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The multiple formations of identity in selected texts by William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams

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Chapter 1
Introduction

> Our question is still identity. What is identity, this concept of which the transparent identity to itself is always dogmatically presupposed by so many debates on monoculturalism or multiculturalism, nationality, citizenship, and, in general, belonging? (Derrida, *Monolingualism* 14)

> If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. (Foucault, "Sex, Power" 166)

> What, then, is the need for a further debate about "identity"? Who needs it? (Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 15)

Personal position of enunciation

While a personal introduction may be an unconventional approach to the opening chapter of an academic thesis, a closer consideration of the name and surname appearing on the title page of this document serves a double function. This name and surname not only reveal my identity to the reader, but also gesture – by way of an example in and through language – towards the principal focus of this enquiry: an investigation into the intricate relationship between language and selfhood. A reader familiar with the South African context might already make certain gendered, racial, linguistic and cultural assumptions about me based on the name "Morné Malan" – most of which would not be inaccurate. I am, indeed, a white, South African man and Afrikaans is both my home language and my cultural heritage. What this implies is that I was born and raised in a white, Afrikaans-speaking family, who shared not only a first language, but also a set of associated, relatively conservative values and norms relating to matters of history, the Afrikaner culture and Christian faith. In addition to this – and owing to the discriminatory language policies of the pre-1994 South African government, which prioritized Afrikaans and English as national media of instruction – I was privileged to have received my primary, secondary and tertiary education also in my "mother

tongue", while acquiring English largely as a second language.[1] In light of this personal information, the question which follows is predictable: Why would an Afrikaans-speaking, contemporary, South African be interested in authors from the American South who wrote in English and lived during the previous century? Moreover, why and how is such a study important here and now?

I suppose that the implication entailed by such questions – particularly in local non-academic circles – is that a South African scholar might appear to be more responsible in choosing a topic that is a little "closer to home", a project which is perhaps more obviously relevant to some of the pressing questions in our current socio-political climate in which the standard of secondary language education is poor, friction between cultures persists, and the debate about the possibility of a national literature continues. Why not a South African topic? Why not a South African author? In certain conservative circles, these questions may even boil down to a matter of loyalty. My choice of English literature as the focus of my research, and English as the medium of my writing, might be construed as a form of denial or betrayal of my Afrikaans heritage, particularly in the face of what is perceived to be mounting pressure on minorities to negotiate the survival of their cultural identities in an increasingly globalised and Anglicized society. "But you're Afrikaans", is the surprised response which my project most often elicits. This observation not only pertains to the languages I am able to speak, but also implies something more about my expected loyalties and interests. What, then, does such an observation as "You are Afrikaans" really mean? Can one be a language, or be an associated culture? Should a first-language speaker of Afrikaans necessarily be associated with the cultural norms and values of the Afrikaner? Given our culturally diversified and highly politicized language environment, I see a study of this kind as particularly important in probing questions about those aspects which we believe make us unique, and those which all languages and cultures have in common. In short, the possessive aspect of expressions such as "my home language", or "my culture", remains perplexing in any language and in any culture.

Theorist Jacques Derrida, born a French-speaking Algerian, is similarly intrigued by the possessive aspects of languages and their speakers. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, he proposes the following seemingly paradoxical maxim: "... I *only* have one language, yet it is

[1] The Republic of South Africa held its first fully democratic elections in 1994. Following this major social and political landmark, the country's policies were adjusted to be inclusive of eleven official languages.

not mine" (2). In his discussion of this ambiguity, he argues that we can never fully own a language, because language pre-exists us. During early childhood, we are absorbed into a linguistic system which we receive from a particular other – the mother, the father or the primary caregiver – who, in turn, has received this language from someone else. "My language," Derrida reiterates, "the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other" (*Monolingualism* 25). The possessive adjective in "my home language" is thus misleading, because it appears to be a matter of language's absorbing us, of language's "owning" us. Even that which we regard as our home language is never "ours" to begin with and, in a sense, we always remain borrowers and users of language, but never owners with special rights of ownership.

But Derrida takes the argument a step further by pointing out that this perpetual displacement of ourselves by language, this alienating effect which a language has on all of its speakers, is an inherent characteristic of language itself, because it is constitutive of the way in which all languages function. "This structure of alienation without alienation, this inalienable alienation ... structures the peculiarity [*le propre*] and property of language" (Derrida, *Monolingualism* 25). Language always and necessarily displaces the individual by placing the subject away, or apart, from itself. This estrangement or splitting is exemplified in the functioning of the personal pronoun "I". The moment that we say, or write, or even think "I" – that is, when we attempt to pin down or capture the self in and through language – is the very moment in which that attempt fails. It is the instant in which the spoken "I" is no longer the same as, or identical to, the speaking self. The logical conclusion of this is that one can never be a language, or absolutely inhabit a language, even a language which one believes is one's "home". Language does not allow for absolute and unquestionable inhabitation or ownership.

In light of these theoretical subtleties, I am often intrigued by the ways in which the languages I write and speak are so easily assumed to contain the essence of my selfhood. Preconceived notions and expectations of me often come into play in my work as a bilingual scholar, tutor and author – assumptions which are, no doubt, heavily influenced by social, cultural and political stigma. Even the way in which I speak English – with a recognizable Afrikaans accent – sometimes invites suspicions based on a persistent historical stereotype of the conservative, close-minded "Afrikaner". These stigmatizing assumptions may create subtle barriers of attitude which are to be broken down before fluid rapport may follow. My personal experience has thus demonstrated the extent to which language, culture and identity

are not only closely, but also politically entwined in South Africa; perhaps consequently, the American South and its complex cultural challenges are particularly intriguing to me as a foreign reader of American literature. Of course, one should be wary of drawing too close a comparison between vastly different socio-cultural realms such as South Africa and the United States, but I have often felt that aspects of Southernness and the subtle ways in which they are perceived in the United States seem peculiarly familiar.

A certain historical stereotyping of Southerners – also a cultural minority in the broader national context of the United States – appears to be common.[2] In some ways, this is comparable to the generalizations associated with Afrikaans speakers in South Africa. Both the Southern subject and the Afrikaner are often wrongly associated with staunch religious conservatism, intellectual backwardness, a strongly patriarchal and agricultural orientation, and even covert racism. Admittedly, the South does not have a language of its own, such as Afrikaans, yet speaking English with a Southern drawl came – and often still comes[3] – with connotations comparable to those associated with the Afrikaans accent in South Africa today. These comparable aspects have intensified my personal interest in the South as an engaging region for an investigation into the ways in which language interacts with personal and cultural identity, as well as a starting point for a rigorous critical enquiry of the selected Southern texts. But to reach beyond the particularities of certain cultures and certain languages, we need to begin the interrogation of selfhood by asking a deceptively simple, yet theoretically vital question: what should we understand under the ubiquitous term "identity"? What is identity?

Identity: a theoretical framework

Identity has been a vexing topic in the Humanities in recent years and, not surprisingly, a proliferation of theoretical studies in an array of disciplines have taken up the challenge of elaborating on the meaning and construction of selfhood. As Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman concur in their General Introduction to *Identity: A Reader*, one of the effects of this growing interest is that the term itself has taken on a host of different meanings,

[2] As recently as 2006, Lori Wynn reports on this topic in an online article in the *Daily Helmsman* entitled "Views of the South Still Based on Flawed Influences". See also "Surveying the South: Studies in Regional Sociology" by John Shelton Reed in *The Journal of Southern History.*

[3] See, for example, Jeffery Collins and Kristen Wyatt's online report "Hey, Y'all, Want to Lose the Drawl?" in *USA Today.*

depending on the precise context in which it is used (1). This rise to prominence of notions of identity, they propose, is owing in part to the idea that the various "categories" of self to which the word was traditionally held to refer – that is, classes of personhood such as man and woman; black and white; Christian or Muslim – are today being questioned more regularly. These categories have become "more contingent, fragile and incomplete, and thus more amenable to reconstitution than was previously thought possible" (Du Gay, Evans and Redman 2). Kathryn Woodward, in another collection of essays on this topic entitled *Identity and Difference*, adds that the instability in the classes of self is often experienced by modern men and women as a kind of loss of identity, a so-called modern-day "identity crisis" in which aspects of the self, which previously seemed incontestable, are constantly being placed under pressure (1). Identity thus appears, from the outset, to be an extremely unstable notion.

It is this general movement away from previously accepted certainties towards what appears to be a growing relativism and contingency in notions of self that registers the broadest division in the theoretical debate on the topic: the persistent tension that exists between the essentialist and the non-essentialist views of the self, or what is more colloquially referred to as the old nature-versus-nurture chestnut. Is identity innate, inherent or inborn; or is it created through familial, social and cultural conditioning and circumstances? However, as Woodward acknowledges, this dualism is merely a historical departure point, as much of the most recent theoretical thinking challenges the validity of this binaristic view by seeking "alternative understandings of identity and difference" that incorporate both "the making of identity" and notions of "source" (4). Contemporary work on the self thus attempts both to embrace and transcend the two sides of the dialogue, this dualism which has previously deadlocked discussion. Drawing on this new strategy, thinkers try to reach beyond pure "nature" and "nurture" into what could be described as a more ambiguous third space in which no absolutisms prevail. Such a view, however, depends on a thorough understanding of what used to be the two extremes of this polarisation: the essentialist and the non-essentialist positions.

Historically, the essentialist view of the self rose to prominence particularly during the Enlightenment project of the mid-seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. This intellectual movement brought about what could be described – broadly speaking – as a general process of rationalization and secularization in Western thought, even to the extent of affecting the

ways in which individual subjects viewed themselves and their place in society.[4] Prior to 1650 – a conventional historical approximation, rather than a precise marker – Western civilization functioned largely around a common core of religious, traditional, and authoritarian beliefs, which left little room for notions of individuality, independence of thought, or personal freedom. The self was seen, during this time, as little more than the mindless and voiceless, and thus perpetually subordinate, subject of the church and state. These two authorities formed a formidable combined hegemony, dictating all beliefs about what should be considered ontologically, morally and politically correct. Pre-Enlightenment society – to use another strategic and synoptic overview – was thus one in which little value was placed on what made a person unique and distinct from other subjects in the kingdom, as the emphasis clearly fell away from the individual and onto the collective self which the papacy and aristocracy imposed; a version of identity that was rarely challenged or questioned.

After 1650, however, the Western intellectual and social landscape began to experience a sea-change. Intensified by increased scientific exploration and discovery, a radical questioning of prescribed and accepted "fundamental" truths of religion and the divinely ordained system of aristocratic land-ownership set in. This movement was based largely on a new philosophical reasoning which assisted in overthrowing theology's hegemony in the world of study. Not since the ancient Greek and Roman societies in late antiquity had philosophy enjoyed such prominence and importance. The rational description of perception slowly but surely began to eradicate belief in the supernatural, but also posed a serious and, to many, quite frightening threat to religion.[5] Distinctive changes in Enlightenment society also reflect this new secularized reasoning, changes which included the end of persecutions based on witchcraft and sorcery and the emergence, in the early 1700s, of women into the public sphere as the

[4] My understanding of the Enlightenment project and its relation to notions of selfhood is shaped by two historical studies on the topic, which I have found thorough and wide enough in scope to be useful for my limited interests here. They are Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* and Alfred Cobban's *In Search of Humanity: The Role of the Enlightenment in Modern History*. Israel makes an important observation regarding the geographical spread of the European Enlightenment when he writes that most accounts of this movement "concentrate on developments in only one or two countries, particularly England and France," but that "the intellectual scenario of the age was extremely wide-ranging and was never confined to just one or two regions. It was ... a drama played out from the depths of Spain to Russia and from Scandinavia to Sicily." (7).

[5] Israel enters, again, an important qualification by pointing out that it would be a mistake to consider the Enlightenment before 1750 as a "straightforward two-way contest between traditionalists and *moderni*. Rather, the rivalry between moderate mainstream and radical fringe was always as much an integral part of the drama as that between the moderate Enlightenment and conservative opposition," thus resembling a "triangular battle of ideas" (11).

potential equals of men in intellect, the arts and personal liberty. Along with these social developments came a shift in focus from ecclesiastic and monarchical authority over the self to such radical notions as self-determination, democracy and the pursuit of individual happiness. For the first time in centuries, the self once again became a legitimate topic for thought and discourse, as increasing value was attached to the abilities, capacities and equality of all individuals. The Enlightenment subject thus began slowly but surely to emancipate itself from its immaturity, which was both imposed by the strictures of church and state and self-incurred, and to embrace its own ability to reason and determine its destiny.

This stronger, perhaps more egotistical, public emphasis on the self is emblematically, yet not solely, reflected in the prominence of Cartesianism during the Enlightenment. This philosophical school of thought followed what is often described as René Descartes' "mechanical" (Israel 14) or "mechanistic world-view" (Cobban 43). Cartesian philosophy proposed a more secular orientation, which differed radically from the unstable supernatural view of the world, and projected a rigorous mechanism of unchangeable natural laws and constants onto the functioning of the universe. To the faithful, this became the subordination of theology to concepts such as mathematics and science. Cartesians, however, never held the overthrow of the Church's hegemony as their explicit goal, although this came to be one of this philosophy's more far-reaching consequences. In a way similar to that in which Copernicus's heliocentrism revolutionised the scientific and astronomical view of the world, Descartes' centring of man's inherent rationality brought about a landmark change in ontology, opening up the way for a view of the self as an integrated, autonomous and self-determined master of its universe.

This perspective on selfhood, however, proved not to be lasting. Modern and contemporary suspicions of essentialism have posed a serious challenge to the Enlightenment notion of the completely autonomous subject. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for example, provides one of the most eloquent and thorough descriptions of this idea in the arena of cultural studies:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. ("From the Native's Point of View" 229)

The "peculiarity" of which Geertz writes is largely owing to the pervasive and progressive de-centering and displacement of the subject that has taken place in post-Enlightenment thought. In a near-reversal of the progression towards individuality and self-reliance, this gradual shift is associated with an increased questioning of the boundaries that seem to separate and differentiate one subject from another. However, despite the growing critique of essentialism, disagreement still reigns over exactly how an alternative view should be conceptualized. In other words, precisely what constitutes a non-essentialist understanding of identity and, if selfhood does not occur "naturally" as an inherent capacity within all subjects, how is it fashioned and which forces assist in its fashioning?

Responses to these questions have emerged concurrently from an array of fields, and continue to appear today. In *Texts of Identity*, for example, Edward E. Sampson identifies no less than six different "voices", which he divides into various disciplines or schools of thought within the Humanities: cultural studies, feminism, social constructionism, systems theory, critical theory and deconstructionism (2). Alternatively, Woodward's method of organisation in *Identity and Difference* reflects a return to matters surrounding the body as the most immediate location for notions of self.[6] In my view, questions of identity constantly transcend physicality, and so – whereas Sampson keeps the different disciplines in the Humanities separate – I favour Du Gay, Evans and Redman's less rigid method, which organises an array of theoretical texts into an often inter-disciplinary division of three kinds of responses, regardless of the disciplinary category of thinking from which they may have emerged. These include: the subject-of-language perspective; the psychoanalytic approach; and a contextually informed strategy which is guided by the specificities of social-historical time and place (Du Gay, Evans and Redman 4).[7] While certainly not the only possible method of organization, this framework lends itself well to the strategy of this project and its interrogation of language and self-fashioning. Throughout the discussion, I will thus highlight the ways in which the research draws largely on the subject-of-language theoretical arena, but also adopts – not uncritically – a cultural-contextual strategy in the reading of the selected Southern texts.

[6] Woodward's collection of essays is divided into five sub-sections written by different contemporary authors, entitled "The Body and Difference"; "The Body, Health and Eating Disorders"; "Sexualities"; "Motherhood: Identities, Meanings and Myths"; and "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity" (1-6).

[7] It is important to note, though, that Du Gay, Evans and Redman never suggest that these areas of response are conceived as monolithic, internally uniform or self-sufficient. A degree of interdependence between, and reciprocity among, these responses is both inevitable and unavoidable.

The subject-of-language family of responses is an informal grouping of texts, which is far from uniform, but draws on the work of a collection of predominantly French theorists from heterogeneous, yet often overlapping and mutually influential, fields of study. One of the earliest texts, Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", appeared in 1969 and asserts a clearly anti-essentialist view of identity.[8] Althusser's central proposition is that selfhood is a construction of, or positioning by, ideology. His use of this term is Marxist, in other words, he sees ideology as a combination of world-views and related values that are characteristic of the reproduction of social relations in all societies, including communist societies. Althusser writes that *"all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects";* then he develops the notion of what he famously calls "interpellation" to describe how subjects are called to, or sutured to, ideological subject positions (31-34).[9] This notion of interpellation is seen as germinal to a structuralist conception of selfhood in that it demonstrates a distinctive preoccupation with, and confidence in, the structures and processes – as Althusser's title indicates, the "apparatuses" – that produce identity, rather than a concern with the individual self within such conceived systems. This is a focus which could be described as typifying structuralism.

However, the term "structuralism" is not entirely unproblematic. This word can be employed as referring to a mode of theoretical engagement in an array of disciplines, including linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, anthropology and psychoanalysis. However, any attempt at defining it as a distinctive theory, or distinguishing it clearly from the poststructuralism of the 1970s and '80s, which is inaccurately said to have "followed" or "replaced" it, remains precarious. Both within and between these broad movements in thought, which are more than succeeding and oppositional periods on a linear timescale, there are similarities and distinctions which tend to fall out of sight in a summarizing and generalizing effort. Structuralist and poststructuralist strategies are often deployed concurrently within the same discipline, and sometimes – as in the case of the social theorist, Michel Foucault – even within a single theorist's trajectory of development. An attempt at definition should thus always be treated as provisional and contingent. Far from aiming to be comprehensive and exhaustive, my account serves the discussion best by keeping a tight

[8] This text appeared in English in 1971.
[9] Althusser's argument is, of course, shaped by earlier work of theorists such as Émile Benviniste, who wrote "Subjectivity in Language". In order to avoid a lengthy digression at this point, I defer my critical account of the development of Althusser's term to Chapter 3 (76-77) where it serves a directly relevant function in the shaping of the discussion.

focus on the differences between the structuralist and poststructuralist attitudes in their engagement with questions of identity.

An important location of friction and interaction between structuralist and poststructuralist thinking is the work of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (first published posthumously in French in 1916), Saussure offers what has proven to be a widely influential attempt at organizing language as a semiotic system, that is, language as a science of signs. Saussure famously proposes that the most basic "unit" of language is the semiotic sign, which consists of a signifier (a word, or more precisely, a sound-image) and the signified (the extra-linguistic concept or object to which the signifier is connected) (65-66). While the rigidity of this binary construction is questionable from the outset – as Jacques Derrida's later deconstructive criticism of Saussure shows (*Of Grammatology* 30-47) – Saussure proposes, more importantly, that the connection between the signifier and the signified remains arbitrary, yet that they cannot be separated arbitrarily. What this implies is that there seems to be no logical or obvious reason why a sound-image such as "tree" should correspond with the familiar object in nature we know as a tree. Yet one cannot substitute for this sound-image any other combination of sounds and expect it to retain the same meaning within the linguistic system of English. It follows that each sign derives its value or meaning within the semiotic system not from its own content, that is, from its essence, but from its positioning in relation to other signs in the same system. Saussure then posits the radical assertion that, "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" – that is, terms that are entirely self-reliant and self-contained and that do not depend on their relationship with others in an articulated system for their meaning (120).

Already in this brief overview of Saussure's work, one begins to notice the anti-essentialist tendencies in the structuralist mindset. A structuralist strategy often deploys semiotic principles as the backbone of its theoretical operation and its engagement with material outside of the linguistic arena. Structuralism therefore tends to display a preoccupation not with inherent meaning, but rather with the processes and structures that produce signification. From this, one can extrapolate the structuralist conception of identity: just as there are no self-referential, essential terms in language, there are also no "true", essential or pre-social selves in culture or society. A structuralist theory of selfhood thus proposes that identities are constituted or enacted purely through the subject positions made available in language and through wider cultural conventions. Identity is seen as an effect of systems and processes

imposed on the subject from the outside, a view with which Althusser's conception of ideology as an identifying system resonates. But Althusser is by no means the only structuralist thinker in the subject-of-language family. Moving away from the Marxist inflection of his notions of ideology as a form of narrow class and economic reductionism, the early work of Foucault proposes a more inclusive view of anti-essentialist self-fashioning: that of discursive relations of power in the shaping of the self. Foucault's account of power relations includes all kinds of discourse: not merely the economic or the political, but also social, cultural and interpersonal relations. Foucault remains, however, a somewhat contradictory figure in the structuralist-postructuralist dialogue, owing to the gradual drift in his position from the archeological approach of his initial work to the genealogical strategy of his later thinking.[10]

In studies such as *Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, The Order of Things, The Archeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault appears almost single-mindedly determined to historicize and contextualize notions of subjectivity within various socio-historical spheres. But this strategy leads, perhaps inadvertently, to the marginalization of individuality and personal choice in his early work. A point of critique of his archeological texts is that Foucault attaches too little value to the role that the subject itself plays within the process of its positioning by social, historical and cultural discourse. It is as though Foucault's subject positions become undisputed categories which the subject seems to occupy without any hesitation or negotiation at all.[11] However, Foucault's later work begins to remedy this weakness through his shift towards a genealogical method. It is, however, only at the end of his career that Foucault begins to recognize the notion that – in order to attain some sort of balance – an account of the individual's making of a self, of practices of self-constitution within social discourse, should carry a weight at least equal to that of the subject's positioning by discourse. This change of emphasis is particularly evident in his uncompleted volumes, collectively called *The History of Sexuality,* where he begins to use an approach that gives more prominence to the individual.

[10] Foucault's term "archeological" is used to denote his initial focus on the ways in which discursive formations manifest themselves in relation to an underlying episteme which determines the relations between ideas. When he later starts using "genealogy", this reflects a growing interest in what is perceived to be (but often is not) the origin or essence of a body of knowledge. David Macey adds that a "genealogical study of gender", for example, "does not ... look forward to the liberation of some repressed essence but, rather, to a liberation from the categories of gender" (157).

[11] See also Chapter 3 (78-79) for a more detailed survey of the criticism of Foucault's work by Stuart Hall and others.

In some ways, though, I agree with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observation that Foucault remains a structuralist at heart, even at the end of his career. This is owing to his continued tendency to diagnose "an age in terms of its *epistémè,* the self-defined structure of its knowing" ("Translator's Preface" lx). This structuralist emphasis never disappears in his work – not even in *The History of Sexuality* – and "he has had, with repeated protestations to the contrary, to step out of epistemic structures in general, assuming that were possible" (Spivak, "Translator's Preface" lx). Underlying Spivak's assertion, one recognises the influence of Derrida's deconstructive reading of Foucault, in which he proposes that there can be no "outside" of the knowledge structure, as Foucault seems to suggest, that is, no vantage point external to the episteme from which to conceptualize and criticize it ("Cogito" 31-63). This is not going so far as to imply that Derrida was directly responsible for Foucault's shift in ideological orientation. However, the destabilising of the inside-outside dichotomy, which is so often encountered in structuralist classificatory thinking, is integral to a deconstructive project and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, in which notions of "outsiderism" in cultures and communities are deconstructed by using ideas traced in Derrida's essay, "Plato's Pharmacy".[12] The early Foucault and Althusser's conceptions of identity are similarly structuralist in that they both see the self not as containing any core or essence within itself, but as an effect of processes which affect and shape the subject, however differently they might conceive of such external forces.

Poststructuralism, in some ways, radicalizes the anti-essentialism in structuralist thinking. Perhaps paradoxically, though, this comes about through a critique of structuralism's linguistic assumptions, and in this area, Derrida's thinking has proven to be unsettling. One of the key thrusts of Derrida's work is a challenge to what he sees as the pervasive logocentrism in Western metaphysics: that is, the constant privileging of the phonic aspects of language over the graphic aspects of writing in Western philosophy and theory, in which the latter is construed as a poor imitation of the spoken word. Jonathan Culler captures this suspicion best: "Writing" is construed by Western philosophy as presenting "language as a series of physical marks that operate in the absence of the speaker. They may be highly ambiguous or organized in artful rhetorical patterns," and are therefore considered less desirable than having the speaker present (91). Derrida engages with Saussure's *Course in General*

[12] See Chapter 4 (140-42).

Linguistics as an example of this logocentric tendency, in a chapter called "Linguistics and Grammatology" in his *Of Grammatology*. Saussure's semiotics, he argues, clearly emphasize the sound-image as the signifier in the construction of the sign. In addition to this, Derrida pursues – in typical deconstructive fashion – the unsettling of the binary construct of the sign, that is, Saussure's apparently rigid pairing of signifier and signified in which the latter seems to attain a hierarchically emphasised, transcendental status outside of language (*Of Grammatology* 27-73). Derrida shows how Saussure's work – while gesturing towards the radically relative and relational aspects of language – unavoidably gets caught in its own structures. There can be no outside of the semiotic system; no signified is itself an origin which exists external to the structure and which remains beyond further division or analysis. Already, Saussure's text thus proceeds implicitly to deconstruct itself.

In my view, this is one of the reasons why it is difficult to pinpoint, at least from a linguistic perspective, a precise and decisive caesura between structuralism and postructuralism: on the surface, they seem to have the radically differential and contingent characteristics of language in common. The distinction between these modes of theoretical operation is thus subtle, and may even be as nuanced as a difference in attitude. There seems to be an underlying confidence in systematic thought with the structuralist mindset, as opposed to the inherent mistrust of systems and structures in poststructuralism. Perhaps Culler puts it best when he writes that "structuralists and semioticians optimistically elaborate theoretical metalanguages to account for textual phenomena; post-structuralists skeptically explore the paradoxes that arise in the pursuit of such projects and stress that their own work is not science but more text" (24-25). An underlying suspicion concerning systematizing processes, combined with a constant, questioning self-awareness, is thus, in my view, emblematic of the poststructuralist orientation, although it may not always be as obvious as even this suggestion wants to propose.

As a version or mode of poststructuralist engagement, deconstruction has further destabilizing implications for contemporary conceptions of identity. Compared with "poststructuralism", "deconstruction" is a term which refers, often more narrowly, to a kind of textual operation, a reading strategy deployed by poststructuralist thinkers to demonstrate and explore the differential and relational aspects of language and textuality in texts; and not merely texts "classified" as philosophy, literature or theory either, but all texts. However, deconstruction cannot be described as a neatly coherent, self-contained method or discipline

with defined origins and principles. In fact, Derrida often mistrusts – particularly in *Of Grammatology* (36) – conceptions of origin, no matter whether these are posited within a historical, linguistic or socio-cultural paradigm. Deconstruction is thus, in some ways, even a kind of counter-theory which questions and resists such theoretical operations as conventional definition and exegesis. American theorist Paul de Man explains that any text, whether it is offered within a philosophical, factual or literary context, inevitably contains moments of wilful non-transparency which have been glossed over in the interest of presenting a sound argument (103). He calls these instances of blindness, moments where the argument threatens to undercut its own premises. Through a careful process of rigorous and attentive reading, a deconstructive reader would locate these subtle ambiguities in the text, and dismantle the ways in which they often elevate one position of a binary to a status of false hierarchical domination. Derrida's critique of Saussure's signifier and signified – in which the latter seems to achieve transcendental status – serves again as an instructive example. The deconstructive reader unsettles the binary hierarchy by highlighting ways in which the pair might be equalized or inverted. This strategy puts into effect the notion that, by virtue of its textuality, no text achieves a complete or definitive meaning, but rather continues to participate in a never-ending process of signification.

Deconstruction's exploitation of the notion of relational differences, as embedded in Derrida's invented term *différance,* has important implications for our reading of identity. Derrida first develops this term in an essay entitled "Differance" in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs,* explaining that *différance* – spelt deliberately with an "a", rather than an "e" – derives from the French word *différer,* which can mean both "to differ" and "to defer" (136-137). At the phonetic level, there is nothing to distinguish the pronunciation of the French *différence* from Derrida's *différance.* The anomalous spelling and indistinguishable pronunciation of *différance* emphasize the value of writing, rather than speech: the distinction between the two words is noticeable only when written. Through this strategy, Derrida again critiques the pervasive logocentrism of Western thought, proposing that language itself, which includes speech, is a relational structure of differential oppositions. Language is made up of a vast array of different, yet co-dependent and perpetually cross-referencing signs, a notion which clearly resonates with Saussure's semiotics. But Derrida's *différance* brings together neatly these aspects of differing and deferring upon which the signification of language depends. To "differ" also shades into to "defer", which involves the idea that meaning is always put off until later "perhaps to the

point of an endless supplementarity" (Norris 32). As Christopher Norris points out, *"[d]ifférance* not only designates this theme but offers in its own unstable meaning" – this interpenetration of, and perpetual suspension between, difference and deferral – "a graphic example of the process at work" (32).

When related to selfhood, the notion of *différance* suggests that identities are not rooted in, for example, biology or a shared history, and do not cohere around an absolute essence. *Différance* implies that identities take their significance precisely from that which they are not, from their conceptual opposites. That which is assumed to be the antithesis of the self becomes part of the constituent definition of the self. The implication of this is that differential identities are themselves inherently unstable, or to use Redman's example, "the identity of the 'civilized' European is constantly haunted by the liminal presence of the 'black' and 'Oriental' others against which it defines itself and into which it continually threatens to collapse" (12).[13] In these remarks, there is already a foreshadowing of many recent texts which challenge the stability of identities and interrogate their differentiality within particular cultural, racial and social contexts. These include Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Edward Said's *Orientalism.*

On the whole, the subject-of-language perspective is thus more than merely anti-essentialist, or structuralist, in its theoretical orientation, but is further augmented by the similarities and tensions it attempts to embrace – with debatable success – between structuralist and postructuralist conceptions of self. Nonetheless, in the subject-of-language approach, identities are seen as precisely that: subjects of language, inherently incomplete signs within a larger, interpersonal system of relational meaning-making. They are therefore continually shaped and re-shaped according to principles similar to those governing language. This conception is provisionally opposed by thinkers in the psychoanalytic arena – at least, as this

[13] In "Strangers on Williams's Stage", Jurgen C. Wolter points out that some social psychologists have also begun to incorporate deconstructive notions of selfhood into their theories of otherness and stereotyping. He uses as example Norman N. Holland's "Reading and Identity: A Psychoanalytic Revolution", in which Holland proposes that "if any reading of a story or another person ... is a function of the reader's identity, then my reading of your identity must be a function of my own" (qtd. in Wolter 33). Wolter notes that social psychologists use the terms "autostereotypes" and "heterostereotypes" to explain this phenomenon: "In order to define our own identity, i.e. our autostereotype, we tend to distort the identity of others by reducing them to heterostereotypes. We try to control anyone who strikes us as strange by first categorizing and then ostracizing him (or her). ... This need to define one's own identity via heterostereotypes has always been at the root of racism, xenophobia, or nativism" (33). This idea is explored further in Chapter 4 (139-44) of this study, focusing on Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Joe Christmas from *Light in August* as figures of communal-cultural othering and expulsion.

is represented in the second grouping of readings collected by Du Gay, Evans and Redman. Psychoanalysis often moves towards the disentanglement of psychology from its subordination to linguistic theory; however, as Evans notes, this opposition occurs more by implication than through outright statement (122). None of the texts in Du Gay, Evans and Redman's substantial psychoanalytic section was written explicitly to attack the subject-of-language view. Instead, Evans points out that the readings represent a very particular tradition of thinking within contemporary psychology: that of the Kleinian and object-relations school of thought "which [has] characterized the British clinical scene since the Second World War" (121). But, while the Kleinian position on identity deserves scrutiny in a study with a stronger psychoanalytic focus, Klein's theory falls outside the scope of this project.

The third area of response posited by Du Gay, Evans and Redman problematizes and transcends the assumptions of both the "subject-of-language" approach to subjectivity and the tenets of psychoanalytic identification. As one of the advocates of this more contingent view of identity-fashioning, Amélie O. Rorty writes that "the contextual approach ... emphasises description rather than reconstruction" and "leave[s] empirically charged questions open for further investigation" (14). It is significant that Rorty uses the term "description", a word introduced by Gilbert Ryle in the second volume of his *Collected Papers,* but more famously adopted by Geertz in the field of anthropology. Largely owing to Geertz's use, the notions of "thick" and "thin" description have begun to enjoy wider currency throughout the Humanities, and are highly relevant to the approach of this study. Geertz's work is particularly instrumental in the interrogation of identity on a social scale, discussed in Chapter 4, where the "description" of communal, cultural and national selves is investigated.

In *The Interpretation of Cultures,* Geertz proposes that within ethnography – that is, the writing of cultures – a distinction should be made between "thick" and "thin" description (6). In a "thick" description of a particular event or occurrence, the writer is sensitive to "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [one] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render" (Geertz, *Interpretation* 10). To explain this principle, Geertz uses the example of the wink as a bodily sign in Western culture. A wink could have an array of meanings, ranging from conspiracy to parody, but may also assume a confusing muddle of combinations, or layers, of these significations depending on the social situation in which it is witnessed (Geertz, *Interpretation* 6-7). An ethnographer

who practices "thick" description would attempt to penetrate and disentangle each one of these layers of meaning in "rendering" a witnessed occurrence of the wink; whereas a "thin" description would entail little more than counting the contractions of one eyelid in a range of events, without sensitivity to the differences in the signification of each.

Through thick description, Geertz writes, the "doing" of ethnography becomes "like trying to read ... a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour" (*Interpretation* 10). One senses in these words a growing suspicion of ethnography's producing empirical information and the foregrounding, instead, of the significant role of the subjective and contextually contingent interpretation of such "data". This approach creates the possibility of an open-ended, ongoing process of meaning-making, of textual creation, rather the positing of over-confident final findings. The "thick" approach thus goes beyond neutral observation, and re-inserts the observing "I" into the reading project. This thesis – which opens in a similar fashion with a description of my personal position of enunciation – fits well within this area of contextual, and textual, responses to questions of identity. As a poststructuralist study, it utilizes the subject-of-language view as its theoretical point of departure, but thereafter relies strongly on the cultural and historical contextualization of theoretical perspectives as played out within the specificities of the American South. The emphasis thus falls on the inseparability of the individual from the social; with this focus, comes the recognition that identity in the South is particularly contingent upon history and culture. It is this interest in the intricate interconnection between the individual self and the communal other which is of particular importance in the work of the three theorists who have had the greatest influence on my reading of selected fictional identities in Faulkner and Williams. Although their work can be read in mutually informing and enlightening ways, their individual positions are often discordant and shows important moments of tension and friction which cannot be ignored.

Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Stuart Hall

The work of Foucault – in particular, his later genealogical thinking in *The History of Sexuality* – interrogates closely the important connection between self and other. The first volume of this largely unfinished study, *The Will to Knowledge*, thus brings an important ethical dimension to bear on the fashioning of identity by investigating the interpenetrative

relationship between the individual and the social – a notion which is scrutinized closely in Chapter 2 of this study. However, Foucault's views on literature, as well as his relationship with the work of Derrida, have not been unproblematic. Foucault, unlike Derrida, has never claimed to be a literary or philosophical commentator, and he is generally regarded as a social theorist. As Simon During points out, Foucault rarely deals with literature directly as a "category or an institution", even though "literary texts" never fall "entirely out of sight" in his writings (186). Foucault's uneasiness with literature appears to sprout from an inherent skepticism relating to literature's central modality: representation (During 186). Although Foucault was unwilling to be classified as a structuralist, even in the early stages of his career (Spivak, "Translator's Preface" lx), his tendency to distinguish between "actual" discourse in the form of public records, and literature as a secondary representation of these, is typical of the structuralist tendency: the desire to classify and privilege some forms of writing as original and others as imitation. Representation is thus assumed to be in play "whenever a cultural product [a novel, a poem] is interpreted as representing a social formation – in however displaced a fashion: where, for instance, a text is read as a 'symptom' of a particular socio-political tension, or as the expression of a particular ideological contradiction" (During 195). Derrida is, of course, highly skeptical of hierarchical binaries such as "original" and "imitation", and challenges the clear distinction made between literature and other categories of traditionally more privileged writing, such as philosophy or science. He unsettles these oppositions throughout his career, not only in theory, but also in practice through his equally thorough treatment and appreciation of texts from both classes.[14]

Deconstruction challenges the rigid distinction between literature and criticism on the basis of its assumption that, on the one hand, "literary texts [possess] meaning" and, on the other, that "literary criticism [seeks] knowledge of that meaning – a knowledge with its own proper claims to validity" (Norris xii). The structuralist strategy thus posits, again, a false hierarchy in which critical writing is positioned as the privileged revealer of the deeper significance that lies obscured in literature. Deconstruction unsettles both the clarity of, and the suppositions that underpin, this assumption by proposing that there is no definitive or transcendental meaning to be "uncovered" in any text, and that criticism thus possesses no "special kind of knowledge" (Norris xi). "For the deconstructionist," adds Norris, "criticism (like philosophy)

[14] See, for example, "The Law of Genre" in *Acts of Literature*. Derrida's discussion of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in his essay "Aphorism Countertime" is also insightful on the topic of the functioning of names. See Chapter 2 (37-38).

is always an activity of *writing*, and nowhere more rigorous … than where it knows and reveals this condition of its own possibility" (xiii). This is not to be understood, though, as implying that there is no relation at all to meaning or truth in literary texts, or that literature remains entirely meaningless. On the contrary, Derrida warns also against such absolutism. He opposes the idea that texts resist all meaningful readings when he writes: "There is no literature without a *suspended* relation to meaning and reference. *Suspended* means *suspense*, but also *dependence*, condition, conditionality" ("'That Strange Institution'" 48). One would be correct in surmising that this is an ambiguous position: literature not only defers meaning, but also depends on meaning as a provision for its existence.

Derrida's critique of Foucault's first major book, *Madness and Civilization*, is perhaps most emblematic of the uneasy intellectual relationship between these two theorists. In Foucault's first major project, his aim is to historicize the Western understanding of madness, in particular, through research into, and sustained discussion of, historical discourses on mental illness. His argument is built around what Boyne calls the moment of "Cartesian exclusion" (36): a point in Western history which Foucault places during the Enlightenment. Foucault argues that during the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man was still in "dialogue" with madness (*Madness* xii). Society's belief was that the mad had direct access to kinds of knowledge which ordinary men and women did not possess – knowledge which was related directly to mystical and religious notions (Foucault, *Madness* xiv). The mad were thus seen not as unreasonable, but as privileged, owing to their association with the supernatural, and they enjoyed, accordingly, a kind of holiness and veneration among ordinary men and women.

However, Foucault argues that during the Enlightenment, a distinct split began to appear between the categories of "reason" and "unreason". It was also during this time that the insane were first separated from the rest of society and placed in asylums, attaining a kind of sub-human, sub-rational status. The West's notion of madness was then positioned as the opposite – the unknowable other – of reason, which subsequently led to the exclusion, marginalization and silencing of the insane through the pseudo-scientific language of psychiatry. "In the serene world of mental illness," writes Foucault, "modern man no longer communicates with the madman" as there is no "common language" any longer: "the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into

oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made" (*Madness* xii).

The gist of Derrida's extended and often complicated response to Foucault's *Madness and Civilization,* offered in "Cogito in the History of Madness", is a sharp and two-pronged deconstructive critique. Derrida, in what could only be described as a typical deconstructive manoeuvre, challenges the hierarchized binarism of reason and madness which Foucault sees in Western thought by suggesting that they are not mutually exclusive, but interpenetrative notions: a concept of madness is part of the constitutive definition of reason ("Cogito" 31-63). Reason co-operates in the construction of unreason and cannot be separated from it. This has always been so, argues Derrida, even during the classical age, and Foucault's notion of an originary moment of exclusion is thus an illusion. He writes further that Foucault's book reproduces the linguistic structures that seek to exclude and determine madness: to attempt to write the archeology of a "silence" in and through language, is not only illogical, but also hypocritical, as it repeats the linguistic violence perpetrated against the insane ("Cogito" 33-38; 55). Foucault's book is thus construed, in Derrida's final and most damaging deconstructive thrust, as yet another gesture of the confinement of madness, yet another act of silencing the insane.[15]

In a belated rebuttal contained in an article in the *Oxford Literary Review* entitled "My Body, This Paper, This Fire" – which also appeared at the end of the second edition of *Madness and Civilisation,* eleven years after the first – Foucault reacts against the specifics of Derrida's reading of Descartes which, in the view of some interpreters of the debate, appear to be "not very different" from his own (Spivak, "Translator's Preface" lxi). He seems neither able nor willing to engage with Derrida's strong critique of his conception of madness as the outside of

[15] While perhaps theoretically sound, this latter point of criticism comes across as itself unfairly one-sided, and does not offer much in the way of a practical solution. Foucault's research and writing attempt, at the very least, to effect some change in the unconsidered and too easily-accepted social perspective on this issue. As Boyne points out, "Foucault's re-readings of history at least focused attention, in new and often surprising ways, on the marginal groupings in Western society" (54). What Foucault perhaps could have done to minimize the apparent violence of his approach is to illustrate a greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, the implications of his own position of enunciation. Perhaps he could have indicated the realization that his writing on behalf of the silent is indeed another act of silencing, but that there is little alternative, as those who have been silenced by discourse remain unable to speak for themselves. Silence and apathy on the part of those in power is not an effective solution. This opinion is heavily influenced by my reading of Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in which she posits that "the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation" ("Subaltern" 80). Thus, if representation cannot be avoided with respect to those who cannot represent themselves, the representative's interest and desire to do so must be foregrounded, an aspect upon which Foucault perhaps could have placed greater emphasis.

reason, that is, that madness must be conceptualised necessarily within the constraints of reason itself. However, what is intriguing is the virulence of Foucault's attack on deconstruction. Foucault takes issue – rather vehemently, one must admit – with deconstruction as a strategy, arguing that this often ruthless and "determined little pedagogy" gives the master a limitless sovereignty, and simply teaches students to repeat and reproduce his methods mindlessly (Foucault, qtd. in Spivak, "Translator's Preface" lxii) – not quite a fair critique of the deconstuctive project.[16] However, this encounter between Derrida and Foucault could be seen as an important initiating step in Foucault's gradual trajectory of development away from an archeological stance and towards the ethical slant of his later genealogical work. It is at this point, with the entry of the role of ethics in the relationship of self with others, that Foucault's work begins to resonate more harmoniously with the thinking of Derrida.

In my view, what Derrida and the later Foucault have most in common is the notion that there is no pure or unadulterated category of otherness in the construction of the self. In Chapter 2, for example, I delve into the detail of Foucault's ambiguous proposition that, in the fashioning of identity, "care of the self" – as he calls it – is profoundly interpenetrated by "care for others" ("The Ethics" 285-288).[17] By taking care of the self, Foucault implies, one necessarily and unavoidably cares for others. For Derrida, this inseparability is illustrative of the notion of *différance:* the self becomes constitutive of the definition of its binary opposite, the other. This constant interplay between opposites, as previously perceived, implies a radical suggestion: that there can be no self without an other, and no other without a self. But it could be argued that Foucault derives his ethics predominantly from ancient Greek models, while Derrida – particularly in his earlier work – seems largely to leave the deployment of the far-reaching implications of his radical argument to social and cultural commentators. How, then, do the apparent convergences in their theoretical argument play out on a practical and contextual level within a specific socio-cultural landscape?

[16] Foucault seems to lose sight of the fact that it was not Derrida himself, but his interpreters who had constituted him as a kind of "master" of deconstruction. A deconstructive strategy poses a challenge to all forms of hierarchical positioning, including Foucault's implied binarism of "master" over "student". Deconstruction is, from the outset, suspicious of "origins" and "sources", and rather "emerges" – as Culler puts it – " from the writings of Derrida and de Man only by dint of iteration: imitation, citation, distortion, parody" (228).

[17] See Chapter 2 (42-43).

It is here that the work of Stuart Hall serves an invaluable purpose. As an astute, theoretically minded cultural commentator, Hall often evaluates, filters and links Derrida and Foucault, aligning their thinking in ways that are mutually enriching and informing, particularly in the investigation of the organization of power in the shaping of selves. It is perhaps not surprising that Hall's work is helpful in this way, as his role in British cultural studies, in particular, has often been that of facilitator and editor, usually working in collaboration with others.[18] Hall's contribution to cultural studies is also not contained in a single text, but lies dispersed in a large number of articles, most notably those on questions of ethnicity and identity which have been collected in anthologies. He often provides a useful contextual framing and development of Foucault and Derrida's positions within a postcolonial paradigm – an approach which is well suited to my reading of Southern identity.

Hall not only traces the implications of Foucault's discourse theory in cultural studies, but also "explores some of the major tensions that run through the subject-of-language tradition" by challenging the more extreme anti-essentialist claims of structuralism (Redman 10). In his essay "Who Needs Identity?", for example, he begins by indicating some of the major themes of this approach, most notably Althusser's notion that there is no pre-social self and that identities are constructed, or performatively enacted, in and through social and cultural subject positions. He then traces the development towards poststructuralist conceptions of selfhood, as inspired by deconstruction; such thinking proposes that identities are radically relational, constructed through difference, and that they rely on the marginal presence of the other for their own definition. After contrasting these views, firstly, with some of the essentialist notions of psychoanalysis and, secondly, with Foucault's emphasis not on signifying practices alone, but on discursive power relations, Hall introduces Judith Butler's work on gender performativity. While Butler's position of enunciation can be located initially within psychoanalysis, her work often transcends this discipline by venturing into linguistic terrain.

Butler is particularly interested in the gendering of the subject through socio-cultural discourse, and draws on J. L. Austin's speech act theory to reconnect the notion of interpellation to the performative aspects of language. By providing an invaluable bridging and integrative reading of Foucault, Derrida and Butler, Hall thus proposes – as Redman puts

[18] For example in "Politics and Ideology: Gramsci" and *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order.*

it – a potential "*rapprochement*" between Foucault's discourse theory and psychoanalysis, a possibility which Foucault's work particularly in *Madness and Civilization* may seem to have foreclosed (10). This "*rapprochement*" is also "one in which Foucauldian insights are reclaimed for a broader 'subject-of-language' project" (Redman 10). Hall and Butler's work is particularly useful in investigating familial bonds, which form the focus of Chapter 3 in this study. Given the complexities of the theoretical orientations outlined above, a theoretical-contextual reading of self-fashioning functions well within a sphere as culturally and historically contingent as the American South. But why Faulkner and Williams as emblematic Southern authors; and which of their texts?

Selection and order of texts

In addition to my personal admiration for these authors, which is always an undeniable influence in the choice of material, both Faulkner and Williams are globally recognized literary figures who are widely taught and studied by scholars all over the world. Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949, and Williams the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1948 and 1955. Most of Williams' plays have been translated and performed internationally, and some have also been transposed successfully into the medium of film, which reaches an even broader audience. But, far from suggesting that fame and literary accolade alone make these Southern authors worthy of academic attention, I believe that their broad appeal – even in cultures and traditions quite removed from the American context – has something to say about the ways in which their texts successfully translate the specificity of "Southernness" into a metaphor for cultural identity to which members of many cultures can relate.[19]

The most obvious binding factor between these writers is thus that they not only hail from, but also write so firmly within, this particular milieu.[20] It would be possible to compare Faulkner and Williams purely from the perspective of this broadly similar "regionalism", in

[19] In "Tennessee Williams: A Southern Writer", Kimball King writes: "That Williams should select a classical myth [as the intertext of his *Orpheus Descending*] in the manner of novelists Faulkner and Walker Percy suggests that he shares with those writers a belief in the South's metaphorical importance – a doomed civilization with a universal message of warning, then despair, and finally, hope" (627).

[20] William Cuthbert Faulkner was born William Falkner in New Albany, Mississippi in 1897, and lived in New Orleans when he wrote his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* in 1925. He lived in Oxford, Mississippi for most of the rest of his life. Thomas Lanier (Tennessee) Williams was born fourteen years Faulkner's junior (1911) in Columbus, Mississippi, wrote his first play *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!* in 1935 and lived in the French Quarter of New Orleans from 1939 – 1947, where he wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire.*

other words, in terms of how they go about "writing the South". In fact, a significant body of criticism already exists that interrogates the "Southernness" of particularly Faulkner's texts.[21] Even so, my research to date has revealed neither academic work which offers extensive and sustained co-consideration of texts by Faulkner and Williams, nor individual readings which are firmly grounded within poststructuralist theory. While it is crucial that a study of identity should be cautious neither to sever, nor to overlook the important "geographic umbilical" that binds the *oeuvre* of an author to the specificities of place and time, this project follows a more integrated approach, filtering the discussion of Southern regionalism through the lens of self-fashioning (Faulkner, qtd. in Weinstein 149). This highlights the role that culture and community play, not only as distinctive characteristics of both authors' writing, but also as a powerful influence on the formation and transformation of the fictional identities they render in their work.

It is also not incidental that I propose to compare selected novels by Faulkner with selected dramas by Williams. The sustained co-consideration of novels and plays is not an attempt at providing a comprehensive historicizing account of the function of each literary genre, but an interrogation of, and textual reflection on, questions raised by personal identity. All kinds of classification – not only literary genres, but also gender, genus, and taxonomies – imply institutionalized conventions, a "law" of belonging and non-belonging enforced by mutual agreement, tradition or habit. But genre, like personal identity, always has the potential for exceeding the parameters that give it shape. In "The Law of Genre", Derrida tests this law of belonging by making the similarity between individual and genre identity explicit. He measures the integrity and exclusivity of the singular literary instance – the "I" of a text – against the general "we", the plurality, of the genre. This I/we dichotomy unsettles the boundaries that separate individual texts from one another (as a subset of a literary genre), as well as the boundaries between literary genres (as a subset of literature). What constitutes such borders? When and how do they break down? Derrida thus poses a challenge to "the tranquil categories of genre-theory" in order to "upset their taxonomic certainties, the distribution of their classes, and the presumed stability of their classical nomenclatures" ("Law" 228).

[21] See, for example, Warren Beck's "Faulkner and the South". A comparable study of Williams' regionalism is "Tennessee Williams: A Southern Writer" by Kimball King, who makes extensive use of the work of acclaimed Southern literary critic Louis D. Rubin, Jr. in the reading of Williams.

Derrida's strategy to this effect is to formulate what he calls the "law of the law of genre". This "law" is the principle of impurity, of contamination, contained in the notion that every text participates in one or several genres; yet, such participation never amounts to what is accepted as belonging (Derrida, "Law" 227). The characteristic that marks the text's membership, argues Derrida, also divides and contaminates the genre. This mark he describes as an identifiable recurrence of a trait "by which one recognizes, or should recognize," a member of the class; in other words, a characteristic by which a "work" corresponds to a type, mode, or form of text ("Law" 228-9). On the basis of this trait, a code comes into existence by which one is able to judge class membership. However, by marking itself generically with a particular trait or characteristic, the text also unmarks itself in the very same instant. When a text bears the trait of the genre designation "novel" – and for Derrida, this does not necessarily imply an explicit mark which it might carry in a subtitle – the designation itself is not "novelistic": "it does not, in whole or in part, take part in the corpus whose denomination it nonetheless imparts" ("Law" 230). Neither does it stand entirely outside of the corpus. Derrida is clear on this – genres are not absolutely interchangeable and indistinguishable owing to "an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity" ("Law" 230). Instead, the genre designation plays perpetually on the border between inclusion and exclusion by gathering together the corpus and, in the same instant, preventing it from being foreclosed.

To illuminate some of the implications of this "law", examples can be given of the inevitable blurring of borders that occurs between the novel and the drama. The interior monologue, for example, features strongly as a narrative device in Faulkner's novels, and is comparable to the soliloquy in a play. In both cases, the fictional figure "speaks" his or her thoughts and feelings as though he or she were reasoning with him- or herself. This self-speaking is rendered in writing in the novel and in the stage script, but its function as a narrative device remains similar to that of the performed soliloquy. In both cases, when the speaker speaks about the self, there is an immediate sense of splitting in the subject.[22] Perhaps one could even suggest that, by speaking the self, the speaker "stages" the self to the self, that is, he or she places the self immediately away from the self to be regarded from a distance, as one

[22] Again, this division can be illustrated by reference to the first person pronoun: in the very same instant that the speaker enunciates or elaborates on the "I", the spoken self is separated from the speaker, and is therefore no longer absolutely identical to the speaker. The spoken "I" and the speaking "I" are never, can never be, identical, and yet the spoken self cannot exist without the speaking self. They are integrally, and interdependently, connected.

would observe an actor performing in a play.[23] Indeed, speaking the self then becomes a kind of enactment, a doing of the self, not only for the benefit of the speaker, but also as an effective way of dramatizing the figure's identity for the sake of the reader and/or audience member. The self is spoken into being. Thus, given the comparable function of the soliloquy and the monologue, the distinction between play and novel becomes unsettled; yet they remain markedly and undeniably different. There is a degree of mutuality between all literary genres – in fact, between all genres – owing to shared or "borrowed" elements which blur the accepted lines of separation. This is why – as Derrida argues – no text ever belongs fully to a genre, but always stands before it, destabilizing the integrity of its identity. However, to reiterate an earlier point, this is not the same as proposing that all genres simply disintegrate into excessive overflow and anarchy. Texts – and, thus, textual identities – always play both within and outside of agreed-upon parameters, classifications, and conventionally acknowledged structures.

Given this perception of the inherently unstable methods of organization and classification, it seems somewhat self-contradictory to find a way of structuring this study without imposing yet another contestable set of categories which constantly burst at their seams. Providing a sense of order and progression has thus proven to be a challenge. From which perspective(s) does one view the abstractions and the concrete manifestations of identity? Is it possible to isolate or individualize various kinds of identity, or clearly to distinguish different self-fashioning influences or forces? Not surprisingly, given his strong structuralist tendencies, Foucault suggests some possibilities in "The Ethics of a Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom". Foucault writes on selfhood:

> You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfill your desires in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same kind of subject. In each case, one plays, one establishes a different type of relationship to oneself. ("The Ethics" 290)

Foucault's suggestion of different "forms" of the subject and "types" of relationships appears to run the risk of reification and of becoming too classificatory in its expression. A useful, less essentialist amendment of his terminology would be to refer to these as "positionings" of

[23] The notion of the endlessly performative self, that is, of the staging of the self to the self, was suggested to me by Prof. Jane Taylor of the Wits School of Arts.

self. With this amendment, one consciously avoids such rigid terms as "placement", "realm", "sphere" or "form" of selfhood, preferring instead a word that suggests process, rather than completion or finality. But Foucault also touches upon two further aspects of the identity-formation process which will be integral to this study: firstly, the notion of "interfering" identities; and secondly, the notion of play.

In Foucault's example, he juxtaposes the identity of the subject as a political entity – a voter and a speaker at a meeting – with the identity of the subject as a sexual entity. The first subject positioning implies the subject's relation to the self and, in this particular instance, with reference to knowing the self's "desires". The second positioning involves the subject's relation to an other within a personal, sexual relationship, while the last involves the subject in relation to a number of others within (and outside of) a particular social circle.[24] As Foucault argues, it is quite possible that two or more of these positionings of self might begin to "interfere" with one another, thus creating interdependencies and cross-influences. It is interesting that Foucault then chooses the word "play" to describe the subject's negotiation of this multiplicity of formations, since the notion of "play" assumes centrality also in the work of Derrida and in deconstruction. It is as though, through this choice of word, one senses Foucault's hesitation: on the one hand, there is a structuralist urge to classify types of selves, dividing the subject confidently into "forms" and "kinds" of selfhood. But, on the other, there is a gesture towards a poststructuralist uncertainty and suspicion of final, centred classification.

For Derrida, "play" is integral to the conception of differential signification, in other words, to the way in which meaning manifests itself within a relational system of differences and deferrals and, thus, within any text. He expands on this proposition in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" when he uses Saussure's semiotic system of language as an illustration and writes of "the original or transcendental signified" which is "never absolutely present outside a system of differences" (280). Importantly, he then proposes that the "absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" ("Structure" 280). What this demonstrates is that, for Derrida, meaning is never complete and final, but rather becomes an effect of endless cross-referential

[24] Other positionings, different from those mentioned by Foucault, are also conceivable: for example, the subject in relation to nature, or the subject in relation to economics. Foucault's configurations, however, provide progressively unfolding parameters within which to focus this study on the subject as a social being.

movement, of constant differences and deferrals, among the structurally conceived "elements" in a meaning-making system.

Derrida's conception of play can be demonstrated by the way in which wordplay, or a traditional Shakespearean pun, may achieve a double meaning within a text. Mercutio says of the mortal wound he has been dealt at the hand of Romeo: "No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve: ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 3. 1. 93). The reference to "grave" carries a dual meaning: it refers not only to Mercutio's anticipation of a depressed state of mind after the attack, but also to the possibility of his demise owing to the wound. The significance of "grave" thus rests neither completely on the first, nor on the second possible meaning, but functions within the text as an effect of the perpetual oscillation between the two, an indecisive "play" without a reduction to one-sided finality or completion. Similarly, there is no end to Derrida's play of meaning-making; if Foucault has in mind this perpetual oscillation in his suggestion that identity "plays" between various subject positionings, the implication is radical. Identity is never final and complete, and it has no absolute essence. Rather, it is a continuing formation-in-process without closure, a constant becoming rather than being. Given this theoretical position – and perhaps Foucault's conception of interfering self-positionings has now itself become a "positioning", rather than a stable "position" – would Foucault's formulations still be a tenable way of structuring this study?

My view is that this is feasible, provided that one conceives of these positionings of self as a placement of emphasis throughout, rather than as an attempt at isolating aspects of selfhood into a rigid system of categories or classes in which one formation is falsely posited as being completely distinguishable from another. This approach illustrates, at the very least, an acknowledgement that identity formations never occur or function independently, but are closely integrated and interdependent in constituting the self. My positing of structure is thus, in many ways, no more than a thought-experiment in which calculated emphases and shadings are useful in illuminating the intricacies of the formation of selves. Foucault's "interferences" between the subject positionings also pose ethical questions, as these tensions influence the ways in which the subject behaves in relation not only to the self, but also towards others in a sexual, familial and political context. Derrida, in his turn, comments on this unavoidably ethical aspect of self-fashioning when he expands on his notion of non-identical self-identity:

> Once you take into account this inner and other difference [of identity], then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity. And this prevents totalitarianism, nationalism, egocentrism, and so on. ... [I]t is a duty, an ethical and political duty, to take into account this impossibility of being one with oneself. ("Villanova" 14)

It is this "ethical and political duty" to sensitize the self to the other which this study aims to interrogate, as dramatised through the fictional characters in the six illustrative texts from the American South.

This method of thematic and structural deconstruction, however, has some implications for the treatment of the chronology of the selected texts. Although the publication dates of all of the selected Faulkner novels precede the first performances of all of the chosen Williams plays, it would not be inaccurate to regard Faulkner and Williams as contemporaries. All six of the selected plays and novels were published within a comparatively limited timeframe, spanning less than thirty years. However, notwithstanding the importance that a precise chronology might have in an enquiry of a different kind – for example, one which could focus on tracing and documenting each author's individual developmental trajectory from the earliest texts, in sequence, to the most recent – I have chosen a different mode of organization to suit my more thematically oriented enquiry. I have thus paired the selected texts not strictly according to the order in which they were produced by the authors, but more freely into thematically comparative units regardless of their publication dates, as texts which – in my view – dramatize a particular identity positioning most effectively.

The body of this thesis is thus divided into the three thematically unfolding sections. Chapter 2 interrogates conceptions of identity from the perspective of the subject's relation to itself by comparing Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) with Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). However, this enquiry begins, first and foremost, with a thorough consideration of the functioning of the name and conventions of naming in the fashioning of a self. The argument draws particularly on Derrida's suggestion in "Aphorism Countertime" that the name is an illustrative location for the ambiguities involved in identity formation and transformation, that is, for the constant interplay between the "private" and the "public" aspects of the self. A name is not only the word by which we know ourselves, but also the linguistic sign by which we introduce ourselves to the world and by which the world hails us. Ethical implications are

thus inevitable, and Foucault's notion of the interdependency of "care of the self" and "care for the other" is introduced and tested. This interpenetration and interdependency of private and public identities is then traced comparatively in a reading of the fictional figures we find dramatized in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Glass Menagerie*.

The discussion then broadens to include notions of the structural and narrative interdependence evident in the ways in which the texts themselves are organized. In *As I Lay Dying*, for example, we find a series of seemingly independent and different voices and perspectives, organized around a single event: the Bundrens' arduous journey to bury the dead Addie in a family plot in the Jefferson cemetery. However, none of these so-called interior monologues functions entirely self-sufficiently in revealing – or rather speaking into being – the various fictional identities. Again, a significant degree of structural interplay and overflow among the monologues is at play. In *The Glass Menagerie*, the organization of different perspectives is rather different, yet the implications are similar: various fictional identities are enveloped within, and therefore dependent on, Tom's consciousness as the central, narrating intelligence which "reads" subjectively the actions and words of his family. Just as the functioning of the name is always a manifestation of the interdependence between the public and the private, the self's relation to the self – as it plays out in the fictional figures in the novel and the play – is never quite separable from the self's relation to others. The notion of inter-subjectivity is thus introduced and evaluated. The most poignantly dramatized inter-subjectifying process is to be found in the intricate relationship between the fictional figures of Darl and Jewel in *As I Lay Dying*, and between Tom, Laura and Amanda in *Menagerie* – relationships which are carefully and thoroughly examined within the context of the intra-familial bonds evident in these texts and within the broader Southern cultural context.

The self's relation to the self thus leads logically to the next progression in emphasis: the self's relation to the family. This forms the focus of Chapter 3, in which I investigate the ways in which the subject's identity is formed and transformed in relation to an "other" within a sexual relationship – that is, with a husband or a wife – or through interaction with members of the immediate family. The texts which deal most incisively with this theme are Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). At the start of this chapter, the discussion returns to a theoretical notion introduced briefly in Chapter 2: Althusser's conception of the interpellation of individual subjects into subject positions which

are made available first within the family. This is treated critically by way of Stuart Halls' important essay "Who Needs 'Identity'?", which draws, in turn, on the work of Derrida and Foucault. However, Judith Butler's thoughts on "gendering" through the creation of sexualized familial power positions are also influential. The process of familial interpellation is then contextualised by measuring it against the specificities of the Southern cultural-historical context in which the family plays a pivotal role.

It is this distinctly Southern theme of family-as-destiny which is ironically dramatized in both the Faulkner and Williams texts: in *The Sound and the Fury* through the decaying Southern aristocrats, the Compsons and, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, through the Pollitts. Both families are deeply rooted within the traditional norms and values of Southern patriarchal culture, yet are fraught with the tensions created by the collapse of patriarchy, parental favouritism, jealousy, sibling rivalry, in-fighting and a general decline in social standing. All of these factors have important implications for the ways in which identities are shaped and reshaped within the Southern family. Questioning again, as I do in Chapter 2, the functioning of names and surnames, I revisit the name from the perspective of its role in determining inheritance and the transfer of a legacy. The readings of the selected texts are both integrated and juxtaposed by focusing on two figures of functional opposition: Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, and Big Daddy in *Cat*. Benjy is the least respected and most "absent" member of the Compson household; Big Daddy Pollitt is the epicentre of his clan, whose overt presence is threatened by his imminent death. These contrasting notions of "presence" and "absence" are treated deconstructively, following Derrida's critical appraisal of this binary in Western thought. Around these two "present-non-presences", the other members of the Compson and Pollitt families are organized in revealing ways. It is through the Compsons' avoidance of Benjy, and the Pollitts' over-indulgence of Big Daddy's whims and wishes that the most intricate processes of individual self-fashioning in the heavily inter-subjective space of the family are demonstrated and examined. However, the family – particularly in the South – cannot be comprehensively contemplated without an investigation into the cultural and social values invested in it. This calls for the last, but by no means the final, positioning within the Southern self-fashioning process: the self in relation to culture and community, which is the topic of Chapter 4.

The texts examined in Chapter 4 – Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) and Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) – are read from a socio-cultural perspective, but the process

is guided theoretically by a linguistic-anthropological conception of the subject's formation of itself in relation to the community. Community and culture are notoriously challenging notions to interrogate, owing to their wide and varied provenance across fields in the Humanities. For this reason, I follow closely some of the recent theoretical thinking on the "reading" of these ideas put forward by Geertz's work, particularly his view of man as suspended perpetually in webs of cultural significance. Geertz's concept of culture as meaning-making "text" is related and compared closely with Derrida's thinking on the woven texture of the text, in which the reader cannot help but get "a few fingers" caught ("Plato's Pharmacy" 63). My reading of Southern culture thus serves not only to contextualize Geertz and Derrida's semiotic strategies, but also to set the scene for the tensions between the individual self and the surrounding community, which we find so effectively dramatized in the figures of Joe Christmas in *Light in August* and Blanche du Bois in *Streetcar*.

Christmas and Blanche are also treated as figures of functional opposition and similarity. However, the strategy in this instance facilitates the construction of an account of how issues of race in Yoknapatawpha, and issues of gender in Elysian Fields, are not only relevant to, but also highly influential in, the fashioning of the individual identities within these communities. In both instances, Derrida's investigation in "Plato's Pharmacy" of the figure of the cultural outsider, or the "scapegoat", offers some illuminating insights. Both Christmas and Blanche are rejected figures, ostracized by the communities which had, at first, embraced them. But, paradoxically, Derrida's theory suggests that communities and cultures cannot do without such figures of opposition and rejection. This thought is tested against the ways in which both Christmas and Blanche ultimately fail in their often different, yet comparable, quests for a functional, sustaining self within the oppressive norms of a racially and sexually charged community and culture.

In the final chapter of this study, the Conclusion, I return to a central line of thought which runs throughout this research: the notion that identity and language seem to be inextricably entwined and that selfhood manifests itself as a textual discourse. The discussion is rounded off with a consideration of a series of single-word instances of identity-fashioning language, taken from each of the six selected texts. These include terms such as "crazy", "cripple", "Polack", "nigger" and "queer". Each of these name-labels is so heavily inflected with layers of individual, familial and communal-cultural meaning that it often threatens to subsume individuality when applied to a particular fictional figure with a weakened sense of self.

These words become illustrations *par excellence* of the powerful bond that exists between language and the self. Using Derrida's conception of the intricate relationship between notions of the singular and the universal posited in *The Gift of Death*, as well as Benveniste's discussion entitled "Subjectivity in Language", I compare the ways in which these compacted terms operate in relation to the ambiguous first person pronoun, "I". This word – occurring throughout all of the texts – is most strongly associated with selfhood, yet is emptiest of individuality, as it may be held concurrently to refer to a multiplicity of distinguishable speakers. This word thus dramatises the iterative interplay between the singular and the universal, and between self and other. The Conclusion of the study is thus linked, by way of a circular movement, to the personal statement offered in the opening paragraphs of the Introduction, in which I position myself as the speaking "I" of this text. An academic Introduction speaks into being the self-identity of the project that is to follow and, in a similar fashion, a personal introduction puts the "I" of the speaking figure into linguistic play. In this case, these two "genres" of introduction have been merged. The subjective "I" is thus never, and can never be, completely absent from this or any other theoretical and scholarly enterprise, despite stylistic and logocentric conventions aimed at muting the authorial voice.

Chapter 2

Self-fashioning through the subject's relation to, and dramatization of, the self in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944).

> Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. (*AILD* 161)

> JIM. ... It seemed almost like I was about to remember your name. But the name that I started to call you – wasn't a name! (*GM* 2. 7. 449)

Names and identities

An enquiry into notions of selfhood would seem incomplete without a consideration of names and the ways in which they function within the formation and transformation of identity. If one is asked, "Who are you?", the shortest response would be one's name which gives clues as to gender, affiliation to a language, nationality and race; written down, a surname becomes an identifying signature. As concise acts of self-speaking or -writing, first names, surnames and nicknames thus constitute the most rudimentary nomenclature of the self. This simplicity is deceptive, though, as the relationship between a self and a name is more complex than it may at first seem. This intricacy of names and the important role they play within the fashioning of a self have intrigued the two authors considered in this study both on a personal level, and as a recurring motif in their creative exploration. William Cuthbert Falkner added the 'u' to his surname owing to persistent public mispronunciation, but also as an attempt at separating himself from his "grandfather's coat-tails" and "strik[ing] out" for himself (Faulkner, qtd. in Gray 65). Similarly, Thomas Lanier Williams adopted the nickname "Tennessee" after it was given to him by college friends on account of his distinctive Southern accent, and because he believed his real name "sounded too much like an old-fashioned poet's" (Boxill 14).

Two important notions emerge from these examples. Firstly, there is a particular kind of relation to the self evident in the lives of both authors, which is integral to notions of modernity, and which resonates with some of the challenges faced by the fictional figures we encounter in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Glass Menagerie*. Secondly, there seems to be a confluence of both public and private motivations for Faulkner and Williams' changes of name: an idea that underpins this study's deconstructive approach to self-fashioning. I will discuss each of these aspects in more detail, before comparing the ways in which they emerge as traceable motifs in the texts.

As one possible paradigm within which to understand the first of these aspects – that is, how the modern subject engages with processes of self-fashioning – Foucault's discussion of the term "modernity" is helpful. In his essay entitled "What is Enlightenment?", Foucault draws on Baudelaire when he argues that modernity is often understood too reductively as an "epoch … situated on a calendar … preceded by [a] … naive or archaic premodernity, and followed by an enigmatic and troubling 'postmodernity'" (309). He points out that the notion of modernity is far more complex than this, involving "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people ... a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" ("What is Enlightenment?" 309). With this "way of thinking and feeling", Foucault suggests, comes "a consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty" and difference from that which occurred before ("What is Enlightenment?" 310). These aspects of the modern self are evident in the examples taken from Faulkner and Williams' lives, which suggest both authors' awareness of, and choice to become, different from a particular genealogical or occupational history. This involves not only a feeling of belonging to something modern, to a generation of the "new", but also a self-imposed task to become new, actively to create a distinction.

Modernity thus implies, says Foucault, a particular mode of relating to the self: "To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" ("What is Enlightenment?" 311). This elaboration, he adds, grows from a compulsion, an underlying urge to "invent" the self, because "modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'," but "compels him to face the task of producing himself" ("What is Enlightenment?" 312). Foucault's choice of diction bears emphasis: modern men and women are "elaborating", "inventing" and "producing"

themselves; their identities are never fully formed, but are constantly being formed and transformed to become, and remain, new. This is the challenging process which manifests itself in elaborate and complicated ways through the fictional figures in *As I Lay Dying* and *Menagerie*. As dramatizations of distinctly modern subjects, these figures desperately seek a sense of stability, a feeling of constancy and homogeneity of self, amid powerful and fluctuating interpersonal and cultural influences. Figures such as Darl, Jewel, Addie, Tom, Laura and Amanda all face the difficult task of embracing the implicit fluidity and hybridity of a modern self, often despite their own reluctance, insecurities and nostalgia for an idyllic past.

The second aspect emerging from Faulkner's and Williams' personal attempts at self-transformation is the evidence of both public and private reasons for a change of name: in the public sense, the mispronunciation of Faulkner's surname and Williams' audibly regional accent; and in the private sense, both writers' desire for a self that would be, in some way or another, different from the generations which came before. However, on closer inspection, the distinction made between the "private" and the "public" appears to be unstable. The public mispronunciation of Faulkner's surname must surely have implied a private response to the repeated mistake. Did it cause the author some frustration or irritation? Similarly, Williams' private desire for a name that would set him apart seems to imply a public aspect: he must have given some thought as to how the new name would be received by the reading and theatre-going public. By choosing an eccentric name like "Tennessee", did Williams perhaps believe that American audiences would be more willing to accept him as a playwright of the fashionable *avant-garde*, rather than an old-fashioned poet?

The intermingling of private and public aspects seems to emerge whenever a light is shone on the functioning of names and identities, whether these are fictional or not. This repeating pattern involves the constant interpenetration of, and mutual influence between, what at first appears to be a distinctive polarity. Borrowing Derrida's term, identity thus introduces a play of *différance* between two sides of a binary opposition: identity is neither a purely private, nor a purely public phenomenon, but a perpetual adjustment and repositioning of the private in relation to the public, and of the public in relation to the private.[25] In fact, the name itself can be seen as a demonstration of this "aporia" at play, as names are not only the most basic

[25] In Chapter 1 (14-15), I discuss Derrida's development of this term in more detail.

units of language by which we know ourselves but, at the same time, they are also the words by which we introduce ourselves to the rest of the world.[26] It is evident, then, that a play of Derrida's *différance* is noticeable between the public and the private in the functioning of names. But as far as immortalizing this ambiguity into the cultural commonplace is concerned, Shakespeare probably deserves most credit. When a love-struck Juliet muses on the Capulet balcony over her lover's identity, she wonders: "What's in a name?" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2. 43). Indeed, what does it mean to live up to or, alternatively, to "refuse" one's name, as it seems both Faulkner and Williams had wished to do (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2. 34)? In other words, how stable and strong is the connection between a name and an identity? Can an identity be separated from a name?

Derrida investigates the question of severance in his essay entitled "Aphorism Countertime", in which he makes use of *Romeo and Juliet* as a sample text. He first draws a close comparison between the ambiguity of names and that of "aphorisms", "dates", "timetables", "property registers", "place-names", and even theatrical performances. These rely, he says, on the subtle interplay between "uniqueness and repetition", thus, on the notion of iterability ("Aphorism" 419). Each day in the year is unique, just as no two theatrical performances are completely alike. Yet the same date has repeated itself annually throughout history, and will keep doing so for eternity, just as the same words and actions are repeated within each theatrical performance. Based on this subtle intermingling of sameness and difference, of singularity and generality, notions such as dates, names and aphorisms, become "the codes that we cast like nets over time and space – in order to reduce or master differences, to arrest them, determine them" (Derrida, "Aphorism" 419).

Derrida uses "Romeo" in applying this argument to the functioning of names:

> Romeo is radically separated from his name. He, his living self, living and singular desire, he is not "Romeo," but the separation, the aphorism of the name remains impossible. He dies without his name but he dies also because he has not been able to set himself free from his name, or from his father, even less to renounce him, to

[26] Literally translated, “aporia” means an "impassable path", but Derrida uses the term to denote the point at which a text reaches a "self-engendered paradox - beyond which it cannot press" (Norris 48). The result is an "irresolvable alternation" (Culler 96) – which activates the text's inherent ambivalences, thus enabling a plurality of meanings, instead of reducing the text to a definitive, univocal or one-sided interpretation. Names thus function aporetically, since they cannot be reduced to either the private or the public domain.

> respond to Juliet's request ("Deny thy father and refuse thy name"). ("Aphorism" 426)

By offering the example of Romeo – who dies owing to his inability to free himself from his name, yet dies without it – Derrida shows that it is both possible and impossible for a person, an identity, to be separated from a name. He paraphrases Juliet's argument to illustrate this point in terms of another aporetic oscillation, that of the "humanity" and "inhumanity" of the name. "A proper name," he writes, "does not name anything which is human, which belongs to a human body, a human spirit, an essence of man. And yet this relation to the inhuman only befalls man, for him, to him, in the name of man. He alone gives himself this inhuman name" ("Aphorism" 427). This leads Derrida to conclude: "I am not my name. One might as well say that I should be able to survive it. But firstly it is destined to survive me. In this way, it announces my death" ("Aphorism" 432). In Derrida's conception, names are thus both public and private, unique and general, human and inhuman. Most importantly, names seem to be both separable and inseparable from identities. These ambiguities are played out effectively by the ways in which names are treated in both *As I Lay Dying* and *Menagerie*.

Naming in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Glass Menagerie*

Both the two epigraphs at the start of this chapter deal with a name in the selected texts and its ambiguous relationship with a particular identity. In the excerpt taken from *As I Lay Dying*, Addie Bundren thrice repeats her husband's first name, Anse. This recalls Juliet's words – "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2. 33) – and her enquiry into the humanity and inhumanity of her lover's name. More than this, though, names in general play a particularly conspicuous role in the structuring of *As I Lay Dying*: they function not only as the names of the individual fictional figures, but also as titles for each of the texts' different chapters or sections. The identities of each of the fictional figures thus emerge through a close interaction that occurs between the name-titles and the monologues themselves. This implies that the names gain greater significance as the novel progresses and as the reader is given more information – in successive monologues – about the fictional figures to whom these names belong. By the time that Addie contemplates the name of Anse in her single monologue, we have already grown to understand the basis of her displeasure with him as her ineffectual husband.

Another intriguing aspect of fictional naming in the novel is the manner in which names often reflect either a feature of the figure's physique, or an aspect of his or her role within the narrative. It is not incidental that Addie's favourite son is called Jewel – both a valuable and valued possession.[27] Dewey Dell's name is reminiscent of a fertile valley and can be read as an allusion to her sexual fecundity and secret pregnancy. This relates aptly to her description of herself as "a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (*AILD* 58). Cash's material orientation – that is, not a craving for earthly possessions so much as a focus on material things – is suggested by his name: to insist on a cash transaction shows a preference for dealing in the tangible, in money, rather than in the abstract, or in credit. Dr Peabody's corpulent physique is fittingly described as "pussel-gutted" and "balloon-like" (*AILD* 34) – an example of what Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster calls Faulkner's typical "name-humor," which is comparable to Dickens' similar technique (104).[28] The surname of Addie's extramarital lover, the hypocritical and cowardly Reverend Whitfield, reminds one of the Biblical "whited sepulchre" which belies the ugly decay of dead bones inside.[29] Reverend Whitfield may appear to be untainted and pure, but he suffers from a guilty conscience owing to his secret sexual affair with the married Addie Bundren, which has lead to her pregnancy with Jewel.

Williams' treatment of names in *Menagerie* is equally multilayered, often including aspects of symbolism and irony. In the second epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, Jim, the gentleman caller, suggests that it is not Laura's given name, but her nickname which captures her identity best. This nickname, to which his mind jumps involuntarily when he sees her again for the first time in years, is Blue Roses – a name he gave her when they were at school together. After Laura had been absent for a few days, Jim enquired about the reason; when Laura explained that she had suffered from a bout of pleurosis (a lung disease), Jim misheard this as "Blue Roses". Again, the Shakespearian influence is evident, both here and throughout the play: Jim's nickname for Tom is "Shakespeare" (*GM* 2. 6. 432) owing to his habit of

[27] Harold J. Douglas and Robert Daniel draw parallels between Jewel's name and that of another "passionate, impulsive, mercurial, and exotic" male offspring from American literature: Hawthorne's Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* (44). The similarity between these figures is underlined by their names, both suggesting a precious object.
[28] A. Wigfall Green adds that the "names of several persons, especially Vardaman and Peabody, are those of buildings on the University of Mississippi campus … " (44). This novel is also the first in which Faulkner calls his fictional region Yoknapatawpha County, showing "how his characters 'name' their surroundings" (Gray 153). With this introduction of spatial significance, Faulkner inflects the names in the novel with not only individual and structural significance, but also spatial importance – a shrewd tactic on the part of a regional author.
[29] "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." (The Holy Bible, Matt. 23:27).

hiding in a closet at work to write poetry; and Jim is wary of being called "Romeo" by his teasing colleagues (*GM* 2. 7. 462). Given this context, it could be argued that Laura's nickname is an allusion to Juliet's "rose" by another "name" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2. 44).[30] Be that as it may, “Blue Roses” does capture Laura's identity more effectively than her "real" name, and for more than one reason. As Jim explains, the nickname alludes to her uniqueness: where other people are "common as – weeds", Laura is as unusual as blue roses (*GM* 2. 7. 457).[31] But, whether innocently or obliquely, the same nickname still connotes her illness – the pleurisy – reminding one of both her physical and emotional fragility.[32]

From these examples, it is clear that names and their multi-layered and ambiguous functioning in relation to personal identities – that is, their simultaneous separability and inseparability from the self – are indeed as complex as Derrida posits. When Richard Gray comments on Faulkner's intricate treatment of names in *As I Lay Dying*, he also mentions the novel's "shifting, metamorphic nature," in which "language and identity are constantly slithering and blending":

> In this fluid verbal environment, there is not so much intimacy as identification – people and things become one another: 'My mother is a fish.' 'Jewel's mother is a horse.' Which makes naming intolerably difficult: nowhere else in Faulkner's work do characters have quite as many problems finding or inventing the right sign, speaking things into being, achieving even tentative, temporary articulation (158).

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[30] An argument might also be made for an autobiographical trace in Williams' treatment of Laura's nickname. The dramatist's own sister who, like Laura, suffered from a degree of mental fragility, was called Rose, while Tom is, of course, short for Thomas: Williams' real first name. However, as Stephanie B. Hammer shows, a connection between Williams and Laura is more plausible than between Williams and Tom. Hammer points out that

> [a]s a child it was Tennessee, not Rose, who was frequently characterized as painfully shy, who clung to mother and sister; quiet, antisocial, he spent hours in his room dreaming and reading, according to Williams's sympathetic biographer, Lyle Leverich. When the siblings approached adolescence it was not Tennessee who struck out on his own – as the play suggests – but Rose, his sister, who was extraverted and sexual, to a fault, as biographers would have it. The youthful Tennessee hung back shy as ever, abandoned and deserted by the sister who was his one and only companion (44).

[31] Jim's nickname for Laura, "Blue Roses," signifies her "affinity for the natural, flowers, together with the transcendent, blue flowers, which do not occur naturally and thus come to symbolize her yearning for both ideal or mystical beauty and spiritual or romantic love" (Cardullo, "Williams's *Menagerie*" 161).

[32] Robert James Cardullo writes that "'Laura' is somewhat ironically derived from the laurel shrub or tree, a wreath of which was conferred as a mark of honor in ancient times upon heroes and athletes; and 'Wingfield' brings to mind the flight of birds across a meadow" ("Williams's Menagerie" 161). Here, the irony of Williams' naming comes to the fore: Laura is neither an honourable victor nor a care-free "bird".

This challenge of "speaking things into being" emerges not only in the speech of the figures themselves, but also in the way in which Faulkner structures the novel, thus in the ways in which identities are "spoken into being" in relation to a name through the successive monologues.

Gray, however, introduces another key concept into the discussion of identity-formation when he writes:

> In the more obviously public areas of speech, these problems encourage the habit of *interpellation*. Characters are constantly hailing one another, trying to summon the other into a particular, fixed identification, a definite subject(ed) status: 'You, Cash!', 'You, Vardaman', 'You, Jewel!', The corollary of this is that, when they cannot name, they feel they cannot know. ... [F]or instance, Samson confesses in passing that he cannot remember the name of Rafe MacCallum's twin. ... Not to know the name is not to know the man ... (158, emphasis added)

Evident in this description is, again, the interpenetration and inseparability of the public and the private in relation to names: to know the name, says Gray, and to pronounce it in public, is to know the other and to "place" the other in relation to the self. To clarify this process of subjectification, it is useful to turn to Althusser's discussion of the term "interpellation" in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses".[33] It is in this essay that Althusser first describes "interpellation" as the summoning into place of the subject by a particular dominant ideology in society.

To explain what this "summoning" by "a dominant ideology" means, David Macey's practical examples are helpful:

> The French *interpellation* is commonly used to mean 'being taken in by the police for questioning'; it also means the 'questioning' of a minister in parliament. Althusser's basic illustration of the mechanism exploits this sense of 'questioning' or 'hailing'. An individual walking down the street is hailed by a police officer – 'Hey, you there!' – and turns round to recognize the fact that he is being addressed. In doing so, that individual is constituted as a subject. (203)

This imposing of subjectivity is dramatized in *As I Lay Dying.* When Addie calls Cash's name through her window, or when Dewey Dell hails Vardaman in the barn after the incident with Peabody's horses, there is an element of domination involved. The hailer is a figure of

[33] See Chapter 3 (76-77) for a discussion and critique of this essay's main points of argument in relation to the processes of familial interpellation.

authority in the family: Addie is Cash's mother; Dewey Dell is Vardaman's older sister. Notably, the name of the hailed figure is added to the interpellation as an attempt at strengthening its effect and enforcing a response. In other words, to subject the hailed figure to the caller's authority, the hailer says: I know your name, I know you, I have authority over you, you must respond to my call. To know the name is to know the person. When the hailed figure responds to the call, he or she bends to the authority of the hailer and so becomes subjectified.

However, recalling Derrida's earlier conclusion in "Aphorism Countertime", there is an ambiguity evident in any act of interpellation, that is, an inherent paradox related to the functioning of the name itself (432). This ambiguity is discussed in greater depth in his essay "*Sauf le nom*" that forms part of a collection entitled *On the Name.* Derrida reiterates that "the name not only is nothing, in any case is not the 'thing' that it names, not the 'nameable' or the renowned, but also risks to bind, to enslave or to engage the other, to link the called, to call him/her to respond even before any decision or any deliberation, even before any freedom" ("*Sauf le nom*" 84). Thus, the inescapable aporia of the name emerges again: a name is nothing, it is not the person, the individual or the identity; and yet it provides the power to bind him or her. On this point – the close relationship between power and subjectification – Foucault's views on the ethics of identity-fashioning are particularly apt.

If Gray observes that "[n]ot to know the name is not to know the man" (158), Foucault suggests that power (over self, over others) is always closely related to knowledge: to know the other, is to have power over the other. But, for Foucault, knowing another begins, paradoxically, with a knowledge[34] of self. This knowledge-power relationship has immediate ethical implications, a topic which Foucault investigates more closely in the final phases of his work. This is when Foucault begins to write a history of the desiring subject and of the

[34] An important development in Foucault's application of the terms "knowing" [*connaître*] and "knowledge" [*connaissance*] is to be traced here. As used in this instance, the latter term should not be conflated with Foucault's conception of knowledge structures, or "epistemes", which features strongly in his earlier work. To quote Merquior's explanation, "epistemes" refer to "conceptual strata" which underpin "various fields of knowledge and [correspond] to different epochs in Western thought ... " (36) As a structuralist endeavour, it was Foucault's stated goal to unearth such hidden underpinnings and expose the mental infrastructure of knowledge, hence his earlier archeological model. However, in Foucault's later work – particularly in *The History of Sexuality* – a conceptual shift occurs in that the "foreground is no longer occupied by power structures or strategies, but by 'technologies of self' envisaged in their own inner space" (Merquior 119). Here "knowledge" refers to a form of self-knowing, and knowing an other, that is, the various ways and means by which a conception of the individual is constituted and by which he or she becomes aware of him- or herself (and others) as subjects.

construction of identity by looking at *The Use of Pleasure* in *The History of Sexuality Volume 2*, and *The Care of the Self* in both the Greek and the Christian traditions in *The History of Sexuality Volume 3*. These texts posit the self not as a personal essence, but rather as an aesthetic and ethical creation that is to be nurtured and cultivated. This notion is consistent with his conception of identity in relation to modernity: the idea that identity is a "complex and difficult elaboration" ("What is Enlightenment?" 311).

With this conception of aesthetic self-creation, Foucault returns to a Greek model: the classic conception of ethics, or *ethos*, as

> a way of being and of behavior. It was a mode of being for the subject [thus, the private self], along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others [thus, the public self]. ... A man possessed of a splendid *ethos,* who could be admired and put forward as an example, was someone who practiced freedom in a certain way. … But extensive work by the self on the self is required for this practice of freedom to take shape in an *ethos* that is good, beautiful, honorable, estimable, memorable and exemplary. ("The Ethics" 286)

For Foucault, this work on the self implies "taking care of the self", and he points out that, in the Western tradition, "[t]aking care of oneself requires knowing [*connaître*] oneself" and "[c]are of self is, of course, knowledge [*connaissance*] of the self ... " ("Ethics" 285). But this degree of self-knowledge is inextricably linked to one's behaviour in relation to others. As Foucault puts it: "The care of the self is ethical in itself; but it implies complex relationships with others insofar as this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others" ("Ethics" 287).[35] In the fashioning of identity, the care of the self is thus conceived as both implicit within, and inseparable from, the care for others, which suggests – to use Culler's terms – an "irresolvable" ethical "alternation" (96).

[35] Foucault's formulation of ethics is by no means the only one that considers the self's complex relationships with others. Emmanuel Levinas has also written extensively on the topic. While Foucault presupposes that a degree of understanding of the other is possible through the knowledge and care of the self, Levinas argues for a more absolute ethical demand on the self. This is based on his belief that the relation with the other will always remain beyond any comprehension, yet irresistible (Critchley 11). Foucault's paradigm, however, has proven to be more suited to the purposes of this study, which challenges the notion of any unconditional or absolute positioning of the subject.

The interdependence of self and other

To show how this interdependence of self and other is dramatized in *As I Lay Dying*, the figures of Cash and Dewey Dell serve as illustrative examples. All of Cash's monologues reveal aspects of his individual, private identity, such as his phlegmatic demeanour and his logical, pragmatic mode of reasoning. For him, there is always a practical implication to all of life's incidents and accidents – even to the burial of his mother. His very first monologue is in the form of a list of reasons for making Addie's coffin "on the bevel" (*AILD* 75). This list reveals both his keen attention to detail and his tendency to analyze every situation in a practical fashion. These aspects of his identity are further underscored by his actions as the "good carpenter" – a meticulous, materialistic perfectionist who never takes the easy way out with a job that needs to be done patiently and correctly (Bleikasten, *Ink* 178). Cash spends hours "trimming out a wedge like it was glass he was working, when he could have reached around and picked up a dozen sticks and drove them into the joint and made it do" (*AILD* 79). Even his hair "is combed smooth down on his brow, smooth and black as if he had painted it on to his head" (*AILD* 81-82).

It is in Cash's own words, however, that his simple philosophy of interpersonal reciprocity shines through: all problems, he believes, can be solved by working hard, getting the details right and leaving emotions out of the equation:

> Folks seem to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has (*sic*) the smooth, pretty boards to build a court-house with and others don't have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy court-house, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse. (*AILD* 220-21)

Cash's focus on, and enjoyment of, the tangible is evident: life is about how well one can construct things out of the materials one has at one's disposal, the "nails," the "smooth pretty boards" and the "rough lumber." But when it comes to the abstract – the "feel[ing] ... better" or "worse" – Cash seems somewhat at a loss. What matters most is building that "tight coop" as well as one can. It is no surprise, then, that Cash's tools are his most prized possessions: they are the objects with which he shapes and controls his world. On the journey to Jefferson, an accidental splatter of mud on Addie’s coffin is carefully wiped away with one of these

valued implements, and then scoured clean with a branch from a willow tree (*AILD* 97). When Cash nearly drowns in the Bundren's disastrous river-crossing and his leg is broken, his lost tools are also the first and only possessions he requests (*AILD* 169).

Cash's way of dealing with the abstraction of Addie's death is thus consistent with his concretely-focused self: he makes a gift of his skills and labour and creates the best coffin he can possibly make for his dying mother, ensuring that it is made "on the bevel" for better grip of the nails and for reasons of waterproofing (*AILD* 75). Donald M. Kartiganer suggests that the coffin is to Cash what the horse is to Jewel and what the fish is to Vardaman: an object of transference, "an image equally effective in enabling Cash to form the limits of his grief" (28). Consistent with his private identity as a materialist shaper and creator, "Cash converts that grief into what is for him the far more comprehensible dimensions of a box" (Kartiganer 28). Given Foucault's conception of ethics, this dramatizes the way in which the care of self is both implicit within, and inseparable from, the care for others. In many ways, Cash cares for himself by caring for his dying mother's coffin. His work on Addie's coffin is, ultimately, "a strategy of self-protection, the most economical way to divert and displace the imminent pain of loss, to separate himself from the lost object," his mother (Bleikasten, *Ink* 179).

This does not imply, though, that the care of the self is necessarily and always in harmony with the care for others. Sometimes these ethical aspects come into conflict through an imbalance, an over-emphasis on either of the seemingly opposing aspects of self-fashioning. A focus on the care of self leads to a neglect of the care for others; too much importance invested in the care for others leads to a neglect of self. As a dramatization of such an ethical imbalance, Dewey Dell's particular construction of self serves as an example. For this country girl, the entire journey to Jefferson becomes a desperate search to find a way of solving her overtly physical problem: a challenge that is so personal that she is unwilling to share it with her immediate family.

The physicality of Dewey Dell's secret has a very peculiar influence on the girl's monologues. Her entire mode of speaking the self into being – thus, her process of self-fashioning in and through language – becomes inextricably linked to the sensations and specifics of the body. In the girl's own, simple words, this reduces her to "a little tub of guts" (*AILD* 52), a reduction which she readily projects onto others:

> It's like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room in it for anything else very important. He [Peabody] is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts and if there is not any room for anything else important in a big tub of guts, how can it be room in a little tub of guts ...
> [Peabody] is his guts and I am my guts. And I am Lafe's guts. That's it." (*AILD* 52-53)

The repetition of the word "guts" is significant in reflecting the notion that Dewey Dell's experience of self has now become predominantly visceral, and not cerebral.

Owing to this preoccupation with the physical, even an ordinary chore, the milking of the cow, becomes a sensual reminder of her inescapable sexuality:

> I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible. Lafe. Lafe. "Lafe" Lafe. Lafe. I lean a little forward, one foot advanced with dead walking. I feel the darkness rushing past my breast, past the cow; I begin to rush upon the darkness but the cow stops me and the darkness rushes on upon the sweet blast of her moaning breath filled with wood and with silence. (*AILD* 55)

Dewey Dell's repetition of the name of her lover, Lafe, recalls Juliet's musings over Romeo. Both instances represent a repeated attempt at pinning down, at subjectifying, the personhood of the lover through the speaking of his name: but it is a desperate and grasping attempt, the very repetition of which suggests its futility. In addition to this, Dewey Dell's use of rich, sensual language is underscored by her constant relation to bovine imagery. This suggests a strong association of her identity with what Philip C. Rule calls the "'womanliness' of nature" (110). Faulkner seems often to draw women as symbols of "the quiet, immemorial, life-giving quality of the earth" (Rule 110).[36] This association places even more emphasis on Dewey Dell's overwhelming obsession with her body.

It soon becomes clear, though, that this self-focus makes Dewey Dell quite ruthless – she will do literally anything in her power to protect her secret. She is prepared to exchange sexual favours with the druggist's assistant, McGowan, who exploits her ignorance and misleads her, in a manner reminiscent of coarse country comedy, into thinking that he is a medical expert

[36] Importantly, Rule adds that not all female identities are drawn as earth goddesses in Faulkner. "Cora Tull," for example, "is conventional religion incarnate" and "has a tidbit of scripture to wrap around every one of her neighbourly condemnations and rash judgments" (113).

and that his "medicine" (a placebo) and "treatment" (a sexual encounter) will terminate her pregnancy (*AILD* 236). And when Darl sets fire to Gillespie's barn with Addie's coffin inside, Dewey Dell takes the opportunity to betray him – the only family member who senses her dilemma – by informing Gillespie about his act of arson (*AILD* 224). Her betrayal leads to Darl's arrest and ultimate removal from the travelling party. Consistent with Foucault's model, it is Darl's intimate knowledge of his sister's desperate plight and his half-brother's status as illegitimate son – aspects which are integral to these two figures' modes of self-fashioning – which provides him with power over them. This power becomes a threat, and Dewey Dell's instinct is to protect her secret at all costs – for her, the emphasis thus falls strongly on taking care of the self above caring for others. The result is her ruthless elimination of the threat posed by a particular other within the familial structure, her brother Darl.

Dewey Dell's actions suggest the antithesis to Cash's process of self-fashioning. With Cash, the scale of Foucault's ethical model is tipped in the opposite direction. Cash's emphasis falls on caring for the other members of his family more than he takes care of himself. Ironically, one of the others for whom he cares so much during this journey is his dead mother, Addie. He takes great care to ensure that her corpse is delivered safely to its intended place of burial, even going so far as to risk his own life by diving into a raging river to retrieve her coffin. In the process, however, his utterly selfless behaviour leads also to a distinct lack in the care of self. Cash allows the Bundren family to ignore and neglect his tremendous physical suffering, in both callous and ludicrous ways, for the greater good of the completion of their journey. When his leg is broken during the river crossing, the ignorant Bundrens cast the damaged limb in concrete, causing the rest of his journey on the back of the wagon to become a torturous test of his endurance. This ambiguous relationship between the private and the public – that is, the interpenetration of the care of the self and the care for others witnessed in the figures of Dewey Dell and Cash Bundren – shows that constructions of self are dramatized not only individually in the novel, but also within a larger network of intersubjectivity. This aspect of self-fashioning is effectively reflected in the structure of the text.

Structural interdependence

As I Lay Dying is organized as a series of seemingly insular first-person monologues, each set apart and identified by the name of the speaking figure. The novel thus contains no traditional overarching narration or a controlling "central intelligence" (Beck, "Realist" 217). The structure of *Menagerie* differs from this, as Tom acts as central narrator and as participant in the action of the different scenes. The entire play is a representation of Tom's memory and, as such, *Menagerie* often relies on theatrical "tricks", such as lighting cues, "music", a "fiddle in the wings" (*GM* 1. 1. 400) and the miming of eating utensils (*GM* 1. 1. 401) to create this illusion.[37] *As I Lay Dying*, however, shows the reader a range of individually represented, yet intricately interdependent, "speaking" fictional figures who are either involved in, or simply observe the action of, the Bundrens' journey. These identities are revealed through a series of monologues which can be compared with, but are not quite the same as, Tom's monologues in *Menagerie*. The difference between the monologues in the novel and the monologues in the play is the notion that Tom addresses the audience/reader directly in the second person – as "you" – thus deliberately breaking the fourth-wall convention which has become well established in the theatre.[38] In the novel, the reader is never addressed directly, nor do the monologues actively imply a listener. One assumes that these monologues are thus a form of self-speaking – that is, a fictional subject both revealing and addressing him- or herself in the words of the mind, rather than through actual speech – and for this reason, the different narrative sections are often described as interior monologues.

[37] This deliberate foregrounding of theatrical devices is reminiscent of Brecht's epic theatre and its "verfremdungstechnik" (Hammer 40), which Williams appropriates as his "plastic theatre" (*GM*, "Production Notes" 395). *Menagerie*'s overt use of theatrical devices functions as an effective analogy between theatre and memory: just as theatre uses "tricks" to create an illusion of reality, memory also "plays tricks" on the one who remembers through its selective focal points and false exaggerations. The play's episodic structure further resembles the fragmentary nature of memory, consisting of a series of short scenes, rather than acts, and reminding critics such as John Gassner of Japanese Noh-drama, "in which story consists mostly of remembered fragments of experience" (391).

[38] The expression "breaking the fourth wall" is used primarily in theatre when characters are aware that they are being watched by the audience. Again, the term originated from Bertold Brecht's theory of "epic theatre." Most often, the fourth wall is broken by a character who directly addresses the audience – as Tom does – although the same effect can be achieved by acting out of character, or by characters interacting with objects outside of the context of the work.

The fact that the reader is privy to this interiority, however, problematizes the clarity of such rigid interior/exterior, thought/speech polarities. This inside/outside ambiguity positions the monologues closer to the Shakespearian soliloquy, a theatrical convention in which a fictional figure's private thoughts are revealed through speech without addressing or acknowledging the audience. The character speaks to him- or herself on stage, either alone, or as an aside which the other characters cannot hear. But whether or not the reader/audience member is addressed directly matters little in terms of the monologue's function. In both the novel and play, the fictional figure uttering the monologue "speaks" his or her own memories, impressions, thoughts and emotions – thus him- or herself – into being. While this act of self-speaking is rendered in writing on the page, it still serves as an enactment of the self, and thus a dramatization or "staging" of the fictional figure's identity in and through language. As with names, the monologue thus suggests an aporetic interpenetration: they are a speaking-to-the-self as much as they are a speaking-of-the-self. This implies that the way in which the figure addresses him-/herself – the kind of language he/she uses and the subject matter of the monologue – effectively reveals the identity of that figure, even when the figure is not speaking about him/herself. This self-revelatory aspect is demonstrated most effectively through the figure of Tom in *Menagerie,* as the entire play becomes a revelation of his nostalgic, yet cynical, recollections and misplaced obsessions and preoccupations.

Thus, while the structural fragmentation of *Menagerie* resembles the fractured, episodic quality of Tom's memories, the disjointed structure of *As I Lay Dying* resembles the fragmentation of individualized experiences. Despite the fractured surface of the novel, the individual monologues never function entirely independently in revealing individual identities, but interpenetrate one another, relying on both their co-placement with other monologues, as well as the order in which they are placed, to gain significance within the narrative. Using Derrida's spatio-temporal conception of *différance*, the entire novel can thus be read as a series of mutually "deconstructing" units, as a textual demonstration of how identity functions as the perpetual interpenetration and mutual repositioning of the public and the private within a network of intersubjectivity. The effect of this structural co-dependence, as Gray argues, is that "no one voice" commenting on the events or other fictional figures in the novel "can be regarded as authoritative but equally no voice can be discounted either; consequently, the narrative assumes a character that is even more frankly relativistic than most of Faulkner's narratives are" (153).

To interrogate this notion of structural relativism, the shortest, yet most striking, monologue in the novel can be used as an analytical focal point. Vardaman, the youngest of the Bundren brothers, declares: "My mother is a fish" (*AILD* 76). Read on its own, this emphatic claim makes little sense. In order to understand why and how this metaphor is forged in the troubled boy's mind, the reader relies on various preceding and subsequent monologues which are often attributed to other fictional figures. Vernon Tull is the first to describe how Vardaman came up the hill, "carrying a fish nigh long as he is"; this is followed by his narration of how, in the dust by the porch, the boy turns the dead fish "over with his foot and prods at the eye-bump with his toe, gouging at it" (*AILD* 25-26). The reader also recalls Darl's monologue, in which he describes intuitively his mother's last moments of consciousness: Addie "looks at Vardaman; her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flares glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them. ... Vardaman peers, his mouth full open [like that of a fish] and all colour draining from his face ..." (*AILD* 43). Until this moment, the only creatures which Vardaman has observed during the life-to-death transition are country animals – the "rabbits and possums" that went "farther than town" (*AILD* 60). The transition has thus always been accompanied by a similar outward sign, the glazing over of the eyes, and when Vardaman recognizes this fading life force in his mother's eyes, the metaphoric fusion of mother and fish begins to be forged.

Later, in Vardaman's own child-like language, he remarks:

> It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him [Peabody] and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there won't be anything in the box and so she can breathe. (*AILD* 60).

In this passage, it is evident that the association of mother and fish has become an intricate, temporal problem for Vardaman – a confusion of what "was" and what "is" – which his immature mind struggles to comprehend. For this child, existence is framed within a sensory paradigm, hence the references to blood, the impression of the fish's body in the dirt, and the pieces of the fish itself. These are physical clues proving the existence the fish. Against this, non-existence – the "was" – is almost inconceivable, and yet it cannot be ignored. Although all the physical signs of the fish's existence are still perceivable, the fish is dead. The fish "is"

no more. Similarly, his mother's dead body "is" – it is still there in the room, touchable, visible – and yet, Addie herself "was"; she is also dead. In light of preceding descriptions such as these, Vardaman's statement, "My mother is a fish" thus gains significance as a startling revelation of the neglected child's shock, confusion and grief at his first encounter with human mortality (*AILD* 76).[39]

The boy's fish statement resonates also with elements that follow his one-sentence monologue, thus effecting not only a spatial, but also a temporal co-dependence. This passage, for example, is placed after Addie's coffin has been retrieved from the raging river:

> My mother is a fish. Darl says that when we come to the water again I might see her and Dewey Dell said, She's in the box; how could she have got out? She got out through the holes I bored, into the water I said, and when we come to the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish. (*AILD* 185)

Here, it is evident that Vardaman's association of the living Addie (more accurately, the memory of her) with a possible living fish involves a dissociation from Addie's dead and decomposing body and from the physical immediacy of her decay. This further complicates Vardaman's reliance on material perception to prove Addie's existence. In addition to this, his first "my mother is a fish" statement now becomes a prefiguring of Addie's near "escape" into the raging water during the river crossing, when her coffin slips off the unstable wagon and almost washes downstream.

In a manner similar to Vardaman's short monologue, all the other sections of the novel rely largely on the intersubjective space – that is, on their spatial and temporal co-dependence and co-placement with other monologues in the novel – to reveal the individual fictional identities of which they are dramatizations. This effect adds to the novel's atmosphere of what André Bleikasten calls, "flux" and "constant change", in which "[a]ll boundaries are crossed or blurred; no identity or function ever solidifies; forms always verge on dissolution and transformation into different patterns. All is fluid and fleeting. Metamorphosis always prevails" (*Ink* 166). While the various episodes of *Menagerie* function in much the same

[39] Richard P. Adams notes that this association of life and fish imagery in Vardaman's monologues refers to the "old fertility ritual, reflected in the Grail legend ... and refined in the Christian sacrament of the communion, of transmuting the life of a dead totem animal or person into the lives of those who eat the flesh or drink the blood" (82).

intersubjective fashion as the monologues in *As I Lay Dying*, we encounter here an additional kind of reciprocal influence in the form of different conceptions of time.

This multiple layering of the temporal is integral to particularly Tom's mode of self-fashioning. Again, a comparison with Faulkner's treatment of time is useful to explain this distinction. In *As I Lay Dying*, the same event – such as the river crossing – is sometimes repeated more than once in various monologues. This technique not only enables the reader to view this event through different pairs of eyes, but also creates a looping back of time, a repetition of chronological sections in the narrative which is aimed at achieving a multidimensional view. In *Menagerie*, however, we encounter a simultaneously layered treatment of time within time. The first layer is the "present" of Tom's monologues. This is when he speaks to the audience directly as a merchant marine who has "traveled around a great deal", describing a period which occurs some years after the Great Depression and the events dramatized in the play (*GM* 2. 7. 465). But, as soon as the play begins, Tom "turn[s] back time" and re-enters "that quaint period" of the 1930s, the years during which the major moments of conflict in the family occur (*GM* 1. 1. 400). Then, as Sam Bluefarb notes, "as soon as we are safely, though not quite comfortably, settled in that era, we are whisked back – through Amanda's monologues – to a time even further remote," the time of the antebellum South (514). These three layers of time constantly interpenetrate each other throughout the play.

In addition to these layers of specific time, there is another, more subtle temporal ambiguity evident – what Frank Durham calls "generalized" and "specific" time:

> The first scene in the apartment, the dinner scene, is an example of generalized time. It is not any one particular dinner but a kind of abstraction of all the dinners shared by the trio in their life of entrapment. Amanda's admonitory speeches are ones often repeated, her stories of the seventeen gentlemen callers are oft-told tales – and Tom's irritated responses are those he makes each and every time the stories are retold. (14)

Further examples of the amalgamation of occurrences into a single, representative scene might be added, such as Amanda's sales calls to friends and acquaintances. Even the mimed comforting scene between Amanda and Laura occurs at the end of the play, as though it is witnessed from behind a glass separation to enhance this sense of "timelessness" (Fambrough 103). One senses that this is not the first occasion on which Amanda eases her daughter's disappointment in this way, nor will it be the last. In contrast to this, the scene in which the

unicorn's horn is broken off takes place in "specific" time, since this particular event could not have happened more than once.

In most of the play, however, the distinction between specific and general time is not as clear-cut as Durham wants to suggest. In this way, the simultaneous, often indistinguishable, representation of specific and general time dramatizes Derrida's notion of iterability: the "play of uniqueness and repetition" which manifests itself also in the functioning of names, aphorisms and dates ("Aphorism" 419). His description of these phenomena as the "codes that we cast like nets over time and space – in order to reduce or master differences, to arrest them, determine them" is particularly apt ("Aphorism" 419). While each individual occurrence of these events in Tom and his family's lives may have been unique, their representation in the text becomes generalized. This demonstrates effectively Tom's continual search for transcendent significance among the repetitive and mundane events captured by his memory; his urge is to find a common thread to bind these occurrences together and invest them with a common meaning. But this urge is so strong that meaning is imposed on the memories through the embellishments of his mind.

It follows that the Tom we find dramatised in the replayed scenes from his family history, is a representation of how Tom views himself within those memories. For the reader/audience member, there is a strong sense of watching the younger Tom through the older Tom's eyes as a quite literal dramatization of a subject "staging" the self to the self. In this way, Tom watches himself play the part of a boy who struggles to become an adult under his mother, to be a man of creativity not "fitting in" in a shoe factory, and a son struggling with overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and guilt owing to an absent father. For Tom, the fashioning of self thus implies a temporal challenge: the reconciliation of the present self with the self from the past. In this way, he assumes the roles of both narrator of his past and participant in its enactment. It is important, though, that this distinction – the difference between Tom the narrator (speaking in the present) and Tom the participant (playing out the scenes from the past) – is also never absolute. Just as the various conceptions of time constantly interpenetrate each other throughout the play, so each of Tom's "roles" contains traces of, and thus deconstructs, the opposite other.

It is usually as the narrator that Tom speaks in the present, challenging the reader's suspension of disbelief by reminding us that we are witnessing a "memory play" and not

reality (*GM* 1. 1. 400). Sometimes, though, the theatrical diction of the narrator's monologues inadvertently spills into Tom's dialogue when he interacts with the other fictional figures and participates in the re-enactment of his past. An example of this is when Tom speaks to his mother about Jim, the gentleman caller, and exclaims: "Mr. O'Connor has not yet appeared *on the scene*!", to which his mother responds: "But will tomorrow. To meet your sister, and what do I know about his *character*?" (*GM* 2. 5. 428, emphasis added). Sometimes Tom acts even as a kind of stage manager while participating in a scene. When Amanda nostalgically recalls the gentleman callers from her past, "Tom motions for music and a spot of light on Amanda" (*GM* 1. 1. 403). As narrator, Tom usually addresses only the audience in the present, observing the convention of not speaking directly to any of the figures from his past unless there is a clear visual clue to indicate the chronological shift and the switch in Tom's role from narrator to participant. These clues include his entering or exiting a designated space on stage, or a lighting or costume change. However, at the very end of the play, Tom breaks also this convention by imploring Laura directly, without any indication of transition, to "blow out" her candles (*GM* 1. 7. 465). Tom's seemingly distinct roles as narrator and participant thus ultimately coalesce.

The intersubjectivity of identities: Darl and Jewel

We have thus far seen that the structural units of both *As I Lay Dying* and *Menagerie* rely strongly on the play of *différance* – a process of constant co-dependence and mutual influence – to gain significance within the texts. How does this resonate with processes of identity-fashioning? Perhaps the most poignant dramatization of the intersubjectivity of identities is the interaction between the figures of Darl and Jewel in *As I Lay Dying*. In fact, one of the most important keys to understanding the complexities of Darl's troubled sense of self is through his critical view of, and chronic obsession with, his half-brother Jewel. Most of what we know about Jewel depends on how he is observed and described by Darl. Jewel himself has only one monologue in the narrative.[40] This monologue is dominated by fantasies of an unstable, brooding, almost demented violence – the urge to roll "rocks" in the "faces" of everyone who approaches him and his (dead) mother (*AILD* 12). This aspect reveals him to be the least articulate and potentially most violent Bundren brother: a man of action, physical confrontation and repressed resentments, rather than ideas and words. Jewel's single

[40] Addie is also afforded only a single monologue but, while she is indeed very articulate, her single self-speaking opportunity reveals, paradoxically, a strong distrust and contempt for words.

monologue underscores the notion that his identity is shaped particularly in the public space, rather than in the private. This implies that his identity is dominated by how he is perceived by others: as a rebellious youth, as a despised neighbour's offspring and – in Darl's eyes – as Addie's illegitimate, yet favourite, son.

When Jewel is nearby, Darl's eyes rarely focus on anyone or anything else. It is telling that the very first monologue in the novel begins with the words: "Jewel and I ..." (*AILD* 1). Ten of Darl's remaining eighteen speeches start similarly with a reference to Jewel; and apart from the last monologue, "there is not a single one that does not begin or end with him" (Bleikasten, *Ink* 189). When they are travelling to town together, Darl notices the minutiae of his brother's person: "[Jewel] has been to town this week: the back of his neck is trimmed close, with a white line between hair and sunburn like a joint of white bone" (*AILD* 34). And when Darl observes Jewel's handling of the horse, he is clearly mesmerized as if by a supernatural vision: "Then Jewel is enclosed by a glittering maze of hooves as by an illusion of wings ... They stand in rigid terrific hiatus, the horse trembling and groaning" (*AILD* 9). Here, Jewel's actions are described hyperbolically as almost god-like in the eyes of Darl – a divine display of splendid, yet brutal, domination. This description underlines Darl's fascination with his half-brother as the ultimate other in relation to whom he fashions his self-image.

It is conceivable that, over many years of sharing the same house with Jewel, Darl has deeply internalized his identity as the unwanted son in relation to his brother (who is Addie's favourite). This involves the realization that he is not, and could never be, his sibling's equal in winning his mother's affection. In this way, the figure of Darl becomes a poignant demonstration of how the shaping of a particular private identity is influenced and made relative by other identities in the public space: in this case, through both Addie's and Jewel's processes of self-fashioning. Addie's favouritism is an aspect that her alternate whipping and petting of Jewel cannot conceal: she lavishes attention – whether loving or in punishment – on the illegitimate child, and this does not go unnoticed.[41]

[41] One notices in the words "whipping" and "petting" the close association of violence and affection – the "cross" and the "salvation" – which epitomizes the ambiguity of Addie and Jewel's relationship (*AILD* 14; 156). This paradox is also, significantly, the essence of Jewel's relationship with the totem figure of his maternal transference: his beloved horse.

Darl's fascination with his younger brother can thus be seen as a way of comparing himself with Jewel, a constant searching of his brother's person, his attitude, his actions, his words, his eyes, for the exact location of, and reason for, his mother's preoccupation with Jewel and his own unchanging inferiority. In fact, as Olga Vickery rightly argues,

> it is [Addie whom Darl] is facing when he taunts and provokes Jewel. This explains the peculiar degree of intensity in the moments of contact between them. Because he refuses to assume responsibility for his knowledge, because he refuses to act from it and out of it, he forces Jewel into its enactment through violence which reaches its resolution only when Jewel beats him up at Jefferson. ("*As I Lay Dying"* 199)

Resonating with this description is Foucault's aporetic oscillation between the care of self and the care for others, and of knowledge of others leading to power over them. Darl's knowledge of the most integral aspect of Jewel's identity – his status as illegitimate son – is what empowers him to incite action and violence in Jewel. But it is a violence that Darl perhaps has an urge, but is unable, to enact himself: a violence aimed at avenging his status as unloved son against his mother. In this way, the mutual interferences in this triangle of inter-personal identities – that is, Darl in relation to Jewel, in relation to Addie and again in relation to Darl – become particularly intricate and involved.

To dramatize the element of sibling rivalry in Jewel and Darl's modes of self-fashioning, they often function as antithetical figures. If Jewel is a god-like hero, Darl is the "antiheroic" intelligence (Brooks, *Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 145). This juxtaposition is introduced metaphorically by the action of the first scene in the novel: the differing ways in which the two brothers approach, and deal with, the obstacle of the cotton house on their way home. Darl, the older brother, leads the walk at first, but is already overshadowed by Jewel's sheer size (*AILD* 1). This suggests an obvious difference in physical stature: Jewel is taller and stronger, which plays into the heroic assumptions associated with him. Epic heroes who race into flood and water always appear to be larger than life, while the anti-hero, Darl, has little capacity for living effectively in the world of practical affairs.

When the brothers reach the cotton house, Darl circumvents the problem with an intellectual solution: he sticks to the path that circles the building and takes the long way round. Jewel does exactly the opposite:

> Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden

> face, he crosses the floor in four strides ... and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In a single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path toward the foot of the bluff. (*AILD* 1-2)

Two aspects are important in this description. Firstly, we already begin to notice Darl's persistent, almost preternatural, vision which stays focused on his brother even though the latter is hidden behind the wall of the barn. Darl imagines Jewel's actions, attitude and expression even when he is not present. This is an integral aspect of Darl's self-fashioning. Arthur F. Kinney writes that "Darl's visual thinking is split between recording what he *sees* and projecting what he *thinks*, the realized and the imagined …" (162) – a combined vision that manifests itself throughout the novel. He adds that Darl "sees not only from two perspectives but from *three*, for he also thinks about the way *both* of them would look to someone at the cotton house as they approach it" (162). Darl thus achieves a kind of hyperawareness of his interpersonal connections: he constantly thinks of himself in relation to his family and surroundings, and is acutely aware of his positioning within a network of interdependent familial bonds.

The opposite of this obsessive relativity is Jewel's blatant insistence on individuality. This introduces the second key aspect emerging from the sample passage: the association of Jewel's identity with repeated images of wood and statues. Jewel's inflexibility, rigidity and dogged self-determination manifest themselves in spite of the potentially influential identity-shaping forces of the family and community around him. This notion is, again, dramatized through his actions in this scene. Jewel confronts the obstacle of the cotton house confidently, head-on and without circumvention. Unlike his brother, Darl, Jewel never shies away from challenges, nor does he recognize any authority other than, or over, himself. He is a rebellious, free spirit, much like his horse, which the community initially believed to be too wild to tame (*AILD* 121). Like a true hero, Jewel rushes unflinchingly into extreme physical exhaustion, raging rivers and roaring fires to achieve his goals. These fearless, almost thoughtless, actions are the result of his strong, yet entirely unselfconscious, identity – a quality that the painfully self-aware Darl does not possess. This contrast between the two brothers sets up a dialectic of identity upon which much of the tension in the novel rests. If care of self begins with knowing the self, Darl is at a loss: "I don't know what I am," he confesses. "I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he doesn't know that he doesn't know whether he is or not" (*AILD* 73).

An existential-phenomenological paradigm – as formulated by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre – is useful further to accentuate these paradoxical, yet intimately interrelated, modes of self-fashioning. In his seminal text *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, Sartre posits two types of "radically separated regions of being": the "in-itself" and the "for-itself" (*Being* lxvii). Describing the "characteristics" of the first kind of existential mode, Sartre writes that the being-in-itself "does not refer to itself as self-consciousness does. It is this self. It is itself so completely that perpetual reflection which constitutes the self is dissolved in an identity" (*Being* lxv). Sartre adds that the in-itself is "opaque to itself precisely because it is filled with itself" (*Being* lxv) and that it is thus "*solid* (*massif*)" (*Being* lxvi). In this description, one recognizes a similarity with the ways in which the figure of Jewel is described in Faulkner's language. Only a single act of self-speaking in the novel relates to Jewel, illustrating a tendency towards a non-reflexive self, a statue-like, opaque mode of being. Jewel simply is what he is, unaffected, unselfconscious and "wooden". Indeed, for Sartre, the "in-itself" is closely associated with inanimate objects which, despite their existence, simply have no capacity to contemplate their being.

Sartre writes further that the in-itself "knows no otherness; it never posits itself as *other-than-another-being*. It can support no connection with the other" (*Being* lxvi). This aspect manifests itself in Jewel's individuality and independence, his habit of being and doing without thinking. Throughout the novel, he displays fierce pride and aggression towards all others, often bordering on violence and incipient madness. In ethical terms, Jewel's focus on the care of the self implies a neglect of the care for others. This misbalancing emphasis in his mode of self-fashioning calls into question whether Jewel should be considered as truly human, as the capacity to sympathize with others is almost completely lacking in this fictional figure. When Anse chastises Jewel for acquiring a horse without first considering where the animal's feed would come from – in other words, for not thinking about the effect that this purchase would have on the family – Jewel responds: "He won't never eat a mouthful of yours ... Not a mouthful. I'll kill him first. Don't you never think it. Don't you never" (*AILD* 123). So self-enclosed is Jewel's subjectivity that he threatens to destroy even the one creature he loves to protect his inviolate identity.

Jewel also entertains violent fantasies against his family: "It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing

them down the hill, faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that damn adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet" (*AILD* 12). In addition to the threat of violence, there is Jewel's strangely possessive and exclusive love for Addie. This is somewhat ironic, though, as there is very little evidence in the novel to suggest that he showed any of this devotion towards her when she was still alive. As a matter of fact, Jewel's rather callous disregard of Addie's concern for his deteriorating health during the horse purchasing episode again proves his complete disconnectedness from others, even from Addie's maternal partiality towards him.

In contrast to Jewel's possessiveness over Addie, Darl considers himself to be motherless – "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother" (*AILD* 86). He tends to shy away from challenges and avoids conflicts. Darl not only circumvents the cotton house, but later also abandons the tilting wagon in the raging river, rather than helping Cash to hold onto Addie's coffin. When Jewel is challenged to a duel by a passerby, it is Darl who quickly defuses the situation through an act of mediation and diplomacy. Within the Sartrean model of being, Darl thus demonstrates a tendency towards the for-itself. Sartre contrasts this self-reflexive mode of being with the unselfconscious being-in-itself: if the in-itself "is what it is", then the for-itself "is defined, on the contrary, as being what it is not and not being what it is" (*Being* lxv). This complex formulation implies that the for-itself involves an essential lack of fullness, essence and immediacy, and involves instead an aspect of distance and contingency, a possible becoming, a making of the self, rather than a being the self. Foucault's similar notion of the modern self as a complex elaboration resonates with Sartre's thinking here, although one senses that Foucault tends more towards an aesthetic approach to self-fashioning. For him, and for the ancient Greeks from whom he appropriates this notion, existence is an art, a conscious creation of beauty using one's life and relationships with others as – for lack of less concrete terms – the "raw material". Sartre's notion of being-for-itself, I would argue, appears to be somewhat less idealistic and value-laden. For Sartre, being-for-itself does not strive necessarily towards any sort of ideal, but seems to be inclusive of any and all conscious movements away from, and beyond, pure facticity.[42]

[42] Macey's explanation of Sartrean "facticity" within a phenomenological context is helpful:

> Sartre defines [the word] in terms of an individual's circumstances of birth, class, race, nationality, and in terms of the physiological and bodily structures that necessarily condition that individual's situation or being-in-the-world. Whereas transcendence defines consciousness's movement away from any given state of being in order to achieve its freedom and realize its potential, facticity restricts and limits freedom by reintroducing the dimension of contingency or the fact of being in a situation that is not freely chosen or determined. (120)

Again, Darl serves as an effective dramatization of this Sartrean model. Rather than simply being, Darl – to use Hazel Barnes' description – "'has to be'; his present being has meaning only in the light of the future toward which he projects himself. Thus he is *not* what at any instant we might want to say that he is, and he is that toward which he projects himself but which he is not yet" (xix). Sartre's for-itself is similarly associated with "questions of possibility, of value, and of temporality" (Barnes xix), questions which are raised in this extract from Darl's complex monologue on existence:

> And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be, and then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*. (*AILD* 73-74)

Darl's problems of temporality and possibility are clearly reflected by his convoluted diction: the "is", "is-not", "was" and "be". But what is most evident from this passage is that he constantly internalizes his search for a coherent, secure self into a perpetually insoluble ontological abstraction, which effectively dramatizes the self-awareness and self-reflection of the for-itself.

It is indeed Darl's internal voice that we hear most often in the novel: nineteen of the fifty-nine monologues are his – more than those assigned to any of the other characters. Vernon observes wisely that "the Lord aimed for [a fellow] to do and not to spend too much time thinking, because his brain it's like a piece of machinery: it won't stand a whole lot of racking. ... I have said and I say again, that's ever living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much" (*AILD* 64). So, whereas Jewel "thinks" too little, which leads to a neglect of the care for others, Darl thinks too much, leading to a neglect of the care of self and, ultimately, to an unsettling lack of identity. Vernon's words are thus prophetic: it is indeed the "machinery" of Darl's mind, not Jewel's, that breaks eventually under the constant "racking". Darl's groping towards an evasive sense of identity shows that he never quite realizes his own ability to fashion a coherent self. Instead, he keeps searching, with mounting despair, for some kind of transcendent personal essence. This hopeless search leads to his ultimate collapse towards the end of the novel.

However, Darl cannot be described as "weaker" than his brother in all respects. His sensitive attempts at self-fashioning cause him to be far more intuitive and perceptive than Jewel with

respect to the identity and emotional life of others. As Adams points out, Darl "confronts the problems of death and identity and relationships and life without defense, partly because he is the most sensitive of them all to his own [I would say, lack of] identity and the identities of other people and things" (78). As a result of this sensitivity, Darl has an extraordinary ability to "read" people, that is, to interpret the subtle external hints and changes in their behaviour, attitudes and facial expressions which reveal emotion – thus, to interpret the language of the body in its revelation of emotion. This ability is so well developed that it is often believed by others to be a supernatural gift. Darl knows, without being told, about Dewey Dell's sexual affair and resultant pregnancy. After the night on which Cash follows Jewel in order to discover the reason for Jewel's unexplained exhaustion, Darl knows that Cash was successful simply by looking at him (*AILD* 119). Darl is also the only Bundren who sees through his father's pretences and false humility.

On at least on two occasions, his extraordinary ability borders on the visionary: when he vividly imagines his mother's death without being in the room (*AILD* 46-47), and when he describes Cash working on the coffin in the rainstorm (*AILD* 68-74). On both occasions, he is not present to witness the details of the events, but manages to imagine the scene with accuracy. Most significantly, though, it is Darl who knows that Jewel has a different father from the rest of the Bundren children, a fact that he reads at first in Addie's behaviour (*AILD* 123). Thus, when Darl sets fire to the barn containing his mother's coffin, his actions are ambiguous. On the one hand, his deliberate intervention in the delivery of the corpse to its intended burial place may be read as a kind of heroic deed – a valiant attempt at ridding the family of the foolishness and horror in which the journey has become steeped. But it could also be seen as an act aimed at avenging himself on Addie for her rejection of him and her favouritism towards his rival, Jewel.

The intersubjectivity of identities: Tom, Laura and Amanda

A degree of interpenetration and interdependency similar to that found between Darl and Jewel is evident in Tom's process of self-fashioning in relation to other fictional figures in *Menagerie*. Tom's conception of, and relation to, himself thus envelops and incorporates his troubled relationships with his mother and sister. What we learn of Amanda in the play is dependent, to a large degree, on what Tom allows us to see. Similarly, the key to

understanding Laura's suffering lies in considering how that suffering is refracted through Tom's views, which are tainted by his own prejudices and preconceptions.

Amanda is never seen in anything other than old and ridiculously outdated clothing. At one point, we learn that she "has on one of those cheap or imitation velvety-looking cloth coats with imitation fur collar. Her hat is five or six years old, one of those dreadful cloche hats that were worn in the late twenties ..." (*GM* 1. 2. 405). In fact, everything relating to Amanda seems to have a history – from her party dress to the jonquils she carries – and the words "I remember" are her often repeated refrain (*GM* 1. 1. 402). Like her clothes, Amanda's language is somewhat old-fashioned and over-used: she utters a constant stream of stilted expressions and idioms such as "try and you will SUCCEED" (*GM* 1. 4. 419); "still water runs deep" (*GM* 1. 4. 420); "Spartan endurance" (*GM* 1. 4. 420); "handwriting on the wall" (*GM* 1. 4. 422); "work like a Turk" (*GM* 1. 5. 427); and more. This trite and clichéd style of expression underscores Tom's perception of Amanda as a mother who has not moved with the times, not even in the way she expresses herself. In addition to this, Amanda's actions and dialogue show a particular preoccupation with bygone Southern gentility: when she rests on the landing, she sits down "gracefully and demurely" on a piece of newspaper, "as if she was sitting into a swing on a Mississippi verandah" (*GM* 1. 5. 425); and when Jim comes to visit Laura, Amanda's vivacity and lavish display of Southern charm and hospitality is so overbearing that it throws him momentarily "off the beam" (*GM* 2. 6. 441). These actions seem to become Amanda's way of staging the self in terms of the past. But, since her mode of self-fashioning is refracted through Tom, this suggests again that his conception of her is as a faded, anachronistic woman clinging frantically to the glory and gentility of the Old South.

Amanda's anachronism is, however, not where Tom's exaggerations end. He remembers her also as a stifling, controlling parent, always trying to dictate practically every aspect of her children's lives: from the way they eat (*GM* 1. 1. 402), drink (*GM* 1. 4. 419), dress (*GM* 1. 4. 422) and comb their hair (*GM* 1. 5. 424), to how much Tom smokes (*GM* 1. 5. 424) or what he should study (*GM* 1. 5. 424). In Tom's mind, Amanda was guilty of a style of mothering that left nothing to chance. Tom also renders his mother as overtly materialistic, as the stories she tells in the play regularly contain references to either money or inheritance (*GM* 1. 2. 403-04). This is ironic in light of the family's financial hardship. The exaggeration on Tom's part reflects how his mother's stories of old Southern money have grated on his sensitive conscience owing to his own feelings of anger and guilt – anger at the fact that his father had

left them in financially dire straits without a hint of a conscience, and guilt owing to his own inability, as sole provider, to secure a better life for the family.

It remains questionable, then, whether this was indeed how Amanda raised her children, or whether this might be simply an effect of Tom's overly sensitive imagination. Very telling of Tom's tendency to exaggerate is the fact that memories of Amanda are often coupled with what seem to be larger-than-life actions and reactions, sometimes bordering on melodrama. In fact, for Amanda, the smallest difficulties seem always to turn into a "fiasco" (*GM* 1. 2. 408-10). When Amanda "slowly opens her purse," she "removes a dainty white handkerchief which she shakes out delicately and delicately touches to her lips and nostrils" (*GM* 1. 2. 406). She cries "grotesquely" after Tom apologizes to her for his angry outburst (*GM* 1. 4. 419). Unresolved feelings of "everlasting regret" (*GM* 1. 5. 429) towards his mother and sister thus anchor Tom's consciousness in the past, as his memory constantly returns to scenes where Amanda spells out his irresponsible failures, saying that his drinking reminds her of his father's (*GM* 1. 4. 420) or that, if Tom leaves, there will be no responsible male to take care of Laura (*GM* 1. 4. 422).

Owing to such feelings of guilt, Tom's sister, Laura, also appears to be overly fragile in his estimation. Laura is always dressed in unobtrusive, off-white colours and fine, flowing materials, which emphasize her girlish femininity and physical delicacy, reminding one of "a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf" (*GM* "The Characters", 394). At one point, she is described as wearing "a dress of soft violet material for a kimono – her hair tied back from her forehead with a ribbon" (*GM* 1. 2. 405). Her fragility is borne out by the fact that Laura not only walks with a limp, but is socially "crippled" by her own uncontrollable shyness and resultant panic attacks. She vomits during a speed test at the business college, never to return out of sheer embarrassment; and she regularly shakes (*GM* 1. 2. 407) or trembles (*GM* 2. 6. 433) out of sheer nervousness. When her gentleman caller knocks, she "utters a low moan", "turns off the lamp" and "sits stiffly on the edge of the sofa, knotting her fingers together", rather than opening the door (*GM* 2. 6. 436). All of these actions appear to be inflated by Tom's mind. This is how he remembers, or rather re-imagines, his sister to have appeared, spoken and acted. Tom's mind fixates on Laura's fragility in consequence of his own feelings of guilt and responsibility. One almost gets the sense that he uses these memories to berate himself for his "selfishness" in pursuing his own life. Tom feels that his caring for himself has taken precedence too overtly over the

care for others, and the result is an overwhelming sense of estrangement and guilt from which he cannot escape.

Significantly, Jim is perhaps the one fictional identity whose fashioning of self remains least tainted by Tom's cynical, guilt-ridden exaggerations. However, the representation of this figure within the play is most influenced by Williams' use of symbolism. In the character list, Jim is described merely as a "nice, ordinary young man" (*GM*, "The Characters", 394), while Tom thinks of his friend as "an emissary from a world of reality" (*GM* 1. 1. 401). But, in light of the play's pervasive religious symbolism, Jim functions as a kind of inverted Christ figure. Roger B. Stein observes that,

> [i]n the "Annunciation" scene, when Amanda learns that the Gentleman Caller's name is O'Connor, she says, "that, of course, means fish – tomorrow is Friday!" The remark functions not only literally, since Jim is Irish Catholic, but also figuratively, for the fish is the traditional symbol of Christ. (40)

Vardaman's fish association in *As I Lay Dying* comes to mind again, although the application of the symbol is far subtler and more nuanced in that novel than in this play. In the novel, the fish symbol is connected to the dead Addie – "My mother is a fish" (*AILD* 76) – and the possibility, at least in Vardaman's mind, of her resurrection through the ingestion of her fish body. Although the fish is to be prepared for a family meal in the play, the symbolic association with Jim as Christ figure carries a very real hope of salvation and rebirth for Amanda and Laura, who are "searching for a Savior who will come to help them, to save them, to give their drab lives meaning" (Stein 40). Of course, the arrival and eventual departure of this saviour figure is steeped in irony, which suggests an inversion of the traditional Christ-story into an anti-climactic disappointment for Laura and Amanda.[43]

The fish is not the most important symbol in Williams' play, though. Laura's identity is more often linked to the symbol of the unicorn which, as Henry Popkin notes, is "different like Laura, 'extinct in the modern world'" (58). The symbolism of the breaking of the unicorn's horn could then be read in two ways, both of which are valid. After the accident, Laura remarks of the broken ornament that "[n]ow it is just like all the other horses" (*GM* 2. 7. 457).

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[43] Stein concurs that Jim's attempt to play the modern saviour is an abysmal failure: "In the after-dinner scene, he offers Laura the sacrament – wine and 'life-savers,' in this case – and a Dale Carnegie version of the Sermon on the Mount – self-help rather than divine help – but to no avail. At the end of the play Laura and Amanda are, as [Amanda's earlier] joke bitterly reminds us, 'in the dark' ..." (42).

If one accepts the unicorn as Laura's symbol, this seems to imply that Laura has momentarily overcome her shyness and that she has transformed herself owing to Jim's encouraging and reassuring influence. However, throughout the preceding scenes, Laura constantly refers to the unicorn as a male:

> LAURA. Go on, I trust you with him! (*Places it in his palm*) There now – you're holding him gently! Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him? (*GM* 2. 7. 455)

The light "shin[ing] through" the male unicorn is not incidental. The unicorn is often seen as another traditional Christ-symbol. If Jim assumes a saviour identity in the play, it follows that the unicorn may also be associated with him, rather than with Laura. The breaking of the horn then anticipates a kind of removal of the saviour's mythical potency, a foreshadowing of Jim's revelation that he is unable to "save" Laura from her pitiful circumstances owing to his engagement to another girl; in effect, he shatters both Laura and Amanda's dreams of deliverance.

To reiterate an earlier point: what we see of Amanda, Laura and Jim is what Tom's memory allows us to see and how he has re-imagined them. These figures become a kind of private glass menagerie for Tom, an inert and fetishized collection of figurines – rather than real persons – playthings, with which he constantly recreates the situations of his own, inescapable past. These figures are inert, because they appear to be frozen in their unchanging appearance and set patterns of behaviour; and fetishized, because Tom repeatedly pores over them as the objects of his distorted, obsessive guilt. The narrow Freudian conception of a fetish is a "non-sexual part of the body" which serves as a "substitute for the mother's penis" in a form of "sexual perversion" (Macey 127). But the term should – in this context – rather be understood in the broader sense as an inanimate object receiving an almost self-defeating degree of devotion and attention. This is the dominant quality of Tom's unhealthy, guilt-driven obsession with the "frozen" figures of his young adulthood. Nevertheless, the effect of Tom's colouration from private awareness and supposition is that the reader learns more about his selfhood through the figures on which he fixates than about the events or figures themselves.

A similar degree of subjective colouration is evident in the monologues of *As I Lay Dying.* This implies that these, too, are permeated by aspects of each individual identity: the desires, hopes, fears, dreams, values and norms of the speaking figure. Even the motivation for the

journey as a whole is not the same for all of the Bundrens. The effect of this is that a single road trip to Jefferson divides into a multiplicity of individual, yet intimately related, experiences. Despite Anse's repeated insistence that he simply wishes to fulfil his promise to Addie, he evidently longs more for a set of store-bought teeth and a brand new wife. Dewey Dell is pregnant and wants to get to town to buy an abortion drug. Vardaman dreams of a red toy train in a Jefferson store window and eating bananas, while even the modest Cash wishes for a gramophone and sees an opportunity to help out with the building of Tull's barn on the return trip (*AILD* 91). This multiplicity of personal motivations leads Bleikasten to observe that "there are as many journeys as there are travelers" (*Ink* 152).

The interior monologue thus serves an important purpose in light of these notions of subjectivity. It draws the reader into the speaking figure's most private space: his/her thoughts and individualized reasoning. This affords each act of self-speaking an intimate, almost confessional tone – an exposing of the self to the self – sometimes revealing deeply guarded secrets that the fictional figure cannot, or would not, otherwise disclose. The Bundren matriarch's fashioning of self is inextricably intertwined with a series of secrets she divulges in her single monologue. Addie says she felt "tricked" when she discovered that she was pregnant with Darl (her second child by Anse) and that Jewel (her third son) is not Anse's (*AILD* 161).[44] Her wish for a burial in ancestral ground is, in part, a plot to exact retribution for the embittering disillusionment and loneliness of her loveless marriage. In addition to this, Addie's family history plays a significant part in exacerbating her existential distress. As an only child, she grew up in a house where her father believed that life, in general, was futile: that "the reason for living is to get ready to stay dead a long time" (*AILD* 157). The most prominent state of Addie's mind has always been one of isolation, purposelessness and quiet desperation, what Cleanth Brooks calls "the loss of the experience of community" (*Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 149). This leads to the "loss of communication" as "[l]anguage seems to her empty and drained and ineffectual" (Brooks, *Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 149).

[44] Vickery reads Addie's feeling of being "tricked" as at the hand of lifelong frustration with the emptiness and ineffectuality of words, as opposed to the immediacy of action – a key tension in the dramatization of her self-fashioning:

> She accepts her first child as the price of her realization of the complete separation of the word and the act. After this, the two lines [of speaking and of doing] begin to diverge until all communication between her and Anse is lost. It is impossible for either of them to reach across to the other. Darl, then, comes as the ultimate outrage because she and Anse have diverged too far for the birth to have been possible. ("*As I Lay Dying*" 193)

The ineffectuality of language is, however, relevant not only in terms of its communicative inadequacy, but also as a compromised ontological tool: a broken vehicle for asserting Addie's existence. Her constant and desperate cries of "I am" seem to fall on deaf ears throughout her life. This profound sense of isolation is the driving force behind her particular mode of self-fashioning, and the source of her growing frustration, disillusionment and discontent. Addie is unhappy with existence itself, and the only way in which she can vent her frustration is to inflict herself – often violently and painfully – on others.[45] This pattern of infliction starts when Addie is still an unmarried school teacher who beats her pupils relentlessly in class:

> When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. (*AILD* 157)

Evident in these images of "flesh" and "blood" are the Christian allusions which often form part of Addie's self-fashioning framework. Just as the blood of Christ becomes both the vehicle and symbol of mankind's redemption from sin, so does Addie's freedom from loneliness and isolation lie in the tangibility of the bleeding wounds of her pupils. But, as is often the case in both Williams' and Faulkner's work, the valences of this symbolic Christ-comparison are reversed in order to emphasize the irony of the situation: Christ's mission is to save humanity from sin and pain, while Addie wilfully inflicts pain.

Worse than the physical agony which Addie causes her pupils in an attempt to relieve her own frustration is the insidious and long-lasting emotional scarring which she leaves behind in her family through her show of favouritism for Jewel. Darl, in particular, is the victim of

[45] Given Addie's complex struggle with isolation and ontological purposelessness, and her corresponding urge to penetrate the consciousness of others, I disagree with Edmond L. Volpe's over-emphasis on what he calls "Addie's intense sex drive" (132). Volpe is of the opinion that Addie's "frustration" is primarily "sexual"; that, being thus sexual, this frustration is most intense in springtime; and that it is owing to this sexual urge that she takes Anse against her better knowledge (132). In my opinion, this focus on the sexual is a reductive emphasis. Sex is but one of the means by which Addie desperately attempts to "violate" her pervasive "aloneness" (*AILD* 160) and to relieve her sense of isolation and assert her existence – if not with Anse, then with Whitfield. The extramarital encounter with the latter could thus be read, as Bleikasten sees it, as an attempt at "hierogamy": "a union, if not with God himself, with a man of God …" (*Ink* 173). Again, the Christian symbolism is overt here: this woman-god union produces a son who is often seen as part-god, part-man and destined to be Addie's "saviour" from flood and water. But Addie is perpetually disillusioned by sex, just as she is with teaching, with religion, with marriage, with love, with life itself. Motherhood is perhaps the only temporary relief from her desperation – her becoming pregnant with Cash – but even this "violation" of her loneliness (the pregnancy, during which Addie becomes "unalone") is, paradoxically, "made whole again by the violation" (the physical separation, at birth, of mother and child) (*AILD* 160). The keyword for Addie's identity, in my view, should thus be "loneliness", rather than "sexuality".

this emotional crime. From an early age, he witnesses how Addie's illegitimate son – conceived "in sin" with the Reverend Whitfield – receives special attention from her, even when Jewel is still a baby sleeping on top of a pillow on her lap during the night. Later, when Jewel is unable to meet the physical demands of working both night and day to earn his horse, it is Addie who divides his chores between the younger children, Vardaman and Dewey Dell, or secretly does them herself in order to protect him (*AILD* 116). Addie even prepares special meals for him and hides them away so that Anse will not notice (*AILD* 116). She does all of this without questioning Jewel, without knowing the reason for his exhaustion and failure to meet his responsibilities at home.

It is significant that the specifics of this favouritism are not mentioned by Addie herself, but by Darl, the unwanted son. When the neighbour's wife, Cora Tull, confronts Addie about this matter – which, in Cora's view, is a terrible sin – Addie goes so far as to describe Jewel hyperbolically as her hero and saviour: "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me" (*AILD* 156). Addie's words become a prophecy, as it is indeed Jewel who later "saves" her from both water and fire, retrieving her coffin from a raging river and a burning barn. Of course, the irony – and here Faulkner inverts the Christian symbolism of the saviour figure much as Williams does – is that Jewel saves Addie only in death.[46] He risks his own life in order to save nothing more than a rotting corpse.

Whereas Addie's acts of self-speaking reveal secrets kept from the other members of the family, Anse's particular mode of staging the self reveals elements of self-deceit – often ironically charged. Returning to a phenomenological conception of being, Anse's mode of existence is steeped in what Sartre would call "bad faith". Barnes explains, in her Translator's Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, that the being-for-itself often opens up a space for bad faith to appear, "since man" – and here one might insert Anse Bundren – "may try to interpret this evanescent 'is' of his as though it were the 'is' of Being-in-itself, or he may fluctuate between the two" (xix). This implies, then, an erroneous confusion of the "is" of the

[46] As with Addie, Christian imagery abounds in association with Amanda in *Menagerie*. It is important to note, though, that Williams' use of Christian symbols "is not accompanied by any notable sympathy for religious institutions" (Popkin 61). One is reminded here also of Faulkner's hypocritical Cora Tull, or the cowardly Reverend Whitfield. For Faulkner and Williams, "religion is a convenient source of symbolism, but it seems to be without real value in the world of [Williams'] plays" or Faulkner's novels (Popkin 62). In *Menagerie*, this irony is, of course, directly related to Tom's critical view of his mother's ineffectual religion.

for-itself with the "is" of the in-itself, a conflation of transcendence and contingency. Macey expands on this notion by explaining Sartre's distinction between lying to others and lying to oneself:

> Sartre makes an important distinction between lying and bad faith. The liar is in possession of the truth, denies it in the words he addresses to others and then silently denies his own denial of the truth. The liar's consciousness can thus be said to be dual. An individual [such as Anse] who is acting in bad faith masks the truth from himself, or herself, and there is therefore no duality between the deceiver and the deceived; bad faith involves a unitary consciousness. (27)

Consistent with this model of bad faith, Anse has convinced himself that he is simply an "honest, hard-working" (*AILD* 98), but perpetually misfortunate, man, who does "the best [he] can" with the little that he has (*AILD* 30). "It ain't that I'm afraid of work;" he reasons, "I always have fed me and mine and kept a roof above us" (*AILD* 31). But then Anse proceeds to blame anything and everyone except himself for his general misfortune. Even the way in which the road leads up to his house – an aspect of contingency and facticity – is called to account for his state of misery (*AILD* 31).

Darl, however, sees through his father's façade as victim and exposes his bad faith: "There is no sweat stain on his shirt," he says, "I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it" (*AILD* 13). This convincing of himself on Anse's part – in other words, his non-possession of the truth about his status as victim and his resultant "unitary consciousness", to borrow Macey's terms, is a strong indication of Anse's bad faith. Darl's remarks thus add a sense of irony to his father's later words, when Anse says: "Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats" (*AILD* 98). According to his own son, Anse has done none of this supposed "sweating" himself.

Considered independently of the other monologues in the novel, Anse's acts of self-speaking obscure our view of his identity. We reach a better understanding of who he is only through the addition of the other sections in the novel: that is, by what his family and neighbours think and say about him. Only from this intersubjective perspective, does Anse emerge as feckless, inept and unscrupulously dependent on the generosity of others, almost to the point

of becoming a kind of caricature. In practice, Anse appears to be self-serving and doggedly persistent; he has a "merciless knowledge of other human beings and of how much they will put up with" (Brooks, *Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 154).[47] His selfishness is exposed when we find out that he – the Bundren who claims to be the most determined to fulfil his promise to his wife – also has an alternative agenda: the acquisition of a new set of teeth and a new wife who comes conveniently with a "graphophone" as part of her dowry (*AILD* 247-248).[48]

It is important, though, not to construct a too rigidly negative framework for an understanding of Anse's identity.[49] In my view, a key distinction lies in the fact that Anse's actions are opportunistic, rather than premeditated. One moment that holds the possibility of a sympathetic response occurs when Darl imagines his father's actions moments after Addie's death. Anse "touches the quilt" over Addie's dead body,

> ... as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity ... (*AILD* 47).

It is almost as if Anse's helpless stroking of the wrinkles holds a symbolic significance. Perhaps his bumbling attempts at "smooth[ing] out" the difficulties of Addie's desperately lonely life through marriage and childbirth were similarly pathetic and ineffective. And perhaps Anse's attempts at pleasing her have led only to further insoluble marital difficulties, owing, at least in part, to his inherent clumsiness and inability to understand (let alone satisfy) Addie's complex expectations. But – as is typical of Faulkner – as soon as this moment emerges and the reader is brought almost to the point of irritable sympathy, the narration takes an abrupt turn: "God's will be done," says Anse, and in the very same breath, "[n]ow I can get them teeth." (*AILD* 47). Again, Anse's opportunism gets the upper hand.

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[47] Brooks goes so far as to call Anse – perhaps too reductively – one of Faulkner's "most accomplished villains" owing to his "deceptively slight" and "delicately flexible" power to deceive – "as a root tendril, but like the tendril, powerful enough to break a boulder" (*Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 154).

[48] Of course, it is Cash – not Anse – who first expresses the humble desire for such a device, but there is no indication at the end of the novel that Anse intends this newly acquired gramophone to be a gift for his oldest son. If Anse stays true to the pattern of behaviour we have witnessed in him until this point – his unashamed habit of leeching off neighbours, even off his own children (as with Dewey Dell's money or Jewel's horse) – he will certainly regard even this little windfall as his own rightful gain for being one of the chosen of God.

[49] As Gray points out, too many critics have fallen victim to an approach that "wag[s] a moralistic finger at this clearly failed father-figure: telling him off for his apparent weakness, selfishness and cant. To treat Anse in this way, however, is to … forget the intersubjective space in which he, like all the other characters, lives" (159).

In addition to the intersubjective space in which self-fashioning in both the novel and the play is dramatized, there is another aspect of identity-formation that cannot not be ignored. This is what Faulkner calls the "geographic umbilical", and here we return to the key notion of the interpenetrative relationship between the private and the public, between self and other (qtd. in Weinstein 149). All of the private identities we encounter in the texts are permeated by distinctly Southern social conditions, speech patterns, expressions, values and norms. These "external" cultural factors tie the self-fashioning of the fictional individual inextricably to the broader social space, thus, to the public. This private-public interplay manifests itself in the country vernacular used by the fictional figures, which consists of pronunciations and religious idiomatic expressions that locate the figure firmly within the cultural milieu of the deep South. Anse's Mississippi drawl is particularly well rendered. In *Menagerie,* Amanda uses the typical speech patterns of the Southern Belle (also recognizable in figures such as Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Alma in *Summer and Smoke*), characterized by Popkin as "affected, prissy, would-be literary, full of little jokes and self-conscious ha-has" (50).

Along with regional accents and dialects, the varying reference frameworks of the fictional figures also dramatize their level of intellectual and cultural engagement with the world. In *As I Lay Dying*, Dr Peabody is able to contemplate death quite philosophically as merely "a function of the mind – and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement," adding that "[t]he nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town" (*AILD* 38). This is clearly the thinking of an educated, rational man who is probably an atheist. It also forms a contrast with the overtly Christian diction that permeates the speech of all the other figures in the novel. Anse's countrified, superstitious philosophy concerning roads may serve as telling example: when God "aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man" (*AILD* 30). Anse's explanation of God's intent with regard to roads is another poorly disguised excuse for his innate laziness, yet one that he has internalized to the point of becoming bad faith.

It is important also to consider how Tom's and, by extension, Amanda's identities have been shaped by a quality often said to be pervasive in Southern culture: a particular nostalgic

melancholia connected to history and memories of a bygone Southern glory. This aspect is evident in many of Williams' plays. Kimball King observes that

> [i]n each the past casts a long shadow over the lives of its protagonists. Whether it is the corruption and decay of Belle Reve which haunts Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Amanda Wingfield's inhibiting vision of genteel female behaviour in *The Glass Menagerie*, or Big Daddy's impoverished childhood in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* none of Williams's characters can escape the burdens of their personal, and by implication, regional histories. (627)

Tom Wingfield also fits into this pattern of nostalgia, although his clinging to the past is not without a balancing sense of bitterness and cynicism, the notion that the past is not necessarily a place of happiness and contentment and may, conversely, represent an inescapable burden of guilt.

This is why Brooks inserts into the discussion of Southern regional identity a vital qualification of nostalgia. In an article in *The Journal of Southern History* entitled "Regionalism in American Literature", he points out that the region – as it is represented in much of Southern writing – "has no illusions about any return to some Garden of Eden":

> It has been too long a plundered province to think of itself as the happy garden, nor has it for a long time past thought it ever was the happy garden. In saying this I am aware that I am being unconventional: our habit is to say that the Southern mood is one of nostalgia for a golden age before the War. But the South has been too often and too constantly reminded of its guilt for it to believe in a former innocence. ... In the South there is a genuine tie to the past, a genuine piety, and a sense of tradition. But that is a very different sort of thing. (38-39)

This distinction, I believe, is an important one: while there may be a strong awareness of, and even reverence for, antebellum history and culture in both Williams' and Faulkner's writing, it is not quite the same as reading into this a desperate wish to return to that period. Brooks' qualification rings true if one considers that, while Amanda wears her old party dress, remembers her jonquils and tells her stories of gentlemen callers with unusual tenderness and reverie, at no point does she actually express in so many words a wish for those days to return. As Popkin asserts: "The memories of the past are beautiful and momentarily comforting, but they have to be beautiful if they are to compensate for the indignities of the present" (54). In some respects it is safer to cherish memories than to risk a renewal of those experiences. Thus, in comparing the general attitude to the South evident in Williams' work

with the writing of other contemporary Southern authors, Popkin argues that both Williams and Faulkner provide a "more impersonal record of Southern nostalgia": both "may indicate a sympathy for those who cherish the Old South", but the texts do not seem to "endorse their attitudes or their values" (54).

An aspect of Southern identity that does seem to manifest itself strongly in many of Faulkner's fictional figures, is a peculiar brand of "Southern frontier humour" – a key aspect which ties the private identity firmly to the cultural space (Campbell and Foster 102).[50] This kind of humour is evident when Vernon Tull compares Anse to "a steer standing knee-deep in a pond and somebody come by and set the pond up on edge and he ain't missed it yet" (*AILD* 65). Countrified Southern humour is also at play in Dr Peabody's remark that it is "[t]oo bad the Lord made the mistake of giving trees roots and giving the Anse Bundrens He makes feet and legs. If He'd just swapped them, there wouldn't ever be a worry about this country being deforested some day" (*AILD* 37). As Campbell and Foster argue, this "natural, pleasant" kind of "frontier humour" works well to balance and relieve the effect of an opposite, darker type of surrealistic humour – Faulkner's so-called situational "grotesquerie" of coffins and dead bodies – which permeates not only this novel, but also texts such as *Sanctuary* and "Miss Zilphia Gant" (101).

As I Lay Dying, in my opinion, thus sustains the delicate balance between horror and humour – the irreverent "[c]rossing" of "farce with anguish" (Howe 175) – quite deftly. This success, suggests Volpe, "is achieved by an accumulation of incongruities," and "before the novel ends, the distinctions between tragedy and comedy, being and non-being, reality and illusion, sanity and insanity have almost vanished" (127). Recall, for example, the "tragedy" of Dewey Dell's unwanted pregnancy and desperate search for an abortion drug. While this may not fit the strict classical description of the term, Dewey Dell's experience is certainly calamitous and misfortunate on an intensely personal level. This seriousness is then set, quite irreverently, against the coarse "comedy" of her sexual exploitation by McGowan. Addie's overbearing "being" influences the action of the entire Bundren journey despite the "non-being" of her rotting corpse in the coffin. Darl's mixture of actual and imagined vision clearly blurs the dividing line between "reality" and "illusion", because we are never entirely sure if what he sees is what is, or whether he imagines circumstances into being. And, which of the

[50] Otis B. Wheeler writes a comprehensive account of the uses of folk humour not only in *As I Lay Dying*, but also in the rest of Faulkner's oeuvre.

Bundren brothers is truly the sane hero, as opposed to the insane fool? Herein, then, lies the greatness of Faulkner's achievement: the unrelenting relativity of the novel, even in so far as the formation and transformation of identity is concerned. As Gray points out, the identities of this strangely fascinating group of fictional figures are exceedingly difficult to "pin down," as "[e]ach member of the family becomes as edgy, protean, and occasionally as baffling and grotesque – that is, as contrary to our expectations – as people that we know from our own intimate experience sometimes are" (154). "…[C]haracter" – and one could replace this with "identity" – "is transformed into process rather than product, seen as a state of perpetual becoming: there is no possibility of closure, no bedrock of certainty here" (Gray 156).

This lack of "bedrock" returns us to Derrida's conception of *différance* in relation to self-fashioning. Identity, like language, always forms part of a relational system, manifesting itself as co-dependent with all other identities within the signifying structure. No conception of self is conceivable as independent or separate from others, whether these "others" represent a familial or a cultural form of interpenetration. Addie Bundren is Addie Bundren because of, and owing to, Anse, Darl, Cash, Dewey Dell, Vardaman, and even the neighbours. Similarly, Tom Wingfield's identity – both past and present – is inextricably intertwined with, and dependent on, that of Amanda, Laura and Jim. But there is another, perhaps more intriguing, aspect of identity-formation that begins to emerge: the inextricable association of identity and language. In all of the dramatizations of identity encountered in the sample texts thus far, language is directly and integrally involved. The obvious observation is that every aspect of these identities is rendered in writing, thus, in language. But, in addition to this, what the fictional figures say about themselves and about others – plus the particularities of the manner of speaking to the self and to others – play an equally important role in speaking their selfhood into being.

This closely intertwined relationship between speech, writing and identity – the notion that identity necessarily involves a form of discourse in and through language – leads to an unavoidable paradox. If identity is shaped in and through language, it negates the possibility of an unplaced self, a self that exists outside of, or beyond, language. "No one," Bleikasten concurs, "is outside the prison house of language" (*Ink* 204). It is owing to language that the subject's identity is necessarily and always situated within the social. "Like it or not, we are born into the public space of language, just as we are born into flesh, time, and mortality" (Bleikasten, *Ink* 204). Derrida also comments on this overtly and necessarily social aspect of

language and identity in *Monolingualism of the Other*. To recall a point made in the Introduction, Derrida proposes that from birth anyone can say " … I *only* have one language, yet it is not mine" (*Monolingualism* 2). This is so because we are always born into an existing language that we receive from a particularly important other – a mother, father or instructor. Even our native language is not our own. This implies that the language we receive as our mother tongue, importantly, from our mothers and fathers, determines our identity just as much as our identity determines the way in which we make use of that language in the discourse, the playing out, of our selves in daily life. It is precisely this important connection between language, family and self-fashioning – the notion that the self is, to a large extent received from, even imposed by, the family in and through language – upon which the next chapter of this study focuses.

Chapter 3

Self-fashioning through the subject's relation to a sexual partner and/or the family in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955).

> 'Fiddlesticks,' Mrs Compson said, 'It's in the blood. Like uncle, like niece. Or mother. I don't know which would be worse. I don't seem to care.' (*SF* 299)
>
> MARGARET. Mama, let *me* tell you!
> BIG MAMA. No, no, leave me alone, you're not my blood! (*CHTR* 3. 962)

One of the most prominent influences in the fashioning of identity is the family environment. So important is the family that a significant part of the answer to the question, "Who am I?" may be provided by the answer to an equally simple question: "Who am I related to?" – or, to use the haematological expression in the epigraphs given above, who shares my blood? But to what extent do the crucial bonds which bind us to the familial "other" influence the formation of a self? Where and how do the non-biological, conjugal bonds we forge with outsider figures – that is, our sexual and matrimonial partners – fit in?

The family as process of interpellation

One aspect of this complex set of questions seems obvious: that the family constitutes the first subjectifying environment into which we are born. For this reason, Althusser proposes that the "individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born … " (34). It is in this essay that Althusser introduces the term "interpellation" to describe the summoning into place of the subject by a particular dominant ideology, of which the family environment and its various parental and sibling relationships are an example. He argues that a child is always summoned into a specific, prefigured space within the family and society, and thus expected to play a particular role in maternal, paternal, fraternal and, eventually, cultural relationships (34). However, there seems to be an imbalance in this formulation: Althusser places an inordinate degree of emphasis on the notion that the child's process of self-fashioning is largely reliant on the family's expectations of the unborn child, that is, on the subject's

positioning within the family. He does not seem clear about the relevance of the subject-to-be's reaction to the familial positioning, that is, the child's inherent ability to appropriate the interpellation in unique and individualizing ways. Thus, since the publication of this essay in 1971, sociologists such as Paul Hirst have criticized Althusser's notion of interpellation by showing that it is in danger of becoming a one-sided or, more precisely, a one-directional affair. Hirst proposes, instead, that the unborn child must already have certain "faculties necessary to support the recognition that will constitute it as a subject" (qtd. in Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 21). Thus he points to the notion that, in any act of interpellation, there is not only the summoning into place at play, but also the equally important response to the call that should be given due attention. It is, however, Stuart Hall who makes this point most succinctly when he writes:

> The notion that an effective suturing[51] of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is 'hailed', but that the subject invests in the position, means that suturing has to be thought of as an *articulation*, rather than a one-sided process, and that in turn places *identification*, if not identities, firmly on the theoretical agenda. (19)

Interpellation thus constitutes a kind of impasse or, to use Derrida's term, an "aporia", in the familial subjectifying process beyond which it seems impossible to think.[52] This leads to a conception of self-fashioning in the family as a continuous, perpetual "articulation": as a process of negotiation between the subject and familial positioning, as identification rather than identity.

Hall thus provides a useful bridge between Althusser's theory of interpellation and the work of Michel Foucault. Hall notes that – from a broad perspective – there are parallels to be drawn between the aporia with which Hirsch's critique of Althusser leaves us, and a similar impasse reached by Foucault in his earlier archeological work in texts such as *Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, The Order of Things,* and *The Archeology of Knowledge* ("Who Needs 'Identity'?" 23). In Foucault's earlier work, argues Hall, Foucault attempts to historicize notions of subjectivity as a critique of humanism and the philosophy of consciousness and, in doing so, Foucault's emphasis – as does Althusser's – falls away from the individual, and more noticeably onto the formation of subject positions within social

[51] By this term, Hall means a "temporary attachment" or "chaining": "what Stephen Heath, in his essay on 'Suture', called 'an intersection' " ("Who Needs 'Identity'?" 19).
[52] See Chapter 2 (37, footnote 26) for a gloss of this term.

discourse. Thus, not enough attention is paid to the role that the subject plays within such instances of interpellation. For Foucault, these subject positions become *a priori* categories which the subjects themselves seem to embrace without question (Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 23). Foucault's later work remedies this weakness, to an extent, through a development in his characteristically rigorous thinking that manifests itself as a move away from his "archeological" to his "genealogical" method – the latter strategy allowing more prominence to the individual.[53] This changed focus is particularly evident in his most recent and uncompleted volumes, collectively called *The History of Sexuality*.

Of course, Foucault's new phase of exploration, which was introduced by his three-volume project on sexuality, has not been received without its share of criticism. Mark Poster writes that the books that followed *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* move too far away from the key questions that his earlier work posed so powerfully. He believes that the "analytics of discourse-practice and technologies of power that were the theoretical centrepieces of the previous two books are almost completely gone" (206). Poster also suggests that the later volumes "might appear to some to be an exercise in paraphraxis, a string of banal summaries of well-known texts, a succession of unimaginative readings of the classics by someone who is hardly versed in the field" (206) – no doubt a scathing, yet valid, critique. To this, Foucault responded in an interview in the journal *Les Nouvelles* just before his death, in which he argued that he "self-consciously adopted a new voice back in the mid-1970s as a result of adding a new dimension to his problematic of truth and power, that of the individual" – a retort that did not do much to satisfy the critics (qtd. in Poster 207).

The keyword in Foucault's response is "self-consciously": some critics, such as Edward Said, allude to the notion that a major weakness of this "overdetermined" ("Michel Foucault" 8) shift to the personal in the project lies in its strong "basis in the vicissitudes of Foucault's own sexual identity" ("Michel Foucault" 5). In other words, Said argues that Foucault was unable to maintain the necessary distance from a topic that addressed his own sexual orientation. I share, however, Poster's conclusion that the enquiry may "have yielded its full potential …

[53] See also Chapter 1 (11-12) for a short discussion of what this theoretical development entailed.

only with the completion of the project in volumes devoted to the modern period" (207).[54] Criticism of Foucault's dualistic conception of self-formation aside, though, his approach has important and useful implications for the identification processes within the family which form the focus of this chapter. This approach serves to underline the idea that the subject position into which the individual is "summoned" by the familial ideology is never absolute or essential in determining who the subject is, or will be, within the blood relations of the family. Instead, there seems to be perpetual tension and interplay involved, not only between the different identities within the family itself, but also between the individual and the culturally inscribed familial position that he or she occupies as father, mother, brother, sister, husband or wife.

Familial interpellation in the Southern context

Questions relating to such notions of kinship, ancestry, progeny and heredity form an integral part of the Southern cultural landscape and are dramatized in much of the region's writing. In *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, Richard H. King writes that the authors of the Southern Renaissance were particularly fascinated by a tradition in which fathers and grandfathers played a dominating role as hierarchical figures of both the literal and symbolic families[55] – a notion which he terms the "Southern family romance" (7). In this cultural paradigm, the family became an organizing model which reached much further and deeper into Southern life than the conventional gender roles played out at home. As a symbolic ideal, the family was super-imposed onto the broader structures of Southern society and economy. Here, the patriarchs of land-owning families became the symbolic fathers and grandfathers of their plantations, as well as the leaders of their rural societies (R. King 27). In the Southern family romance, identity, self-worth and status thus depended to a large extent on one's familial positioning, as the "actual family was destiny" (R. King 27). Perhaps Richard King's use of the term "destiny" is too

[54] For a fuller discussion of the criticism of Foucault's genealogical approach, see also During's analysis (136-46). Isaac D. Balbus' feminist critique and Jana Sawicki's similarly positioned defense of Foucault's later work are also illuminating, while not directly relevant to the focus of this project.

[55] The Southern Renaissance was a period of literary renewal and exuberance, spearheaded by a "group of poets and critics at Vanderbilt University – notably, John Crow Ransom, Donald Davidson, Robert Penn Warren and Allan Tate …" (Boxill 10). While occupying a slightly more peripheral position, Williams and Faulkner were regarded as important as well. The Vanderbilt group was involved in the publication of the literary magazine *The Fugitive* (1922-5). From there the title of Williams' *The Fugitive Kind* (1937), "an early unpublished play about derelicts in a St. Louis flophouse. It is also the title of the screen version of *Orpheus Descending* (1960)" (Boxill 10).

deterministic, given the theoretical slant of this study. Using Hall's earlier point: the self-fashioning of the individual – no matter how strongly influential the familial or cultural environment might be – is a process of constant negotiation, rather than fate. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the family played not only a practical, but also a strongly symbolic role in Southern identification until as recently as the mid-twentieth century.

In light of this family-based cultural super-text, it is no surprise that both Faulkner and Williams return to the family-as-destiny motif regularly in their work. Both authors dramatize searching and often quite personal questions about the perpetual tension that exists between the individual subject and the family as a determining influence – the very same process which Althusser and Foucault investigate from a theoretical perspective.[56] Faulkner and Williams often criticize the ways in which the Southern family romance, as a particular kind of socio-cultural discourse, interpellates a subject into a rigidly conceived role, a process which problematizes the subject's ability to fashion an individual self independent from his or her family position. The texts that, in my view, deal overtly with this problem are Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). In both texts, we encounter a disintegrating, yet distinctly Southern family: the Compsons and the Pollitts.[57] Both of these families are deeply rooted within the traditional norms of Southern culture – thus, in Richard King's notion of the Southern family romance – and are fraught with the tensions created by the collapse of a patriarchal structure, parental favouritism, jealousy, sibling rivalry, in-fighting and a general decline in social standing.[58] These aspects not only intensify the individual family members' struggle to fashion a self within the discourse of the family, but also contribute to the corrosion of the fibre that holds the families together. This process of destruction is further underscored by a questioning of family names and what they signify within the context of the family's history.

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[56] Biographically speaking, there is reason to believe that both Faulkner and Williams were particularly well positioned to address matters of familial import. Of Faulkner, Richard King writes: "Born into a family which had come down in the world, [he] was uniquely situated to devote his life to a fictional exploration of the Southern family romance" (77); while Roger Boxill proposes that "[t]he decline of the Williams family from prominence among early settlers of Tennessee mirrors the fate of the South" (2).

[57] A class distinction could perhaps be drawn immediately: the Compsons are descended from true Southern "aristocratic" planter stock, that is, Jason Compson Sr. is a descendant of previously highly regarded land and slave owners, while Big Daddy Pollitt is largely a self-made man who has worked his way up from the working middle class towards owning the vast plantation that now forms part of his material legacy.

[58] Michael Millgate notes that the original manuscript of *The Sound and the Fury* bears the undeleted title "Twilight". Presumably, this is the title of the original short story from which Faulkner developed the novel: "As a title for the whole book, the word immediately suggests the decay of the Compson family[,] caught at the moment when the dimmed glory of its eminent past is about to fade into ultimate extinction" (94).

Familial naming

The treatment of names in both texts thus serves an important thematic purpose in providing a pivotal point for some of the tensions of selfhood played out within these families. Names in *The Sound and the Fury* show less symbolism, but more ambivalence and ambiguity, than those used in *As I Lay Dying.* The often confusing duality of names in the former – that is, the notion that the same first name may refer to either one of two family members from different generations – introduces the motif of heredity and inheritance in names. Inherited names often carry traces of the people to whom they first belonged, in other words, reputations, associations and connotations connected with the name itself. This leads to a degree of confluence and entanglement of the different figures' identities in the mind of the reader. Particularly during a first reading, we are often momentarily confused between Quentin (the suicidal son) and Quentin (the rebellious niece); between Jason (the alcoholic patriarch) and Jason (the embittered son); and between Maury (the Bascomb uncle) and Maury (the Compson son, later re-named Benjy). Derrida's notion of the aporetic separability and inseparability of the name, discussed in Chapter 2, is again relevant, as these figures often struggle in vain to separate their own identities from the reputations so closely associated with the names they have inherited.

However, the confusion of names also affects the reading experience in a peculiar way. The confusion forces the reader to pay more attention to the situational and chronological context in which the name is used so as to identify the figure in question. But the reverse is also true: sometimes, by paying attention to the different names, for example, of Benjy's caretakers – first Versh, then T. P., then Luster – the reader is given clues as to the exact time, place and situation pertaining to an event in the life of this mentally handicapped man. Overall, Faulkner's technique of confused and confusing naming resonates with the notion that names and identities often merge and blend within the family environment – even between two generations – which complicates further the subject's struggle to assert a sense of individuality and self-worth in a system of imposed inheritance.

Perhaps the most obvious illustration of this process at play in the novel is the use of the name Quentin for the rebellious offspring of the estranged Compson daughter, Caddy. Quentin suffers greatly under the legacy of the name she has inherited from her suicidal

uncle. She is named Quentin, one assumes, out of a sense of guilt on the part of her mother, Caddy, who feels partly responsible for the suicide of her own brother. Before his death, Quentin – the suicidal brother – has an incestuous fondness for Caddy. Owing to a confluence of various self-destructive aspects of his individual process of self-fashioning, he drowns himself. There is no evidence in the novel to suggest that Quentin (the teenager) is indeed Quentin's (the suicidal brother's) daughter through incest – in fact, the rebellious teenager's biological father remains significantly nameless. Nonetheless, there is still an undertone of incest associated with the name Quentin and, for Jason, this is a reminder of the love between his siblings from which he was ultimately excluded. This, coupled with Jason's jealousy towards Caddy and Quentin owing to their father's favouritism, makes his domination of Quentin (his niece) seem particularly vindictive. In the traditional Southern family, the process of "passing down" a name from one generation to the next extends not only to the name itself, but also to intangible and inseparable aspects such as related connotations, attitudes and stigmas.

Along with the name “Quentin”, there is degree of inconsistency and irony associated also with Benjy's name in the novel. This Compson's full name is Benjamin, which is Biblical. According to the Book of Genesis, Benjamin was the son of Jacob and the second (and last) son of Rachel. Benjamin's name arose when Jacob revised his son's original name, *Benoni* ("son of my sorrow"), which was given to the baby when Rachel died. However, Jacob started calling his son *ben yamin* instead, which means "son of my right hand", reflecting Benjamin's newfound status as Jacob's favourite. With Benjamin Compson, we have an ironic inversion of this Biblical detail. As soon as her son's mental handicap becomes apparent, his mother, Caroline, starts believing that his disability is a form of punishment visited upon her for past mistakes. Subsequently, she decides to change his name to Benjamin, even though, ironically, he is hardly her favourite.

One of Benjy's caretakers, Versh, hits the nail on the head when he remarks that the name-change occurs because Caroline Compson is too "proud" to call her son after her own brother, a Bascomb (*SF* 68). The final word on this name-change, however, belongs to the inimitable housekeeper Dilsey who, as non-family member, often serves as a foil for the folly of the Compsons: "*Name ain't going to help him," she says. "Hurt him neither. Folks don't have no luck, changing names*" (*SF* 56). Here, Dilsey instinctively captures some of the paradoxical attributes – the severability and inseparability, the humanity and inhumanity – of names and

identities interrogated by Derrida in "Aphorism Countertime".[59] Names are indeed changeable and lack absolute substance, as is illustrated by the ease with which the name "Maury" can be changed to "Benjy". And yet, like Romeo who cannot deny his father (his family identity, his inheritance) and refuse his name, Benjy will never be anything other than Caroline's son, no matter how often, or how radically, his name is changed. Derrida expands on this point in his essay "Passions: 'An Oblique Offering'" in *On the Name* by showing that there are further illusions and paradoxes involved in the notion of, on the one hand, giving one's name to a child as Jason Sr does with Jason Jr., and, on the other, rejecting one's given family name as Caroline does on Maury's behalf.

Derrida writes that it is a naïve illusion to think that, once you have given your name to a child, "all that returns" to that child "in a direct or indirect way, in a straight line or oblique line, *returns* to you, as a profit of your narcissism" ("Passions" 12). One can imagine both Caroline and Jason Sr. adopting this self-glorifying attitude when they name Jason Jr. and Maury at birth. Whatever the achievements of these offspring might one day be, these parents probably hoped that part of their children's glory would return to them. It is noteworthy that, while the patriarch, Jason Sr., has the opportunity to name a child after himself in both first name and surname, Caroline can attempt this gesture only by giving her youngest son a male first name associated with her Bascomb clan. This is a significant moment in which Caroline's insecurity of self begins to play a role. One almost senses her desperation to prove that her familial background is every bit as formidable and respectable as that of her husband, and therefore that her heritage also deserves to be honoured and perpetuated through her act of hereditary naming.

Derrida, however, highlights the pointlessness of this act of narcissism. If the child who has inherited the name manages to become a success without reliance on the family name, the initial gesture is empty and the self-love of the parent is "frustrated a priori by that from which it profits or hopes to profit" (Derrida, "Passions" 12). There is no "return," as the glory belongs to the child him- or herself. But the opposite of this is also true, as Faulkner demonstrates with his characteristic irony: the "profit" which "returns" to the parents can also be unflattering. The novel shows how Jason Jr. becomes an unpleasant, materialistic and selfish son for whom Jason Sr. has no particular fondness despite their shared name, while

[59] See Chapter 2 (37-38).

Maury, on whom Caroline at first pins all hope for a Bascomb deliverance, turns out to be an embarrassment to her rather than a reason for pride. Jason Sr.'s reaction is severe in its symbolic significance: he disinherits both of these children by selling part of the Compson property – the part specifically set aside for Benjy – in order to send his favourite son, Quentin, to Harvard. Jason Jr. is entirely overlooked. In this light, Richard King's earlier claim that "the actual family was destiny" in the South seems not to be farfetched (27). Owing to Jason Jr. and Maury's particular positioning within the Compson family, their material futures have been decided without their having much sway in the matter.

Derrida's further formulations are intriguing in light of Caroline's decision to change Maury's name to Benjamin. Should a child decide to change an inherited name, argues Derrida, the parent should feel pride, not injury, at the fact that the child is "sufficiently free, powerful, creative, and autonomous" to live without the family name (Derrida, "Passions" 13). This suggests the parents of competent and self-sufficient offspring, who could indeed feel proud of their children for not relying on a family name to succeed. But what about offspring who are entirely dependent on their parents? In Faulkner, we find again an ironic inversion. Maury Compson makes no choice of his own to change his name in an attempt at severing himself from an association with his family – it is his mother who takes this radical step on his behalf in order to confound his association with her side of the family. However, what Caroline seems too shortsighted to realize is that she allows herself to be caught in the paradoxical double-bind of inherited names. By "refusing" Maury's given name, she merely underlines her own failure as a nurturing, caring mother by showing that she is too embarrassed to associate the handicapped Benjy with the Bascombs and, thus, with herself. The inheritance of names is always a double-edged sword as it can provide both a positive and a negative "return" for the name-giving or -removing parent.

The Sound and the Fury thus questions, in subtle and ironic ways, the customs and traditions related to inherited naming within the Southern family. In comparison with this, the emphasis in *Cat* falls on a different, yet equally crucial, aspect of familial naming: that of the subject's gendered positioning within the traditional, patriarchal ideology. Althusser's suggestion that an unborn child is interpellated into a specific, prefigured space – and thus expected to play a particular role as boy or girl within the family – is apt here, but this gendering of the subject position is of particular interest also to the feminist theorist, Judith Butler. Drawing on J. L. Austin's speech act theory, Butler connects Althusser's notion of interpellation to the

performative aspect of language, which starts with, for example, the midwife's cry of "It's a girl!" at birth (110). Following Austin, Butler explains that speech-acts "are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power" (108). The speech-act thus helps to create precisely that which it names. When the midwife says "It's a girl!", she not only makes an observation, but also plays a part in prefiguring the gendered space that the newborn will occupy. From this moment onwards, the parents, siblings, grandparents, playmates, teachers and all other members of her web of influential relationships will treat and raise this girl in ways which they assume to be appropriate for a girl. In this way, the "It's a girl!" speech-act is the first step towards shaping the infant subject into a girl.

However, Butler qualifies this assertion by arguing that this enunciation is "less an 'act,' singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" (108). It is not owing to the midwife's personal authority that the interpellation carries weight, she proposes, but to her implied citation of some higher authority or convention – be it God, nature, or society – which has decided the newborn's gender. The "binding power" of the speech act can therefore not be attributed to the midwife or her own will, but to the notion that the speech act has been performed as one instance in a "chain of binding conventions" (Butler 109). Butler's view is, of course, heavily influenced by Derrida's thinking on the iterability and citationality of the sign, as addressed in his essay "Signature Event Context". Derrida engages critically with speech-act theory by questioning, as Butler does, the privileging of the speaker's intentionality in Austin's account ("Signature Event Context" 97-100). The binding power of the speech act "is more properly attributable to a citational force of the speaking, the iterability that establishes the authority of the speech act, but which establishes the non-singular character of that act" (Butler 117, Endnote 3). Every speech-act thus becomes an echo – a repeated, yet not quite similar occurrence – of a previously performed event that lends, through the implied invocation of its universal iterability, weight to the singularity of this particular event.

If one extrapolates this set of ideas into a reading of the names by which family members refer to one another in *Cat*, one again encounters a strongly performative gendering attribute to the names used – perhaps, more so than in *The Sound and the Fury*. In other words, names in the play become a kind of designation through which the individual is both summoned and confined to a particular sexually defined place within the family hierarchy. Examples of this

call to gender positions abound throughout. For instance, we hardly ever hear Big Mama's first name being used by any of her family members, and we never learn what Big Daddy's given name is.[60] Only when there is friction between Big Daddy and his wife, does he resort to calling her "Ida" (*CHTR* 2. 922). The gendered interpellations "Daddy" and "Mama" introduce a childlike element of affection and adoration into these familial names, however, since both the Pollitt sons and their wives use these terms of endearment despite being adults, this may also be seen as somewhat childish. In this patriarchal household, children always seem to remain children – that is, they continue to occupy a subordinate position in the family no matter how old they are.

More importantly, the overtly gendered aspect of the names "Mama" and "Daddy" is noticeable. Each one of these is inscribed with culturally fashioned codes, connotations and expectations in the South. These codified positions can be traced back to the end of the Civil War and, to follow their emergence within Southern culture and politics, we return to Richard King's interrogation of the family romance. At the centre of this imposing cultural paradigm stands the figure of the powerful and heroic father. Richard King explains that the father came to be the "gracious, courteous, but tough planter of the pre-War years who had led the heroic and collective struggle against the Yankees" (34). But as the father's role diminished over the years, grandsons tended to admire their grandfathers more. In this way, the Southern family romance often creates tension between fathers and sons while alliances between grandsons and grandfathers are forged (R. King 35). Connected to this trope was the underlying perception that "the age of heroes lay in the past" and that the future of the family held only slow dissolution and decay (R. King 35). Evidence of this decline in stature of the father within the Southern family can be found not only in Big Daddy Pollitt, but also in Jason Compson and his mutually destructive relationship with his son, Quentin. The latter idealizes the Confederate heroes of the past, but to such a degree that his own father becomes prosaic and quite ineffectual as the cynical and passive father-figure of the decaying Compson family.

In dialectical opposition to the figure of the "Daddy" in the Southern family romance, is the figure of the "Mama," who was expected to play the role of the soft, nurturing, caring – but

[60] One assumes that the "Big" in both "Big Daddy" and "Big Mama" refers to the subject's hierarchical position at the head of the family, rather than to physical size, even though Big Mama is described as overweight, while Big Daddy's overbearing, bombastic personality might be seen as somewhat larger than life.

distinctly subordinate – parent. Richard King writes that this familial positioning became a kind of "social double-bind" for Southern women: "toward men she was to be submissive, meek and gentle; with the children and slaves and in the management of the household, she was supposed to display competence, initiative, and energy" (35). He also ascribes sexual connotations to the conception of the traditional mother by observing that "sexuality or erotic appeal was denied her" (35). Daniel J. Singal corroborates this by showing that the mythical Southern lady strove to be "a paragon of moral innocence and selflessness whose prime concern was upholding the canon of sexual purity" (7). The dichotomy of submissiveness versus competence is dramatized most noticeably through the figure of Big Mama in *Cat*, who is unfairly criticized by Big Daddy for wanting to take control of the household in his absence; this is experienced by him as a form of rebellion against his domination. The sexually submissive attribute of the Southern woman is also noticeable in Big Daddy's articulated, growing revulsion at Big Mama's cloying loyalty towards him on both a mental and physical level. Richard King adds that in extreme cases the mother figure "was stripped of any emotional, nurturing attributes at all" (35) – an aspect which is perhaps more evident in the overtly non-sexual way in which Caroline Compson is rendered in *The Sound and the Fury*.

Caroline's ultimate failure as a mother heightens the irony of her situation, as the role of caretaker and nurturer in the Compson household is taken over by her servant. Dilsey is perhaps the most overt dramatization of Foucault's interpenetration of care of the self and care for others: only by knowing, and actively taking care of the self, is the subject able to know and care for others. The irony is that Dilsey is not a member of the Compson family, nor even of the same race, yet she takes care of all of the family members as though they were her own. She places herself in the line of Jason's outbursts against the rebellious Quentin Jr. She serves and pampers the hypochondriacal Caroline, although never without a sense of exasperation or, sometimes, irritation at her incompetence. She treats Benjy's burned hand and bakes him a birthday cake, using her own money so as not to upset the miserly Jason. She soothes Benjy when he is upset, and delegates his daily eating, playing and sleeping routine among his caretakers. For Dilsey, taking care of the Compsons is not a duty determined by blood relations or family names in the first place, but a responsibility underpinned by selflessness and compassion towards others.

This is not, however, to be read as a reduction of the complex matrix of meanings within which Dilsey functions as a fictional figure. In many ways, Dilsey is also caught within a politicized discourse that plays itself out within the microcosm of the household, but she is not tyrannized by it into passivity. Just like their mother, Caroline, Quentin and Jason look upon her blackness through a historically shaped lens of condescension and contempt: the black servant as the white man's burden. But, to use Peters' example, the tone that Dilsey takes in her handling of Caroline's whims suggests that she functions constantly on the borderline between service and servitude, often alternating imperceptibly between the two attitudes and functioning across interpellations (139). She is by no means to be read as the immemorial "mammy" of the Southern household, whose reason for being is to nurture and protect the master's offspring (Kent 55-62). This is proven by the sense of objective distance she manages to attain in her relationships with both Jason and Quentin. Neither is she ever the mindless, uninvolved servant: her kitchen is a place of caring and warmth in the back of the cold, unforgiving mansion. Dilsey's mistrustful attitude towards the narcissistic and foolish traditions of familial naming in the South thus comes as no surprise because, again, she challenges all secular processes of interpellation and answers only to a divine authority.

Continuing in the Southern tradition of naming in *Cat* – but now with gendered overtones – Gooper, the oldest Pollitt son, is often referred to as "Brother Man" (*CHTR* 1. 886), while his wife, Mae, is called "Sister Woman" (*CHTR* 1. 895). Their children are summoned by the familial appellations "Junior", "Sister" and "Brother" (*CHTR* 1. 884). Again, the pattern of interpellation into predetermined sexual roles connected with patriarchal succession is evident here. Brothers are expected to follow in their father's footsteps to become the head of their own households, while sisters strive to become the mothers of their own families. Later, Brick is called "Little Father" by Big Mama (*CHTR* 3. 975) and "li'l Brother" by Mae (*CHTR* 3. 983). It is significant that these family nicknames are so overtly sexed, as the play – in many ways – deals subversively with aspects of gender and patriarchal identity within the family, often challenging and blurring the lines between the preconceived roles of the father, the mother, the brother and the sister. In a patriarchal environment in which gender responsibilities are so specifically accentuated, this approach to naming heightens the tensions, the conflicts and the irony that arise when these roles are questioned by the individual subject's response to the applied interpellation.

Big Daddy and Benjy as figures in functional opposition

To illuminate exactly how processes of call-and-response identification are played out within the Compson and Pollitt families, a deconstructive reading of the selected texts is helpful. As focal points for this strategy, I have selected a contrasting figure from each family, in relation to whom the other familial identities are fashioned in revealing ways. These figures are Big Daddy Pollit and Benjy Compson. They are, of course, by no means the only possible, nor the only definitive focal points for a perceptive reading of the texts.[61] They do, however, offer a particularly engaging view of complex interpersonal identification processes at play within these two fictional families. By using this strategy, I wish to illustrate firstly that there is a distinction to be made between the novel and the play's treatments of the identification-within-the-family motif. Reading the texts together thus reveals what seem to be two different phases of the patriarchal collapse. *The Sound and the Fury* shows the Compson family mostly after the head of the household, Jason Sr., has died,[62] while *Cat* shows the Pollitt family in an earlier phase of the collapse, before the core of the family is ripped out.

The symbolic aspects of the disappearing patriarchal figure are brought into relief through the lens of Derrida's questioning of pure presence. As mentioned in an earlier discussion of his conception of the term *différance*,[63] Derrida argues, in his essay "Differance" in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, that the notion of pure presence is an illusion. He positions this argument within a linguistic paradigm to illustrate that the experience of presence and absence can be modeled on the way in which a reader reads a text, thus, as a process of tracing signification:

> Differance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be "present," appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it

[61] Carl Darryl Malmgren suggests, for example, the possibility of taking Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury* as the "unnamable Other into which various selves project their self-images, fears, and frustrated desires" (97), while Robert Penn Warren proposes that Dilsey may be read as the "moral centre" of the novel against whom to "gauge" the "worth" of all the other figures (258). Any number of such readings are thus possible.
[62] Viewed chronologically, it is only Quentin's section that precedes this key event.
[63] See also Chapter 1 (14-15).

> absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as a modified present. ("Differance" 142)

It is significant that Derrida places the word "present" in quotation marks, as this indicates a suspicion of this notion in not only a spatial, but also a temporal, sense. For Derrida, there is no pure presence. To put it simply, our presence in one room of a house always-already implies our absence in another. It is impossible to be present in the kitchen without being absent in the lounge. The notion of spatial presence is interpenetrated and thus deconstructed by the notion of spatial absence. But, at the very same moment, spatial presence also implies temporal presence – being somewhere now. This being in the now is not only made possible and perpetually interpenetrated by who (or where) we were in the past, but also immediately vitiated by who (or where) we will be in the future. The two seemingly opposite states, being present and being absent, are thus never mutually exclusive.

This deconstructive conception of presence and absence offers an illuminating theoretical vantage point from which to read the imposing figure of Big Daddy as an embodiment of the desire for absolute presence in the family – a drive that is typically associated with patriarchal control and dominance. Thomas Gregory Carpenter describes Big Daddy as "one loud, bombastic titan of masculine achievement" (24) and points out that "[t]he character overwhelms the play to such an extent that the Broadway director, Elia Kazan, pushed Williams to rewrite the third act in objection to Williams's having excluded the character" (30, Endnote 15).[64] In my opinion, the return of Big Daddy in the last act of the Broadway version remains unsupported by the preceding action of the play precisely because he is such an imposing "presence" in the first two acts. It seems as though the play specifically constructs, and expands upon, the reach and influence of this over-bearing patriarch in the first two acts, so that his removal from the centre of the family in the third – symbolized by the reduction of his stage appearance to mere off-stage sounds – is all the more effective. The extrication – thus, the sudden "absence" – of the patriarch from a family that is so intensely

[64] This is, of course, only part of the reason for the existence of a second version of Act Three. Williams himself writes that Kazan also "felt that the character of Brick should undergo some apparent mutation as a result of the virtual vivisection that he undergoes in his interview with his father in Act Two" and that "Margaret ... should be, if possible, more clearly sympathetic to an audience" (*CHTR*, "Note of Explanation" 977). In *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in Theatre*, Brenda Murphy problematizes the clear distinction between performance and text by looking at the process by which the initial staging of Williams' plays was often inscribed in the text that was subsequently published, either as an "acting version" or "reading versions" (xi). Murphy provides a detailed analysis of the well-known "third act controversy" over *Cat*, which led to the publication of its two alternative endings. In summary, she locates the difference between the endings in a change in tonality from raging defiance of death in Big Daddy, to wisdom and acceptance (98-103).

and detrimentally focused on its father figure should be as confusing and devastating as the reading version of the play seems to show. The Broadway version thus minimizes the gaping hole left in the family by Big Daddy's imminent demise and, as a result, seems both thematically and dramatically weaker.

Nevertheless, Big Daddy's "presence" in the Pollitt family appears to be both dominating and far-reaching. For most of the play, he is very much "in charge" as an undeniable centrifugal force in the formation of all of the other identities in the family. And yet, this almost absolute state of presence is significantly interpenetrated and weakened by his imminent death – an unavoidable, threatening absence – which will destroy his position of power and influence. As Derrida's theory holds, Big Daddy's state of presence is thus not, nor can it ever be, absolute in remaining unvitiated by his potential absence. In fact, Big Daddy's identity, as it manifests itself within the play, revolves largely around the matter of his terminal illness. Most of his discussions are about the loss of control, about death and about his attempts at finding an heir for the family throne who would need to become equally "present" in order to fill his shoes. But the here and now of this patriarch are diluted and weakened by his approaching absence from life itself.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Jason Sr.'s death has already left a kind of negative space and an emptiness at the heart of the Compson clan, which none of the remaining fictional figures is able to fill. For this reason, it is ironic that the least "present" of the family members, Benjy, plays such a key role in reflecting, rather than determining, some of the identification processes in this household. In contrast to the dominating weight and influence of Big Daddy's "presence" at the heart of the Pollitt family is the virtual transparency of what appears to be the Compson household's most marginalized member: Benjy. He is physically present, but most of the Compsons – with the possible exception of Caddy – either ignore Benjy, or constantly wish for him to be removed from their midst, to be taken outside or to be put to bed. Even though Benjy is often, if not mostly, absent from the family's immediate vicinity, his absence is again interwoven with an undeniable "presence" in their collective consciousness. Simply sending Benjy away does not remove him from their broader concerns and he remains for them a troubling and irritating reminder of their general decline and degeneracy.

The "sound and fury" of Benjy's confused and confusing experience of the Compson family thus comes to occupy a privileged structural position in the novel. His monologue occurs first, while the novel also ends with his view of the town square as its last images. As Eric J. Sundquist (18), Judith Bryant Wittenberg (79) and Laurence Edward Bowling (177) concur, the embryo of the novel is contained within Benjy's section, while the subsequent parts serve to amplify, elaborate, and provide different perspectives on, the events already recorded by him. It seems as though Benjy's fragments of undeveloped consciousness and observation form a framework for the interpersonal identity-fashioning processes of the mentally competent members of the Compson family. His non-chronological, casually associated thoughts and memories have none of the subjective inflection one would expect of first-person narration, and which one finds in the succeeding sections. Nevertheless, much is revealed by the different ways in which the Compsons think of, and interact with, Benjy, despite his seeming lack of presence, power and control.

Big Daddy

As an almost all-powerful patriarch, Big Daddy can be linked to a chain of similarly imposing figures in Williams' work. These are first introduced by Boss Whalen in *Not About Nightingales* and followed by Boss Finley in *Sweet Bird of Youth* (Carpenter 17). On more than one occasion in this play, Big Daddy is likened to a king ruling over a large kingdom. This is consistent with Richard King's Southern family romance, in which the dominance of the father figure in the family expanded not only into an autocratic style of plantation management, but also into the patriarchal structures of the Southern rural society itself (27). The comparison with royalty is thus significant: Big Daddy does seem to rule over his plantation as a king would – his "twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile" (*CHTR* 2. 942). With this constant comparison with a royal ruler, the figure of Big Daddy harks back to an older tradition of great fathers and grandfathers who were first plantation owners and, later, defenders of the Confederacy which they protected and fought for as though it were a kingdom. This is the kind of cultural patriarch Big Daddy (not to mention his upwardly mobile family) admires, but does not quite resemble in all respects.

As with royalty, Big Daddy always demands complete attention, in fact, the action of the play revolves around the celebration of his homecoming from hospital and his birthday. Whenever Big Daddy enters the room, the family gathers around him as a matter of course, and focuses

its undivided attention on him. The family members thus play the part of adoring subjects with conviction, although the devotion may be largely false. One senses that at least Gooper and Mae feel very little tenderness for Big Daddy as a father and merely perform the role of loving offspring for their own material benefit. In his final exit in the Broadway version of Act Three, Big Daddy goes up to the roof of his mansion to "look out" over his "kingdom" (*CHTR* 3. 1002), and much like any royal ruler, his key concern is that of succession. The Pollitt estate has been built up over many years and Big Daddy's decision will determine which of his male offspring will take responsibility for perpetuating this legacy.

On the matter of familial succession, C. W. E. Bigsby writes that "the problem this father is given is how he can infuse his own personality into the prostrated spirit of his son so that a hand as strong as his own will guide his fortune when he is gone – more particularly, so that his own immortality, his civilization, will be carried on" (89). But the "prostrated spirit" of the son who is to take over from Big Daddy does not belong to his older child. Ironically, Big Daddy intensely dislikes his first-born son, Gooper, who should, according to the norm, be the traditional inheritor of his father's estate. In this respect, Big Daddy already begins to subvert the traditional notion of the conservative patriarch, interpreting this interpellative positioning in an individualizing fashion. What complicates the matter, however, is that his younger and favourite son, Brick, is a socially dysfunctional, depressive alcoholic and completely unsuitable for the financial and practical responsibilities of such a large inheritance. This leaves Big Daddy with an acute dilemma: which of his sons should succeed to the Pollitt "throne"?

Big Daddy's control-hungry personality plays firmly into the patriarchal role that he appropriates for himself. His manhood, for example, is closely connected to a sense of sexual entitlement. Big Daddy's prowess is particularly evident when he shamelessly "lech[es]" after his daughter-in-law (*CHTR* 1. 887) and also in his coarse boast that, despite being unable to stand the sight of his wife for more than forty years, he still "laid" her as "regular as a piston" (*CHTR* 2. 941). When Big Daddy believes the false report that he is not dying of cancer, he contemplates "pleasure with *women*" to prove to himself that he is still alive (*CHTR* 2. 932). In his eyes, sex is both the statement and endorsement of his power and influence. This, of course, adds irony to Big Daddy's elephant joke, which forms the centre piece of Act Three in the Broadway version of the play. Big Daddy returns to the stage after finding out that he is dying, but only to tell a tale about a boastful man with an inflated sense of his own sexual

superiority. The joke is, however, on Big Daddy, as he is comparable to the over-confident figure in his story. The degree of his self-awareness is questionable and ambiguous, though: perhaps he is fully aware at this point of the uselessness of sexual boasts in the face of the ultimate destruction of death, and tells the joke with self-deprecating, bitter irony. On the other hand, he may also be genuinely flippant and incapable of drawing such comparisons, leaving it to his somewhat shocked family to gasp at the irony of his tale. Either way, whether he is aware of this or not, death makes a mockery of Big Daddy's overblown masculinity.

In addition to his unrefined behaviour and sexual focus, Big Daddy always insists on being, and staying, firmly in charge at all times, and he resents his wife's attempts at keeping order in the household during his illness (*CHTR* 2. 923). This desperate urge to control his environment leads Big Daddy to despise even the slightest suggestion that anything may be "out of hand" (*CHTR* 2. 925). Even his son's alcoholism is, to his mind, a sign of how he has "let things go" (*CHTR* 2. 936). If, according to Foucault's model, the ethical dimensions of self-fashioning require a balance between the care of self and the care for others, one could argue that Big Daddy's approach has tipped the scale too far towards the former. One takes care of the self precisely by caring for others – these are inseparably interpenetrative strategies, says Foucault – but Big Daddy has too often ignored his duty to others. His emphasis has fallen only on the care of self, which has manifested itself in his building of an empire over many years to glorify himself as a self-made success. This has led to a neglect of the care for others.

The outcome of this is that Big Daddy now seems to be experiencing some of the effects of this imbalance first-hand in the decay of his family. A sign that his conscience is starting to bother him is his sympathy for the poverty of the children of Barcelona and his feelings of guilt that the cost of one of Big Mamma's chair coverings is enough to feed a large number of them (*CHTR* 2. 929). He is also concerned about the horrors of child prostitution in Africa (*CHTR* 2. 929). All of this seems to point to the notion that perhaps now, at the imminent close of his life, Big Daddy is starting to wonder whether he has not neglected those around him too often in favour of himself. This is heightened by the fact that Big Daddy remembers very well that he came from poverty himself and was assisted in quite a selfless way by Straw and Ochello – and what has he done to repay this social debt? Nevertheless, when it comes to illness and death, he has no choice but to relinquish all control – a situation which he fears desperately. This explains why there are as many as nine references to death and dying in his

rant against Big Mama's supposed campaign to "take over" the household (*CHTR* 2. 922). Death is apparently the only thing over which Big Daddy has no control, and he eventually crumbles under this fear.

As Carpenter shows, traditional notions of patriarchy not only influence the shaping of Big Daddy's identity in a one-directional fashion but are, in some ways, also challenged and subverted by this figure (26). As does Williams' earlier *Not About Nightingales*, *Cat* connects the "power" of the patriarch with "practiced masculinity" and examines this fictional figure by "exposing flaws, contradictions, and inconsistencies" in the ways in which he plays the role of the family father (Carpenter 16). As measured against the conventional conception of the patriarch, these inconsistencies are not necessarily to be understood as weaknesses of character, but merely as evidence of the constant articulation that characterizes Big Daddy's process of identification. In Hall's formulation, the position of the patriarch is thus not simply an *a priori* category of identity which Big Daddy embraces without question – he interprets and appropriates this role in ways that make him unique ("Who Needs 'Identity?'" 23). This individuality manifests itself overtly when Big Daddy shows an unusual and surprising tolerance, understanding and respect for the homosexual couple, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, who first employed him on the estate that he now owns (*CHTR* 2. 946). This attitude of tolerance is not typical of the traditional patriarch, but what makes it even more surprising is that it extends even to Big Daddy's acceptance of the possibility that Brick's ambiguous relationship with his friend, Skipper, may have been homosexual. The shaping of Big Daddy's identity is thus effectively dramatized as a perpetual interplay between aspects of a culturally and conventionally conceived gendered positioning – that of the self-made, conservative, patriarch – and attributes of his unique sense of self developed over years. The effect of this process is that Big Daddy is, in many ways, an ambiguous figure: never quite the chauvinistic brute, and yet never the all-forgiving, all-loving father either.

Benjy

If Big Daddy is in most respects the embodiment of the powerful, sexualized "presence" of the patriarch, Benjy is his "absent" and castrated other. In some ways, Benjy is absent from life itself as his existence revolves largely around sensory input accompanied by a severely limited cerebration. Faulkner writes: "It was as if even eagerness were muscle-bound in him too, and hunger itself inarticulate, not knowing it is hunger" (*SF* 276). Through this

description of "hunger ... not knowing it is hunger" and the notion of being "muscle-bound", one recalls Sartre's conception of the being-in-itself that "does not refer to itself as self-consciousness does. It is this self. It is itself so completely that perpetual reflection which constitutes the self is dissolved in an identity" (*Being* lxv).[65] This notion is related particularly to the existence of inanimate objects, which simply exist without knowing, caring or thinking about their existence or identity. Benjy is very much alive; however, he also has no capacity to conceive of himself as a living creature rather than a lifeless thing.

If one measures this reading of Benjy against Foucault's model of ethics, one could argue that Benjy exists in a space that is beyond the ethical. He has no conscious awareness of himself, and thus cannot be seen to be caring either too much or too little for the self in relation to others. Ethics therefore apply to Benjy as little as they would apply to an unconscious, inanimate object. The figure of Benjy should thus be read, first and foremost, as a theoretical construct, rather than an attempt at any sort of realistic portrayal of a mentally handicapped person.[66] Benjy dramatizes an almost pure state of Sartrean being-in-itself – in so far as that is humanly possible. This mode of bodily-focused existence often creates a paradoxical, seemingly disembodied automatism in Benjy's sounds and actions. Faulkner writes: "Then Ben wailed again, hopeless and prolonged. It was nothing. Just sound. It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets" (*SF* 288). Even his body's reaction to the physical pain of a burnt hand seems to occur in and of itself without much conscious intervention: "I looked at the fire but my hand didn't stop [hurting] and I didn't stop [wailing]. My hand was trying to go to my mouth, but Dilsey held it" (*SF* 57). Again, this focus on sensory awareness without controlling or interpreting cerebration is reflected in Sartre's model of being-in-itself, which is limited strictly to the physical realm and excludes all processes usually associated with human consciousness.

Owing to this complete immersion in the realm of sensation and observation, Benjy seems extremely sensitive to subtle physical changes in those around him. This sensory hyper-awareness is often mistaken for – or, perhaps more accurately, misinterpreted by critics as – a kind of supersensory, moral cognition. But, as Singal rightly points out, Benjy's keen sense

[65] See Chapter 2 (58-60) for a more detailed discussion of Sartre's conception of these two contrasting modes of existence: the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself.

[66] By tracing the contradictions in the portrayal of Benjy, as Bleikasten does, one finds sufficient proof that this fictional figure cannot, and should not, be read naturalistically: "… Benjy is dumb, and yet he speaks; he is deaf, and yet he can hear. Which is to say he belongs with the idiots of literature, not with those of the asylum" (*Splendid Failure* 67).

of smell is "akin to", but not exactly the same as, "a moral sense" (139). Benjy has no conception of morals or associated values and, indeed, has no system of language by which to grasp such abstractions. If Derrida's conception of the logocentric mode of being is an existence anchored within spoken language – that is, within the accepted Western philosophical tradition that privileges the spoken word owing to what is believed to be the accompanying presence of the speaker – Benjy's way of being could be described as limited to a kind of somacentrism.[67] In other words, Benjy exists in a space unbounded by language, but within the purely physical sensations of the body. Consequently, Beny cannot experience and influence the identity of those around him in and through language as Big Daddy does; he can simply see, feel, smell and hear them.

It follows that Benjy identifies his sister, Caddy, predominantly by the smell of leaves and trees (*SF* 4), which comforts him, as these odours are associated with the physical pleasure of her warmth and proximity. Caddy often holds him, carries him and warms his hands when it is cold. Benjy registers the death of Damuddy through a subtle change in smell, long before any of the other children realizes what has occurred. His sensory acuity, however, extends also to a sensitivity to auditory signals, such as the sound of Caddy's name: '"Saying a name.' Frony said. 'He don't know nobody's name.' 'You say it and see if he don't.' Dilsey said. 'You say it to him while he sleeping and I bet he hear you'"(*SF* 29). From this excerpt, it would seem as though Benjy recognizes the name "Caddy" even when he is not awake.[68] Thus, if Benjy has no system of language, he also has no conception of language as – according to the semiotic theory of Saussure and Derrida – a system of differential relationships between signs, in which the connection between the signifier and the signified remains arbitrary and never fully determined. This is why Benjy so often makes the mistake of attempting to bind the sound image "Caddy" directly and inseparably to the presence of the person herself. When this strategy fails, Benjy experiences a primitive, inarticulate sense of loss – an absolute absence – which registers in his reactions as discontented, yet almost disembodied, wailing and moaning.

In contrast to Derrida's suspicion of the notion of absolute states, Benjy's world contains nothing but unadulterated states of presence and absence. While Derrida questions the clarity

[67] This term, which captures Benjy's mode of being, was suggested to me by my supervisor, Prof. Merle Williams from the Department of English, University of the Witwatersrand.
[68] Ironically, as Roskus points out, “Caddy” is the one name that may not be spoken aloud in the Compson household in view of what Caroline and Jason perceive to be her scandalous indiscretions (*SF* 29).

and purity of this distinction, Benjy's mind seems to function as a practically immediate and absolute oscillation between these polarities, which is also directly connected to his states of complete contentment and utter discontent (Bleikasten, *Splendid Failure* 72-73). For Benjy there simply is no middle ground – there is no play of *différance*, the principle upon which instances of signification depend. For him, Caddy's developing sexuality thus implies not so much the loss of her virginity – again, an abstract notion of which he would have no understanding – but the loss of her actual presence in his life, a loss which is signified by a change in his sensory perception of her. When she wears perfume, she does not smell like trees any longer, therefore she must somehow be "going away", becoming absent. And when another presence – for example, that of Charlie, the boy who kisses Caddy on the swing – intrudes on Benjy's proximity to her and causes a momentary loss, he registers not a lapse in her moral standards (which is Caddie's interpretation of his reaction), but her physical absence, which leads to his discontent.

The correlative of this absolutized conception is that presence registers in Benjy's mind not only through the olfactory sense but also, significantly, through touch. He constantly needs to grasp and hold his treasured objects of presence/contentment – the slipper, the cushion, the Narcissus, even the fire which burns him – as though to reassure himself that they are indeed there. The same applies to people. Singal rightly observes that one of Benjy's most treasured muscle memories – for Benjy, there is no sophisticated distinction between past and present – is the physical sensation of lying in the same bed as his siblings. Conversely, when they are taken away from him, taken from his grasp, he wails. The result of this is that, when Benjy registers a potential loss of Caddy, he grabs at her, clutching at her dress, as though to pull her close and regain her lost presence through touch. This nexus of presence and absence traps Benjy's existence within routine and order. Any unusual eventualities that disrupt this pattern confuse and upset him. As Vickery observes: "When Luster removes one of the bottles" on Benjy's makeshift graveyard, "Benjy is momentarily shocked into a silence which is immediately succeeded by a roar of protest" ("Worlds at Counterpoint" 45-46). The same reaction occurs in the final scene of the novel, when Luster drives the coach the wrong way around the statue on the town square. The usual order in which things are present to Benjy is suddenly absent, and he bellows.

Part of Benjy's regular routine includes waiting by the gate of the Compson property for his sister to return from school. Again, this is a momentary absence that is to be remedied every

day by tangible presence. When this regularity suddenly changes and Caddy becomes estranged permanently from the family, Benjy expects the presence of the other school girls walking by the house still to include the presence of his sister. One fateful afternoon, he escapes and charges toward these girls "trying to say" that which he lacks even the capacity to articulate: his urge to regain his lost sister (*SF* 51). One assumes that his actions include again the usual clutching and holding actions associated with a regaining or affirmation of presence through the sensation of touch. Nothing in Benjy's limited account of this incident, nor in any other place in the novel, suggests that his need for closeness to Caddy is anything as developed as mature sexual desire. To my mind, his need for her is comparable to an infant's need for the proximity of its mother, a need that exists before sexual values and connotations are overlaid on, or invested into, this bond. What confuses those around Benjy, however, is that he shows the outward signs of being a mature male of thirty-three. Owing to his physiologically developed maleness, others interpellate Benjy into a falsely gendered subject position, and expect his behaviour towards the opposite sex to correspond to such inaccurate assumptions.[69] Benjy has no conception of conventional male-female categories of behaviour, yet his family and the parents of the frightened girl mistake his actions as an attempt at sexual assault; he is then cruelly and wrongfully castrated.

At this point, it is useful to reiterate the sharp contrast that Benjy forms with the figure of Big Daddy. Whereas Big Daddy's behaviour towards women is dramatized as highly, and consciously, sexualized to the point of boasting about his prowess (as symbolised by the elephant's phallus in the coarse joke), Benjy remains pathetically desexualised to the point of being castrated and left without a sexually signifying phallus. Big Daddy exists firmly within a logocentric paradigm – his words are even copied by Big Mama in an attempt at enacting a kind of patriarchal, authoritarian stance through speaking his words. Benjy operates purely somacentrically, and thus outside the freedom offered, and restrictions imposed, by the conventions of language. Lastly, Big Daddy's power extends over all of his vast plantation and, to some extent, he actively influences the identity-fashioning of most of his family

[69] For these reasons, I believe it is overstating the matter to describe Benjy as "extraordinarily alert to his sister's sexual development" or as being "preoccupied with her virginity" (Bleikasten, *Splendid Failure* 78). Benjy has no understanding of such abstractions and merely registers these phenomena as sensory changes that upset the primitive presence/absence nexus within which he "loves" his sister. Not even Faulkner's own comment that "Benjy tries to rape a young girl and is castrated" is convincing enough to construe the "attack" as anything overtly sexual (qtd. in Bleikasten, *Splendid Failure* 83). Faulkner was notoriously unforthcoming, unreliable and inconsistent in his commentary on his own work and, besides this, he may even have been avoiding purposefully a complicated explanation of the subtleties of this event and merely mentioned the general opinion of the attack held by the adults in the novel.

members. Benjy's pasture is sold and turned into a golf course – he is trapped within the confines of the mansion while serving as a largely passive reflection, a "moral" sounding board, for the self-fashioning of those with whom he shares the house. Ultimately, if Big Daddy is the king of the Pollitts, Benjy is the fool of the Compsons – not only literally, but also figuratively speaking. In this way, Benjy's function within the family resembles that of the Shakespearian court jester who enjoys the freedom to criticize as the lowest of the royal entourage, regardless of the consequences.[70] Although Benjy cannot speak, he often reflects uncomfortable notions of the family which no-one, except perhaps Caddy, would care to acknowledge. In opposition to this, stands the patriarch of the Pollitt clan whose opinions everyone regards – perhaps foolishly – as unquestionably superior.

The Pollitt family in relation to Big Daddy

Already in the first act of *Cat*, the patriarchal influence and its associated rules and values of succession through birth are in evidence. Maggie feels that Gooper and Mae, who have five children, while Mae is pregnant with a sixth, look down upon her and Brick owing to the fact they have not yet "produced" any grandchildren for Big Daddy (*CHTR* 1. 884). This is inextricably coupled with the possibility of material inheritance: Maggie fears that she and Brick may be sidelined in Big Daddy's will owing to the fact that they are childless (*CHTR* 1. 885). Maggie knows that such a situation could be catastrophic for her and her husband's future: Brick has already lost his job and is quickly descending further into a shadowy world of alcoholism and depression. She would not be able to support them without some form of inherited income (*CHTR* 1. 907). This underscores the typical patriarchal confluence of identity, sexual power-play and material wealth that is so prevalent in the Southern family romance. In the Pollitt family, not only one's sense of self, but also one's place and value in the family – and, by extension, the size of one's inheritance – is determined by one's ability to produce heirs for the patriarch and to perpetuate the blood line.

The keyword here is thus, once again, "blood". This is why, when Maggie offers to tell Big Mama the truth about Big Daddy's illness, she is quick to respond: "... leave me alone, you're not my blood!" (*CHTR* 3. 962). And when Big Mama learns that Big Daddy's death is

[70] This is a notion that Shakespeare exploited in plays such as *Henry IV* in the figure of Falstaff, and in *Twelfth Night* in the figure of Feste.

imminent, she says to Brick: "Y'know what would be his fondest dream come true? If before he passed on, if Big Daddy has to pass on, you gave him a child of yours, a grandson as much like his son as his son is like Big Daddy!" (*CHTR* 3. 971). Evident in these words, is the emphasizing repetition of "son" – a gendered interpellation – illustrating the value that the patriarchal system of inheritance places on male offspring, as well as the associated marginalization of the female. These gendered norms and values cause the Pollitt family environment to be strained and competitive, an atmosphere that complicates the processes of self-fashioning by imposing predetermined, reductive roles and expectations on each of the individual family members. Brick is not only factually referred to as Big Daddy's "son", but is by implication also expected to play the conventional role of the son in producing a male grandson for his father, just as his brother Gooper had done.

In this competitive environment, family members start to feel and behave more like rival animals trapped in the same cage, desperately vying for dominance, breeding rights and survival, than human beings. This animalistic motif is underscored by Williams' directions for the set design, which calls for plenty of open space to "give the actors room to move about freely (to show their restlessness, their passion for breaking out)… (*CHTR* 881). In addition to this, the animal motif is made overt throughout. Maggie comments that Gooper's children are "little no-neck monsters (*CHTR* 1. 883) and that their nicknames sound like "four dogs and a parrot ... [an] animal act in a circus!" (*CHTR* 1. 896). Maggie herself feels and behaves like a desperate "cat on a hot tin roof" (*CHTR* 1. 892). One of her most famous quotations from the play occurs when she tells Brick: "I'm not living with you. We occupy the same cage" (*CHTR* 1. 895). When Brick raises the chair above himself and his wife, he does so "like a lion-tamer facing a big circus cat" (*CHTR* 1. 898). Big Mama first appears on-stage, "huffing and puffing like an old bulldog" (*CHTR* 1. 899) and, later on, she charges in like a "rhino" (*CHTR* 2. 915). Her patterned dress has the "markings of some massive animal" (*CHTR* 2. 916). Big Daddy – the leader of the Pollitt "pack" – describes Gooper and Mae's children as five performing "monkeys" (*CHTR* 2. 942). He asserts that "the human animal is a selfish beast" (*CHTR* 2. 929) and expands on this by explaining that the "human machine is not no different from the animal machine or the fish machine or the bird machine or the reptile machine or the insect machine! It's just a whole God damn lot more complicated and consequently more trouble to keep together" (*CHTR* 2. 937).

Evident in this comparison between humans and animals is, once again, Big Daddy's sense of responsibility for his family's animalistic behaviour and his urge to retain control over every aspect of it – a task that seems as impossible as herding cats. This desperate urge to keep control is one of the aspects of his personality with which Maggie seems to identify strongly. From the start of the play, it is clear that she has a large degree of respect and tolerance for Big Daddy – more so than his own two sons. She says that she admires him because he "*is* what he *is*," without apologies: he is not from pretentious, Southern aristocratic stock, but a truly self-made success (*CHTR* 1. 906) – a humble background with which she can identify. But on a deeper level, she recognizes in herself the same sense of desperation to achieve control over an almost hopeless situation. Just as Big Daddy feels the reins of the Pollitt family slowly slipping out of his grasp owing to his illness, so Maggie sees her marriage disintegrating before her eyes owing to Brick's self-loathing, depression and incessant drinking. So desperate is she to keep control of her relationship that she once goes so far as to sleep with his best friend Skipper, "dream[ing]" it was Brick (*CHTR* 1. 909). However, in Maggie's caring for others – specifically for Big Daddy and Brick – there is more than a hint of caring for herself. Her strategy is not simply one of blind admiration, but also an effect of her ambition and jealousy. Brick, and by extension, Big Daddy, are the tickets to her own success as a wife, mother and woman

Another aspect of Maggie's self-fashioning thus comes into play: she seems to welcome and enjoy Big Daddy's "lech" for her, because her sense of self-worth seems to depend greatly on the degree of admiration and attention she garners from men for her physical beauty and sexual desirability. As a woman in a man's world, this is perhaps the only avenue to success Maggie has ever known, which relates directly to the culturally constructed archetype of the Southern Belle as, paradoxically, both flirtatious and chaste: flirtatious so as to live up to the Southern ideals of hospitality and generosity of spirit even towards men, but also chaste so as to embody a conservative sense of traditional family values in accordance with the Southern family romance. Since Brick is unable (or unwilling) to provide Maggie with any self-affirming reassurance of her sexual desirability, Maggie is desperate to find it elsewhere. If it is not Big Daddy who "drops his eyes down [her] body when [she is] talkin' to him" (*CHTR* 1. 887), then it's the "men's eyes" in Memphis "burn[ing] holes in [her] clothes," or Sonny Boy Maxwell, the best looking man at "Alice's party for her New York cousins," who chases her amorously into the powder room (*CHTR* 1. 904).

One should not lose sight of the context in which these boasts of desirability are made: Maggie is speaking privately to her uninterested and distant husband. Figuratively speaking, she is prodding him, as a child would poke at a slumbering animal. She is desperately trying to incite a sense of sexual jealousy by suggesting that – despite her marriage to him – he is but one of many males competing for her attention. This is, however, to no avail. It is thus debatable whether Maggie's individual process of self-fashioning has always been so dependent on male attention, or whether her marriage into this competitive, overly sexualized familial environment has driven her to this point. Here we encounter, again, an articulation between the influence of social and familial positioning on the subject and the individual's appropriation of this subjection. Maggie's response to the familial interpellation as potential mother of the patriarch's grandchildren is to act in a sexually aggressive way in order to fulfill those expectations. But embedded within this behavior is also a sense of self-preservation, as it may be her only avenue to ensure her and her failing husband's material survival.

A third aspect of Maggie's self-fashioning in relation to Big Daddy is introduced when she says: "Living with someone you love can be lonelier – than living entirely *alone*! – if the one y' love doesn't love you..." (*CHTR* 1. 891). Just as Maggie's love for Brick has gone largely unrequited, Big Mama's love for Big Daddy has led only to his revulsion and frustration. In Maggie's mind, the connection between Brick and Big Daddy runs deeper than merely the bond between a father and a son. Williams writes in one of his characteristically descriptive stage directions: *(... Big Daddy, who must have had something Brick has, who made himself loved so much by the "simple expedient" of not loving enough to disturb his charming detachment, also once coupled, like Brick's, with virile beauty.)* (*CHTR* 3. 960) This highlights the notion that Maggie recognizes in Big Daddy the same once virile, but now waning, sexuality as her husband, as well as a similar aloof charm that she has known and grown to love in Brick, and which Big Mama once admired in Big Daddy.

In the fashioning of Maggie's selfhood within the family, the analogy of the cat functions on many levels. Sexually, Maggie behaves like an alley cat – constantly pursued by males of all types and vocal about this attention. Here, Brick's comment to Big Daddy about the essential emptiness of his marital relationship with Maggie is apt. He describes this relationship as becoming no closer than "two cats on a – fence humping" (*CHTR* 2. 950). One senses that Maggie's sexual relations are devoid of passion, becoming merely acts of bodily function or

animalistic dominance. Just like a feline, Maggie is an opportunistic huntress. She knows exactly what she needs and stalks her injured prey, ready to pounce. Maggie's target is the dying Big Daddy, whose material wealth will lead to her survival. When she feels threatened, Maggie's claws come out and she is not afraid to scratch. To this, both Gooper and Mae can attest. But Maggie is also as desperate as a cat caught on a hot tin roof with no way off, and the only solution left is to try to "[stay] on it ... as long as she can" (*CHTR* 1. 892-93). In the severely "heated" and competitive atmosphere of the Pollitt household, she will do anything to survive – even telling the desperate lie about being pregnant in the vain hope that, somehow, the telling of it will prove to her husband how strong-minded and willful she is. This she hopes may lead to a change in his attitude towards her and then, perhaps, a miraculous sexual re-awakening will occur between them which will cancel the lie by making her claims to pregnancy true. Maggie thus gambles everything on an untruth that may either become a redeeming truth, or lead to even greater desperation.[71]

Maggie's constant formation and transformation of identity in relation to Brick's influence is comparable to Big Mama's formation of self in relation to Big Daddy – although this might be something that Maggie herself would deny. One senses that Big Mama is far more capable and coherent than anyone in the family would give her credit for being – particularly Big Daddy, who makes a habit of demeaning her in front of company. It is almost as though Big Mama's inability instantly to grasp the gist of a conversation and her insensitivity to the insults and tensions in the family are forms of learnt behaviour, perhaps even techniques of self-preservation which protect her from embarrassment and pain. Similar to Maggie's flirtatiousness, this way of behaving may owe more to Big Mama's loveless marriage than to an inherent lack of intelligence or savvy. Big Mama has learnt to ignore that which she chooses not to hear or see, and to laugh at herself, sometimes barely able to mask the hurt she feels inside (*CHTR* 2. 915). Her way of behaving thus becomes a way of acting – that is, of playing the gendered role of the good-natured but less intelligent mother within the family.

[71] It is in relation to this point that the Broadway version of Act Three fails yet again in my estimation. The overriding attribute of Maggie, the cat, in the play is one of desperation, not of cool confidence. Maggie gambles, she connives, she scratches and she claws her way to survival. By granting her the relatively easy outcome of a possible sexual success – which is denied her in the reading version, but hinted at by the Broadway ending – her cat-like identity is watered down and weakened.

Why she chooses to conform in this way becomes clearer when one considers that Big Mama's entire life is dedicated to pleasing her husband. The resulting behaviour is thus predictable: a Southern mother should never be a threat to the patriarch's superiority. In other words, Big Mama should never seem more intelligent, or more competent as a leader, than Big Daddy is, even though she may have such potential. Her over-compensating submissiveness towards Big Daddy even extends to the sexual: hence her words to Maggie in Act One, when she points to the bed and says: "– When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are *there*, right *there!"* (*CHTR* 1. 903). This could be read as Big Mama speaking in support of the patriarchal notion that a dutiful wife is obliged to please her husband sexually and, if she does not, she will be the sole cause of the marriage's collapsing.

However, Big Mama's strategy of constantly pleasing and appeasing her husband in all things is not sustainable – a notion evident in Big Daddy's words:

> BIG DADDY. All I ask of that woman is that she leave me alone. But she can't admit to herself that she makes me sick. That comes of having slept with her too many years. Should of quit much sooner but that old woman she never got enough of it – and I was good in bed ... (*CHTR* 2. 934)

Reading between these lines – and ignoring for the moment Big Daddy's chauvinistic sexual conceit – one almost senses in his description Big Mama's desperation in constantly trying to keep her relationship with Big Daddy as satisfying for him as possible, bending to his authority and kow-towing to his will in everything and, in the process, forgetting about herself. Perhaps Big Mama has in some ways been complicit in her marginalization as a woman within this oppressive environment, and as the bitter reward for all her fawning she receives only Big Daddy's ever-darkening disgust and disrespect. Her words to Maggie about the marital bed thus become not only an urging towards compliance, but also a subtle confession of her own failure at the game of sexual power-play, and a word of prophecy and warning for Maggie to avoid the same mistake. If Maggie should stay on her path of sexual desperation, she may also lose her husband in the end, just as Big Mama had lost Big Daddy. This, above all, illustrates Big Mamma's hidden insight and emotional intelligence.

Based on Foucault's ethics of self-fashioning, the consequence of Big Mama's over-emphasis on the care for others is a neglect of the care of self. When Big Mama is forced to take control of her bickering family, this neglect of self is shown in the way in which she is unable to do so on the basis of her own authority. As Carpenter points out, "Big Daddy's sphere of

influence overwhelms the members of the house to the extent that whether he is present or not, and whether he performs or not, his ideology will be performed by others in the home – particularly by his '*wife*' ... emphasizing their sex roles" (25). Big Mama resorts to using Big Daddy's words: "I'm talkin' in Big Daddy's language now;" she says, "I'm his *wife*, not his *widow*, I'm still his *wife*! And I'm talking to you in his language an'..." (*CHTR* 3. 970). Patriarchy's logocentric power and influence thus extend to the domination of the female both in and through the language that she uses. Big Mama has no words of her own because she has no self outside of the family. So fully dominated by her relationship with Big Daddy is her process of self-fashioning that she lacks even the words to define herself as anybody other than his wife. Her personal identity is thus profoundly determined by her positioning within the patriarchal-familial structure. This dramatizes an almost complete subsumption of an individual subject within the interpellating subject position – and the result is that Big Mama is left with very little individuality or independence. She is utterly unable to be anyone or anything other than a Big Daddy's Big Mamma.

Big Mama thus hits the nail squarely on the head on the matter of power-play in the family. A large portion of the marital problems she has experienced herself – and which she recognizes in Brick and Maggie's marriage – revolve around questions of sex and sexual identity. Margaret has already noticed that Brick's lovemaking to her has never been passionate, but rather indifferent. In her own words, his lovemaking was "more like opening a door for a lady or seating her at a table than giving expression to any longing for her" (*CHTR* 1. 892). In much of the play, Brick comes across as distant and uninterested in his wife on most levels, unless he is aggressively provoked by her. This is in contrast to the affectionate relationship he shared with his friend, Skipper, although according to him the affection manifested itself only in ways that were socially acceptable and should not be tainted by vulgar discussions of sex and homosexuality (*CHTR* 1. 910).

Brick pre-emptively accuses his father and Maggie of thinking that he and Skipper have committed "*sodomy*", and of thinking that they were "sissies" and "queers" (*CHTR* 2. 947). Brick seems overly sensitive to, and perhaps even preoccupied with, the ambivalence of the socially condemned tenderness he shared with Skipper, which contravenes the conventions that permeate the Southern family. In this paradigm, homosexuality is contrary to the traditionally prescribed procreative values that underscore the perpetuation of patriarchal domination and is thus construed as unacceptable. But Brick's detailed and vivid recollection

of the "clean" physical interactions with Skipper – the hands on the shoulders, the sharing of rooms on tour and the "reach[ing] across the space between the beds" to "shake hands" (*CHTR* 2. 948-49) – casts an aura of contradiction and ambiguity on the matter. If the incidents looked and physically felt as innocent as he claims they were, the question remains why he would feel it necessary to describe the physical encounters in protest against what are merely perceived accusations. This points at least to the possibility that these events may have been more emotionally significant in his mind at the time than he would care to admit. The play, however, remains ambiguous on the matter of Brick's sexuality. Does Brick reject Skipper purely for being a homosexual and confessing his love? Or does his unjustifiably harsh reaction reveal Brick's self-disgust and rejection of his own suppressed homosexuality?

In my view, it would be a mistake to reduce this duality upon which Brick's identity is fashioned to any one-sided interpretation. This uncertainty is both necessary and functional to highlight an unresolved crisis of identification in this figure, which remains at the root of his sexual and spiritual paralysis. Brick's predicament is one of seemingly incompatible identificatory positionings. To use Foucault's formulation, Brick is experiencing "interferences" between the "different forms" of his subjectivity ("*Ethics"* 290). If Brick confesses to rejecting his friend simply because Skipper was a homosexual who inadvertently fell in love with him, this confession would negate his positioning as Skipper's most trusted and trustworthy friend. In Brick's mind, no real or true friend would reject a loving friendship that is based on nothing but honesty and admiration, and the idea that he may be guilty of this draws into question the truth of his caring for Skipper. To use Big Daddy's harsh words, Brick would indeed be guilty of digging Skipper's grave and kicking him into it (*CHTR* 2. 951). This is a terrible responsibility for which Brick simply cannot take ownership. On the other hand, should Brick confess to being a homosexual himself and to a suppressed attraction to Skipper on which he never acted, this would negate his patriarchal and familial positioning as heterosexual husband, son, and potential progenitor of Big Daddy's family name. In other words, Brick would have to take responsibility for years of marriage based on lies and pretence. This is, again, a charge he cannot face in front of Maggie, his father and the rest of his family.

What we witness here is a dramatized example of the process of *différance* at play in the shaping of Brick's selfhood. Reading Brick as either a suppressed homosexual on the one hand, or heterosexual and racked by guilt on the other, would be reducing his self-fashioning

to only one side of the interpenetrating duality around which his identity is fashioned. From a deconstructive perspective, the seemingly oppositional concepts of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" are never mutually exclusive. The notion of being "classified" as a heterosexual immediately incorporates, within its very definition, the idea of homosexuality as its oppositional "other" from which it cannot be separated, and on which it depends for its own demarcation. One cannot claim to be homosexual without implying a difference, a distinction from that which one considers to be heterosexual. In practical terms, the idea of sexuality as a perpetually variable continuum – which is largely dependent on context and circumstance, rather than as a rigidly defined set of "sides" or "classes" into which one fits unquestioningly – has long since made its way into our contemporary understanding of sexuality. But Brick has not reached this conception yet. In his mind, sexual identity cannot be ambiguous and multi-faceted; in other words, it must be consonant with either one of two extremes, and the fact that he is unable or unwilling to say which one paralyses his process of identification. But this paralysis is not the result of an irresolvable impasse between homosexuality and heterosexuality: it owes more to the fact that he is either unable or unwilling to embrace and accept ambivalence.[72]

The outcome of the corrosive aspects of self-fashioning mentioned above is an almost complete breakdown in communication between father and son. As Brick says, whenever they "talk" to one another, it seems as though Big Daddy "gas[ses] about this and that" while Brick merely pretends to listen (*CHTR* 2. 931). At the heart of this verbal dysfunction lies, once again, the interplay of, and tensions between, the familial and personal identities of these two figures. To put it differently, Brick's retreat from life and his incessant drinking are a constant reminder for Big Daddy of his own failure in keeping control over his family and his inability to live up to his own preconceived ideals of the father-figure. And for Brick, Big Daddy is a constant reminder of his own failure as a son and husband, perhaps even as a man. According to Foucault's ethics, both of these figures have placed an inordinate degree of emphasis on the care of self over the years, which has led to the neglect of others. The result is the slowly disintegrating marital and familial relationships we see dramatized on stage, which are all characterized by a breakdown in communication and subsequent feelings of revulsion. This is particularly evident in the relationship between Big Daddy and Big

[72] In light of this distinctly monochrome vision that is so carefully established in the first two acts of the play, the Broadway version's sudden resolution of Brick's emotional paralysis remains, at best, unsupported by the preceding action and, at worst, becomes trite and ill-conceived.

Mamma, and between Brick and Maggie, but also – to some extent – between father and son. In this way, Big Daddy once again comes to occupy a central place in the shaping of Brick's sense of self, while Brick has much the same effect on his father.

The Compson family in relation to Benjy

In contrast to Big Daddy's influence on the Pollitt family, Benjy's influence on the Compsons is less noticeable, but revealing in terms of the ethics of self-fashioning. Lawrance Thompson argues, for example, that Caroline, Quentin and Jason – "each motivated by different kinds of need for self-justification" – first make a "scapegoat of Ben" (owing to his mental incapacity) and, following this, make a "scapegoat of Caddy" (owing to her so-called sexual indiscretions), "so that they may heap on these two scapegoats the ultimate blame for the disintegration within the Compson family" (114). The formation of their identities thus involves viewing themselves as victims of circumstances beyond their control, and all three project onto other family members, and onto life itself, their own chaos. Foucault's ethical model can be used to tie together the figures of Jason, Quentin and Caroline. In all three of these figures there is an over-emphasis on the care of self, which limits and, in some ways, negates the possibility of caring for others. This incessant self-focus is in contrast firstly to Benjy, who simply has no developed notion or awareness of self, or of other, as a clear, functional or ethical distinction. Secondly, their self-interest is sharply juxtaposed to Caddy and Dilsey, the only figures in the novel who do seem capable of self-sacrifice in favour of others.

The first of the three self-absorbed family members, Caroline Compson, appears to be a neurotic hypochondriac with an inferiority complex and, ultimately, a failed mother. Caroline firmly believes that she is physically weak and suffers precisely because she is a woman who was put upon by her husband, her children and society. Throughout the novel, she keeps reminding all those around her of her physical fragility, which is often associated with the notion that she is a suffering "lady". Her favourite refrain is: "It's a judgment on me" (*SF* 3), as she constantly feels victimized by practically everything around her. Commenting on Quentin's suicide, she even complains: "'Under God's heaven what reason did he have? It can't be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am'"(*SF* 300). Here Caroline addresses the nexus of her insecurity: as a consequence of her low self-esteem, she constantly needs re-

assurance of her status and value within the family. Even though she married into higher social standing, she never stops thinking of herself as a Bascomb, her maiden name. The reason for this is that Caroline has always felt unworthy in relation to her husband, and perhaps has been made to feel this way by the Compson family, who are of Southern aristocratic stock. As a result, she overcompensates by constantly insisting that the Bascombs are equally important in Southern society, and that her favourite son, Jason, is the only real Bascomb in the family, while the other children are all true Compsons (*SF* 92, 100, 181). The implication of this is that only Jason shares what is in her opinion the stronger bloodline, and that the other children are deemed to have inherited the over-bred weaknesses and condescension of the Southern aristocratic Compsons.

As is apparent in Caroline's complaint about her husband's holding himself "above" her, some parallels may be drawn between her and the figure of Big Mama in *Cat.* Both women serve as dramatizations of the cultural values inscribed in the roles of Southern wives and mothers. Caroline and Big Mama have married into a different Southern social stratum from that in which they were raised: Big Mama into a lower stratum, Caroline into a higher. Since Big Mama has chosen a self-made man who once had nothing, but now owns an entire plantation, she is perhaps a little too determined to be the equally successful wife and mother. Ever since Caroline married "upwards", she has felt inferior and unworthy – feelings which the cynical, alcoholic Jason Sr. has never done much to allay. Singal elaborates on this aspect by writing that Caroline's

> ... origins lie in a different part of the southern social landscape, the lower middle class, which had long lived under the shadow of planter families like the Compsons. Desperate for status in a culture weighted against them, members of this class in the period after the war often became models of probity, populating the evangelical churches and grasping Victorian morality as their ticket to respectability. (117)

Aspects of Caroline Compson resemble this pattern of "grasping" morality. She constantly overcompensates for her feelings of inferiority by protesting that her own family, the Bascombs, are just as good as the Compsons, and by "imposing a repressive moral standard on her children" – particularly, on her daughter, Caddy (Singal 117). Ultimately, though, the identities of Caroline and Big Mama are shaped to a significant degree by their positioning within the patriarchal structure of the family – particularly in relation to their distant, unloving husbands. The result of this interpellation into the role of the mother-figure is that

the removal (or potential removal) from the family of the domineering patriarch leaves the mothers pathetically unable either to assert themselves, or to cope with familial tensions. Consequently, the entire family structure starts slowly to disintegrate around them after the loss of their husbands.

A further effect that customs of patriarchal succession have on these Southern mothers is that these lead them to place an inordinate degree of hope and trust in their male offspring, particularly in light of either the ineffectuality, or imminent absence, of their husbands. This, in turn, places a great degree of pressure on the self-fashioning processes of the sons within the family. But there is, of course, a deep irony in Caroline's perception that Jason Jr. is her salvation, just as there is irony in Big Mama's desperate hopes for a male child from Brick. The irony is that Jason and Brick never quite play the saviour that their mothers have imagined them to become, as it is impossible to meet the demanding and idealized standards of the traditional role of heir to the familial seat of power. Jason shamelessly deceives and steals from Caroline; in fact, it is almost as though his blatant reversal of expectations becomes a form of revenge taken on her and her unfounded idealization of him. Much to Big Mama's despair Brick shows no sexual interest in his wife – however, in this case, his disappointment of maternal expectations is not a conscious and active form of rebellion. As shown before, Brick's impotence has little to do with Big Mamma, and more to do with his own identity-crisis.

It is Caroline's low regard for Benjy that is, again, most revealing of the ethics of her process of self-fashioning. Caroline sees Benjy as nothing more than a punishment for putting her pride aside and marrying a condescending husband. This constant feeling of being victimized is a reflection of Caroline's lack of interest as a mother. Even when Benjy burns his hand at the fire and starts wailing, Caroline accuses Dilsey and the other caretakers of getting him "started" on purpose because she is sick (*SF* 57). In terms of Benjy's relationship with the other family members, she feels that Jason Sr. and Caddy both "humour" him too much in their attempts at keeping him calm, and that she suffers as a result of his being spoilt (*SF* 61). For Caroline, care for others – and for Benjy in particular – is practically impossible owing to a neglect of the care of self: Caroline has no secure sense of who she is, and the result is that she is pathetically unable to nurture or care for Benjamin or any of her other children. Even her "love" and subsequent favouritism for Jason are based not on feelings of tenderness for him as a son, but rather on her misguided perception of him as the only one of her children

who cares for her – again a reflection of her own self-obsession. In Caroline's world, everything revolves around herself. The outcome of this imbalance is that Caroline also perceives a threat from, and lives in fear of, almost everything around her. Her life is merely a preparation for death and she constantly imagines herself to be "ill", "keep[ing]" herself "sick" and, thereby, distancing herself from the tensions and conflicts that are slowly tearing her family apart (*SF* 261). Big Mama's reaction to a similar situation in her family is the opposite, yet it remains equally unsuccessful: where Caroline withdraws into a world of self-pity, paranoia and isolation, Big Mama overcompensates by being overbearing and over-involved – a strategy which also fails. Again, an instinctive grasp of the interpenetrative ethical equilibrium might prove more effective: one takes care of the self by caring for others, but this does not imply that one denies or negates the self in the process, as Big Mama does.

As mothers, Big Mama and Caroline have another familial challenge in common. Each has a son who struggles with aspects of his sexual identity: Brick with homosexuality and Quentin with incest. Brick and Quentin's abhorrence of these social taboos has grown to such proportions that it involves a festering distaste for themselves, which they expect those around them to share. To understand Quentin's conception and appropriation of the incest taboo, it is helpful to use, again by way of contrast and refraction, the figure of Benjy as a foil.[73] As Thompson, following Faulkner, suggests, Quentin is – in many ways – a kind of inverted reflection of Benjy (114). We have already noted that Benjy is trapped within a mode of somacentric awareness – he exists within a primitive state of physicality without cerebration. But if Benjy's existence is limited to the body as a dramatization of the Sartrean notion of being-in-itself, then Quentin's mode of existence dramatizes the being-for-itself which is lodged within his consistent attempts at retreating into a state of unadulterated consciousness and ideological abstraction without physical intrusion. This coheres with his preoccupation with incest because, although he claims to have had thoughts of intercourse

[73] In Richard King's extensive discussion of the prevalent manifestation of incest in both Faulkner and Southern culture as a whole, he distinguishes between the "psychological meaning of incest, which varies from culture to culture, and the function of the incest taboo, which is one of the few cultural universals" (116). King follows Lévi-Strauss in observing that, while "there is no society in which there are *not* rules regulating marriage", the incest prohibition does not cover "the same relationships in all societies or even within the same society at different historical moments" (116). He then argues that "the incest taboo signifies that society has certain rights over the individual; indeed it is the primary means of ordering society and ensuring its survival by linking a unit – the family or clan or whatever – with others through intermarriage" (117). However, since Freud, the psychological aspect of incest should also not be ignored. "The incest taboo is not only the most maiming repression, it is the absolutely necessary one. We are only human in that we are repressed in our most fundamental desire. The son must give up the mother, an abnegation which is matched by the father's (or brother's) exchange of the daughter. No one may marry whom he originally desires" (R. King 117).

with his sister Caddy, he has never acted on such fantasies. One could read Quentin's attitude then as an exaggeration – perhaps even a parody – of the deconstructive mode of thinking: he constantly escapes into the uncertainty of dislocated signification in which nothing is ever determined and in which meaning remains perpetually pliable and deferred with no relation at all to truth. Following Derrida, such a notion is deconstruction taken to an extreme. Consciousness trapped within perpetual abstraction, combined with an attempt at completely denying physical facticity is both untenable and self-destructive.

The best illustration of this tendency towards abstraction and self-destruction can be found in Quentin's use of the word "incest", which constitutes another way in which he attempts to "soar above his earthly environment into the 'drowsing infinity' of the ether …" (Singal 120). For Quentin, there is little difference between uttering the word and committing the deed which it represents – that is, he seems to invest an inordinate degree of value in merely saying that he has been considering incest with Caddy. This resonates with the way in which Brick uses the word "sodomy" in *Cat*. When Brick eventually uses this term in relation to his ambiguous relationship with Skipper, he barely manages to say it. This is so because he is filled with such disgust and self-loathing merely at the verbal conjuration of the taboo, that it matters little to him whether or not actual sexual contact occurred. To put it simply, both "incest" and "sodomy" are powerful enough to taint a reputation purely by mentioning the possibility of the act in relation to a person, whether that person is guilty of the taboo or not. Thus, when it comes to tainting the purity of this friendship – or, as Brick says, "nam[ing] it dirty" (*CHTR* 1. 910) – the word is as powerful as the deed.

But, whereas Brick shies away from using the word, one senses that Quentin consciously wields the power of the word as a weapon aimed at achieving a desired effect. He uses "incest" precisely because he perceives the word to be as deplorable as the deed itself. As Singal, quoting Vickery, proposes, Quentin prefers that "incest" stays within this symbolic realm, rather than becoming an act, because "actualizing his fantasy … would ruin everything 'by involving him in the terrible reality of experience'" (124). He thus admits to his father: "I was afraid she might [commit the act] and then it wouldn't have done any good but if I could tell you we did it would have been so…" (*SF* 176). Quentin is frightened of the physical aspects of his bond with Caddy, but believes that using the word "incest" will be equally effective in binding her to him. His solution, then, is to claim her loss of virginity as an actuality, as his doing, thus attaching to her purity the most perverse socio-cultural stigma

possible. Since he cannot or will not act on claiming her physically for himself, he wields this word in an attempt at trapping Caddy within his own preferred realm of abstraction.

Closely connected to this strategy is Quentin's troubled relationship with time.[74] Derrida's linguistic conception of *difference* – in particular, his notion of the trace – is again relevant here. Derrida questions the possibility of all absolute states by showing that instances of spatio-temporal presence are always-already interpenetrated by notions of absence. This theory can be applied also to our perception of meaningful events within time. Events, and our perception or experience of these events, are never significant in and of themselves – that is, they contain no essence of meaning – but manifest themselves always within a relationship of difference and deferral to other past and future events. Any experience in the present thus attains significance only when weighed against similar experiences in the past and – at the same time – becoming the germinal point for more experiences in the future. Underpinning this thought is, of course, Derrida's conception of the trace, in which each "element" in the relational web retains the mark of a past element, but also allows itself to be "hollowed out" by the mark of its relation to a future element ("Differance" 142).

Quentin is obsessed by this relational aspect of temporal experience: that is, by this relentless movement in which all meaning in the present seems to become, at best, contingent and, at worst, tainted and corrupted. This forms a sharp contrast with Benjy, who is never even conscious of time, or of self within time, and is thus oppressed by the weight of unqualified, unalleviated presences. For Benjy, everything is constantly present – even memories of the past are intermingled with the now in a blending and blurring effect. Quentin, however, is deeply troubled by the interpenetration of present, past and future, which engenders a feeling of complete meaninglessness and the effect of this frustration is a decentred, dissolving self. Just like Derrida's sign – or any other single "element" within a relational structure of meaning-making – Quentin's experience of the present is perpetually and inescapably haunted

[74] Faulkner's treatment of time in the novel has received a large degree of critical attention since its publication, and deservedly so. Sartre, for example, wrote a renowned essay entitled "Time in Faulkner: *The Sound and The Fury",* in which he takes issue with Faulkner's metaphysics. Sundquist shows that *The Sound and the Fury* "anticipates a problem Faulkner would never fully resolve" but which would form the "implied subject" of much of his work (7). This involves the notion that the relationship between present and past is "central to the Southern experience and often creates the pressured situation in which the past becomes an ... imposing model to the same extent that – like the childhood of a doomed, beautiful girl – it cannot be recaptured, relived, or even clearly remembered" (7). The sheer weight of this history is clearly at play in the dramatization of the figure of Quentin, not only in this novel, but also in the later *Absalom, Absalom!*

by its liminal opposite: the past. But in the very same moment, it is "hollowed out" by what is to come, to such an degree that Quentin's present seems to have no significance for him.

Again, Quentin's experience of time thus becomes an exaggeration or parody of Derrida's deconstructive conception of temporality, edging Quentin towards chaos and self-destruction. "By contrast with Ben's instinctive response to objects used to symbolize positive values in human experience," such as the light and warmth of fire, the smell of trees and leaves, which he often multiplies through mirror images and reflections, Quentin dramatizes a tendency towards negative values which are "life-injuring, life-destroying" (Thompson 114). These are symbolized, for example, by his obsession with shadows. Carvel Collins notes that the word "shadow" recurs at least forty-five times in Quentin's section (62). Shadows suggest both the absence of light and inseparability from the one who casts them. In effect, Quentin is thus followed by his self-created darkness and despair – a psychological pursuit from which he seems constantly unable to escape. But he may also be seen as casting darkness and despair ahead of himself, as one casts a shadow when the sun shines from behind. Eventually, Quentin's only solution is to want to escape or cancel time altogether. This urge is first dramatized through the symbolic twisting off of the hands of his clock but, later, also through his act of suicide. Death is the only escape from this web of perpetual meaninglessness in which he feels caught.

If Quentin is the extreme logocentric idealist frustrated by the meaninglessness of the present and its failure to achieve absolute plenitude, and Benjy's experience of time remains locked within a realm of unadulterated presences, their brother Jason tends towards an egocentric literalism in which, if nothing else, time is money. Jason is thus "forever racing about behind schedule with no hope of catching up" (Singal 134), because he conceives of time only in a narrow, "mechanical and minute-to-minute sense" and is attempting to project himself into a possible future of wealth, power and social status (Lowrey, qtd. in Brooks, *Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 328). Jason thinks of Quentin's preferred realm of linguistic abstractions as pathetically ineffectual, only to be derided and abhorred in favour of the material world. His materialism has a history: Jason has always been the rejected outsider and the "*treasurer*" among the children (*SF* 92). There is thus a degree of irony in Versh's comment on Jason's childhood habit of always standing with his hands in his pockets: "'Jason going to be a rich man.' Versh said. 'He holding his money all the time.'" (*SF* 34). Jason eventually does "hold on" to money, but it is not his. Nonetheless, he feels he is perfectly entitled to the money he

extorts. This sense of entitlement develops from two notions: firstly, from Jason Sr.'s disinheritance of Benjy to send Quentin to Harvard; and secondly, from Caddy's husband, Herbert Head's, empty promises to employ Jason in the bank after the wedding – promises on which he never delivers and in response to which Jason carries a grudge. It is ironic, though, that Jason's deceit, pent-up hatred and anger towards his blood relations have a subliminal effect on his health: he suffers from regular, blinding headaches, most probably as the result of high blood pressure (*SF* 237).

Jason's mode of self-fashioning is refracted negatively through his relationship with Ben. Jason never uses "Benjy" as a term of endearment for his handicapped brother as his other siblings do. This demonstrates his lack of affection. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Jason regards Ben more as an animal than a human being: he calls him the "Great American Gelding" because of his castration, and after Benjy's encounter with the school girls at the open gate, even remarks that "they never started soon enough with their cutting" (*SF* 263), as though he welcomed, even relished, the idea of his brother's maiming. If Benjy is physically castrated, and Quentin's desexualisation is of an abstract kind due to the notion of incest with his sister, Jason's notion of sex is, once again, reduced to the cash nexus. He sleeps only with women whom he can pay in return for their sexual services, and thus treats them as he treats everyone else around him, as purely economic commodities. If a person is of no value to Jason – that is, in the most literal sense, as cash in hand – that individual simply means nothing to him. This is why Jason would prefer to send Ben to the asylum in Jackson: for the tax benefits that might accrue on his account (*SF* 222).

Using Foucault's thinking, Jason, Caroline and Quentin can thus be juxtaposed to Caddy and Dilsey, the only figures in the novel who do seem capable of self-sacrifice in favour of the care for others. This is clearly illustrated by the patient and loving way in which they are both willing to facilitate Benjy's constant need for soothing and gratification. Caddy is quite unselfish in the way in which she treats Benjy: she is willing to lie with him in bed until he falls asleep (*SF* 42); she likes to take care of him when he is awake (*SF* 61); and she knows how to soothe and please him: whether it is with his mother's cushion (*SF* 61), the old satin "slipper", or simply by feeding him correctly (*SF* 68). As Thompson points out, "Caddy has discovered ways of appealing to Ben's limited responses, to satisfy his instinctive and unreasoning hunger for orderliness, peacefulness, serenity" (111). This necessitates that she

stays very much in tune with her brother's moods and needs, taking care of him in both a physical and mental way.

However, in return, Caddy also derives her own significance from Ben's role in her life. This is dramatized in four key episodes – each connected to different phases of Caddy's development as a woman (Thompson 112). When Caddy is old enough to become interested in the opposite sex and starts wearing perfume, Benjy's negative reaction to the smell makes her wash herself clean – a guilty act of symbolic cleansing. When Benjy stumbles upon Caddy kissing Charlie, she promises – again out of guilt – not to kiss any other boys when he is nearby because it upsets him so much, a promise she is unable to keep. Then, upon her return home directly after her first complete sexual experience, Benjy begins wailing again, following her up the stairs and tugging at her dress as though he recognizes the significant change that has occurred in her life. But the significance of Ben's behaviour depends on her interpretation of his actions. We have noted earlier how Benjy's understanding of Caddy is severely reduced to a primitive presence-absence nexus which has no moral underpinning. Thus, the accusatory inflection she sees in his wailing and tugging is a significance which she reads into this behaviour. In this way, Benjy becomes a reflection of her own moral conscience, even though he has not the capacity to grasp even the most basic notions of right and wrong. It is, of course, Caddy's sexual "indiscretion" which eventually leads to her pregnancy and marriage, and consequently to her estrangement and removal from the Compson family. The grief that this "absence" of Caddy then causes becomes the permanent loss which Benjy's wailing has perhaps symbolically foreshadowed.

Owing to Caddy's progressive "fading away" in the novel – both physically from the Compson household, and psychologically as a form of dissolution of self – Sundquist conceives of Caddy as the key "symbol of loss" in the novel (10). She is not so much a complete and fully dramatized fictional figure as an "idea, an obsession in the minds of her brothers" that keeps fading away (Sundquist 10). I would add, though, that this progression towards absence is also not without its interpenetrative notion of presence. While Derrida is at pains to show that there is no pure state of metaphysical presence that is not marked by notions of absence, the reverse can also be argued, using the example of Caddy. Caddy was never and, one imagines, will never be, absolutely absent from her brothers' lives, even though she may be in another physical space. For Benjy, she remains the trigger for his polarized existence between presence and contentment, and absence and discontent. And for

Jason, she will always be a reminder of literal loss in the form of his exclusion from material wealth. Thus, while the figure of Caddy appears increasingly insubstantial and evanescent in the novel – until, by the fourth section, she is hardly afforded so much as a mention – she remains a kind of enchanted figure, a ghostly presence, that "lies always always *(sic)* beneath the shadowy surface of the prose" (Sundquist 18).

From a broader socio-cultural perspective, the progression towards promiscuity in Caddy – some have even argued that it becomes a form of nymphomania (Singal 131) – dramatizes her growing rejection of the traditional, culturally prescribed sexual positioning of the chaste and pure Southern lady, a role which her mother, Caroline, has both embraced and tried to instill in Caddy. Yet, as Singal shows, "she can discover no suitable identity to replace the one she rejects" (131). Throughout Caddy's process of maturation beside her psychological other – her brother, Quentin – she confuses their gender roles, often behaving more like the aggressive Southern male, while Quentin takes on the persona of the weak, submissive female. Singal notes that the episode in which this reversal of roles is clearest occurs directly after Quentin's disastrous and unsuccessful challenge of Dalton Ames to a duel in defense of the honour of his sister. After this encounter, Caddie – symbolically, riding up on a horse – comes to rescue her brother, who had "passed out like a girl" (Singal 131). "For these descendents of antebellum elite …", writes Singal, "the entire process of gender identification has irretrievably broken down" (131). To this assessment, one could add that the norms and values of the Southern family romance, which is so deeply incorporated into the structure of this society, rely heavily on the example of strong role models for the processes of gender identification in the family. With the weak and ineffectual Jason Sr. and Caroline, it causes little surprise that both Caddie and Quentin are so unsuccessful at finding a secure sense of selfhood in a society governed to the core by often reductive patriarchal strictures.

Evident again in this final example of familial self-fashioning – that of Caddie's development of identity within the Compson household – is a broader theme which we have traced throughout all the familial relationships of the Pollitts and the Compsons. Caddie's formation of self – thus, her process of identification – seems profoundly shaped by her placement, or positioning, within the familial network and in relation to all the other Compsons. This is similar to the way in which, for example, Brick's identity is shaped by his father-son connection to Big Daddy, or Caroline's by her mother-son relationship with Ben. In addition to this, these delicate processes of identification are interpenetrated by certain predetermined

cultural codes, such as the traditional roles of the mother, father, son and daughter, as these manifest themselves within the Southern family romance. But these instances of ideological interpellation are never all-powerful in determining the individual family member's formation and practice of self, as subject positions are always appropriated and articulated in unique and individualizing ways. For this reason, Big Daddy is no more the "typical" patriarch than Caddie is the "typical" Southern daughter. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that individual processes of identification are always-already shaped by social discourse. So, while there seems to be no self without family in the South, there also seems to be no self, or family, without culture and community – a proposition which the next chapter of this study interrogates in further detail.

Chapter 4

Self-fashioning through the subject's relation to community and culture in *Light in August* (1932) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947).

> But as soon as they heard [Christmas' name], it was as though there was something in the sound of it that was trying to tell them what to expect; that he carried with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle. (*LA* 27)

> STANLEY. … And for the last year or two she has been washed up like poison. That's why she's here this summer, visiting royalty, putting on all this act – because she's practically told by the mayor to get out of town! … (*SND* 7. 531).

Community and culture

A discussion of the final mode of self-fashioning posited by this study, the influence of the community and culture on the processes of identity-formation and transformation, is a particularly challenging undertaking. This complexity stems from the multiplicity of meanings and connotations associated with the term "community" within the Humanities, as well as the intricacy with which these are interwoven with conceptions of "culture". It seems impossible to speak of a community without making reference to the larger cultural framework within which that community is rooted. It is equally difficult to discuss the particularities of a culture – its history, traditions, values, beliefs and interpersonal behavioural patterns – without considering how these aspects are lived both within and by various communities. From the outset, it would thus seem as though culture and community are intricately interconnected and mutually influential, but not entirely interchangeable, notions. How, then, should one approach the challenge of reading two cultural products which are considered to be as distinctly and undoubtedly "Southern" as *Light in August* and *A Streetcar Named Desire?* Moreover, what do these texts have to say about the important role that the community plays in the fashioning of individual selves?

To begin with, culture – in comparison with community – seems to be a more challenging idea to delineate, since it refers to a confluence of an array of different abstractions. These include such problematic notions as the relationships among people, forms of art, ways of living, and so forth. Community, on the other hand, appears to point towards something more concrete: to a group of people who share a particular space and, therefore, a set of distinctive characteristics. It would also imply a level of either casual or formal interaction between such members owing to what could be described as a set of shared interests, needs or goals. But, on closer inspection, this determinacy is deceptive. The instability of both "culture" and "community" becomes apparent whenever an attempt is made at tracing the margins and drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion around cultures or communities, which often seem to transcend assumed differences. For this reason, there simply are no neat lists to be compiled giving the distinct and definitive characteristics of the Southern experience, along with the claim that precisely such factors constitute the region's culture. Similarly, when one begins to separate those individuals who belong to a particular community from those who do not, one faces questions that challenge the precise criteria for belonging – issues which, historically, have vexed many anthropological and cultural research projects. As anthropologist James Clifford points out, culture remains "a deeply compromised idea that [we] cannot yet do without" (10). And so, it would seem, does community.

There is, however, a theoretical paradigm within which the indeterminacy of concepts such as "culture" and "community" is functional. Given Saussure's conception of language as a network of differential interconnections between linguistic signs, a semiotic strategy offers a possible solution to the challenge. Such an approach is followed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Although his is neither the only, nor the ultimate, theory of culture, Geertz's thinking has proven particularly useful owing to its semiotic underpinning. There are relevant comparisons to be made between the "reading" of a culture or community, and the "reading" of texts. Geertz writes: "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (*Interpretation* 5). Cultures are thus to be understood, in Geertz's view, not as something concrete and stable, as "objects" that could be studied "objectively", but rather as systems of signification which are open to being interpreted, thus, to being "read" in subjective ways. My preference for the term "signification", rather than Geertz's word "meaning", is calculated: "meaning" is in danger of being understood as an unchanging core

or essence to be discovered through the reading process, whereas signification captures more aptly the irreducibility and persistent flux involved in the interpretative activity. The "reading" of a culture or community is a never-quite-completed process of meaning-making. Nevertheless, Geertz's striking image of man's self-spinning a web of relations is directly comparable to Derrida's similar conception of the "woven texture" of a text, "spun" in and through language: "a web that envelops a web" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 63). A text, says Derrida, is a relational structure precisely because it is spun both around and within another relational web: a text not only contains language within its pages, but it is also written in language; in other words the language also contains the text in a relationship of mutual penetration.

Derrida makes another apt observation regarding the reader's engagement with a text, which can be related to the anthropologist's engagement with a culture. He argues that the "dissimulation" of the "woven texture" of a piece of writing, through years of reading and critical engagement, serves both to "undo the web" and also to "reconstitut[e] it ... as an organism, indefinitely regenerating its own tissue behind the cutting edge, the decision [perhaps also incision] of each reading" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 63). The function of reading as the interpretation of a text is thus ambiguous: it breaks apart and penetrates the text as an attempt at arriving at the elusive heart of its meaning but, simultaneously, it serves to create the text through the accretion and transformation of its significance. This dual process implies that a reader of a text cannot avoid "getting a few fingers caught" in the web of the text owing to his or her "addition of some new thread" to an already dense texture (Derrida, *"Plato's Pharmacy"* 63). The reading and writing about a text thus assists in making the text, in decomposing as much as weaving the web.

Derrida's thinking resonates strongly with Geertz's anthropological theory, which conceptualises notions of culture and community as texts. "In short," Geertz elaborates, "anthropological writings are themselves interpretations ... They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned'", and here one wants to add: fictions fashioned in and through language (*Interpretation* 15).[75] Precisely owing to the

[75] While Geertz describes his approach to anthropology in this way, he has been criticized by anthropologists such as James Clifford for the non-application of this semiotic theory in field work. In his critique of Geertz's now famous description of the Balinese cockfight – in *The Interpretation of Cultures* – as a ritual sport which becomes a "text" in a "contextual world" to be read for its cultural meanings, Clifford argues that Geertz stages an "abrupt disappearance" into the role of participant-observer to describe this ritual. This "quasi-invisibility" obscures the notion that "an essential part of the cockfight's construction as a text is dialogical – the author's talking face to face with particular Balinese, rather than reading culture 'over the[ir] shoulders'," as Geertz

pervasiveness of, and dependency on, language, culture – like language – is a symbolic system consisting of traceable "internal relationships" between various "symbols", themselves indefinite and interdependent, by which "man confers significance upon his own experience" (Geertz, *Interpretation* 250). The affinity between Geertz and Derrida's perspectives is most apt when Geertz asserts that "[c]ultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete" and, "worse than that, the more deeply it goes, the less complete it is" (*Interpretation* 29). This echoes Derrida's idea of the reading of texts as an ongoing process which dissimulates as much as it constitutes, reduces as much as it expands. The process of reading is never quite completed; neither is anthropological commentary, which never reaches a conclusive end.

Into this line of semiotic argument one could draw the notion of community. If culture and community are co-dependent and interpenetrative signs within a relational, semiotic system, it follows that they would share similar characteristics of indeterminacy and heterogeneity. Culture, as we have seen, is a notion that finds relational and non-essential meaning only within the structural systems of language and anthropology. Since culture is inextricably connected to, and interpenetrated by, community, the same could be said of community. This would imply that, given their common semiotic characteristics, notions of both culture and community are necessarily multifaceted, finely nuanced and ever-evolving, and should not be imagined as finite, homogenous or monolithic. Furthermore, the reading of a community is a never-ending process which serves both to reduce and to expand, to reveal and to obscure its signification within a larger semiotic framework. In relation to this study's focus on the South, the implication is that writing about this particular culture serves to enrich the "reading" of the South. At the same time, there is an inevitable indeterminacy to such an endeavour: by reading the South we weave in yet another thread to the ever-evolving texture of its "text".

Taking a step further, a semiotic approach can be applied to an understanding of a cultural and communal identity. The idea of the self as a positioning within webs of signification can be traced also in a discussion by theorist, Stuart Hall, in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In this text, Hall uses the Afro-Caribbean black diaspora and "its narratives of

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suggests he did (Clifford 40-41). Again, to return to Derrida's earlier image, even a "reader" of culture cannot read the relational web of a culture without getting his/her fingers caught – a notion which Geertz's adheres to theoretically but, it would seem, not always in practice.

displacement" as an illustrative framework within which to compare two different conceptions of cultural identity: the essentialist, and the positional (392). The essentialist conception, as Hall sees it, proposes that cultural identity is "a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves'", and that this core identity is shared by people with a common history and ancestry ("Cultural Identity" 393). This notion facilitates attempts at rediscovering a shared geographical and historical "origin" or "roots", and is prevalent in many displaced cultures, particularly in instances of human migration that were the result of forced physical relocation. One of the central tenets of this "essentialist" conception is the belief in the "unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" – the idea that there is some fixed and clear point in time and place at which a single, homogenous identity existed and was shared by a group of people who were later to be displaced through slavery, exile or banishment. A rediscovery and reclamation of, even a return to, this common "origin" has often led to a more stable and secure sense of self in the here and now (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 395).[76]

The spiritual and inspirational value which projects of imaginative rediscovery hold should thus not be underestimated, a notion which many of the well-known social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racist – have proven (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 393). However, Clifford makes the point – and a deconstructive attitude is evident here – that "claims to purity are ... always subverted by the need to stage authenticity *in opposition* to external, often dominating alternatives" (12). Feminist historical identity is thus posited against patriarchy; white, Western identity against its Oriental other, and so forth (Clifford 12). Clifford thus asserts that, "[i]f authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political, cultural invention, a local tactic" (12). The idea of an unchallenged point of "origin" is thus problematic from the outset.

The instability of origins is investigated further by Derrida in his *Of Grammatology*. In this text, Derrida questions Rousseau's hierarchical positioning of voice as the "origin" of writing,

[76] Hall rightly points out that, within a postcolonial context, the essentialist conception of culture has played a major role in re-shaping the black world: "It lay at the centre of the vision of poets of 'Negritude', like Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor, and of the Pan-African political project, earlier in the century" ("Cultural Identity" 395). Hall adds that the essentialist notion "continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised peoples", often taking the form – to quote Frantz Fanon – of valuable, "passionate research ... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and ... to others" (qtd. in Hall, "Cultural Identity" 393).

thus of written language as merely the "shadow" or "reflection" of spoken language (36). Speech, argues Derrida, is marked by the very same qualities associated with writing – absence and deferral – since it manifests itself within the relational system of language. "In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. ... There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected [speech] is split *in itself* ..." (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 36). Derrida's repositioning of speech as an example of an unoriginal "origin" has wider significance: it could be applied to any moment that is over-confidently posited as an unchallenged point of beginning. All origins – that is, even in conceptions of an "original" culture, or "original" identity – should be treated with a degree of skepticism. If moments of origin are constructed retrospectively as "myths", as Derrida shows is the case in relation to speech, then the notion of origin itself implies a lack of essence and fullness, an absence: it immediately loses its privileged position as an unadulterated beginning.

On this point, Hall's relational conception of cultural identity as a positioning, rather than an essence, is relevant. Hall proposes that cultural identities are constantly evolving and never static, which is similar to the way in which Geertz thinks of cultures (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 394). The deconstructive underpinning of this idea is evident when Hall writes that, "[f]ar from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. … [I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" ("Cultural Identity" 394).[77] What Hall argues for is thus by no means a negation of historicity in the shaping of a contemporary cultural identity, but an awareness that historical influences are far less rigid and less readily interpretable than an essentialist theory would suggest. Hall's emphasis falls, again, on the relational aspect of cultural identity, that is, identity within Derrida and Geertz's "webs" of signification.

To this, Clifford adds a creative and inventive aspect: "Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere, individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts ..." (14). The introduction of a performative aspect – that is, the playing of a role in relation to a remembered history – is particularly apt.

[77] This view is shared by Clifford, who uses the example of Melanesian cultural identity as "something I came to understand not as an archaic survival but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished" (9). In general, Clifford's work also tests the boundary between literature and anthropology, and both builds upon, and critiques, the semiotic approach of Geertz.

Performativity, argues Derrida, always implies a subtle interplay of uniqueness and repetition, which is captured in the notion of iterability, in other words, in the aporetic interpenetration of singularity and universality.[78] Similar to repeated performances of a stage play, the performativity of cultural identity implies that the individual relies upon the repeatability of certain aspects of the cultural code – aspects which have been passed down from, and copied between, successive generations of that community. And yet, he or she manages to appropriate these repeated codes into a unique and singular iteration of identity. As we shall see, the performative aspect – the staging of a self in relation to a mythical-historical recollection – is particularly well dramatized in the figure of Blanche DuBois as a version of the typical Southern Belle, as well as in Joe Christmas as an iteration of the cultural-mythical figure of the "Negro".

Foucault: discourse and power-play

When Hall writes about the "continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" ("Cultural Identity" 394), his discussion provides a useful bridge between Derrida's thinking on unoriginal origins and the work of Michel Foucault. Hall shares with Foucault a professional interest in the study of the organization of power in society, although he reads Foucault from a postcolonial and non-essentialist perspective. For Foucault, relations of power are associated with all forms of social discourse, including culture, through its close connection to knowledge. To know the other, he argues, is to have power over the other.[79] This argument is substantiated by his tracing of the knowledge-power connection in various social institutions and their related discourses, such as hospitals, prisons and asylums. In these institutions, "subjects became objects of knowledge and domination" as patients, criminals and the insane (Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude" 177). With regard to power relations, Foucault thus implies particular strategic positions between individuals and institutions, and among various individuals.

Power relations, Foucault argues, are omnipresent at all levels and layers of family, community and culture. However, this pervasiveness does not imply that subjects remain necessarily "trapped" and powerless within them ("Sex, Power" 167). There is always the possibility of resistance, the freedom to negotiate, within the power dynamic. In fact,

[78] See "Aphorism Countertime" (419), or *The Gift of Death* (61; 70).
[79] See Chapter 2 (42-43) for a discussion of Foucault's power-knowledge nexus.

Foucault argues that, without the freedom to resist, there is no dynamic, only obedience. This realization on Foucault's part brings him to the point of recognizing that perhaps he had previously focused too closely on domination and power in his work leading up to *The History of Sexuality* ("Technologies of Self" 225). Nonetheless, Foucault eventually accepts that strands of social discourse not only construct groups of others who are seen as different from the norm, but also depend on those others to experience themselves as different and abnormal. Again, there is a strong interdependency and interconnectedness between the individual and the social, between the private and the public.

With this maturation in thought, Foucault arrives at what he calls "technologies of self": that is, "techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a number of operations ... to transform themselves, modify themselves" and, thus, to fashion an identity based on the interaction of, and negotiation between, techniques of domination and techniques of self ("Sexuality and Solitude" 177). Foucault writes: "This encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of self I call 'governmentality.'" ("Technologies of Self" 225). To this notion, Hall adds the following, speaking from within the context of black identity: "It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of the dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, [but also] by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm" ("Cultural Identity" 395). It is through this notion – the individual's faith in, and appropriation of, the subordinate role – that the disturbing truth of the domination of slavery and patriarchy is revealed. These were strategies of domination pertaining not only to the possession of, and control over, the body of the other, but also to a hegemony of the mind, resulting in women or slaves believing in, even promoting, their own inferiority.[80] Writing within the Southern context, Erskine Peters concurs that "[n]egative connotations of blackness were so deeply ingrained" in this region "that it did not take very long for even the blacks themselves to imbibe them ... Blackness of skin, then, was perceived as an extra liability ...", not just by whites engaging with notions of blackness, but also by blacks thinking about themselves (26).

[80] Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon describes this point from a psychoanalytic perspective as a "collapse" of the black person's weakened "ego": "The black man stops behaving like an *actional* person. The goal of his behaviour will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem" (154).

This domination of the racial or gendered other has important ethical implications for Foucault. He argues that "in the abuse of power" – of which racism and patriarchy are examples – "one exceeds the legitimate exercise of one's power and imposes one's fantasies, appetites, and desires on others" ("Ethics" 288). He adds that "the risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them", whether such tyranny occurs on an interpersonal or cultural level, or on the basis of gender or race, "arises precisely when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires" ("Ethics" 288). The care of self thus becomes a way of keeping power under control, because a righteous ruler exercises control over him- or herself in a measure equal to his or her control over others. Foucault thus returns to an aporia in his conception of the ethics of self-fashioning: the notion that the care for others at once oscillates with, depends upon, and is regulated by the care of self.[81] But this care of the self begins with knowledge of the self which, in Foucault's view, has many facets. Knowledge of self, he argues, includes knowing what one is capable of; knowing what it means to be part of a household and a member of a community; knowing what one should and should not fear and what one could reasonably hope for; and, finally, knowing that "one should not fear death" ("Ethics" 288). All of these aspects of self-knowledge serve as preventative measures against the abuse of power over others.

The emphasis on knowing the self is key to the texts discussed in this chapter, because – as we shall see – one of the central challenges in the problematic shaping of Joe Christmas' identity is precisely his seeming lack of self-knowledge, that is, the perpetual uncertainty about where his place might be in the community. Interpersonal abuses of power are also dramatized in the mutually destructive relationships between Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, and Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. In these encounters, both figures within the power dynamic attempt to impose forcefully, sometimes violently, a particular set of sexual or racial fantasies, appetites and desires upon the other. Foucault points out, though, that such "practices of self" – whether ethical or not – "are … not something invented [purely] by the individual himself", but are "models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group" ("Ethics" 291). Often, such models are not based on essence, but rely on the appropriation of myth as well as on Clifford's performative recreation. As Hall's conception of cultural identity as a positioning of the self within "the narratives of the past" suggests, such

[81] See also Chapter 2 (42-43) for a detailed discussion of Foucault's interdependent "care of self" and "care for others".

behavioural models are strongly shaped by a regional culture and history, and this is particularly pertinent to the American South ("Cultural Identity" 394).

Southern history and culture

Arguably one of the most perceptive commentators on the relationship between Southern history and culture, and its influences on the work of Faulkner, is biographer and literary critic Richard Gray. Gray traces the gradual change from the Old Southern order, with its agrarianism, pretensions to landed gentility and related gender and race issues, against the emerging modernity of the New South with its strong industrializing and urbanizing focus (16). He does so by plotting four thematic arteries that run through Southern history: "agricultural monopoly, economic poverty, military defeat and slavery/segregation" (16) – all of which are intricately related. After 1820, the South saw the gradual ascendancy of cotton as its dominant agricultural product, which necessitated slavery as the most cost-effective form of labour. Then, rather than breaking the stranglehold of the cotton monopoly, the Civil War served only to consolidate its economic position. With the abolition of slavery after the War, a new system of sharecropping served to grow the already enormous cotton plantations, but impoverished the ordinary farm worker.[82] From 1920 onwards, widespread poverty was thus the order of the day in the Deep South – an aspect that is reflected in much of Faulkner's fiction. One thinks immediately of Lena Grove in *Light in August*, who saves her shoes by walking all the way to Jefferson barefoot, and who relishes along the way a simple meal consisting of sardines.

In addition to being an aggravating factor for the economic difficulties of the region, the Civil War had an undeniable psychological effect. Beck's description of the South's retrospective focus on the War is most memorable: for him, the post-bellum South is like "Lot's wife", standing "petrified in a morbid backward glance at the holocaust consuming a damned people" ("Faulkner and the South" 20). This description is reminiscent of the Reverend Gail Hightower's all-consuming retrospective fantasies of the galloping horses of his Confederate

[82] Sharecropping "made it possible for planters to obtain labour without paying wages and for landless farmers to obtain land without buying it or paying rent ... Instead of exchanging money, owner and tenant agreed to share the proceeds of the crop" but, "in order to meet the immediate demand of the farmer for food and appliances, the crop-lien merchant appeared, who provided credit against the prospected harvest" (Gray 17-18). As could be expected, these harvests often failed to meet the high expectations set by creditors, and soon enough, sharecroppers were entangled in a downward spiral of unpaid debts and growing poverty, which was exacerbated by the Great Depression.

forefathers, which seem to alienate him from his church and community. The loss of life during the War was great: Gray reminds us that an entire "generation of young men had been wiped out" by the War (23). As a result, bitter and resentful Southern subjects felt not only physically, but also morally, victimized as their Northern victors proclaimed their overwhelming military success to be the undoubted proof "of the superiority of their ethical case" (Gray 26). The outcome was predictable: the South reacted defensively, soon turning to outright defiance and a proud determination to tell its side of the story. This took the form of a collective re-imagination and reinvention of history: the creation of a mythical master narrative of the Old South as a lost place of legendary grandeur destroyed by the Northern invasion. Played out on a grand scale, one encounters what both Derrida and Geertz would describe as a collective "reading" of history, which served not only as an attempt at discovering a shared heritage, but also as the creation through discourse of a cultural-historical narrative.

This nostalgic story of an aristocratic, genteel South is what Singal calls the "Cavalier myth" (6). He sees the debunking of this mythology, and its related prefabricated constructions of identity for Southern gentlemen and ladies, as an important motif in Faulkner's work (6). Williams' plays often address the same questions, though, since interrogations of the Southern brand of patriarchy, and the role of women in particular, are commonly occurring motifs in his work. It was within the fiction of Southern gentility and aristocracy that particular gendered roles were imagined, practiced and propagated well into the twentieth century. "The Southern gentleman," claimed Ronald F. Howell as recently as 1957 in *The Lasting South*, "is tolerant, kindly, broadminded, non-puritan, moderate, hospitable, and courteous ... A totally integrated personality, he is also supremely gregarious and sees himself as fitting rightly into an organic familial and social order that has a sense of purpose and continuity'" (147). In tandem with this, the mythical Southern lady was "a paragon of moral innocence and selflessness whose prime concern was upholding the canon of sexual purity" (Singal 7).

The irony of this mythical vision of the Southern Belle, as compared with Blanche DuBois' appropriation of it, is self-evident. While Blanche certainly pretends to uphold the culturally imposed strictures of sexual purity, it is precisely her promiscuity in the eyes of her community which leads to her eventual downfall. This dramatizes the notion that cultural and gendered stereotypes are frequently reliant on a set of unrealistic and unattainable ideals

which are honoured more in the exception than the rule. Nonetheless, as Joel Williamson notes in *The Crucible of Race*, "the idea of men as chivalrous knights and women as castellated ladies was not merely coincidental, nor was it frivolous. On the contrary it was immanent and deadly serious" (26). Effectively, the South thus created a cultural-historical fiction after the Civil War, even in so far as the gendering of individual behaviour was concerned. These cultural texts were, according to Geertz's semiotic model, "'something made,' 'something fashioned'" and, for this reason, they were open to be "read" in different ways (*Interpretation* 15). The notion of a culturally fictionalized racial or gendered identity is central to the discussion of both Joe Christmas and Blanche DuBois. Both of these dramatized figures interpret and appropriate their culturally fashioned "role" in highly individualizing ways.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the myth of the Old South is the way in which this belief system attempted to incorporate the institution of slavery as both historically and naturally justified. This rationalization involved, as Gray notes, an almost unselfconscious "presumption on the part of one race that it could own another" (30). Echoes of Foucault's notions of unethical domination – of the imposing of personal fantasies, appetites and desires on others – are again pertinent. In order to rationalize the practice of human ownership, slavery was incorporated into the Southern family fantasy. In the plantation family, the argument went, the "'Negro learns each civilizing art' at the knees of his 'father' and 'mother', the master of the house and his wife; and he 'acquires the habit that refinement gives' in the company of his 'brothers' and 'sisters', the young white men and women of the plantation" (Gray 31). The shared white delusion was that there was no question of exploitation, since both parties were believed to be benefiting from the arrangement: the slave enjoyed the love and care of a white family in return for labour. Peters adds that this led to a "related premise ... that the blacks should have been content with what the whites deemed appropriate for them" (20). The glaring irony was, of course, that no slave had the opportunity of choosing whether he or she needed or wanted this incorporation into the white family in the first place. This became the great unwanted "gift" of slavery, forcibly thrust upon black men and women through patronizing and euphemistic familial fantasies that disguised self-serving white desires and appetites.

Furthermore, the familial justification of slavery created a confusing dichotomy: slaves were, "according to the master narrative of the culture, part of the family. And yet they were

strangers. They were omnipresent, and yet they were unknown" (Gray 33). Gray's use of the phrase "master narrative" is important in light of the semiotic reading of cultural tropes as texts. Within this narrative, black slaves came to embody a confusing, non-present presence, a racial re-rendering of a fictional identity based on myth and fantasy. It is no wonder that Quentin Compson observes in *The Sound and the Fury* that the "negro" is "not so much a person as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among" (84). This "obverse reflection" involved not only the white slave owner's imposing of a particular subservient role on the faceless slave, but also the slave's inadvertent appropriation of that role. The slave reflected, through his or her behaviour, what he or she imagined the owner wanted to see: a mask of subservience, gratitude and placidity.[83] Again, Hall's observation about instances of racial domination and control is insightful: slavery not only exerted power as imposed domination, but also relied on "the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm" ("Cultural Identity" 395). It is precisely against this drive to conform to the domination of the racialized Jefferson community that Joe Christmas rebels. In a sense, he reflects precisely what the community does not want to see: defiance and violent rebellion as opposed to quiet subservience, indeterminacy instead of racial definition.

Jefferson and race

As we have seen, the ways in which individuals had formed and transformed their identities within the South were heavily influenced by cultural values and preconceptions of race and gender. These were, in turn, strongly guided by a range of significant historical events and circumstances. The notion of a varied and heterogeneous Southern culture is illustrated effectively by the two very different communities dramatized in the selected texts, as well as by the two key individual figures who live within them. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas is dramatized against the racialized, rural background of the fictional Southern town of Jefferson, Mississippi, situated in Faulkner's fictional county, Yoknapatawpha; in *Streetcar*

[83] Fanon writes effectively about this "scission" or "fracture" in the consciousness of the black subject. He argues that, in the presence of whites, "a Negro is forever in combat with his own image" (194). Within the context of Fanon's particular frame of reference, this struggle becomes particularly pronounced when – for example – a black-skinned, French-speaking Martiniquan comes into contact with European racism:

> In effect, what happens is this: As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro. There are two ways out of this conflict. Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it. I try then to find value for what is bad – since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the colour of evil. (197)

Blanche DuBois is dramatized within the cosmopolitan, urban space of the French Quarter of New Orleans, where heightened gender conflict is pervasive. Both of these communities are undeniably Southern, yet very different in significant and revealing ways.[84]

Light in August seems to place a significant degree of emphasis on the notion that Jefferson is fraught with racial intolerance and tensions. Perhaps the most noticeable evidence of this is the pervasive, unselfconscious and unapologetically pejorative use of racial and political markers in the community's common parlance, each with its own set of prejudiced connotations and associations. These include words such as "nigger", "Negro", "Yankee", "lover of niggers" and to a certain extent, even "whitefolks" and "cap'm". Racial naming also extends to socio-economic labels, such as a "negro's job" (*LA* 29) and a "negro's cabin" (*LA* 29*),* implying that both of these categories are unfit for whites. Vickery makes the point that the "sheer weight of generations" has helped to create such markers in the South: "What starts as a verbal pattern of classification thus becomes a social order not to be challenged and changed" ("The Shadow" 27-28). Again, there is thus evidence of Geertz's thinking: cultural discourse becomes a text that is "read" in meaningful ways. From this perspective, *Light in August is* an incisive interrogation of these "social orders" in the form of Joe Christmas' challenge to patterns of cultural classification in the community, that is, to the textualization of racial roles which are liable for reinterpretation.

Underpinning these historically evolved labels and pejoratives is a nexus of perpetuated racist myths which permeate all layers of the community. A label such as "Negro" thus becomes – to borrow Vickery's term – a "compressed myth" to which the community responds in set and predictable ways ("The Shadow" 28). Chief among these beliefs is the notion that racial differences are distinctions grounded in essence, in the very nature and biology of the different groupings. Peters summarizes this aspect as "the codification of the black race as an

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[84] Kimball King, following commentators such as C. Hugo Holman, points out that the South was composed of three regions: the Tidewater, Piedmont, and the 'deep' South, each with its own socio-cultural atmosphere (627). "However, the majority of Williams's plays draw on the New Orleans scene ... The conflict between the genteel world of the Garden District in New Orleans and the bohemian French Quarter is especially well suited to drama" (K. King 627). However, I have found John Timpane's commentary on this matter to be more insightful and, geographically speaking, less rigid than King's:

> While many of [Williams'] plays are indeed set in the South, ... place is a dynamic thing, as are the lives lived in it. In the Williams gaze, there are many ways to be "Southern". Recall the battle of accents in *Streetcar* – the fake High Southern of Blanche and the inner-city acerbity of Stanley. (What Blanche and Stanley have in common is their difference.) One can be "Southern" in the midst of St. Louis, a town with a conflicted identity if ever there was one, or in the middle of Mexico. Within the Williams gaze, then, to be "Southern" is less to be situated than to be displaced. (751)

inferior species of humanity, the archetype of servility, ignorance, passion, and brute strength needing the paternalism of the white race for guidance and survival …" (20). This mythical codification is, of course, a fantasy of the white race which, in Foucault's conception of domination, enforces a hegemony over others to fulfill an inherent lack: the need for a collective self that seems better, purer and more akin to a particular, often religious, ideal than the other against whom it is measured. Joanna Burden's father illustrates the automatic assumption and incorporation of supremacy in the collective white subconscious when he remarks – and without realizing the condescension in his words – that it is the white person's duty to "struggle" and "rise, but in order to rise, [he/she] must raise the shadow with [him/her].'" (*LA* 191). This hierarchical differentiation leads to an extreme polarization in which white is equated with sexual purity and religious piety, while black becomes the dark embodiment of the unchecked sexual urges and bedevilment of the non-elect.[85]

Embroidered onto this system of myths one finds a range of additional racist superstitions and folklore, some elements of which are shown in the novel and which border on the ridiculous. These include the notion that "only a negro can tell when a mule is asleep or awake" *(LA* 10), or that the black skin colour derives directly from the curse of slavery and that, after black people are freed, they will "bleach" out again (*LA* 186). There is also the more disturbing belief that black people are – again, by nature and in essence – more savage and violent than whites, and thus more inclined to commit atrocities such as rape and murder. This conviction is demonstrated when white members of the Jefferson community come to stare at the decapitated body of Joanna Burden after news of her murder by Christmas has spread. As the omniscient narrator reveals to us, these "white folks" secretly wish that Joanna had not only been murdered, but also ravished by Christmas, so that they could assign even more blame to the mythical figure of the "Negro" as the dark, savage, murderous other (*LA* 216). Joe Brown (Lucas Burch) exploits this racist prejudice in the community when he finds himself under suspicion for Joanna's murder; he shifts the focus away from himself successfully by mentioning the possibility that Joe Christmas may be of mixed race (*LA* 75). As Vickery points out, the mere mention of the word "nigger" makes Christmas' actual guilt or innocence irrelevant, because "the connection between 'Negro' and 'murderer' is part of the public myth", that is, part of the collective text created and read by the community ("The Shadow"

[85] Fanon elaborates extensively on the Western cultural symbolism of blackness in relation to whiteness: "Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth, abysmal depths, blacken someone's reputation; and, on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical, heavenly light" (189).

31). The marshal's response to this word is thus telling: "'A nigger ... I always thought there was something funny about that fellow'" (*LA* 76). It is as though assigning this word to the figure of Joe has finally provided the community with a concrete category, a name-label with which to pin down his perturbing difference, indeterminacy and aura of non-conformity.

However, Joe Christmas defies this pattern of classification by bluntly refusing to allow himself to be slotted into any absolute racial or social text imagined for him by the community. Most telling of how Christmas' defiant irreducibility disturbs the community is the way in which his behaviour is described directly after he is captured in the neighbouring Mottstown:

> He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (*LA* 263).

Apparent in this extract is the immediate association of the compressed myth of the "nigger" with the atrocity of murder. As long as Joe is both a "nigger" and a "murderer", he fits well into known and comfortable discourses of Southern identification aimed at oppressing black people in favour of white supremacy. Indeterminacy, the empty signifier, is what this society fears most. Furthermore, Christmas' seeming as though he did not "know" that he was a murderer and a “nigger” suggests an emphasis on a knowledge of self which the community feels he lacks. Such a lack, according to Foucault, predicts an uncertainty of one's place in the larger social body and a related inability to care for others. Christmas is indeed unable to find stability and fulfillment anywhere in the South – neither in the white nor in the black community. He is also overtly and somewhat pathetically unable to care for others – later, for Joanna in particular. This is owing to this paradoxical and inherent lack of knowing, and caring for, the self.

The strong emphasis on race in the novel makes it tempting to say that it exposes racism as a pervasive attribute of Southern culture as a whole. Yet, it needs to be pointed out that within this fictional community one still finds such figures as Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden who – to the chagrin of Jefferson society – assist black people in various physical and financial ways. Byron Bunch's thoughts after the Ku Klux Klan's attack on Hightower are particularly revealing: he observes it was "[a]s though ... 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" (*LA* 56). Bunch realizes that a community such as Jefferson's has the power to interpellate individuals into predetermined, discursive positionalities, to "read" them into "roles" that are expected to be played out, to be performed, sometimes against the subject's will and better judgment. But not all members of this community perform their "allotted" roles in the same way. Individuals interpret and appropriate the cultural positions to which they are called in unique and varied ways. Rather than performing blind re-enactments, these subjects negotiate their "positioning" within the communal and cultural discourse. Neither Hightower nor Joanna Burden conforms to the power which attempts to mould them to racist norms. Hightower refuses to stop consorting with black people, even after an attack by the KKK. Joanna continues to correspond with educational institutions on behalf of prospective black students despite her being shunned and isolated by the rest of Jefferson society. Processes of identification thus create communities that are necessarily and always varied and heterogeneous.

Elysian Fields and gender

In contrast to the racialized small-town, rural environment of Jefferson stands the multi-racial, urban culture of Elysian Fields in New Orleans. The cosmopolitanism of the French Quarter, in which there is a "relatively warm and easy intermingling of races", is established at the start of *Streetcar* (*SND* 1. 469). A white woman, Eunice, is "taking the air" and engaging in a relaxed conversation with a black neighbour on the steps of their apartment block; in the background, a jazz piano can be heard (*SND* 1. 469). Williams writes in his characteristically extensive stage directions that "[i]n this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers" (*SND* 1. 469).[86] In addition to this

[86] In an essay entitled "Misrepresentation and Miscegenation: Reading the Racialized Discourse of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*", George W. Crandell investigates the apparent absence or underrepresentation of black characters in the playwright's work, lamenting the notion that the black woman with whom Eunice is interacting at the start of the play remains ostensibly nameless (337). To strengthen his case, Crandell mentions the negative connotations of the names or nicknames of some "subservient" black figures who do appear in his plays, such as "Fly" in *Sweet Bird of Youth* and "Chicken" in *Kingdom of Earth*. Where Crandell takes the argument too far, though, is when he attempts to show that Stanley Kowalski is an example of Williams' "fabrications of Africanist personae", a strategy he finds exemplified in the "racialized discourse spoken by Blanche and Stella when comparing Stanley to a beast" and, particularly, in Blanche's expression concerning the "mixing" of Southern aristocratic and bourgeois "blood" (337). I find this argument

proximity of black and white, one finds suggestions of many other nationalities and languages in the community. When Blanche thanks Eunice for letting her into the apartment, Eunice replies: "*Por nada,* as the Mexicans say, *por nada*!*"* (*SND* 1. 472). Stanley is of Polish descent, although he claims to be "one hundred percent American" (*SND* 7. 539). There are Chinese traders in the area who sell both fast food (*SND* 3. 499) and paper lanterns (*SND* 3. 499), and the young man who later delivers the paper to the apartment is called Lucio Franscesco Romano, which perhaps suggests an Italian heritage (*SND* 5. 519). There is also a stream of Mexican street vendors peddling either hot tamale or traditional plastic flowers for the dead (*SND* 9. 546).

While the cultural atmosphere of Elysian Fields thus allows for a "warm and easy intermingling of races", the same cannot be said for the interaction between genders (*SND* 1. 469). There seems to be a pervasive, brooding tension between men and women, often flaring up into open conflict and violence. This is exacerbated by the oppressive heat and humidity of New Orleans, the lack of privacy both inside and outside the cramped apartments, and the undeniable influence of alcohol.[87] Male-female violence has apparently become an accepted norm in Elysian Fields, and both men and women seem ill-equipped to solve interpersonal problems in other ways. When Eunice suspects Steve of infidelity, she hurls household objects at him, screaming: "You hit me! I'm gonna call the police!", after which she rushes out to "get a drink" (*SND* 5. 512). When a drunk Stanley beats his wife, Stella, she runs to the safety of Eunice's flat upstairs, after which Eunice shouts to Stanley: "I hope they do haul you in and turn the fire hose on you, same as last time!" (*SND* 3. 502). This exclamation suggests a pattern of violence, abuse and police intervention, which is rationalized by those who witness and suffer the violence. The cultural "text" of gender violence has thus been written by repetition, which serves to desensitize the individual subject's, or victim's, judgment.

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unconvincing not only from a poststructuralist perspective which questions suggestions of authorial intent, but also owing to its apparent determination to reduce the complexities of the Blanche-Stanley confrontation to matters of race.

[87] To these aspects, Kimball King adds the pervasive double standards of sexual chastity that exist in Southern gender relations and which manifest themselves overtly in Williams' plays:

> The nearly schizophrenic division between strong sexual needs and a chaste public image which both Lucretia Collins and Blanche DuBois try to maintain is not a conflict shared by male characters, who are free to boast of their sexuality (Val, Stanley, Big Daddy, etc.). In fact, the veneration of the male as "stud" and progenitor and the codification of physical bravery and strength, leadership, decisiveness and aggressiveness are carried to ... an extreme ... (627).

The process of rationalization often takes the form of verbal discourse which minimizes or justifies the violence, its inevitability and regularity. But it is significant that the explanations always occur after the offence, that is, after the violence has taken place. Following Stanley and Stella's fall-out, Mitch comforts Blanche by saying: "There's nothing to be scared of. They're crazy about each other", as though the pair's love for each other somehow negates the abuse, and the attack is simply another way – illogical as it may sound – of expressing devotion (*SND* 3. 503). Even Stella, as victim of spousal abuse, rationalizes Stanley's attack by assuring Blanche that "it wasn't anything as serious as [she] seem[s] to take it. ... [w]hen men are drinking and playing poker, anything can happen" *(SND* 4. 505). Stella then confirms her husband's pattern of outbursts when she says: "Stanley's always smashed things" (*SND* 4. 505). Later, this communally accepted pattern culminates in the shocking final confrontation between Blanche and Stanley, during which Blanche is raped.

Frank Bradley makes the point that "Stanley's ... penetration of Blanche's privacy" – the word "penetration" foreshadows the terrible outcome of their conflict – "happens largely as a result of space and proximity" … (55). There is no additional space in the Kowalski apartment to accommodate Blanche: her suitcase is left in the bedroom where it is "vulnerable to Stanley's rough dissection as he hurls about the room the last vestiges of her private life"; her bed stands in the kitchen and dining room where the men play poker and, as a final humiliation, she is forced to take baths in the same place where Stanley and his friends urinate (Bradley 55). The result of this extreme publicizing of Blanche's private self is that she is "exposed to multiple and often conflicting outside influences," such as those of Stanley (Bradley 55). For this reason, before Stanley's final attack on Blanche, he finds it necessary to remark: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning" (*SND* 11. 555), as though some sort of violent encounter was a foregone conclusion, owing not only to the playing out of their gender roles, but also to the imposition of their extreme physical proximity.

Whereas Jefferson's attempts at dominating Joe Christmas' process of identification is based on racial prejudice, Elysian Fields' power struggle with Blanche centres on gender issues. Foucault's ethical conceptions are, however, equally relevant. As a dramatization of gender-based domination and the abuse of power, [88] Stanley's physical and mental attack on Blanche

[88] Michael DiSchiavi observes that many of Williams' women find themselves in precariously powerless positions in relation to men in the families and communities that he portrays:

– in other words, his inability to sympathize with, and care for, Blanche as a female other – is the result of his own inherent insecurity, which manifests itself in his constant need for the adoration and approval of all women. When this affirming adulation by women is missing, Stanley "bullies" them, often violently, into submission. This gratuitous violence is thus aimed at forcibly imposing his own "fantasies, appetites and desires" on women – an act of domination which is played out on an individual and interpersonal scale (Foucault, "Ethics" 288).

Christmas and Blanche as figures of functional opposition and similarity

The accentuation of inter-gender conflict in *Streetcar* and the emphasis on racial tension in *Light in August* provide a similarly problematizing background against which to offset the challenges to identity faced by Blanche DuBois and Joe Christmas. Common to the treatment of these figures is that they are both positioned as outsiders, ostracized and alienated from their particular communities.[89] Christmas' feelings of non-belonging are heightened by the rural, racialized culture of Jefferson in a way similar to that in which Blanche's search for self is highlighted by the gender conflict of the French Quarter. Furthermore, Christmas and Blanche's perspectives are highlighted because they both ultimately fail in their quests for identity within a community: Christmas is killed and mutilated as a fugitive from the law and from racial hatred; Blanche is sent away to an insane asylum. It is useful, then, to read *Light in August* and *Streetcar* in mutually informative ways with Christmas and Blanche serving as figures of both functional similarity and opposition. By focusing on these two instances of misidentification, we gain a deeper understanding of not only the difficulties of forming an individual self within a community, but also of the singularities of the rejecting communities themselves.

> It is the men who control events; the women are entirely dependent on the men and use them to achieve their goals. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the strangers on whose kindness Blanche DuBois has "always depended" are exclusively male strangers. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda and Laura Wingfield depend on Tom for their very survival. And, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* , childless Maggie the Cat lacks any claim to the estate of her husband's family. (18)

[89] Christmas is by no means the only figure of alienation whom we find dramatized in *Light in August*. As Vickery notes, all of the major figures in the novel can be read as, in some way or another, "strangers to Jefferson" who "remain strangers no matter how long they stay or how deep their roots" go ("The Shadow" 26). Bleikasten concurs: "Around [Hightower], the community has drawn ... circles of scandal, reproval, and rejection, and a similar ostracism has struck the negrophile daughter of carpetbaggers [Joanna Burden]" (*Ink* 314). And, while Lena and Joe differ from one another in very overt and sharply contrasting ways, "they are likewise strangers, ... nomads" for whom Jefferson is merely a "stopover" (Bleikasten, *Ink* 314). Even less central characters, such as Lucas Burch, Doc Hines, and Percy Grimm are "figures on the fringe", while Byron Bunch is considered to be a "harmless" – yet not completely innocent – "eccentric" (Bleikasten, *Ink* 314).

In the case of Blanche and Christmas, the community's *modus operandi* seems to be a system of both inclusion and exclusion, thus, an aporetic interpenetration of notions of inside and outside. Both of these figures are excluded from the group as individuals who – for some or other reason – do not measure up to the community's norms and criteria of belonging and who are marginalized as a result. The community thus attempts to expel a dangerous element from inside itself, an alien presence which it has harboured within for some time, in the same manner in which – to return to the epigraphs of this chapter – a physical body might reject a poison, or a homeowner would expel a snake. However, these individuals remain within the same geographical space as the community from which they have been excluded. To borrow Brooks' effective metaphor,[90] both figures exist as a kind of "cultural cyst" – an alien impurity which remains both part of, and separate from, the rejecting body (*Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 53).[91]

From a theoretical perspective, Derrida investigates this interpenetration of the internal and the external in notions of exile in his essay "Plato's Pharmacy". The main thrust of Derrida's argument engages again with Western logocentrism by showing that the positions adopted in Plato's *Phaedrus* are – contrary to common interpretations – not self-consistent in their

[90] André Bleikasten describes Cleanth Brooks' conception of community in his study of *Light in August*, entitled "The Community and the Pariah", as "a tightly knit social organization, with something like an 'organic' character, whose stability is guaranteed by unanimous acceptance of inherited values and unquestioning compliance with established cultural codes" (*Ink* 315). I agree with Bleikasten's suggestion that this conception of "an organic community" is at risk of becoming too monolithic and essentialist, and also that Brooks at times seems overly eager to argue for only a positive side to the community's involvement in influencing and shaping individual behaviour. Brooks laments the notion that the "organic community has all but disappeared from modern fiction," and suggests that the "disappearance accounts for the terrifying self-consciousness and subjectivity of a great deal of modern writing" (*Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha County* 69). To my mind, this does not necessarily reflect the modern "disappearance" of the community from society, but speaks rather to the growing, collective realization that notions of wholeness and homogeneity in relation to what was *believed to be* "organic" communities are illusory, and that the influence of the community on the individual's self-fashioning is not always positive. Brooks argues further that Faulkner's fiction "reveals keen awareness of the perils risked by the individual who attempts to run counter to the community. The divergent individual may invite martyrdom; he certainly risks fanaticism and madness" (*Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 69-70). Again, it seems as though Brooks' conservatism – the notion that deviance from traditional, communal values and norms entails rebellious and transgressive acts and is thus destructive of self and of the community – leads to a reductive interpretation of Faulkner's highly nuanced and ambiguous dramatizations of instances of alienation. The matter is never as simple as setting the nurturing values of the community against the defiant individual, and then accounting for his or her rejection as the result of the individual's errors in judgment, as though social deviance always comes with its deserved punishment. In most cases in the novel, alienation does not occur as a matter of deliberate rebellion on the part of the individual who challenges society outright, but rather as a complex confluence of individual circumstances.

[91] The same can also be said about the rest of Jefferson's cast of aliens – Hightower, Joanna Burden and Hines – who are all accommodated within the community, even as outcasts, sometimes both suffering its disapproval and enjoying a degree of benevolence and peace (Kartiganer 62).

privileging of speech over writing. Through a careful deconstructive reading, Derrida demonstrates that Plato's attitude towards writing is implicitly ambivalent, and that he sometimes arrives at attitudes that seem to reverse the general direction of his reasoning. Already at the beginning of the text, this ambiguity is revealed through Plato's subtle insertion of the notion of *pharmacia*, this being "a common noun signifying the administration of the *pharmakon*, the drug: the medicine and/or poison" (Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 70). Derrida argues that the problem with over-determining Plato's ambivalence towards writing is lodged in a one-sided translation and understanding of the *pharmakon* as an analogy for writing. Plato, he argues, calls on both the negative and positive sides of the term's possible meaning: *pharmakon* as both remedy and poison, as both medicine and drug.

Derrida then shows that the mutually exclusive polarization of poison and drug does not hold. The notion of noxiousness is always-already interpenetrated by its conceptual opposite, by traces of remedy. A practical illustration of this is the scientific functioning of antidotes and anti-venoms in medicine, in which a small quantity of toxin assists in the eradication, the expulsion or extraction, of the same damaging element from the body. The suffering body thus needs the poison to rid itself of the same toxin. As we shall see, the ambiguous functioning of the poison-drug is relevant also to notions of social expulsion. Dangerous elements alienated from a community – such as the figures of Blanche and Joe – may also come to serve as a necessary "cure" to restore the integrity of that community. Here, Derrida's discussion of another word containing the *pharma*-root becomes particularly relevant: the term *pharmakos*, meaning "wizard" or "poisoner", but which also has connotations pertaining to the traditional scapegoat figure ("Plato's Pharmacy" 130). According to the ancient Greek custom, a person of low social standing was imprisoned within the city limits until such time as war or natural catastrophe threatened the integrity of the population. This individual was then publically chastised to appease the angry gods, and subsequently banished, taking with him or her the evil that had turned away the favour of the immortals. In this way, what was at first nourished internally within the community – that is, within the walls of the city – had been expelled, placed outside of the enclosing body, as a kind of remedy or cure.

However, as Derrida points out, this ejection is paradoxical: "being therapeutic in nature, [the rejection] must call upon the very thing it is expelling, the very surplus it is *putting out.* The pharmaceutical operation must therefore *exclude itself from itself*" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 128). In other words, through its imprisonment within the city, the scapegoat has been nourished,

kept and protected by the city and, in this way, has became an organic part of the community. The community comes to depend on the scapegoat for its integrity – it would not be complete without a scapegoat to protect it when the gods are angry. By eventually banishing the prisoner, the city thus expels and excludes an integral part of itself. Derrida elaborates: "The ceremony of the *pharmakos* is thus played out on the boundary line between inside and outside … the *pharmakos* represents evil both introjected and projected" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 141): introjected, because the evil is created and nourished within the community; projected, because the scapegoat also takes on the evil of the community and carries it outside in order to re-establish the city's order of unity and integrity.

In Derrida's description of "evil" both inside and outside of the rejecting body, one begins to notice striking similarities with the rejected figures of Joe Christmas and Blanche DuBois. At first, Christmas is an ordinary orphan, taken in and cared for by an orphanage within the community and, later, he is adopted and raised by the McEacherns. Yet, while at the orphanage, he is treated as an outsider owing to his uncertain race – a "rattlesnake" with a "rattle" (*LA* 27) – an unworthy curiosity to be pointed at, despised, humiliated, and eventually rejected in order to confirm the rejecters' sense of order and belonging. Similarly, Blanche DuBois is an English teacher who nurtures and instructs the young members of her community. Soon enough, though, remedy turns to poison: she strays from the community's norms of acceptable behaviour through her sexual indiscretions and is rejected, not only by the community of Belle Reve, but also by the people of Elysian Fields. As Derrida's treatment of the scapegoat figure suggests, in order for the social body – a city, a community, a culture – to define itself, to ensure its assumed purity and integrity and to establish its criteria of belonging and non-belonging, it needs these figures of rejection and alienation. Both Jefferson and Elysian fields cannot do without the "poison" of Joe Christmas and Blanche DuBois as despised cultural cysts which are both part of, and external to, their communities.

Vickery comments on this aspect in relation to *Light in August*: "Collectively, Jefferson is Southern, White, and Elect, qualities which have meaning only within a context which recognizes something or someone as Northern or Black or Damned" ("The Shadow" 26). In other words, white people from Jefferson rely on those whom they can so easily label as "Yankees", "niggers" and the "damned" in order to confirm the significance and integrity of their own racial, political and religious identities. Every "city" needs its "scapegoats". Vickery's categories are closely related to their figurative representatives in the novel: Joanna

Burden, the rejected Yankee of Jefferson with her Northern ideas of racial responsibilities; Joe Christmas, the "nigger murderer" who is hated and feared; and the Reverend Gail Hightower, the "Done Damned" who is rejected by both his church and his community. In many ways, however, Christmas threatens all of three of these categorical divisions at once: he cannot say for certain whether he is black or white; nobody knows where he comes from; "and he seems quite indifferent to salvation or damnation" (Vickery, "The Shadow" 27). Christmas thus embodies a kind of ultimate stranger to the community, an outsider *par excellence* into whom it can "read" all of its racial, religious and political fear and loathing.

Jefferson needs this scapegoat figure as much as Elysian Fields needs Blanche DuBois. If there is no other, it follows that no racial, religious, political or gendered differentiation between self and other is possible, and without this, the clarity, integrity and definition of the "I" are left compromised. When Derrida elaborates on the figure of the scapegoat as an analogy for the *pharmakon* of writing, his description becomes particularly relevant in light of the ways in which Christmas and Blanche are rendered:

> This signifier of little … rolls … this way and that like someone who has lost his way, who does not know where he is going, having strayed from the correct path, the right direction, the rule of rectitude, the norm; but also like someone who has lost his rights, an outlaw, a pervert, a bad seed, a vagrant, an adventurer, a bum. Wandering in the streets, he doesn't even know who he is, what his identity – if he has one – might be, what his name is, what his father's name is. ("Plato's Pharmacy" 143)

The resemblance to the rootless, wandering and rejected figures of both Christmas and Blanche is striking. In a way similar to that in which writing is traditionally considered to be divorced from the logos, that is, from the authoritative father-figure, Christmas is an orphan who does not know the name, or even the race, of his father, and so he too becomes suspect through difference (*LA* 25). Christmas is an illegitimate child, a "bad seed". As an adult, he appears out of nowhere, "as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" (*LA* 87). Similarly, Blanche enters the opening scene of *Streetcar*, carrying all of her belongings in a suitcase – a rejected figure – and feeling as though she is lost in the French Quarter, until someone assures her that she has found the right street.

As comparable wanderers, Joe and Blanche are constantly on the run, fleeing from authority and moving from place to place. On more than one occasion, Christmas is even described as a homeless "tramp" (*LA* 25), which is close to Derrida's "vagrant" and "adventurer, a bum"

("Plato's Pharmacy" 143). Christmas and Blanche are both "outlaws" and "perverts" in the eyes of their communities – Christmas in terms of his perceived mixed race and his sexual relationship with Ms Burden, Blanche in terms of her sexual exploitation of a young pupil at a school in Belle Reve and her reputation in a nearby military camp. Most importantly, both figures are desperately searching for a sense of stability and constancy of self within their communities. The over-determined roles which are then thrust upon Joe Christmas by the Jefferson community are the threefold myth-laden labels of the usual racial texts: "nigger", pervert and damned. Joe rejects the over-determination of these communal roles outright and refuses to be "placed". Blanche, on the other hand, assumes and performs the role of the fragile Southern Belle in defiance of Stanley's chauvinistic rule of law. The results of both strategies are, however, dismal.

Names: Joe Christmas

It is important that Derrida's wanderer is nameless, "[u]prooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal" and "can be picked up by both the competent and the incompetent", the latter being able to "inflict all manner of impertinence on it" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 144). Both the names Joe Christmas and Blanche DuBois reflect aspects of this vulnerable namelessness and blankness. As a first name, Joe is common, in fact, the name could belong to almost anyone and is often used to refer to someone in general, a "Joe Public", a nameless individual.[92] But given Joe's undetermined race – which society simply assumes is black – the traditions, habits and meanings of racialized Southern name-calling, and their related anxieties, are also brought firmly into play.

In a chapter dedicated to this topic – entitled "'What's in a Name?': Some Meanings of Blackness"– Henry Louis Gates, Jr. recalls a passage from Trey Ellis' "Remember My Name", in which the latter offers an "extended, italicized list of bynames" and slurs given to black citizens by white Southerners during the last century. This occurred particularly if the name of the black individual could not be remembered or was considered unimportant (131). One of the bynames on this list is "George", which is perhaps as common a name as "Joe".

[92] Christmas' right-hand man, Lucas Burch, also chooses Joe as his false first name, and becomes Joe Brown in an attempt at remaining nameless and unobtrusive (*LA* 42). This surname, Brown, is equally common in the English speaking world and may refer to multiple individuals.

Gates then recalls an incident from his own childhood during which his father was called "George" by a white man who was known to them both at the time and whom Gates' father greeted politely as "Mr Wilson". When the boy asked about the puzzling use of "George" in the greeting, his father simply responded, "He calls all coloured people George" (Gates 133). Gates' analysis of this generalizing habit, and his disappointment at his father's passive acceptance of it, is poignant: "Even then, that early, I knew when I was in the presence of 'one of those things', one of those things that provided a glimpse, through a rent curtain, at another world that we could not affect but that affected us" (133). Through his use of generalized naming, Mr Wilson had interpellated Gates' father into a role of subservience someone who deserves no such individualizing feature as a name, a Joe Public, a nameless wanderer. What is worse than this – in Gates' estimation – is that his father responded to the calling as though he uncritically acquiesced in the reduction of his selfhood.

Both the names "George" and "Joe" thus function as a kind of empty signifier to which any meaning, any identity, may be attached. This is consonant with the pattern that is repeated throughout Christmas' life, a pattern in which different people attempt to thrust a particular prefigured identity onto this indeterminate figure and thus to write their own significance onto Joe's "white sheet" of selfhood. First, his grandfather, Old Doc Hines, figures Joe as a black child despite his uncertain race. Then his stepfather, McEachern, attempts to make Joe into a religious puritan. Finally, Joanna Burden also attempts to thrust a range of sexual, political and religious "selves" onto him before he murders her in cold blood. In contrast to the name Joe, the surname, Christmas, is extremely uncommon. Again, this reflects Joe's lack of identity which his coworkers attempt to put down to racial otherness and idiosyncrasy: "'Is he a foreigner?' 'Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?' the foreman said. 'I never heard of nobody a-tall named it,' the other said" (*LA* 26). The name Joe, short for Joseph, is first given to the boy as a joke when he is left on the orphanage's doorstep by old Doc Hines around the time of Christmas (*LA* 289). Christian symbolism begins to play a role, although Joseph is the name of Jesus' human, but not biological, father. Like Christmas, Christ is not a surname – it is an honorific title meaning the "anointed". Ironically, though, there is no honour in the non-surname Christmas. Nevertheless, the loose association of the proper nouns Joe, Joseph, Jesus, Christ and Christmas is enough to draw the symbolism of the saviour into play.

This symbolic motif is borne out by the notion that similarities between the figures of Jesus Christ and Joe Christmas relate to more than merely the shared initials, J.C. Lewis Leary elaborates:

> Joe Christmas was born of an unwed mother [which, one could argue, makes both men social and communal "outsiders"]. ... When as a small boy [Joe] first arrives at his foster parents' home, Mrs. McEachern ceremoniously washes his feet. When ... he clears the Negro church of its frightened congregation, Faulkner makes it plain that this happens on a Tuesday, the day of the Holy Week on which Jesus cleansed the temple. Two days later, on the day of the Last Supper, Joe enters a Negro cabin where a meal mysteriously appears before him, but he eats alone, for he has no disciples, except for the Judas whose name is either Joe Brown or Lucas Burch, and who has already betrayed him. (88-89)

Given these similarities, it could be argued that Christmas dies as a kind of ironic saviour for an intensely racialized community in a way that is comparable to Jesus' death, which is believed to have cleansed the sins of all humanity.

The rendering of Joe as a secularized Jesus-figure is not without Faulkner's usual sense of irony, though.[93] In Jefferson, the "sins" of the community revolve around the hatred for, and eventual murder of, two members of the Burden family and the subsequent rejection of Joanna Burden for her humane treatment of black people. By murdering her, Joe does the community's dirty work. He removes the "evil" that has existed for many years within its midst – this "cultural cyst" which served as a constant reminder of the community's racial "sins". Joe literally renders this evil external, he cuts it out of the social body by slitting Joanna's throat grotesquely with his razor blade. In this way, Joe enacts the ambiguity of the *pharmakon* – he is both remedy and poison, bringer of both death to Joanna and salvation for the community. But for this act of salvation – ironically, it is murder and not self-sacrificial crucifixion – Joe also becomes the insider-outcast, the *pharmakos* who is hated, feared and, eventually, killed by the very same community that he has helped to restore to integrity and to cleanse of "sin".

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[93] Some critics, such as Richard Chase, view the use of Christian allusions in the rendering of Christmas as a weakness in the novel, an "artificial, inorganic" and even "arty" technique on the part of Faulkner (22). In my opinion, though, such criticism falls into the trap of over-interpreting the text's ironic allusions into a rigid and totalizing framework, onto which the entirety of Joe's identity it then shackled. When this reductive strategy fails, which it inevitably does, the deficiencies are attributed more to Faulkner's fanciful artifice than to the reader's inability to grasp the important value and function of indeterminacy, ambiguity and contradiction in his work.

Names: Blanche du Bois

The motif of vulnerable "blankness" of identity is traceable also in the name Blanche DuBois.[94] Here, the suggestion of whiteness relates to ironic notions of sexual purity and chastity, and is emphasized by Blanche's habit of preferring white clothes. Even her fox furs, we learn, are "[b]ushy" and "snow-white" (*SND* 2. 485). Blanche's whiteness further supports her resemblance to a "delicate" moth (*SND* 1. 471), and connects her identity to the "white columns" of Belle Reve rather than the colourful, "raffish charm" of the French Quarter (*SND* 1. 469). The connection of whiteness to purity is established when Blanche claims to have been born under the sign of the Virgin. This motif is borne out when, after her eventual sexual assault by Stanley, she dons a robe that is Della Robia blue, the colour of the Virgin Mary's mantle (*SND* 11. 558). This image is further strengthened by the appearance of the Kowalskis' baby boy, who is carried onstage by Eunice. Christian symbolism is thus, again, at play but – as with Faulkner – it is employed with a degree of irony and inversion. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is believed to have conceived immaculately – that is, as an act of God – but there is nothing divine about Blanche's alleged sexual promiscuity or, later, the rape perpetrated by Stanley. Blanche is an earthy, ironic version of Mary, in the same way as Joe Christmas, who is also conceived "in sin", is an inversion of Jesus.

Yet, at a psychological rather than physical level, Blanche does seem to retain a degree of unspoilt innocence despite a tarnished reputation. Her delicate vulnerability, her childlike, and perhaps delusional, trust in the goodness and mercy of others is what lends the final moments of the play their powerful and touching pathos. In spite of all the horrors and abuse by men that Blanche has had to suffer, the doctor – significantly, yet another man – needs only to "remove his hat" and speak "*gentl[y] and reassuring[ly]*" to her to win her complete trust (*SND* 11. 563). Blanche clings to his arm and even *"allows him to lead her as if she were blind"* (*SND* 11. 564). The terrible irony is that the new man she so plainly and easily takes into her confidence is, once again, not leading her off to a life of shared romantic bliss, but to the loneliness and isolation of an insane asylum.

The surname DuBois, according to Blanche, means "woods" and together with "Blanche", the name becomes "white woods. Like an orchard in spring!" (*SND* 3. 499) The irony of this is

[94] Both the name and surname are French and, for this reason, Blanche enjoys reminding everyone that she and Stella are descendants of the French Huguenots in order to emphasize her refined heritage (*SND* 3. 499).

overt: if Blanche is an orchard, she is "past her spring, and the purity of Blanche-white is undermined by the thicket of DuBois-woods" (Cohn 46).[95] In addition to these aspects, "white" may also relate to an uncertainty of self which Blanche tries desperately to cover with layers of pretense. In some ways, Blanche – like Joe – is another white sheet of paper, a *tabula rasa*, upon which anyone may write his or her notion of identity. In this way, Blanche embodies Derrida's "almost insignificant signifier", which is "at everyone's disposal" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 144). Stanley Kowalski takes advantage of this exposed vulnerability and forces her violently to conform to his dominating will.

Elaborating on this point – Blanche as blank paper – Philip Kolin offers a perceptive and relevant reading of the play in an article entitled "'It's only a paper moon': The Paper Ontologies in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*". Kolin traces the appearance of paper as recurring motif in the play and as a textual marker connected not only with Blanche, but also with Stanley. Blanche first appears on stage carrying a slip of paper, she scribbles a letter on a Kleenex, keeps a notebook, decorates the apartment with a paper lantern and has a whole collection of legal documents pertaining to her loss of the family property. "Blanche", writes Kolin, "encapsulates herself in paper, her epistemology is lined in paper" (454). Even from a career perspective, "[s]he is deeply invested in the paper economy of the arts, teaching the sacred texts of a 'literary heritage', quoting poetry, and preaching the sanctity (and snobbery) of literacy" (Kolin 454). What Kolin's reading suggests, although it is not coherently theorized from a postructuralist perspective, is that the significance of paper lies not in the material itself, but rather in its symbolic representation of textuality in relation to Blanche.

This textuality becomes particularly evident in light of the ways in which Stanley Kowalski engages with Blanche's papers, in other words, how he interprets her scripts in relation to her persona and her history and, eventually, "reads" her in a reductive way.[96] This notion

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[95] Ruby Cohn also suggests that DuBois is an anglicized version of DuBoys which relates to Blanche's lust for young men (46). This allusion might be in danger of over-emphasizing the sexual aspect of Blanche's struggle for selfhood. Underlying her "promiscuity" is a more deep-seated desire for acceptance by others, even strangers.

[96] Anca Vlasopolos also writes memorably on this point:

> *A Streetcar Named Desire* is made up of acts of "reading," of interpretations of texts that range from documents and inscriptions – the Belle Reve papers and the words on Mitch's cigarette case – to pictures and people. As they contest each other's interpretive authority, Blanche and Stanley resort to similar emotional and linguistic strategies in order to gain ascendancy. ... Meaning both 'white' and

resonates clearly with Geertz and Derrida: Blanche is surrounded by her paper texts, she is caught within the webs of their signification which are open to interpretation by the community that surrounds her and, particularly, by Stanley as its dominating representative. Eventually, Blanche becomes a script. As Kolin notes, Stanley's destructive power lies in his approach to paper "from a completely different registry" than Blanche's: "While Blanche escapes [or, at least attempts to escape] the cruel realities of documentation, Stanley revels in the evidentiary" (454). In other words, Blanche uses paper to obscure, to conceal, to beautify and to escape; Stanley uses paper to reveal, to expose and, eventually, to humiliate. Kolin puts it poetically: "Blanche fantasizes through paper magic; Stanley constructs paper empires and courts to legitimize the polity. He legislates a witch hunt against Blanche's paper ontologies" and, I would add, uses her textuality against her in the fashioning of her downfall (454).

Blanche as gendered outsider

In addition to her paper-based persona, the ways in which Blanche is rendered in the play – that is, her appearance, actions and dialogue – seem to underscore the notion that she embodies an amplified version of Southern femininity. However, I believe this to be neither a misogynistic strategy aimed at ridiculing women in general, nor a cross-dressing of homosexual fears and anxieties frequently attributed to the playwright.[97] Criticism of this kind often loses sight of the view that the rendering of Stanley's territorial brutishness and tendency towards physical violence – almost to the point of becoming a parody of the alpha male – balances evenly with Blanche's inflated dependency and delicate fragility. Neither Stanley nor Blanche should thus be taken as realistic representations, but rather as

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> 'blank,' the name [Blanche] seems predetermined to succumb to inscription, to be made other than itself. (326).

This is, of course, precisely the outcome of the struggle for authorial supremacy when, at the end of the play, Stanley is "given complete authority over his sister-in-law's true colours" (Vlasopolos 326).

[97] Williams' female characterizations, combined with knowledge of the dramatist's overt homosexuality, have often led to feminist critical speculation that "the playwright venomously travesties female representation for the male homosexuality he cannot stage openly" (Schiavi 107). This suspicion of what James Fisher calls "transference" is a contentious matter of which other openly gay playwrights, such as Edward Albee, have also been accused (13). Although there are many examples of this kind of critique of Williams' work, Schiavi makes particular mention of Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape*, in which she refers to Williams' female characters as "hothouse, hot-blooded 'earthmothers' and drag queens ... baroquely transvestized homosexual fantasies. By no stretch can they be called 'real' women ..." (qtd. in Schiavi 119, Note 1). Albee himself is reported to have refuted strongly the notion of transference when he said: "Tennessee never did that, and I can't think of any self-respecting worthwhile writer who would do that sort of thing. It's beneath contempt to suggest it, and it's beneath contempt to do it" (qtd. in Fisher 13).

fictionalized and exaggerated versions of a man and woman, thus serving to underline the destructive polarity of inter-sexual differences prevalent in *Streetcar's* French Quarter.

As we have seen in Singal's descriptions of the aristocratic lady of the plantation, the role of the Southern Belle is inscribed with a set of gender-based values and norms of behaviour, which are intensified in the figure of Blanche. To offset the cultural master narrative of gallantry and gentility associated with the aristocratic Southern man – the reverse of the figure of Stanley – women were figured as chaste and fragile, yet physically and socially alluring, in what must have been a confusing paradox for both genders. This socio-cultural internalizing of gender texts is echoed in Blanche's belief in the "law" that "the lady must entertain the gentleman" (*SND* 6. 521) and that a "cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life – immeasurably!" (*SND* 10. 551). Before arriving at Elysian Fields, Blanche was a "cultivated" English teacher, and she still makes constant literary references to "stabilize her in disorienting surroundings" (Bradley 56). However, while her breeding and education may have been functional in the conservative Belle Reve, emphasizing this background makes her seem out of place in Elysian Fields, particularly in opposition to Stanley. Blanche is viewed by the inhabitants of the French Quarter as frivolous and pretentious, a woman who needs to be brought down to the level of the "real" world. Instead of adjusting her behaviour and adapting to this hostile environment, Blanche reacts in the opposite way. She exaggerates her refinement and Southern femininity in the presence of the uncouth Stanley, as though to drive home the point that she does not belong to his world and so widening the cultural chasm that gapes between them.

In tandem with this pointed amplification, external appearances are paramount for Blanche. When we meet her for the first time, she is "daintily dressed ... as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district" and not searching for her sister in the dirty streets of the French Quarter (*SND* 1. 471). Once in the flat, she constantly occupies the bathroom, "soaking" in the "hot tub" and fretting in front of the mirror (*SND* 2. 483). Her only possession is a suitcase full of clothes – these look expensive, yet on closer inspection, they appear to be mostly cheap imitations, costumes which show an aspect of decay (*SND* 10 548; 10. 550). The notion that Blanche's clothes are more reminiscent of stage costumes than of ordinary garments, enhances the performative aspects of her selfhood. Blanche stages herself in relation to the cultural-historical narrative of the Southern Belle. She performs this fictional "role" as she re-imagines it, and thus re-writes and transforms the repeatable "text"

of the mythical plantation lady by adding her own thread of meaning; the aim is to win male attention and approval.

Blanche needs the constant reassurance of others about the way she "looks", which shows that her insecurity of self is more deeply rooted than superficial vanity. The extent of this insecurity comes to the fore in the perception that her interaction with others is often based on a strategy of lies and manipulation. She lies about how much she drinks (*SND* 1. 475), about the circumstances under which she left the school where she taught (*SND* 1. 475), about being younger than Stella (*SND* 3. 499), and about her "old-fashioned ideals" of purity and chastity (*SND* 9. 545). On a date with Mitch, she pretends to be in Paris, rather than New Orleans (*SND* 6. 523), and she concocts a story about being invited on a Caribbean cruise with an "old admirer" to avoid Stanley's uncomfortable questions about her latest dress (*SND* 10. 549).

Blanche lies constantly, and particularly during her interactions with Stanley. She feels deeply uncertain of herself in relation to this unrefined male, who is clearly different from any of the typical Southern gentlemen she is used to, and who appear to have treated her with unquestioning adoration and respect. With Stanley, her fictions become almost comically ironic. She says her motto in life is to "be comfortable" (*SND* 1. 482), that she likes "artists" (metaphorically implying men) who "paint in bold colors" (*SND* 2. 488), and that she is "adaptable – to circumstances" (*SND* 3. 499). However, the events of the play soon reveal that all these claims are untrue. Blanche is distinctly uncomfortable in the Kowalski apartment and jumps at every sudden sound or movement. Her own monochromatic dress code clashes, both literally and symbolically, with the bold colours of Stanley's bowling shirts and silk pajamas, and Stella constantly feels its necessary to keeping her nervous sister away from the card-playing, drinking men. This proves that Blanche is anything but adaptable to circumstances. It is important, though, that Blanche believes herself to be quite truthful. When Mitch accuses her of lying to him, she responds: "Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart ..." (*SND* 9. 546). This is a crucial distinction which supports the idea that Blanche's identity consists largely of fantasies. Her selfhood has become overly fictionalized, overly fashioned and self-referential, since there is nobody beside herself to substantiate her stories and claims. Not even the jewels or furs in her suitcase are "real". In Foucault's terms, Blanche's lack of self-knowledge increases throughout the play, as Stanley continues his cruel, paper-based campaign of "truth" against her. But it is his truth, thrust upon her. Consequently, her

selfhood seems more and more unfounded and insubstantial; it grows flimsy like a paper moon.

The desperation of Blanche's situation is thus heightened by Stanley's inability to understand or empathize with her. In his eyes, Blanche's behaviour simply plays into a sexist cliché: that of the deceitful, beautiful woman who manipulates and cheats men in order to have her own way. This is, of course, a gross over-simplification of Blanche's strategy on his part. Stanley does not seem to fathom the way in which she uses her exaggerations and pretentions not only to achieve what she wants, but also to conceal an inherent vulnerability. Her lies are as much a defense mechanism as a technique of manipulation. When she first arrives at the apartment, Blanche exploits Stella's guilty conscience by subtly accusing her of abandoning her with the "burden" of the family estate (*SND* 1. 479). But she does this not only because she is destitute and needs a place to live, but also because she feels guilty about her own inability to prevent the loss of the property. Later, when Blanche considers Mitch as a potential husband, she says that she needs to "*deceive*" him in order to make him "want" her (*SND* 5. 517). Superficially, Blanche seeks to conceal her real age from him because she believes that Mitch – like all men, in her view – needs to be kept interested in an older woman. But there is more to this than manipulation. Besides her age, Blanche does not believe herself to be interesting enough to win and hold a man's interest. Thus, she feels that she needs to elaborate on her persona through a host of little white lies and pretenses in order to "put out", to enhance herself in the company of men so that they will notice and respect her.

Joe Christmas as racial outsider

As is the case with Blanche, from the moment we meet Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, everything about him suggests an aspect of difference and strangeness. He immediately seems not to fit into his social environment, and for the workers at the saw mill he is impossible to place. At first, Joe is referred to simply as a "stranger" (*LA* 25, 26) – even after his co-workers have learnt his name (*LA* 27). Alternatively, he is called a "foreigner" (*LA* 27) or "rootless" and a "hobo" (*LA* 25). His skin is neither white nor black, but the colour of "parchment" (*LA* 28). Even the way he works reflects a "silent and unflagging savageness", which is unusual for those around him (*LA* 32). When he responds after being addressed, it is as though he speaks "a different language" from those who have spoken to him (*LA* 32); and

his voice "ain't pleasant, ain't mad either" (*LA* 61). All these qualities underscore Christmas' otherness, which is rooted in an indeterminacy of race. This is both unfamiliar to, and uncomfortable for, the Jefferson community, and therein lies the great central irony of the novel: Christmas' exact racial heritage remains indefinite, despite the community's furious interpellation of him as "nigger murderer". At no point is it made explicit that Joe had a black parent. There is speculation that Christmas' father may even have been Mexican (*LA* 281). It is Christmas' grandfather, old Doc Hines, who first states that Christmas was fathered by a black man. The only reason for his conviction is that this is what Hines chooses to believe, owing to his religious fanaticism.

Faulkner notes of men of such extreme religious views that they "usually have just as firmly fixed convictions about the mechanics, the theatring *(sic)* of evil as about those of good" (*LA* 152). In Hines' view, his daughter's unwanted pregnancy is not only a personal affront to his God-given patriarchal authority, but also an unforgiveable sin. To use Derrida's terms, Hines needs a "scapegoat" on whom to blame his personal and religious affront, and his grandson presents a crude opportunity for such an expression. Vickery writes that "[b]y calling [Millie's] lover a 'nigger,' [Hines] can transform a commonplace seduction into the horror of miscegenation" – in his view, an abomination in the eyes of God and a convenient excuse for the mistreatment of his daughter and her newborn son ("The Shadow" 28). Hines' firm belief that Christmas is evil incarnate, and his subsequent obsessive observation of his grandson at the orphanage, condemn Christmas to a life of rootlessness, suffering and rejection as a racial other (*LA* 98). The narrator tells us that a child with "more vocabulary" may have observed: "*That is why I am different from the others: because he [Hines] is watching me all the time*" (*LA* 105). Christmas is thus "born into a myth created for him by others", which is comparable to the way in which Blanche is interpellated into the cultural master text of Southern femininity (Vickery, "The Shadow" 28).

As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear that Joe's uncertainty of self is by no means purely racial. Through a series of life stages dramatized in the novel, racial indeterminacy becomes inextricably entangled with questions of sexuality and religion. This confluence in Joe reflects the nexus of broader narratives around racial differences in the deep South. Joe's story thus serves as an effective interrogation of these bipolar oppositions. While Christmas' exact racial heritage remains unknown, he comes to represent, in the collective consciousness of the community, a disturbing and turbulent meeting point of these

polarities. Peters comments, for example, that the figure of the mulatto – a role which Jefferson imposes on Christmas – "symbolizes the fear of black being touching white being" or, to use the language of the novel, of "white blood" mixing with "black blood" (113). This relates to "a fear of defilement of a presumed European or white purity", which forms "the essence of the dread of miscegenation ..." (Peters 113). Although not of a racial nature, Blanche's fear is similar: the dread of allowing her pure, aristocratic blood to "mix" with that of Elysian Fields and the New South. Again, cultural and racial hybridisation is seen conservatively as a process of defilement and decay, and not as opportunity, progress and inevitable change.

Christmas' racial otherness is imprinted in the initial and most impressionable phases of his childhood at the orphanage. He remembers the first instances of being called a "nigger" by the other children in the playground. It is never made explicit how this name-calling comes about, but it is conceivable that Old Doc Hines' conviction about Joe's parentage had at least some part to play. It is important that the chapter describing Joe's childhood opens with: "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" (*LA* 91). Peters' observation is apt: "Joe is an example of how human beings can become pathetically attached to memories …" – and I would add, particularly to traumatic recollections (126). In this way – as we have seen also in *The Glass Menagerie*, in relation to Tom's painful recollections – the memory of trauma often becomes a powerful, elaborated version of that experience, as memory tends to exaggerate and distort. Peters adds that "[e]ven when memories become destructive" – as Christmas' memories clearly have – "humans are often reluctant to relinquish them owing to the tragic human dilemma that identity is bound up with memories: to relinquish memories is to relinquish identity, to relinquish identity is to plunge into a void" (126). This assertion also calls to mind Blanche's self-destructive attachment to the recollections of the fall of Belle Reve. Her fictionalized memory, she feels, is integral and essential to who she is because, without it, she feels she will "plunge" into the abyss that is Elysian Fields and, in the process, lose herself. Ironically, these recollections keep her from integrating into the community by reinforcing her state of alienation and estrangement.

In a similar way, Christmas keeps returning to the trauma of his early childhood, remembering being called a "nigger" not only by the other children in the playground, but also by the orphanage dietician. An inability or unwillingness – sometimes the two are not

clearly distinguishable – to let go of the past is thus evident in both Christmas and Blanche. Theoretically speaking, one could relate this obsessive return to an earlier trauma to what Derrida would regard as a false "origin": an event that is self-deludingly believed to be a moment of initiation, the start of a downfall, or the beginning of the end. But on closer analysis, even such negative "origins" appear to be less substantial and essential than the remembering subject believes them to be. For this reason, both Joe's playground memories and Blanche's Belle Reve recollections are, significantly, not of a single and unequivocally dramatized event, but appear to be a confluence of various unfortunate circumstances and occurrences into which the "text" of original trauma is read after the fact. The value of originality thus seems always to be read into a moment of beginning, that is, specified only after the trauma and suffering have been experienced and when the subject subsequently attempts to reach its believed "roots".

In this way, Joe believes that it is through his childhood encounter with the dietician that the race-sex connection is forged for the first time. At the age of five, he sneaks into the school dietician's bedroom to steal and eat her pink toothpaste. When she returns unexpectedly, Joe hides behind a curtain, and overhears the dietician having sexual intercourse with an intern. Having overindulged in the sweet toothpaste, Joe begins to vomit, and is discovered in his hiding place, after which the shocked dietician calls him a "little nigger bastard" (*LA* 94). The traumatizing power of this childhood experience is illustrated by the awareness that, after this, Joe is never again able to disentangle his racial otherness from complicating feelings of sexual contamination, female treachery and guilt. This becomes a lifelong revulsion at the acts of eating and sex, as well as the linking of negative connotations, such as falsehood and betrayal, to women.[98] Bleikasten makes the point succinctly: "To eat, for Christmas, is to submit to the needs of the body and to acknowledge dependency on women, and indeed, almost all the women encountered by him are food providers, beginning with the dietician at the orphanage, the prototype of all the others …" (*Ink* 292). The suspicion of women is settled in Joe's mind when, tortured by her own guilty conscience, the dietician tries to bribe Joe to keep quiet about what he has seen. But Joe misinterprets this as an offer of money to buy more of the nauseating toothpaste, the very substance which had made him ill in the first

[98] The fact that Joe eats toothpaste, rather than a foodstuff meant for nourishment is, doubly ironic. Toothpaste is generally regarded as a substance which assists in the cleansing of the body, yet Joe's use of it here – given the sexually charged context of the episode – leaves the innocence of the child tainted and dirtied. Furthermore, eating is usually associated with the strengthening of the body, but this particular eating episode leaves Joe psychologically weakened for life.

place. Faulkner's description of the poor boy's repugnance is apt in capturing the conflation of the money and the toothpaste, as well as his sense of imminent entrapment: "Looking at the dollar, he seemed to see ranked tubes of toothpaste like corded wood, endless and terrifying; his whole being coiled in a rich and passionate revulsion. 'I don't want no more,' he said. 'I don't never want no more,' he thought." (*LA* 95-96). But, once again, even this moment of perceived "original" trauma needs the affirmation of events later and throughout Joe's life to gain the power and significance of being the "first".

The expanding progression of imposed associations in Joe's mind deserves further attention. Food is equated with sex, which in turn becomes confused with race, guilt and money: a dangerous nexus of entangled connotations from which he is unable to escape. These associations are played out with disturbing regularity during every stage of Joe's development – from childhood to adulthood – and, particularly, in all of his encounters with women. But, as Foucault and Hall have shown, the individual's response to familial and communal influences plays an equally important part in the shaping of the self. Christmas' reaction to how others view and treat him, thus how he views himself, is equally integral to his process of self-fashioning. In this light, the remembered events of his childhood lead the young Christmas to believe that he is different, long before he knows anything about his family history – a belief that is so firmly entrenched that it never changes, no matter what knowledge comes to light later.

The black gardener's words at the orphanage thus prefigure Christmas' life-long struggle: "'You are worse than [a nigger]. You don't know what you are. And more than that, you wont (*sic*) never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont (*sic*) never know,' ..." (*LA* 288). The emphasis on knowing is important, particularly in light of the notion that, as Foucault argues, "care of the self" begins with "knowing the self". If Christmas has not even the most rudimentary knowledge of self in the community's eyes – that is, knowing whether he is black or white – there is no hope of ever fashioning a coherent sense of self while he is growing up. Instead, what Joe clings to are these remembrances of doubt and uncertainty. Ironically, then, Joe's only knowledge of self consists of memories of not knowing. This leads to his searching, groping uncertainty which he – and the gardener acts as a prophet here – will carry with him all through his life. But a lack of self-knowing has wider, ethical implications: it leads to a compromised ability to care for others. One lacks the ability to negotiate a personal identity among powerful social influences and so becomes a perpetual victim of

instances of domination: a "blank page", says Derrida, on whom the community is free to "write" its own notions of self. Like Blanche, Joe is vulnerable. He is unable to fashion a self with any conviction and can react to instances of domination only with blind and inarticulate violence.

As if further to complicate Joe's early struggle with racial otherness, his adolescence in the strictly Puritan household of the McEacherns – the second phase of his life – adds another confusing, value-laden influence into the mix: that of religion and related notions of evil and sin. Again, sex plays a role, while race is temporarily placed in the background. This is perhaps primarily because the McEacherns are never informed about Joe's questionable parentage, which means that the question of his race never arises. The focus on religion is indicated by Joe's interim adoption of the surname McEachern: Joe's stepfather imposes this name on him after he rejects Joe's surname, Christmas, as "heathenish" and a "[s]acrilege" (*LA* 110). The time spent with the McEacherns fosters within Joe a confusing dichotomy: on the one hand, it causes him to "crave" the "order and predictability" of McEachern's enforced pattern of religious transgression and punishment; on the other hand, it also "strengthens his resolve to reject any identity imposed on him by outside forces" (Singal 173) – a rejection which he repeats throughout his life. For this reason, it is significant that Joe reclaims his "original" name when he begins to distance himself deliberately from his stepfather's authority. He introduces himself to his first girlfriend – the prostitute, Bobbie – as follows: "'It's not McEachern,' he said. 'It's Christmas'" (*LA* 139). Here it is as though Joe wishes to re-embrace a remembered difference, rooted in childhood, which flies in the face of the over-determining influence of McEachern's strict puritan values. But, again, this "originality" remains relational: although Joe invests the name with meaning and value, the name itself remains without any meaningful essence.

It is important to notice, then, that Joe views the two surnames, Christmas and McEachern, as a polarity that requires a determined choice of either the one extreme or the other. The one side of Joe's binary construction is the McEachern identity which implies connotations of religious piety, purity and the certainty of labour, reward, crime and punishment. At the opposite end is the Joe Christmas of his childhood, with the implications of uncertainty, alienation and freedom from imposed authority. This rigid juxtaposition is severely limiting and self-destructive, as Joe seems unable to embrace the play of *différance* that is possible in his notions of selfhood, that is, to realise the power in viewing himself as neither purely Joe

McEachern, nor purely Joe Christmas, but as a hybrid self-creation which integrates aspects of both personae. This is borne out when Christmas later admits the uncertainty of his race to Bobbie in an uncharacteristically self-revealing moment. He confesses: "'I think I got some nigger blood in me.' ... 'I don't know. I believe I have,'" (*LA* 148). Again, the lack of knowing is replaced by the choice of uncertainty and indeterminacy, by the reading into his own selfhood of a preconceived racial-cultural text.

Joe's rebellion against the strictures imposed by his stepfather plays out against a process of sexual discovery and a related deepening revulsion at the female.[99] This growing disgust is compounded by his dysfunctional relationship with his stepmother, the oppressed Mrs McEachern, who attempts to buy Joe's trust and respect with food. This she provides secretly and against the will of McEachern. But these insipid attempts only strengthen Joe's distrust of women, which began with his childhood encounter with the dietician. Joe resents Mrs McEachern's covert assistance more than he does Mr. McEachern's demands and punishments: "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" *(LA* 128). Notions of race are re-introduced by Joe's first sexual encounter during this period. In the darkness of a sawmill, the "womanshenegro" smell of the black prostitute reminds Joe not only of her black otherness – a certainty of race which he lacks – but also of the dark, soft treachery of women (*LA* 119). As Singal argues, the "dichotomized moral sense" that was so coldly and uncompromisingly instilled in him by his stepfather, causes him to see the woman as "the abyss itself, 'a black well' of sinful female sensuality that can only lead to terrible retribution …" (174). Underpinning this sexist view is the mythical-cultural association of blackness, sexuality and evil, to which Joe reacts with blind violence: he kicks and hits the prostitute without understanding the reasons for his attack.

The second phase of Joe's development draws to a dramatic close with a final act of defiance against McEachern's patriarchal authority. Joe defends himself against his stepfather's attack in the local dance hall in order to claim his freedom. Shortly after this, though, another

[99]Although Christmas' ever-deepening revulsion at women is overtly portrayed in the novel, I believe it is misrepresenting the matter to refer to this as Joe's "latent homosexuality" (Brooks, *Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 57). While it may be true that Joanna Burden's physical appearance is initially described as somewhat masculine, there is no evidence in the novel to support the notion that Christmas' distrust of, and even distaste for, women necessarily coincides with a sexual attraction to men. Observations such as these are at risk of perpetuating the homophobic myth that homosexuality is necessarily to be equated with misogyny.

moment of female betrayal on the grounds of his race is dramatised, compounding the effect of his first rejection by the dietician. Blaming Joe for endangering her position in town through his act of violence, Bobbie – the prostitute girlfriend – shouts: "'Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!'" (*LA* 164). This accusation is ironic in revealing the girl's bigotry: if Bobbie consciously and deliberately treated Christmas "like a white man", it proves that she never thought of him as white. Instead, she conceived of Joe in racial terms, as a curiosity who needed to be handled in a "normal" way in spite of his inherent racial otherness. After this key incident, which launches the third phase of Christmas' development, Joe begins to react with even more contempt and arrogance against all instances of racial interpellation which in his mind are closely associated with sex and the role of the female.

In the third, wandering phase of his life, it is as though Joe constantly and deliberately provokes the community to define him, that is, to position him within a particular racial mould against which he can then rebel. When a black stranger in the street calls him a "white man" and addresses him as "cap'm", Christmas draws a blade (*LA* 90). Joe even recognises the irony of his self-contradictory behaviour: "... how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought the negro who called him white" (*LA* 170). But Joe's perspective on his dilemma never goes beyond this manner of superficial and ironic observation. It is as though Joe remains opaque to himself, a perpetual outsider coldly observing his own contradictions and flaring rage without any real insight. The ambiguity in Joe's self-loathing thus lies in the notion that he oscillates between affirming and abhorring his indeterminacy and uncertainty.

This dichotomy is demonstrated effectively in Joe's initial exploitation of the community's tendency towards racist determination to suit his own needs. When he does not have enough money to pay the prostitutes he has slept with, he tells them that he is a negro (*LA* 169). One assumes that this fills the white women of the Deep South with such shock and disgust that they flee from him without demanding payment. These girls obviously conform to the racial master narrative of the South, that of the Negro's symbolizing evil, defilement and sin. This racist reaction suits Joe, and he repeatedly employs this shock strategy with relative success until, one day, a white girl from slightly further afield does not seem to care whether he is black or white, and insists on the usual remuneration for her favours. In effect, she turns the tables on Joe by revealing his indeterminacy to be a weak and powerless weapon outside of

the Southern region. Predictably, Christmas almost kills her (*LA* 169). Realizing now that his exploitative strategy of inducing racial fear for personal gain has failed, he reverts to the attitude of the community in loathing all things indeterminate. So overwhelming is Joe's obsession with his racial uncertainty, that he cannot tolerate even the possibility of another's indifference to it.

Throughout the novel, Christmas is a subversive agent, the embodiment of a direct challenge to any social imperative towards conformity, who refuses outright any classification into the categories of the established Southern social order. Most importantly, Joe does not seem to rebel against either whiteness or blackness in themselves, but against any kind racial or cultural determination. Joe despises being interpellated, no matter to which side of the black-white binary he is called. He resists the notion of being figured as an other, of being included in, or excluded by, any kind of grouping. And yet, simultaneously, he is unable to fashion an identity that is entirely self-created and independent of the community's fixities.

Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois

In both *Light in August* and *Streetcar*, two key figures appear to dramatize a high concentration of these communal attitudes, norms and values, which stand in opposition to Joe Christmas and Blanche DuBois' processes of self-fashioning. These figures thus come to serve as focal points for the tensions which the alienated individuals experience between themselves and the community. In this way, they play a significant part in driving the two outsiders' search for identity towards a self-destructive climax. Christmas's journey brings him to Joanna Burden; Blanche's trail leads her to Stanley Kowalski. If Blanche DuBois is a moth, Stanley Kowalski is her fatal flame: unquestionably attractive, yet ultimately destructive. Although Blanche sees Stanley as "primitive" (*SND* 1. 488), "*bestial*", the leader of a "party of apes" and a "*brut[e]*" (*SND* 5. 510-11), she cannot help but be attracted to him, even flirting with Stanley outright and stroking his male ego with remarks such as: "My sister has married a man!" (*SND* 2. 488). The contrast between them is, however, undeniable. Blanche aspires to be the refined, unspoilt Virgo, an amplification of the Southern feminine virtues of purity, dependency and fragility, while Stanley is the virile, animalistic and territorial alpha male: a "Capricorn – the Goat" (*SND* 5. 514). Even the hard consonants in the name Stanley Kowalski clash with the soft, rounded vowels of Blanche DuBois (Cohn 49). Sexuality in Blanche is associated with "sentimentality, a decayed yet not wholly

unattractive gentility, ... in Stanley, with a coarse new order, vigorous but rude and boorish" (Heilman 18). Thus, if there were two contrasting people who should never have crossed each other's paths, these are Blanche and Stanley, for they seem to provoke the worst aspects of each other.

The conflict between the figures of Blanche and Stanley is underlined by the different ways in which they employ language. To use Vlasopolos' description: "The two levels of discourse, Blanche's evocative, diffuse, evasive language and Stanley's direct seemingly factual speech, point to a distinction based on gender and class that for a time works in Blanche's favour, but ultimately defeats her" (328). Blanche's speech immediately sets her apart from the easy, mixed vernacular of her new cultural environment – this New Orleans suburb in which many languages mix with English street vernacular. When Stanley rushes her out of the bathroom, Blanche chides him with: "Possess your soul in patience!" to which he responds: "It's not my soul, it's my kidneys I'm worried about!" (*SND* 7. 533). In this remark, there is evidence of Stanley's tendency towards an earthy, acerbic and literal-minded humour which, on the face of it, is constantly lost on Blanche.[100] They simply speak different languages. In fact, Blanche's way of speaking makes her particularly vulnerable to Stanley's brutality by giving him both reason and opportunity to mock her. This is perhaps the strongest reflection of his sense of inadequacy: he is an uneducated man, and the mere presence of a "teacher" constantly reminds him of this deficiency. As Bradley points out, Stanley's contempt for, and derision of, Blanche's language becomes the means by which he attempts to restore to "his household" – the possessive is key here – "its pure language, a language of ecstatic shrieks and violent shouts, a language to which his wife, unlike her sister, seems well accustomed" (56).

Stanley's rambunctious bravado seems outwardly confident, yet – as do Blanche's pretentions to refinement and purity – this hides a particular vulnerability of self. His low self-esteem is evident in his pathetic show of remorse after his violent attack on Stella: "… *he throws back his head like a baying hound and bellows his wife's name ..."* (*SND* 3. 502). Despite his violence towards her, Stanley desperately needs Stella's adoration and submissiveness in order to be himself – he cannot survive without it. Foucault's interpenetrative conception of

[100] This kind of humour is also at play when Stella describes Stanley's friends as a "mixed lot" and Blanche haughtily asks: "Heterogenous – types?". Stella answers: "Oh, yes. Yes, types is right!" (*SND* 1. 477). Stella understands the ambiguity rooted in the common use of this word, "type", as referring to someone of dubious reputation, but the comic connotation is lost on Blanche.

self and other is pertinent: Stanley's lack of a coherently or securely fashioned identity does not allow for the ability properly to love and care for Stella. He brutalizes her instead into a kind of forced adoration – she does not seem to have a choice whether to love him or not. His insecurity of self is revealed most overtly when Stanley accidentally overhears Blanche's ranting about his behaviour towards Stella. Stanley cannot face such criticism: he is sensitive to being described as "common," an "animal", terms which undermine his superiority (*SND* 7. 540). This is also the moment when Stanley makes a malicious decision to avenge himself and crush Blanche in an attempt at re-establishing his dominance (*SND* 4. 511).[101]

The key difference between Stanley and Blanche's otherwise comparable exaggeration of gender roles relates to context and community. Unlike Blanche's interpretation of the typical female from the Old South, Stanley's posed masculinity seems to function well in the community of the Quarter. Here, as we have seen, male violence and dominance is both common and acceptable: it has become a communal text into which Stanley is easily interpellated. Stanley has managed to collect around him a chorus of men – with the possible exception of Mitch[102] - who resemble him in the way in which they think of, and treat, women. Furthermore, Stanley seems well-connected and respected by everyone from appraisers (*SND* 2. 485) to lawyers (*SND* 2. 491). Two of Stanley's favourite social activities are bowling and playing cards, competitive games through which he finds yet more ways of exercising and displaying his domination (*SND* 7. 539). This kind of cultural environment, together with these forms of social interaction, seems to facilitate and encourage Stanley's egotistical self-affirmations, while simultaneously stifling Blanche's. Stanley's identity is thus firmly rooted in, and congruent with, his culture and community; Blanche is culturally and socially displaced.

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[101] Wolter elaborates effectively on the notion of powerplay within the household:

> Stanley knows that he is living in the urban jungle of a competitive society, and as compensation for his subordinate position in the rat race outside, he insists that at least at home he be respected ... When Blanche appears, she severely endangers the stability of his reign, since Stella and Mitch are clearly drifting toward her. Consequently, Stanley begins an unscrupulous campaign to retain his dominance in the house, a battle for positions which is symbolically fought over the occupation of the bathroom ... (33)

[102] Owing to Mitch's imposing physical size, he seems to be far more stable and secure in his masculinity than Stanley. This serves to dramatize the questionable value system of Elysian Fields: the larger the size of the male, the more secure and unchallenged is his position. If a challenge is posed, the understanding is that it will be countered with brute strength. For this reason, Mitch has no qualms about taking care of his mother or treating Blanche with unusual respect and adoration. He is the largest among the males and fears no humiliation.

In the final scene, just before Blanche is removed from the apartment by the doctor and a matron, the precariousness of her self-fashioning is again emphasized through the important symbol of paper. Blanche runs back into the apartment as if she has left something behind, when Stanley remarks:

> You left nothing here but spilt talcum powder and old empty perfume bottles – unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you. You want the lantern? *(He crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb, and extends it towards her. She cries out as if the lantern was herself. ...)* (*SND* 11. 562)

Stanley thus rips away the flimsy decoration which Blanche herself has placed over the naked bulb. Earlier, Blanche had remarked to Stella: "And you've got to have your existence admitted by someone, if you're going to have someone's protection. And so soft people have got to – shimmer and glow – put a – paper lantern over the light ..." (*SND* 5. 515). The implication is that Blanche herself is such a "soft person", who is able to achieve self-affirmation only in pleasing or deceiving others. Returning to Kolin's tracing of the paper motif in the play, the paper shade "enables Blanche to script herself" (454). We have witnessed her trying "to redefine existence – for herself, Stella, Stanley, Mitch – with the paper lantern. Ostensibly, she wants to dilute ... Stanley's harshness, the power of his glaring male gaze, by shadowing and thereby diminishing the intensity of the light bulb" (Kolin 454). It is the same gaze, we remember, which has read her paper texts with the sole purpose of reducing her ambiguity as woman to a one-sided interpretation that supports Stanley's will to power. And power over others, argues Foucault, begins with knowledge of others. In Stanley's eyes, Blanche's persona is both overly fashioned and socially incongruent, which is why her strategy fails in his world. In the same way that the fragile paper lantern, this flimsy, make-shift cover for a bare light bulb, is callously torn away, Blanche's "text" of pretensions and little white lies is cruelly and brutally exposed by Stanley.

Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas

The interplay between self and oppositional other is also dramatized in the relationship between Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden. As Vickery points out, during their relationship Joe's preoccupation with the categories of race, sex and religion "becomes especially acute since he recognizes the same obsession in [Joanna]" ("The Shadow" 30). This mutually reflexive function is underscored by Faulkner's naming: Joanna, one could argue, is the

female version of the name “Joe”. Joanna is white and of Yankee descent with a strong familial heritage: her forefathers moved to the South during the Reconstruction and had a reputation for being abolitionists and carpetbaggers. For this "otherness", Joanna's grandfather and half-brother paid with their lives; they were shot in Jefferson's town square by Colonel Sartoris. This suggests a kind of double alienation with respect to Joanna: not only is she rejected owing to her political-familial heritage as the daughter of Yankee carpetbaggers, but also on the grounds of her association with another distinctly Southern category of otherness: the "Negro". Christmas, on the other hand, was raised as an orphan by Southern rural religious conservatives and later rejected by society for having "mixed blood". Thus, as is the case with Blanche and Stanley, the attraction between, as well as the mutual destruction of, these two oppositional figures is almost inevitable within the cultural setting of the novel.

Despite supporting the abolitionist cause, Joanna's grandfather and father both saw black people as the living symbol of white guilt. Given these convictions, they both play a key role in changing the young Joanna's perception of blackness and whiteness from harmless differences in skin colour into something more determined and essentialist. She is taught to objectify black people, to dehumanize them and see them "not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which [she] lived, we lived, all white people, all other people" (*LA* 190). Thus, while Joanna's humanitarian assistance to "negroes" seems on the surface to be motivated by benevolence and sympathy, it disguises a deep-seated heritage of racial objectification fired by a religious "obligation to carry out God's design in a depraved world" (Van O'Connor 76). At the heart of it, this notion remains just as bigoted as the worst of Southern prejudice and religious zealotry. Racists see and treat people of a different skin colour as sub-human beings who deserve such treatment; bigots condescend to "help" members of other races, but in no less dehumanizing a fashion, owing to the condescension and falseness of their actions. Joanna is never able to free herself from these attitudes – an aspect that is brought to light acutely through her confrontation with Christmas.

The relationship between Joanna and Christmas unfolds over three apparent, yet often overlapping, "phases": the "cold and impervious" phase, the "wild" phase and the "religious" phase (*LA* 196; 202-03). All three of these stages relate closely to the changing ways in which Joanna views and treats Joe as a racial, sexual and religious other. In turn, her treatment of

Joe invites certain reactions on his part, based on his lifelong concatenation of race, sex and religion. Christmas summarizes the phases of their relationship as follows:

> During the first phase it had been as though he were outside a house where snow was on the ground, trying to get into the house; during the second phase he was at the bottom of a pit in the hot wild darkness; now he was in the middle of a plain where there was no house, not even snow, not even wind. (*LA* 202-03).

When Joe first encounters Joanna Burden's house, he is indeed excluded and kept at a distance by her. In fact, he is never formally invited inside, but breaks in at night, entering like an intruder. During this phase, Joanna leaves food for him in the kitchen, but she never joins him at the table. Again the association in Joe's mind of food and dependency on women is brought into play. Joanna's "cold and impervious" treatment of his presence irks the racially sensitive Joe as another instance of cultural interpellation. He sends a carefully prepared meal – significantly, ham and peas, a traditional slave meal – crashing against the wall in a way similar to his rejection of Mrs McEachern's food.

Then, in the second phase of the relationship – the "hot, wild" phase – Joe encounters the other side of Joanna's bifurcated personality, when an overtly sexual aspect is suddenly introduced into their interaction. During the day, Joanna is the masculine "spinster who methodically carries out her destiny by advising and aiding Negro colleges," and by night, she is "the frustrated middle-aged woman ... in sexual orgy with a man she believes or hopes is part Negro" (Kartiganer 55). During this wild affair, Joanna uses Christmas to enact a particular sexual fear-fantasy which sprouts from a common racist trope: the white woman's fear of being ravaged by the dangerous, hyper-sexual "Negro"; thus the horror of miscegenation is given shape as the ultimate price for the guilt of slavery and oppression. Hence proceed Joanna's carefully orchestrated, nymphomaniacal trysts with Christmas, which are always enacted in a "dark house" – this was also the original title of the novel – in "closets", "empty rooms", "beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her," whispering: "'Negro! Negro! Negro!'" (*LA* 195).

The details of these encounters indicate a determined attempt on the part of Joanna at recreating an atmosphere of savage, sexual violation. Rather than mere gratification, what Joanna seeks is – to use Bleikasten's description – "forbidden knowledge about evil and the unpardonable transgression of the paternal law" (*Ink* 322). In other words, by indulging in

illicit sex with someone whom she believes to be a black man, Joanna deliberately breaks the patriarchal law which prescribes that, as a woman, she is not to engage in acts of sexual indiscretion, particularly not with a member of another race. According to the cultural narrative of the virtuous woman, she is to remain chaste and untainted until the day of her betrothal to a future husband. By breaking this patriarchal law, she overwrites the gendering "text" and revenges herself upon the symbolic father-figure by maintaining her own sexual independence as a woman and retaining control over the choice of her own virginity. In this way, however, Christmas is interpellated into her schema, not as a person, but as an appropriated racial symbol, a representation of the culturally constructed myth of the "Negro". When Christmas recognizes Joanna's corrupt motives, he resists. For him, there is something utterly distasteful about their encounters: "It was as though he had fallen into a sewer" (*LA* 192). But the corruption has less to do with physical violation than with an invasion of his personhood. Again, it is an attempt at reading Joe into a role which is predetermined for him: the part of the dark, evil black man which is, in turn, laden with a confluence of cultural and communal values.

In the third and last phase of the troubled Burden-Christmas relationship, the traditional Puritan association of sex and sin prepares the way for what is described as an ebbing of the wild "tide" (*LA* 197). In this period, Christmas' associative progression is complete: food and sex becomes entangled once again with religious guilt, as Joanna's conscience slowly regains dominance. Their meetings are now restricted to the bedroom, during which they look "at one another like strangers, with hopeless and reproachful (on his part with weary: on hers with despairing) eyes" (*LA* 197). Instead of the symbol of her guilt and damnation, Christmas becomes Joanna's means to salvation. Her reasoning is that if she were to assist Christmas in becoming an asset to society, an upstanding member of the black community, she would regain her state of grace and save her corrupted soul. This is why she wants Christmas to assist her in her work with "negro schools" so as to not "wast[e]" his "life" (*LA* 202). Joanna suggests sending Christmas to a black school to study and, after qualifying, to work with a black lawyer on exclusively black affairs. But Christmas rejects also this text that she has written for him: " ... not only had she changed her life completely, but ... she was trying to change his too and make of him something between a hermit and a missionary to negroes" (*LA* 204). Instead, Christmas attacks her with his fists. After failing in all other attempts at interpellation, Joanna then tries to force Christmas to pray for the salvation of his soul. She

points a gun at him. But violence breeds only reactionary violence; he kills her grotesquely by slitting her throat with a razor blade.

In all three of the phases of the relationship, a similar pattern is repeated: Joanna attempts to determine the uncertainty, the unfamiliarity, that is Joe Christmas' identity within a specific and predetermined framework that suits her own purposes. Joanna attempts forcibly to dominate Christmas by imposing her own appetites and desires on him. Each time, Joanna expects him to enact a role which he has no intention of playing. First, she casts him as an ordinary black man who needs her humanitarian assistance, like so many of the others she has objectified and dehumanized over the years. Then he becomes a racial-sexual symbol, which she exploits and uses as both a challenge to, and an appeasement for, her own racist heritage. Lastly, she reduces Christmas to a mere heathen, a lost soul who needs God's salvation and forgiveness, and without whose redemption her own soul would be lost forever. Each time, it is an attempt to impose meaning, to write away the whiteness of Joe's *tabula rasa*. But Christmas constantly places himself outside of these identity paradigms, these webs of meaning which Joanna has spun for him and in which she attempts to capture and hold him. Ultimately, the only way he can escape is by killing her.

The way in which the murder takes place foreshadows aspects of his own death at the hands of Percy Grimm. The misfiring pistol in Joanna's hands has its reflection in the pistol that Christmas holds when he flees from Jefferson, and eventually in Grimm's pistol with which he kills Christmas. "Similarly," David L. Minter observes, "the razor with which Joe Christmas grotesquely kills Joanna Burden has its counterpart in the bloody knife Percy Grimm wields in mutilation" (9). The death of Joe Christmas as a victim is thus both prefigured by, and implied within, the death he inflicts on Joanna Burden. Joe finally fulfills his role as the racial-sexual scapegoat of the community. He writes his own "text" with the knife acting as a stylus. He then becomes "the beast to be slaughtered", and Grimm "appears on the scene as exterminating angel" (Bleikasten, *Ink* 311).[103] Through Christmas' death, the

[103] Brooks argues that Percy Grimm's acts of murder and mutilation "[do] not commit the community", since he acts alone (*Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha* 52). However, I agree with Bleikasten's more convincing argument that "[e]xtremist groups such as the KKK and fanatic individuals such as Grimm may not be typical; still, they do the community's dirty work and act as the unofficial agents of collective violence. Technically, the assassination of Christmas is no 'lynching,' but is condoned beforehand by the mob hysteria" which precedes the act (*Ink* 315). In addition to this, as my own argument has thus far shown, the possibility of separating any individual decisively from a community is an illusion. While Grimm may indeed act alone when he kills and mutilates Christmas, he is still a member of the community which has played at least a partial role in shaping him into a person who could make such a terrible choice – even if the process involves his alienation and rejection. Following Derrida,

community is able to imagine that it has returned to a former state of purity, a shared illusion in which it believes it has rid itself of the feared abomination of indeterminacy and uncertainty. To use Hall's terms, the community believes it has recovered, through the act of expulsion, its shared, historical "roots": the perceived "essence" of untainted race.

Read in mutually informative ways as dramatizations of cultural exclusion and rejection, both Joe Christmas and Blanche DuBois thus become emblematic figures. Their enhanced eccentricity – that is, Blanche's overly fashioned fragility and dependency, and Christmas' self-destructive racial indeterminacy – brings us closer to an understanding of the strong undercurrents of race and gender that flow through the experience of cultural and communal identity in the South. Christmas and Blanche embody, in a crystallized fashion, the ambiguities and contradictions, the tensions and conflicts between self and other, which are prevalent in this region. More broadly speaking, they bring to life the notion that no community is able to achieve definition and integrity without its representatives of trauma and exclusion. Despite their differences and rejection, such figures can, and should, not be considered entirely apart from the social bodies which have ostracized and thus helped to shape them. At the heart of questions of identity is always this dialectic of self and other: a relationship of constant tension – and, yet, interdependency – between "I" and "you". It is to this underlying reverberation that, inevitably, the Conclusion of this study must return.

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every community needs its figures of alienation and rejection for the affirmation of its own sense of belonging and unity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

> The question of the self: "who am I?" not in the sense of "who am I" but "who is this 'I' " that can say "who"? What is the "I," and what becomes of responsibility once the identity of the "I" trembles *in secret*? (Derrida, *The Gift of Death* 92)

> Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person,* for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*. (Benveniste 40-41)

Although no "method" is ever incontestable, an organizing structure is both a necessary and a useful convention in academic research and writing. Thus far – notwithstanding its strongly poststructuralist orientation – this study has followed tradition by devising a way of organizing the reading of identity in selected texts by Faulkner and Williams into progressively unfolding and interlinking units of argument, each combined with a pairing of texts that dramatizes effectively a particular aspect of selfhood. It has indeed been useful to consider the subject's relation to the self as separate – at least theoretically – from the subject's relationships with family members, and from the subject's relation to the communal-cultural. But we have also seen that this strategy is largely a synthetic exercise, an illusion of imposed focus and emphasis for the sake of an ordered discussion. While divisions or classes of self-hood constantly threaten to burst at the seams, this is not to say that different "forms" of self – such as those proposed by Foucault and discussed in the Introduction of this thesis[104] – are entirely imaginary. The individual carries traces of, and is thus inseparably connected to, the familial, while the family is both shaped in and interpenetrated by the community and culture.

[104] See Chapter 1 (26-28) for a discussion of Foucault's conception of "forms" of selves and how this has been amended to "positionings" in order better to convey a sense of process, rather than completion or reification.

However, rather than further deferring the inevitable overflow of, and interconnections among, these various positionings of self, what can one conclude about the relationship between language and selfhood by undoing the seams of structure we have sewn thus far, and allowing for a freer intermingling and blending of the personal, the familial and the communal-cultural? In the deployment of this self-deconstructive strategy, the focus now shifts away from the major fictional figures we have discussed, and towards individual instances of the language of self-fashioning – or name-labels – associated with, or imposed upon, these figures. Name-labels are complex and heavily inflected socio-cultural appellations used in the six selected texts and, as distinctive markers of selfhood, they exemplify in a particularly vivid way the merging of personal, familial and cultural values in the fashioning of selves within both the context of the selected texts and the broader Southern social sphere. This reading of name-labels follows what Geertz would describe as a strategy of "thick" description: a teasing out of the multiple, intricately interwoven and differentially realized layers of signification traceable in each contextually active sign.[105]

Examples of such multilayered, yet often reductively imposed, brandings abound in the six selected texts. There is, for example, the word "cripple" used in relation to Laura's identity in *Menagerie;* this can be compared with the term "Polack" used in relation to Stanley in *Streetcar.* The former name-label first appears in the play when Tom reminds his mother – quite callously, one should add – that his sister Laura is "crippled" and that, as a family, they should thus not expect too much from her appointment with the gentleman caller (*GM* 1. 5. 430).[106] Amanda then protests against his choice of term: "Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used!" (*GM* 1. 5. 430). In *Streetcar,* Stanley objects in a similar way to Blanche and Stella's word choice: "Don't ever talk that way to me! 'Pig – Polack – disgusting – vulgar – greasy!' – them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here!" (*SND* 8. 537); and later, again: "I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is one hundred percent American, born

[105] See Chapter 1 (16-17) for an account of Geertz's distinction between "thick" and "thin" description in the field of cultural studies.

[106] Of course, Williams uses this word already in Laura's character description: "A childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other, and held in a brace. The defect need not be more than suggested on the stage" (*GM* 394). It is possible that the contrast between harsh words such as "crippled" and "defect" in Williams' description, and the notion that the disability is merely "suggested" on-stage, anticipates and heightens Tom's later cruelty towards his sister.

and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack" (*SND* 8. 539).

A multiplicity of significations is brought into play when one compares Amanda and Stanley's objections to these terms. The words "cripple" and "Polack" are used not merely as descriptors denoting a physical or ethnic difference, but also become – in Tom and Blanche's derogatory use – metonymic for what is construed as a defective, incompetent or lesser person. In deconstructive terms, "Polack" and "cripple" are rigid categories of identity which are placed, by implication, in a subordinate hierarchical position in relation to their binary opposites of wholeness and plenitude: the able-bodied, "complete" individual as a physical ideal, or the "pure" American as a fantasy of national or political prejudice. Amanda and Stanley thus both object to the tendency of these insensitively applied name-labels to determine selfhood. Both figures seem to realize that, when used repeatedly, a name-label becomes a social branding which has the power to reduce and "fix" one's selfhood in the eyes of the community, attaching to one a stigma of defectiveness from which it will be difficult to escape or, worse, in the aptness of which one may begin to believe. Laura's is physically disabled, Amanda would argue, but this does not mean that she is a defective person, and she should thus not be treated, or referred to, in this way. Similarly, Stanley is of foreign descent, but this does not imply that he may be referred to, or treated as, a lesser American.

Of course, the disproportionate vehemence of Stanley's reaction seems to suggest more than a hint of niggling self-doubt. By reacting in this way, he invests the pejorative with the power of negative signification: the word cuts close to the bone precisely because he harbours feelings of inadequacy and insufficiency. Similarly, it becomes clear through the events dramatized in *Menagerie* that Laura's disability lies deeper than the physical. She appears also to be shy and to suffer from a debilitating lack of self-confidence, perhaps owing to her mother's overprotection and mollycoddling during adolescence. It is deeply ironic then, and quite telling of Amanda's disappointment, disillusionment and despondence after Laura's failed appointment with the gentleman caller, that she resigns herself to using this very same loaded term to describe Laura as Tom's "unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job!" (*GM* 2. 7. 464). Effectively, the word now becomes doubly negative owing to Amanda's own protest against its use, building its signification not only on the pejorative communal-cultural application, but also simultaneously on this specific familial context.

Much has been written in Chapter 4 about the multiple layers of socio-cultural signification traceable in what is arguably the most prominent linguistic scar on Faulkner's Southern landscape: the use of the name-label "nigger". This racist term is used freely and pervasively in the Southern community's common parlance, not only in *Light in August* – the novel in which Faulkner dramatizes most overtly the connotations of this word and its closest relative, "Negro" – but, to a lesser extent, also in *The Sound and The Fury* and *As I Lay Dying.* Joe Christmas' struggle against the over-simplification of this "branding" is comparable with Brick's hatred of the term "queer" in *Cat.* The word "nigger" is loaded with racist preconceptions and prejudice almost to the same degree that "queer" is weighted with values and assumptions regarding gender and sexuality in the patriarchal South. Drawing on Butler's work on the performative aspects of language, the act of naming assists in the creation of that which it names.[107] Joe becomes a "nigger" in the eyes of his community, because he is branded as such. The school nurse, who first sows the seeds of doubt over Joe's racial purity, realizes this when she reasons: "*He will look just like a pea in a pan full of coffee beans"* (*LA* 99). And being thought of as, or even called, a "[q]ueer" (*CHTR* 2. 947) – or any of its related euphemisms, such as "sissie" (*CHTR* 2. 947), "sister" (*CHTR* 2. 946) or "fairy" (CHTR 2. 948) – is as reductive and damaging to Brick's self-image and social reputation as being named a "nigger" is to Joe Christmas.

The most insightful discussion of the determining capacity of a name-label can be found in *As I Lay Dying*, coming, quite surprisingly, from one of the least articulate members of the Bundren clan. Cash ponders the term "crazy" in relation to the identity of his younger brother, Darl. When Darl is arrested and taken to a Jackson insane asylum for setting fire to a neighbour's barn which contained his mother's coffin, Cash reasons as follows:

> Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he ain't. Sometimes I think it ain't none of us pure crazy and ain't none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it (*AILD* 219-20).

Cash's argument suggests a spark of deconstructive thinking. He realizes (in a way that is perhaps reminiscent of Foucault's argument in *Madness and Civilization*) that the distinction between madness and sanity relies heavily on social discourse, on the "we" who "[talk] him

[107] See Chapter 3 (84-85) for an account of Butler's interpretation of Austin's speech-act theory.

that-a-way", and that this distinction therefore manifests itself as a rigid binary conception in which sanity is not only set against, but also implicitly privileged over, madness.[108] Cash knows that the difference between madness and sanity is not as clear-cut as one might imagine. Society often tends to conceive of madness as an essential positioning outside of, or beyond, reason. Yet, as a deconstructive attitude would suggest – and as Derrida's sharp critique of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* has shown more pointedly – there simply can be no "outside" of reason. In other words, one cannot conceive of madness without relying implicitly on reason itself: they are intimately related and interdependent terms, drawing their linguistic significance from a relationship of *différance* in relation to each other.

Following Foucault's ethical argument, I would contend that assigning this name-label is an attempt by the community at gaining power and control over a distinctly different individual in their midst, an other whom they have failed fully to understand according to their shared conventions of "normal" appearance and behaviour. As Cash later points out, the members of this community assume that Darl's callous and reckless destruction of a neighbour's barn is a completely irrational and irresponsible action, because they do not fully grasp the circumstances of the situation or the desperation of this family. Incorporating Derrida's thinking, one should add that Darl becomes another scapegoat figure, a socially imposed role which is comparable to the way in which Blanche du Bois and Joe Christmas occupy the ambiguous position of the banished "outsider" within their respective communities.[109] "Banishing" Darl into a rigid category of otherness, outsiderism and difference in and through language – that is, labelling him distinctly and deliberately as "crazy" – enables both the Bundren family and the surrounding community to affirm and concretize their own sense of sameness and belonging. In short, the community needs the craziness of Darl in opposition to which it can maintain its collective sense of sanity and identity: "crazy" again becomes unavoidably implicit within the very definition of "normal".

However, Cash's discussion of the word "crazy" also carries traces other than the communal-cultural values he has observed. There is a host of subtle chains of signification layered onto this linguistic sign within the context of the novel. Long before Darl is branded explicitly as "crazy" owing to his act of arson, the community's uncertainty about his unconventionality is

[108] Foucault's book and Derrida's deconstructive critique of it are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 (19-21).
[109] See Chapter 4 (139-44) for a detailed comparison of Blanche and Joe as communal scapegoat figures. This account uses Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" as a theoretical frame of reference in its deconstructive conception of outsiderism and othering.

denoted by a related descriptor more regularly connected with him. On many occasions, figures such as Cora (*AILD* 20; 155) and Tull (*AILD* 112; 140) mention that Darl seems "queer" to them and to others, meaning that he appears to be strange or eccentric in his appearance and behaviour. Neighbours who choose not to be as explicit, such as Sampson, simply mention how "folks talks" (*sic*) about Darl, implying that there is something unsettling or different enough about him to be worthy of constant discussion (*AILD* 100). Again, one notices the role that discourse plays in Darl's "othering" by the community. No-one is "pure crazy", Cash would say, unless someone "talks him" that way. But this immediately implies the opposite as well: no-one can be purely "sane" or "reasonable" until discourse fashions him or her to be so.

A further interesting motif in the depiction of Darl's "craziness" is his habit of inappropriate laughter during social interaction. Anse believes firmly – and has apparently told Darl so on occasion – that it is this habit that "makes folks talk" about him most (*AILD* 94). To his father's chagrin, Darl laughs even while sitting on his mother's coffin in the back of the wagon. In fact, the word "laughing" is repeated four times by Anse in this particular monologue, not only indicating the father's exasperation at the son's consistently indecorous behaviour, but also preparing the way for Darl's final moments in the novel. When he is arrested and removed from the travelling party, Darl bursts into peals of uncontrollable, incongruous laughter, and is taken away by train to an insane asylum. In Darl's final monologue – which renders aptly his dissociative mental breakdown through an abrupt shift in narrative perspective to the third person – the words "laugh" or "laughing" appear no less than nine times, strengthening the community's preceding suspicions about his psychological instability. This is, however, a one-sided view of what the ambiguous laughing may signify. As is illustrated by Darl's laughing on Addie's coffin, the laughter often occurs in situations in which weeping might be deemed more appropriate. Perhaps Darl's laughter is thus an unorthodox expression of profound grief: Darl laughs because the situation in which he finds himself is so absurd and deeply saddening that he is unable to cry. Then again, he might also laugh simply because he is emotionally immature owing to a neglected upbringing by a mother who barely noticed his presence, not to mention failing to take care of his mental nurturing.

However, if Darl appears to be mentally disturbed, it is not because he is surrounded by an overtly rational family. The Bundrens' macabre expedition to Jefferson with the mother's

dead body on the back of a wagon seems to be, by all conventional standards, a "crazy" undertaking and, at one point or another, there is more than a hint of the psychologically questionable associated with each one of the Bundren brothers. Vardaman thinks his mother is a fish (*AILD* 76). When he appears on Tulls' doorstep in the middle of the night, drenched in rain, Tull comments that the child gave him the "creeps", while Cora says outright that he is "outen his head" (*AILD* 63); as with the ambiguous reading of Darl's laughter, profound grief is implicitly associated here with mental disturbance. Jewel dreams of isolating himself high on a hilltop with his dying mother, and rolling down rocks at the faces of those who try to approach (*AILD* 12). In Freudian terms, one could read into this violent fantasy traces of an underlying Oedipal obsession with the mother figure, suggesting the glaring absence of the necessary intruding phallus during the infantile mother-son relationship. Cash sometimes reasons in neatly ordered and numbered lists, yet each item contains bizarre associations, connecting dead bodies, coffins and graves with the skills and mathematics of carpentry (*AILD* 75). The eccentric familial inflection thus gives a darkly ironic undertone to Cash's observations about his brother's so-called "craziness": it would be easy to see Darl as merely the most obviously "crazy" of an already mentally unstable family. To some extent, the members of the surrounding community already read the Bundrens in this way. At the sight of Cash's broken leg set precariously in cement by his father and brothers, Mr. Gillespie exclaims: "Didn't none of you have more sense than that?" (*AILD* 210). Dr. Peabody is even more scathingly ironic when he says to Cash: "... why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family ..." *(AILD* 228).

In addition to the community's "talking" someone crazy, it is important to note that Cash mentions the act of "looking" in his discussion of Darl's alleged craziness. In fact, Cash later describes madness explicitly as an inability to "see eye to eye with other folks" (*AILD* 220). Cash is thus sensitive also to the ways in which the self is fashioned in and through the gaze of the other. One recalls here the way in which Old Doc Hines watched his illegitimate grandson and how this influenced the boy's early sense of difference and otherness: "*That is why I am different from the others: because he [Hines] is watching me all the time*" (*LA* 105). But this gaze is never simply uni-directional: an observed subject always gazes back at his or her observers and, through the returned gaze, influences the way in which he or she is observed. In other words, the way in which Darl is viewed by his family and his community as "crazy" is shaped significantly by the way he looks back at them while he is being

observed. To illustrate this mutuality of observation, it is helpful to recall how often Darl's peculiar eyes and unsettling ways of looking at people are mentioned by Dewey Dell (*AILD* 23) and Anse (*AILD* 31). But it is perhaps Tull who is most articulate on this characteristic:

> He is looking at me. He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it ain't never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes. (*AILD* 112)

Tull's description underscores effectively the interpenetration of the self and the other's gaze in the fashioning of a self. The "I" constantly looks at the "you", which in turn returns the gaze of the "I", until there is almost a sense of convergence between the "I" and the "you" in and through the act of looking.

From a linguistic perspective, this peculiar relationship between the "I" and the "you" is of particular interest. In fact, in an essay entitled "Subjectivity in Language", Émile Benveniste makes the point that a conception of subjectivity – that is, "the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as a 'subject'" – is possible only in and through language (40). Benveniste defines subjectivity further as not "the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself ... but … the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness" (40). Subjectivity is thus a condition made possible by language: "'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego'" (Benveniste 40). However, the word "says" in Benveniste's formulation – along with his recurring references to speaking throughout the essay – is misleading. The word "I" need not be uttered or written by the subject in order for the sign to carry the corresponding signification as a marker of subjectivity. This suggests a broader notion of language – any and all languages – thus including language as it manifests itself within our consciousness of the world. Subjectivity is thus a condition of language in the broadest semiotic sense, and not only of the spoken or written word.

Benveniste takes the argument a step further by positing that "[c]onsciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use I only when I am speaking to [and I would add, "or conceiving of"] someone who will be a *you* in my address [or conception]" (40-41). In other words, "I" always exists in a relationship of implicit interaction, interdependency and reciprocity with "you". Benveniste refers to this as a relationship of "dialogue" but, again, one

should be careful of creating the impression, albeit inadvertently, that the linguistic conception of "you" becomes valid only when one addresses the "you" in and through the act of speech. Similar to the conception of "I", the linguistic conception of "you" manifests itself already at the level of consciousness and does not need actual utterance to attain validity. Benveniste adds that this I-you relationship is "peculiar in itself, as it offers a type of opposition whose equivalent is encountered nowhere else outside of language" (41). "I" and "you" not only form an interdependent polarity, he explains, but also function reversibly (41). In other words, when I address, or conceive of, another person as "you", the implication is that I will become the "you" in that person's conception of me. No other pair of linguistic signs functions in a similarly interchangeable way.

The broader implication of this is paradoxical: "There is no concept 'I'," writes Benveniste, "that incorporates all the *I*s that are uttered at every moment in the mouths of all speakers ..." (42). Nor does the word "I" refer permanently to any one, particular individual. "How could the same term refer indifferently to any individual whatsoever and still at the same time identify him in his individuality?" (Benveniste 42). Indeed, what we are dealing with is "a class of words, the 'personal pronouns,' that escape the status of all the other signs of language" (Benveniste 42). But what, then, does "I" refer to? Benveniste writes: "["I" refers to] something very peculiar which is exclusively linguistic: *I* refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker. It is a term that cannot be identified except in ... an instance of discourse and that has only a momentary reference" (42). A shift in the discursive context would thus affect an immediate and complete shift in the signification of the word "I". Furthermore, no "I" – no selfhood, no identity – is possible outside of discourse. It is particularly Benveniste's use of the word "individual" and, in the earlier quotation, his reference to the subject's "individuality", which opens the way for a consideration of the ethical implications of the I-you interdependency within discourse. If "I" and "you" can refer to a single subject and to everyone at the same time, Derrida's conception of singularity and universality with respect to questions of responsibility becomes pertinent.

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida teases out the relationship between the singular and the universal using Kierkegaard's discussion of the Biblical figures of Abraham and his son, Isaac. Derrida's central concern is with the question whether Abraham is acting absolutely responsibly, or absolutely irresponsibly, in his near-sacrifice of Isaac. Within the framework

of Derrida's account, Abraham has a duty to obey God, and to do so unquestioningly, even if God demands the death of his first-born without explaining the reason for such an order. This is Abraham's responsibility to the singularity of God. But, at the same time, Abraham has a duty also to the universal, that is, to the familial and communal, as a loving father who should not commit infanticide. At the moment of the near-sacrifice, these two responsibilities are inevitably and necessarily in opposition. Derrida thus proposes that there is always an element of betrayal of the universal (that is, of the family or society) implicit within every act of duty to an absolute singular (which may be God or the self). The two clashing duties cannot be separated and are implicitly interlinked.

Derrida leaves no doubt: "The sacrifice of Isaac is an abomination in the eyes of all, and it should continue to be seen for what it is – atrocious, criminal, unforgiveable ... The ethical point of view must remain valid: Abraham is a murderer" (*Gift* 85).[110] But Abraham is also absolutely responsible to the singular, because he "had the courage to behave like a murderer in the eyes of the world" and, in doing so, has neglected his duty to the general (Derrida, *Gift* 72). This does not imply that he has completely renounced his love for Isaac. He must love his son in order for the intended sacrifice to be valid, otherwise it would not be a sacrifice. The ethical is thus, in one sense, recuperated in and through Abraham's act of duty to the singular and through his ultimate love for his son, but it is also negated in the very same instant. This contradiction is irresolvable, says Derrida: Abraham is "at the same time the most moral and the most immoral, the most responsible and the most irresponsible of men …" (*Gift* 72).[111]

The aporia of singular and universal responsibility is also traceable in the earlier example of Darl Bundren. In fact, it is again Cash who ponders the ethical paradox in the actions of his so-called crazy brother:

> But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did taken her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of

[110] Of course, Abraham never sacrifices Isaac, but Derrida points out that "it is as if Abraham had *already* killed Isaac," because he goes through all the preparations for putting the sacrifice into effect (*Gift* 72).

[111] Derrida sets this aporetic view in contrast with Kierkegaard's hierarchical juxtaposition of faith to the ethical. For Kierkegaard, faith transcends ethics, while Derrida attempts to show that religious faith cannot be conceived as existing beyond, or outside of, rationality and responsibility.

> us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. But I don't reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he can't see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they ain't nothing else to do with him but what the most folks says is right. (*AILD* 220)

Cash's repetition of the phrase "in a way" before the decisive caesura in his argument – which is clearly marked by the word "but" – emphasizes his realization that there is, indeed, more than one way to reason about this event. When Darl decides to burn down the barn with his mother's coffin inside, he acts in response only to his singular duty to himself as the neglected and rejected son who wants to rid himself of the abomination and embarrassment of the mother's corpse decaying on the back of a wagon. However, this duty to the singular stands in opposition to Darl's responsibility towards the community. There is no doubt in Cash's mind: Darl's burning down of the barn and his causing unnecessary injury and damage to a neighbour remains a criminal and inexcusable act of arson. The paradox of responsibility is, once again, both inevitable and irresolvable. Just as Abraham is simultaneously the "cruellest" and the most "loving" father to Isaac, so Darl is the most "reasonable" and the most "insane" brother of the Bundren clan. Nevertheless, Cash's condemnation is final and telling: Darl has been deemed, and thus conclusively branded, "crazy" by the community in spite of the ambiguity of his actions. In Cash and the community's eyes, the universal norm has weighed more than the singular duty and Darl thus deserves his due punishment.

In the final moments of the novel, Darl allows his identity to be subsumed by the name-label with which he has been branded – albeit, perhaps, unintentionally. He makes no rational argument for the sanity of his actions in light of his singular duty, but instead laughs incongruously at the situation and, in doing so, provides the non-verbal discourse that confirms his eventual inhabitation of the descriptor "crazy". For Benveniste, this process of discursive identification is, again, not only pervasive in, but made possible by, language:

> Language is accordingly the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity, and discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances. In some way language puts forth 'empty' forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself and which he relates to his 'person' ... (43).

It is useful to investigate the distinction made by Benveniste between "language" and "discourse". Language, he argues, provides the framework or system within which

subjectivity becomes possible, but in which it still lies dormant. At the moment when language is made to fulfil a purpose or is put to use within a particular context, the "empty forms" of subjectivity are filled and language becomes discourse. This is not unlike Althusser's conception of interpellation: when a police officer shouts to the passing individual: "Hey, you!", the context in which the interpellation is offered – in other words, the power relationship that exists between an officer and a member of the public – allows for the empty form "you" to be filled by the individual's selfhood. The "you" in the officer's hailing becomes the individual in the same moment in which the individual recognizes that he or she is being hailed by the law and turns to face the officer. Discourse, in Benveniste's thinking, is thus language in action, language engaged with an other. But this distinction – like Althusser's notion of interpellation – is open to deconstructive critique. Language is always-already engaged with an other: there can be no language without implicitly incorporating notions of an other. The empty forms or vessels of language – even "I" and "you" which are most associated with selfhood and which occur throughout all the selected texts – are thus never completely "empty", because language cannot exist without some context. It follows that there is no "I" or "you" – no identity – outside of discourse.

What, then, of this particular textual discourse, a thesis, which is also played out in and through language and on the borderline between the "I" of the author and the "you" of the reader? Perhaps the answer to this question is simultaneously so simple and radically intricate that it should remain a matter of inconclusion and ongoing discussion. Nevertheless – returning to the personal note struck in the opening section of this text – one might simply "pause", then, to attest to the distinct multidirectionality of the flow of influence and change in the activity of textualization. Theoretically speaking, my selfhood has not only been foregrounded as the subjective "reader" of identity in the selected texts, but has also been "written" in return by the very activity of reading. Derrida notes the inseparable connection between reading and writing in a short introductory section to "Plato's Pharmacy". He argues that it is an illusion for a "reader" of any text – also a "reader" of identity, or in Geertz's terms, a reader of a culture – to think it is possible to read without "committing" something of the self to the reading process and so assist in the "writing" of that text ("Plato's Pharmacy" 63-64). But Derrida clarifies that the connection between these textual activities is not as simple as proposing that reading is writing: "If reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days ... this oneness designates neither undifferentiated (con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest; the *is* that couples reading with writing must rip apart" ("Plato's Pharmacy"

64). In other words, the reader who "feel[s] himself authorized merely to add on; that is, to add any old thing" to the text would add nothing ("Plato's Pharmacy" 64). This would involve over-emphasizing the aspect of writing involved in the reading process. On the other hand, "he who through 'methodological prudence,' 'norms of objectivity,' or 'safeguards of knowledge' would refrain from committing anything of himself, would not read at all" (Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 64). What we have here is yet another double-bind, an aporetic oscillation, and this is why Derrida proposes that "[o]ne must then, in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write" (Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 64).

What has my reading of identity thus contributed to "writing" about identity in general and, more importantly, about my own selfhood? To borrow Derrida's haunting expression, it is clear to me that the authorial I of this text also could not help but get "a few fingers caught" in the weaving process ("Plato's Pharmacy" 63). As a result, my identity has been shifted, adjusted and changed through this textual exploration of what it signifies to be an "I". In the conception of myself, I am no longer an absolute essence. I no longer entertain an illusion that "within" me lies some kind of unchangeable or unchanging core of selfhood based on a set of rigid laws, values or norms. This is so, even despite the facticity of the physical shape and space into which I was born. Most importantly, though, this realization of a perpetually contingent and relative self does not manifest itself reductively as a sense of "loss" of identity or instability within often turbulent contemporary social, cultural and political circumstances, but as an empowering awareness of the capacity and ability to make a self, that is, to make choices, changes and adjustments in my selfhood. In both the simplest and most intricate ways, then, I am already no longer the "I" that I was at the beginning of this project; and I will continue to change even as this text is being read by "you". Perhaps the most intriguing question to ask about identity should thus no longer involve the essence of who we believe we “are”, but the possibility of who we want to be and who we are in the process of becoming.

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