discovers him watching her, she hisses, "'You little rat! [. . .] you little rat! Spying on me! You little nigger bastard!'" (122). Even as a child, Joe is trapped, doomed to be forever branded and re-branded with identities he cannot command and which, as an adult, he struggles constantly to resist. When he leaves the orphanage, McEachern declares, "'He will eat my bread and he will observe my religion [. . .] Why should he not bear my name?'" (145). Although his new step-father refers to him like a stray farm animal, the young Joe refuses to acknowledge the new label with simplistic indifference: "The child was not listening. He was not bothered. He did not especially care [. . .] He didn't even bother to say to himself *My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas* There was no need to bother about that

yet. There was plenty of time” (145). Sure enough, the adult Joe exhausts himself “bothering about that,” as he violently resists the labels stamped on him by McEachern, Joanna, and all of Jefferson – until he eventually succumbs to Percy Grimm, his violent mirror and the executor of the town’s final, immutable brand.

In fact, Joe’s childhood beatings at the hands of his stepfather leave him feeling “weak and peaceful” (153), revealing that Joe’s only reprieve from his traumatized resistance – demonstrated in his constant fighting and fleeing – comes with the act of deliberate submission. When Joe is finally captured in the end, yet another animal analogy is used to describe his encounter with the fanatical Doc Hines:

They held Hines, cursing, his old frail bones and his stringlike muscles for the time inherent with the fluid and supple fury of a weasel. He broke free of them and sprang forward, burrowing, and broke through [. . .] before they could grasp him again he had raised the stick and struck the captive once and he was trying to strike again when they caught him at last and held him impotent and raging, with that light, thin foam about his lips. (345)

Once again, the simultaneous impotence and rage of a male character leads him to engage in predatory violence against another man. This constant replication and refraction of traumatized masculinity exists in all of the male characters and indicates that the men in the novel are programmed to respond to their trauma in a combination of ritualistic and animalistic ways.

The only man who neither fights nor flees in the novel is the “Done Damned” Reverend Hightower (61). However, he is also trapped in the vicious cycle of masculine trauma, like “a sort of cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth” (62).

Banned from the pulpit, Hightower is isolated from society and yet refuses to leave Jefferson, frozen like prey trying to camouflage itself from a predator's strike. Like Joe, Hightower is labeled and branded by society; but unlike their response to "that nigger murderer, Christmas" (346), the people of Jefferson feel sorry for their former minister, "as people are sometimes sorry for those whom they have at last forced to do as they wanted them to" (70). Their pity does not keep the town from speculating that Hightower was "not a natural husband" and thus is not "a natural man" (71), immediately pointing to his failure to live up to society's gender standards as a means of explaining his quarantine from them. After his wife's scandalous death, his parishioners hold him accountable for her indiscretions: "the town said that if Hightower had just been a more dependable kind of man, the kind of man a minister should be [. . .], she would have been all right too" (62). Rather than deeming him independent and respecting his individuality, his congregation – a microcosmic representation of Jefferson society – perceives him as undependable and unpredictable, thus rendering him unacceptable. Ensnared in the traumatized realm of unobtainable manhood, Hightower "watch[es] himself among faces, always among, enclosed and surrounded by, faces, as though he watched himself in his own pulpit, from the rear of the church, or as though he were a fish in a bowl" (488).

Jefferson's rejection of Hightower and his ambiguous gender construct ultimately reaches its peak with the speculation regarding his sexual orientation; the town physically victimizes him for supposedly committing acts "against God and nature" (72) with not only his "negro woman" cook (71) but also with the "negro man" (72) he hires to replace her. After being tied to a tree and beaten unconscious,

He refused to tell who had done it. The town knew that that was wrong, and

some men came to him and tried to persuade him to leave Jefferson, for his own good, telling him that the next time they might kill him. But he refused to leave. [. . .] He would neither tell, nor depart. Then all of a sudden the whole thing seemed to blow away, like an evil wind. It was as though the town realized at last that he would be a part of its life until he died, and that they might as well become reconciled. (72)

Hightower's simultaneous submission and resistance, manifested in his refusal to tell and his refusal to leave, echoes Joe's own struggle with the town of Jefferson. Unlike Joe, however, Hightower is allowed to adapt to his new role in the town; he is once again like frozen prey, seen by predators who choose inexplicably not to go in for the kill. As Byron succinctly notes, it seems "the entire affair had been a lot of people performing a play and that now and at last they had all played out the parts which had been allotted them and now they could live quietly with one another" (73). Although he is a white male, the town associatively brands Hightower with a demeaning, racially gendered identity as a means of justifying their disapproval of and alienation from him. It is from this vantage point that the former reverend concludes, "Man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear. That's how he finds he can bear anything. That's it. That's what is so terrible. That he can bear anything, anything" (299).

Hightower's observation draws attention to the cyclical relationship between the gendered performances and expectations of Jefferson society; it also examines how submission and endurance traumatically perpetuate both shame and blame.

Undoubtedly, the grimmest of all the gendered performances within the novel is executed by the hyper-masculine, appropriately named Percy Grimm. A "captain in the

State national guard” (449-50), he sees war as a valiant play in which males prove their masculine worth by acting out their respective masculine roles though ritualistic, military service. Mediocre in school and small in stature, Grimm demonstrates his masculine prowess by wearing a uniform and assuming the role of a soldier: “with his marksman’s badge (he was a fine shot)⁹ and his bars, grave, erect, he walked among the civilians with about him an air half belligerent and half the selfconscious pride of a boy” (451). A child in “man” clothes, Grimm’s masculine worth and authority are found in his outfit and his actions, somehow rendering his inadequacies immaterial. In response to his zealous performance, the town of Jefferson gradually reinforces his vainglorious existence, revealing another vicious cycle of awe and shame involved in their construction of gender identities:

So quickly is man unwittingly and unpredictably moved that without knowing that they were thinking it, the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs. (457)

Though he is Joe’s violent mirror in many respects, Grimm thrives where Joe is cut down, indicating the extreme power of Jefferson’s perception and their subsequent social decrees.

Born too young to fight in the Great War, Grimm “suffer[s] the terrible tragedy of having been born not alone too late but not late enough to have escaped first hand knowledge of the lost time when he should have been a man instead of a child” (450). When the “heroes who had suffered and served [begin] to look at one another a

little askance" (450), the young Grimm does not value their experience and knowledge, naively fighting an ex-soldier who expresses dissatisfaction with the war:

Grimm struck him at once; he was smaller than the soldier, still in his teens.

The result was foregone; even Grimm doubtless knew that. But he took his punishment until even the soldier begged the bystanders to hold the boy back.

And he wore the scars of that battle proudly as he was later to wear the uniform itself for which he had blindly fought. (450)

Like Byron and Joe, Grimm finds solace in his beating, drawing a power from his physical wounds that cannot be derived from the figurative wounds of his traumatized existence. For Grimm, however, the beating does not serve as a reprieve from the constant fight to prove his masculine worth, but rather fortifies his construction of masculine identity as evidenced by the pride in his battle scars. For him, submission to another male is equivalent to a noble, self-sacrifice, and thus is seen as a completely strong/masculine act devoid of any "feminine" weakness.

Unlike Grimm and his fixed notions of masculinity, Joe is not convinced of his own masculine constructs. When the two finally meet, it is as predator and prey, with Joe handcuffed, fleeing and panting with the "desperate breath of [a] man who even now was not free" (461). Once again, Faulkner's narrator describes the men in animal-like terms: "For an instant they glared at one another, the one stopped in the act of crouching from the leap, the other in midstride of running [. . .] He [Grimm] ran to the ditch. But in the beginning of his plunge downward into the brush that choked the steep descent he turned, clawing" (461-2). At first, Grimm chases Joe without "fury" or "outrage," like a predator hunting for survival and not merely for the thrill of the kill; ultimately, however,

Grimm's animalistic "instincts" result in a merciless and distinctly human slaughter, as "it was upon them, of them: its shameless savageness" (463). Grimm's gruesome butchery of Joe is not an act of "nature," but rather a violent and inhumane execution of social justice.

Jefferson's mob mentality is placated by the sacrifice of Joe (much like he is placated when he slays the sheep); however, the narrator notes that his death will plague the town with guilt and shame, with little hope of ceasing further trauma:

the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (465)

After his castration, "He just lay there [. . .] For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes" (464-5). In the end, Joe finds the ultimate peace in submission, as his final flight (and not fight) for survival ends with his violent destruction, completing his inescapable cycle of trauma (though contributing to the continued trauma of Jefferson society). The very fact that Joe "crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand" (449), emphasizes his futile position within the town and his inability to redefine his masculine existence. Joe's failure to defend himself, or in other words his refusal to resist, is a final act of submission, as he succumbs once and for all to the restrictive social mandates of Jefferson.

However, it is not only the townspeople of Jefferson who confine the characters within the novel, especially Joe Christmas, to a limited, racialized and gendered existence, but also critics who strive to brand him in their own resistance to his uncertain indefinability. Analyzing the incident with the “negro-girl” in the barn, Peppers writes, “In a few short pages, Faulkner has coded and uncoded Joe’s subjectivity as fascistic/masochistic to such a confusing state that it is impossible to see his representation of Joe’s masculinity as unified; in effect, he has ‘shattered the constancy’ of Joe’s identity” (134). Faulkner’s “shattering” of his protagonist’s masculine identity is evidence of Joe’s disjointed existence. When read as a fragmented male, Joe’s responses to the restrictive world around him indicate the depth of his trauma. His “fight-or-flight” reactions and his final choice to not react, or rather to “freeze,” are all acts of resistance, mere futile attempts to control the self in situations where power is neither evident nor expected. Peppers, convinced that control and submission are distinct, polar opposites¹⁰, points out, “the ultimate enactment of Joe’s ‘masochism,’ his castration and death, is less an act of submission than a somewhat traditional act of heroic defiance” (135). However defiant his actions may seem, Joe does submit in a final, desperate attempt to control his fate. His frozen refusal to resist is neither a masochistic nor a heroic suicide, but rather a compulsively impulsive survival response.

Peppers further claims, “whenever Joe subverts his masculine identity by even briefly identifying with the abject feminine (or his ‘feminized’ black blood), the narrative hastens to reinstate coding that constructs his fascistic subjectivity” (133). However, it is more than just the narrative that reinforces Joe’s rigid masculinity. Not only the dubiously omniscient narrator but the townspeople of Jefferson, including Joe himself, all

struggle to label and define – and as a result *confine* – his masculine existence, a struggle that has engulfed even the critical examiners of the text. Joe's resistance, to both his feminine self and his masculine fixity, proves *Light in August* is an anxious text that revolves around society's strict enforcement of gender boundaries. In her final assessment of the novel, Peppers argues:

When it is related by the District Attorney to his schoolmate in the distanced narrative we 'overhear,' Joe's death is coded as a heroic battle between his 'black blood' and his 'white blood,' which want Joe to kill Hightower and escape, and submit to the law, respectively. The two competing 'flows' in his interior are resolved when Joe's 'white blood' triumphs, allowing him to attain a transcendence that 'sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book' (449). This final masochistic position is not so much submissive as heroically masculine [. . .] The final ambivalent vision of male subjectivity we are left with is simultaneously one of the complete dissolution of Joe's 'fortified' masculine self and of transcendent masculinity. (135-6)

In concluding that Joe's final submission is "heroically masculine," Peppers fails to place appropriate emphasis on the source of the estimation of Joe's supposed "transcendent masculinity" – the District Attorney, Gavin Stevens¹¹, yet another traumatized male of Jefferson, who suspiciously merges Joe's tragically violent demise with the romanticized version that Peppers systematically assesses.

Within the novel, the quest for masculine autonomy involves a constant struggle to endure, or rather, to put it in animalistic terms, to survive and adapt. Perhaps Faulkner

puts it best when, with Byron Bunch as his mouthpiece, he declares ““it seems like a man can just about bear anything. He can even bear the thinking how some things is just more than he can bear. He can even bear it that if he could just give down and cry, he wouldn’t do it”” (423). In other words, if there were no boundaries to resist there would be no need for resistance, but then, one could argue, there would be no humanity either. In the end, the men of Jefferson are all wounded and, as such, respond to the threat of perceived emasculation by struggling to fix their own identities while escaping the confinement of external branding perpetrated on them by others. This constant resistance is manifested in both their violently aggressive and desperately passive reactions to each other and, in due course, to the “womenfolk” of Jefferson as well. Traumatized by such peripheral restrictions and an insatiable desire for the predictable and “known,” Joe Christmas is doomed from the start, programmed from birth to respond in over-exaggerated, “masculine” ways. Furthermore, his inability to reconcile his feminine and masculine selves, most evident in his violent interactions and failed relations with “man-like” women, is both a symptom *and* a perpetuation of Joe’s traumatic existence.

Notes

¹ Arguably, his actions are not truly masochistic in the sense that it is not the humiliation that he derives pleasure from but rather the power that comes from knowing his role within their power dynamic.

² Yet another label branded on a character within the novel limiting an identity to race and gender, a pattern repeated throughout the text.

³ Arnold Weinstein further examines other instances of “fusion” and “confusion” in *Light in August*, though he focuses on the multiple, literal confusions of one character with another (such as Lena’s child and Joe Christmas, Lucus Burch and Byron Bunch, and Joanna Burden’s “fused perspective on black and white” (9)).

⁴ Faulkner constantly refers to the men of this novel in predator-like and prey-like terms, a matter I examine and discuss in detail towards the end of this chapter.

⁵ In the novel, submission is only problematic and a sign of weakness when it is to a female character. When defeat comes at the hands of a stronger male character, a “worthy adversary” if you will, it is somehow empowering rather than effeminizing.

⁶ I realize that this is a controversial assessment; however, it is necessary to acknowledge Joanna’s “masculine” agency here.

⁷ Roberts also writes, “She displays no fear of violation; she does not seem bothered when she discovers Christmas in her kitchen one night and does not run when he, uninvited, enters her room to rape her [. . .] Joanna’s body verges on the parapet of gender: she is *almost* a man, yet she is also a woman” (174). Roberts seems determined to place Joanna in terms of her gender and Roberts’ own subjective notions of the “appropriate” gendered response. Drawing attention to another part of the traumatizing social cycle, Faulkner prompts the reader to engage in the same polarizations of gender and power that the novel seems determined to encourage readers to resist.

⁸ Cannon was president of the American Physiological Society at the time. By 1927, he began to consider rage and shock caused by trauma and their effects on emotional response. He further developed his theory with psychologist Philip Bard in an attempt to explain why people feel emotions first and then act upon them. Though he does not acknowledge it, Cannon is particularly interested in male subjects, as can be seen in the book *Walter B. Cannon, Science and Society* (Harvard UP, 2000) in which the authors explore Cannon’s World War II battlefield work on traumatic shock in England and France. Also see *Walter B. Cannon: The Life and Times of a Young Scientist* (Harvard UP, 1987).

⁹ In 1873, the gun manufacturer, Samuel Colt, touted that his new weapons were “great equalizers” of men, because they could be loaded and fired by anyone without requiring sufficient strength or dexterity. See John Walter’s *The Guns that Won the West: Firearms on the American Frontier, 1848-1898* (Greenhill Books 2006) and Harry Turtledove’s *The Guns of the South* (Del Rey, 1993).

¹⁰ Peppers writes “Throughout this shifting in his relationship with Joanna, Joe’s position shifts from control to submission” (135). Much like Foucault’s take on resistance and power, I argue that willing/consensual submission is not the opposite of controlling dominance as there is autonomy in both acts. Violent acts of assault are not actually exchanges involving a dominant and a submissive party, as the very root of the term submission implies not only consent, but even initiation. In cases of actual rape, there is no voluntary/true submission, as Faulkner states “woman resistance [is] that resistance, which, if really meant, cannot be overcome by any man for the reason that the woman observes no rules of physical combat,” or in other words, refuses to actually submit (235).

¹¹ Faulkner once again uses a Stevens (Gowan Stevens in *Sanctuary* and Gavin Stevens in *Light in August*) as a male character who romanticizes masculinity. Proud of their Ivy League educations and their respective fraternal associations, both Stevens characters read other males based on their own, fixed, particularly Southern codes of masculine conduct.

Conclusion

This thesis explored violent masculinity and trauma in two of Faulkner's most brutal and gruesome novels. Caught in the vortex of shame and impotent rage that traps all of the men in both novels, Popeye and Joe Christmas retaliate against their constrictions by aggressively performing their genders. Determined to control the other males' perceptions of them, both men unwittingly succumb to their own doomed characterizations after their vicious encounters with women. Although Popeye escapes punishment for raping and kidnapping Temple Drake, he is eventually hanged for a murder he did not commit. Joe, on the other hand, is punished for the murder of Joanna Burden, though it never comes to light that he acted in self defense. Ultimately, the tragedies that envelop and originate with both Popeye and Joe result from their own dreadful, traumatic existences. But why study the implications of the trauma inflicted upon and by these men? Does this merely keep readers from "reducing" these characters to "allegorical symbol[s]" as J. Douglas Canfield contends (7)?

In her essay "Trauma Studies and Faulkner's *Sanctuary*," D. Stringer notes, "trauma studies has taken literature as one of its primary objects for over a decade" (5). Stringer focuses on Cathy Caruth's 1996 *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, claiming it "is the most comprehensive, and influential, theoretical articulation of a Freudian account of psychic trauma with literary-critical disciplinary practices" (5). Building on Caruth's arguments, Stringer asserts that

not only should literature be reread as an extension of Freudian accounts of material and psychic trauma, but trauma should be read in/as literature. The

‘crucial link between literature and theory’ is not some more or less arbitrary connection forged by the field-definition and field-coverage model of disciplinary expansion, but a vital imperative generated by the practice of rereading itself. Insofar as academic literary study is definable as professional rereading, Caruth aims not merely to influence some sector of the profession, but to reframe all professional literary-scholarly activity in terms of psychoanalytic and historical accounts of trauma. From this point of view, reading and criticism, though based in deep knowledge, are also an encounter, at once ethical and epistemological, with that which we cannot describe or know. (5)

Thus, the recounting of the traumatic childhoods of both Faulkner’s protagonists in each novel is more than just Canfield’s “anecdotal parody of a typically modern, sociopsychological, environmental explanation” (7); it is the link that re-humanizes two of his most tragic male figures and demands a rereading, to use Stringer’s term, of each of their characters and gender constructs.

Focusing on male characters, I intentionally sidestepped engaging in any in-depth analyses of the females in both texts. However in closing, I want to assert that Lena Grove in *Light in August* seems to offer something outside of this masculine system of power and rage. The novel opens with a fully pregnant Lena, an unescorted and unwed woman who is somehow able to literally walk in a man’s shoes, traveling across multiple states in a slightly worn pair of her brother’s shoes (6). When the farmer, Armstid, stops to offer her a ride, he notices that “She wears no stockings. Her bare feet side by side in the shallow ditch. The pair of dusty, heavy, manlooking shoes beside them [. . .]” (11). In this instance, Lena demonstrates that she is poignantly aware of

society's perception of her, deliberately removing her "manly" shoes and assuming the role of a pregnant woman in need of help when approached by members of society. As a fully realized female, her "womanliness" is obvious and she is simultaneously viewed as threatening and non-threatening – a symbol of both disgrace and hope, signified by the potential she carries in her womb, which she refuses to hide away in the face of its clearly scandalous connotations. Ripe with power, Lena experiences a freedom that she exploits, for it is the very condition that causes Jefferson to judge her that renders her above reproach and beyond shame. Furthermore, her seemingly naive refusal to perform her gender and own the shame that society expects of her enables her to journey beyond societal boundaries and progress at will.

In a sense, Lena's adaptable nature and ability to walk in her brother's shoes allows her to accomplish what Joe Christmas could never do. At one point, Joe is also given the chance to walk in another's shoes: "a woman appeared [. . .] She was wearing a pair of man's shoes, which a member of the posse identified as having belonged to the fugitive. She told them about the white man on the road [. . .] and how he had swapped shoes with her, taking in exchange a pair of her husband's brogans which she was wearing at the time" (329). Although the exchange does permit Joe a brief reprieve, unlike Lena, he is unable to thoroughly capitalize on his borrowed identity. As T.H. Adamowski points out,

Christmas' fate with men has always been that they appeared right and infallible.

But he struggled with them and with the women who mystified him. The result was life based on the model of the past. In his final days he seeks to break the circle that such struggle has formed around his life. [. . .] To find peace requires

that he give up his personal and individual past and accept the institutional and general past that the Others had always in waiting for the niggers whom they had created. ("Joe Christmas," 251)

This peace that eludes Joe is what Lena is able to procure for herself. Her unashamed serenity and stubborn progress prove that she is not only intelligent but resourceful too, as she "resists or creates meaning, but never acts to fulfill the fixed interpretations of others" (Richardson 31). In fact, as Deborah Clarke points out, "The literal truth of Lena's thoughts and actions destroys the myths which the men create about her. Her denial of male established order threatens the patriarchal community far more than Joe Christmas' violence. [. . .] Because she remains 'literal,' she paradoxically remains distanced and mysterious" (403). In the end, it is Lena who is able to successfully resist being permanently branded by Jefferson, refusing to succumb to the townspeople's judgments and moving beyond their grasp.

In *Light in August*, Faulkner encompasses the tragic story of Joe Christmas within Lena's story of determination, potential and hope. This is the exact opposite effect that Faulkner achieves in his previous construction of *Sanctuary*, which begins with the mechanized Popeye and ends with an equally emotionless Temple Drake, who survives her dreadful rape but never manages to escape being dominated and defined by the males that surround her. In fact, *Sanctuary* does not offer female characters who signify any hope for the future generations of Jefferson. Besides Miss Reba with her prostitute "daughters" and her two dogs, the only mother figure that is presented by Faulkner is Ruby Lamar, with her sickly child who is kept in a wooden box near the stove to keep the rats away – a coffin-like image that symbolizes her failure to nurture as well as her

dismal chance for leaving a lasting, meaningful legacy. While Ruby is also a survivor, she is filled with despair and lacks Lena's uncanny ability to thrive. In fact, with the exception of Joanna Burden, the women in both of these novels all manage to adapt and survive, but only Lena is able to move beyond the physical and societal limitations of Jefferson.

On the other hand, *Sanctuary*'s Popeye and *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas are both destroyed in the end. In the novels, Faulkner revisits the themes of masculine trauma caused by society-enforced gender constructions, creating two tales of despair and desperation that present similarly tragic male figures who struggle to maintain control through masculine rituals. Ultimately, the first novel's lack of any wholly sympathetic character prevents it from achieving the three-dimensionality of its successor. In fact, while it is easy to vilify and condemn Popeye, many critics struggle to defend Joe Christmas and denounce his violent demise. When studying these texts together, however, a new light is shed on *Sanctuary* and its dismal cast of abused and abandoned characters – here, Jefferson society is depicted at its worst, without hope of redemption. While *Light in August* also portrays a distressed society, fraught with disapproval and conviction, Faulkner incorporates signs of hope and possibility. Combined, *Sanctuary* and *Light in August* test more than the boundaries of Jefferson – they urge readers not to polarize the characters but to allow for the coexistence of good and evil, black and white, masculine and feminine within each of them.