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THE SHORT STORY AS INTERTEXTUAL SATELLITE:
THE CASE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

*In a short story that's next to the poem,
almost every word has got to be almost exactly
right. In the novel you can be careless but in
the short story you can't.*

—William Faulkner (1957)

*To me she was the beautiful one, she was
my heart's darling. That's what I wrote the
book about...*

—William Faulkner (1957)

[1] An open-ended, revisable quality

Despite the fact that he did mass-produce short stories on occasion, mainly for financial reasons, few twentieth-century modernists were as sophisticated in their short-prose technique and narrative depth as William Faulkner. This sophistication may be due, among several other factors, to his particular brand of a “process aesthetic.” The publishing history of Faulkner’s long and short prose fiction clearly documents his conviction that narratives should always be open to further revision, that they are never complete or finished. This aesthetic, variably practiced by such well-known predecessors as Poe and Whitman, is most clearly manifested in Faulkner’s revisiting and recasting of thematic units in new guises. These repeated tellings have

coalesced into distinct novel-plus-short-story clusters in the Faulkner canon, with the symbiotic components of the clusters signifying upon each other.

We find, in other words, that Faulkner was, in a sense, often retelling. He kept returning to a vision not quite perfectly apprehended, he tended to brood over his material and approached a subject, a character, a type figure, an emotion-laden symbol repeatedly from different points of view for the purposes of fictional “corrections” or of adding further perspectives. This has largely contributed, in a technical sense, to the Balzacian “design,” that is, the *interlocking* quality of his output, which is most obviously present in the textual device of *recall*. It is some of the consequences of this aesthetic, of this design and device that the present study is going to look at.

The most crucial consequences of Faulkner’s realization that narratives are open-ended, that familiar material should be accessible to reiterated scrutiny and to further revision, are his fictional reassessments and retellings. “Few other authors,” a critic has remarked, “invite such self-consciousness in the process of reading, or display in the course of a story how firmly readerly judgments emerge from the reader’s own predilections. This open-ended, revisable quality of Faulkner’s aesthetic may help us understand why so many of his stories appear again in novels” (Mitchell 258). Or vice versa: a number of short prose narratives have materialized as spin-offs of novels previously published.

[2] Determining agents: intertexts within the canon

Thus, for instance, the incidents related in “Wash” (1934)—which was to be incorporated later into *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and which presents the experiences of the McCaslin clan—bloomed into the massive *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). *The Hamlet* (1940) incorporates revised versions of five stories published in the 1930s, and *The Unvanquished* (1938)—like *Go Down, Moses*—is a novel made up entirely of short stories. Contrariwise, still exploring the Sartoris legend after the publication of *Flags in the Dusts* (1929), the first of the county novels, Faulkner looked both forward and backward in time, writing of the situation of the family ten years after the

conclusion of *Sartoris* in “There Was a Queen” (1933). Or take “That Evening Sun,” Faulkner’s most anthologized and perhaps his most gripping story, which can be regarded as a satellite of *The Sound and the Fury*. Because “Evening Sun” carries such a heavy load of determinacy in texts other than itself, it is the least accessible outside the Yoknapatawpha County context, depending as it does on the subtle characterizations and tensions of the Compson family of the novel whose fictional satellite the short story actually is. The textual links and analogies—discrete objectifications of mandatory intertextuality—oscillate between “That Evening Song” and *The Sound and the Fury*, with the latter serving as the core fathering text.

Indeed, the problematic of intertextual linkage, or more specifically, the degree of determinism arising out of it, will be another major concern in the present study. Indeed, eventually it will also have to be pondered whether or not intertextuality is always a helpful tool and enriching filter in interpretive transactions when the texts scrutinized belong to the same individual canon. Of course, this dilemma spawns further questions: when does determinacy become overdeterminacy? What are the ideal limits of the reading agent’s extratextual background information? What, after all, is the difference between intertextual and “innocent,” thus between “contaminated” and “unadulterated” reading?

In the subsequent discussion—as my title indicates—the word “satellite” will be used to denote a given *short story* as related to a core determining text: that of a *novel*. This relationship would, in the first analysis, prompt a look at evolutionary and ontological interrelationships between novel and short story. In the given framework—the degree of embedding in the construction and elaboration of Yoknapatawpha County—this will not be necessary.

[3] County Tales: “adjunctive” and “projective”

It will be, however, useful to remember two of the classes of Olga Vickery’s threefold division of Faulkner’s “County” stories: *adjunctive* and *projective*.¹ An *adjunctive* story is a narrative unit in its own right; it will simply add more information about certain

¹ The third type of story, both formulaic and parodistic, will not be dealt with here.

characters, situations, or the history of Yoknapatawpha County. To put it more unequivocally, the functional components of an adjunctive story will reinforce or document what has already and elsewhere been established. Established primarily in *Flags in the Dust*, in which Faulkner created the world that he subsequently explored throughout his career. Consequently, a story of this class will operate with a high degree of predictability. Typical adjunctive stories in the Faulkner canon are “Dry September” or “A Rose for Emily.” Thus, Miss Minnie May’s actions and the consequences of her reactions are choreographed—like the subsequent motions of a familiar ballet performance—by a predictable script. The script is nothing else but the “logic” and ethos of Yoknapatawpha County. Again, despite the story’s surprise ending, all the acts and decisions of Miss Grierson—as of a deranged “Sartoris” woman and a “proud fool”—are predictable in the sense that they do not contradict the by now decadent ethos of the Sartoris world. Hence its peculiar and broader—no matter how Gothic and gruesome—realism.

Conversely, a *projective* story tends to be “an element of structure” (300), meaning that this type of short story tends to be more organically involved in the very genesis of construction: the architectonics of Yoknapatawpha. In this logic, the story is to examine a new aspect (for instance, of character) of what has already been established. As such, it will impose new demands of action on the characters and, more importantly, it will project *new demands of understanding* on the reader.

[4] “Possibly but not Probably”: what makes “There Was a Queen” projective?

In this logic, therefore, owing to the fact that it creates new demands of understanding in the reader, “There Was a Queen” (1933) should be considered a projective story: it subverts and redefines an essential question perhaps insinuated but not actually confirmed in *Flags in the Dust* (1929). The dramatic power of the story centers on the contrast between the pride and dignity and sense of family of Mrs. Virginia DuPre (Miss Jenny or Aunt Jenny), the sole direct survivor of the family line, the last of the Sartoris women, and the lack of these qualities in Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, the widow of Miss Jenny’s

great-great-nephew. Her crudely pragmatic attitudes, the sexually unscrupulous role she plays, her outrageous act of “sleeping with the enemy” disqualifies—or ought to disqualify—her from entering the race for the title of Sartoris Woman after Virginia is gone.

The irony of the situation is that although Narcissa will clearly not be a worthy keeper of Miss Jenny’s code, this female outsider with the morality of a Snopes will inherit the Sartoris estate. Although morally she fails to measure up to the family code, socially she is and will be “a Sartoris woman.” The nature of the story’s most significant dilemma is thus primarily a problem of merit rather than of identity: who after all is deserving to be the last Sartoris woman? If we ask this question at the end of the novel, the answer clearly is Miss Virginia. In the short story, however, owing to the passage of time (which ultimately brings the death of the ninety-year-old Miss Jenny) and, more importantly, a piece of additional information pertaining to the blood-line of another female character creates a new element which is likely to reverberate and which may give the reader a pause.

In the second paragraph of the text, when talking about how all the men are gone and how this new quiet is “the quiet of womenfolks,” Faulkner injects a statement, an apparently casual remark that the novel has not confirmed:

As Elnora crossed the back yard toward the kitchen door she remembered how ten years ago at this hour old Bayard, *who was her half-brother (though possibly but not probably neither of them knew it, including Bayard’s father)*, would be tramping up and down the back porch, shouting stableward for the Negro men and for his saddle mare. (210; emphases added)

This brief shift in the narrative focus is also bound to change the moral focus somewhat. Suddenly it turns out that there *is* a woman in the family, Elnora, who is not only a blood kin but who would also be ethically suited to serving as the true keeper of Miss Jenny’s code. Besides undertaking the slave woman’s—then the house servant’s—role in the family, Elnora has assumed the white family’s cares and griefs as her own. Without knowing precisely about the outrageous act of Bory’s mother in Memphis, Elnora turns out to be an infallible judge of the Benbow woman. To begin with, Elnora considers Narcissa an “outsider from town” (211). She is also aware of

Narcissa's predatory mentality. "'She ain't going to leave this place, now that she done got in here.' Then she said quietly, aloud, without rancor, without heat: 'Trash. Town trash'" (212). Later:

"Born Sartoris or born quality of any kind ain't *is*, it's *does*." [...] "Her not come back? When she worked for five years to get herself married to Bayard? Working on Miss Jenny all the time Bayard was off to that war? I watched. Coming out here two or three times a week, with Miss Jenny thinking she was just coming out to visit like quality. But I knowed. I knowed what she was up to all the time. Because I knows trash. I knows the way trash goes about working in with quality. Quality can't see that, because it is quality." (216–218)

The double irony of having the wrong woman for a rank of high morality and responsibility, as well as the irony of having to disqualify Elnora is tacitly implied in the dialogue between Miss Jenny and Elnora:

"They ain't come in the back way, have they?" she said.
"Nome," Elnora said. She approached the chair.
The old woman looked out the window again. "I must say I don't understand this at all. Miss Narcissa's doing a mighty lot of traipsing around all of a sudden. Picking up and—"
Elnora came to the chair. "A right smart," she said in her cold, quiet voice, "for a woman lazy as her."
"Picking up—" the old woman said. She ceased. "You stop talking that way about her."
"I ain't said nothing but the truth," Elnora said.
"Then you keep it to yourself. She's Bayard's wife. A Sartoris woman now."
"She won't never be a Sartoris woman," Elnora said. (213–214)

The short story text, as opposed to that of the novel, raises the option that through genes and codes—heredity and morality—the last Sartoris woman after Miss Jenny's death should be the one who has remained and will remain a monument of Sartoris values: the daughter of John Sartoris, product of the widely practiced "illicit plantation liaison." On account of her ethnic handicap, however, Elnora would never be socially accepted as a Sartoris kin by the community. That she could and ought to be the last Sartoris woman remains a whispered secret between Faulkner and the reader.

[5] Intertextual versus “innocent” reading

“That Evening Sun”: this ominous short story, a classic of the genre, has been selected for closer scrutiny in this discussion. It was first published in *American Mercury* in March, 1931, less than two years after *The Sound and the Fury* saw print. The ties that link the two texts, the novel and the short story, are obvious and somewhat complicated. Blotner suggests, for instance, that the *Sound* itself was originally intended as a short story (565). He also suggests that very possibly this early work was the material that grew later into “That Evening Sun Go Down,”² which was a beefed-up version of another early text, “Never Done No Weeping When You Wanted to Laugh.” Another source claims that there were some other early texts (“A Justice” and “The Twilight”) using the Compson background (Karl 314). Minter adds that “Twilight” was the third Compson story and it became *The Sound and the Fury* (345).

“That Evening Sun” is successfully constructed—primarily contextualized—to operate as a “projective” composition. When, in the reading process, it is continually compared with the fathering text, that is, when it is being read against the background of the story’s novelistic intertext (*The Sound and the Fury*), the short-story satellite will offer radically essential insights. However, it would be a mistake to think that a prior familiarity with the novel is a *sine qua non* prerequisite: the story is self-contained and sufficiently autonomous to be read in isolation (that is, in a sense “innocently”; not in tandem with the longer text from whose central experience it partly grew). Thus, to put it simply, “Evening Sun” does not necessarily require the intertextual crutches. In other words, “innocent” reading in the given context means “unadulterated” reading, i.e., sense-making free from the determinism of the potential intertext.

This also means, however, that in Faulkner’s interlocking canon understanding and interpreting the respective novelistic and short-story text in the two different modes (intertextual ↔ “innocent”) can be radically different. Moreover, statistically, because the initiated recipient—the one familiar with *Sound*—cannot be made to “unlearn”

² The title is a line from “St. Louis Blues,” which Faulkner heard W. C. Handy play years before.

the reading experience, an “innocent” receptive acquisition of “Evening Sun” is seldom probable. Thus, for instance, each of the Compson children reacts differently to the horror of the situation described in “Evening Sun” but whether the interactions and transactions between the children are also anticipated—thus in a way predictable, “typical”—depends on the interpretive filter used. This filter can only be derived from the reader’s previous exposure to and familiarity with the novel. Much of the story’s determinism and predictability in this case can only be derived from a prior exposure to *The Sound and the Fury*. Reading “Evening Sun” as the satellite of a particular novelistic text (or *texts*, as we shall see) is thus likely to elicit a host of contradictory questions and dilemmas which range from fictional inconsistencies and excessive determinism to the problems of predictability and of “innocent” reading. In this understanding, “innocent” or “unadulterated” reading would mean a newcomer’s apprehending the impact of the meaning structure of the text. The reading, that is, of a newcomer to Faulkner.

There exist altogether three “Evening Suns.” In view of the fact that there is no conclusive evidence which would permit accurate dating of the inception and writing of the definitive version of this story, I will not be concerned here with the earlier versions. The inevitable question, of course, cannot be avoided: which of them (or whether any of them, or all of them, or none of them) did Faulkner regard as an added telling of the Compson story?

[6] “That Evening Sun”: the shape of the story

Those early, and substantially shorter, versions comprise the building blocks that later found their way into the 1931 version of the short-story text: the County background; the Compson home; Nancy working for the family; Quentin as narrator; and, marginally, Candace and Jason. Benjy is absent, as he is kept out of all the early texts as well as of the final version. Apparently the fast tempo and the economicality of composition yielded no room for accommodating the logistics of containing the idiot child.

The largest bulk of the story focuses on the black washerwoman Nancy, who lives in a cabin near the Compson house. Besides taking in washing from the Compsons, she also cooks for the white family

when Dilsey, their regular servant, is ill. Nancy is also a prostitute, and is mortally afraid of Jesus, her estranged common-law husband, who she believes is trying to kill her with a razor—apparently because she is pregnant with another (probably a white) man's child. Nancy is thus expecting a white man's child and a black man's rage. She foresees her death. But even as Nancy becomes more certain, the older Compsons downplay the chance of violence. When Dilsey returns to work, Mrs. Compson refuses to let Nancy stay in the house for the night and Nancy, frightened but still clever, persuades the three Compson children to come to her cabin in the evening with her.

In one of the most desperate scenes literature can create, she tries to make them stay as long as possible because she is desperately hoping to rely on them for temporary protection against the man she knows is lying in wait in the ditch outside the cabin: she knows that the presence of the white children in her home can prevent Jesus from entering. The contrast between Nancy's calm horror and the death she knows awaits her and the children's partial or total failure to sense that horror accentuate the pathos and the horror of the situation. Nancy tries desperately to entertain the children. She tells them a story and they pop corn. The children—especially Caddy—comment on her strange story (which seems to be chiming in with her own present situation) and her strange actions, but are untouched by the fear behind them. Everything seems to be conspiring against Nancy and she knows full well that her desperate attempt to buy more time from fate is a losing battle. It is becoming apparent that she is unable to induce the children to stay long. It is getting late. Jason is fretful and wants to go home, Quentin and Candace are becoming uneasy. Finally, Mr. Compson arrives; he is sympathetic with Nancy's fears, but does not believe that she is in imminent danger. He takes the children away, and Nancy is so much convinced that Jesus will get her no matter what she does that she does not even close the door. Faulkner developed the story subsequently to contrast the father's—and Quentin's—lack of real concern with the two younger ones'—especially Caddy's—more immediate involvement in a kind of violence and an unreported tragic *dénouement* which will eventually envelope them. Because Faulkner does not dramatize the conclusive action (the violent act, that is, the actual murder), questions regarding Nancy's ultimate fate remain unanswered. The story's certain but

unspoken conclusion is that Nancy is dead beyond the narrative's temporal parameters, that is, soon after the story's conclusion.³

[7] "That Evening Sun": the Compson background

In "That Evening Sun" Faulkner clearly turned to already created characters and setting as vehicles for his reinvigorated subject. The Compson parents in the short story are much the same as the novel's Mr. and Mrs. Compson. The father, Jason III, who figures prominently in the plot, is basically well-intentioned, sensitive, kind, and he loves his brood. Yet he is incapable of taking command of his household; he is soft and weak when confronted with his whining and neurotic wife. However, he has not yet retired into the kind of ironic and cynical detachment from the world in which we find him in the novel. In "Evening Sun," because he cannot do more than advise Nancy not to take the threat from Jesus seriously, he plays a crucial role in unwittingly causing her death (if it is a death). Caroline Bascomb Compson is in each and every important aspect a close replica of the novelistic image, with both these portraits harking back to another well-known selfish, hypochondriac and egoistic Southern wife, Harriet Beecher Stowe's Marie St. Clare of New Orleans.

As regards the Compson children, the Benjy of the novel, as mentioned, does not exist in the story. The economy of the rather crowded and hectic plot obviously did not require the presence of the idiot child. If there were a Benjy present, he would be four years old. The other three children, however, are very much in evidence. Quentin, a surprisingly quiet boy, is the narrator of the story which he tells as a childhood experience. We are informed of everything through his mind's filter; thus we learn about the ages of the children from him: "I was nine and Caddy was seven and Jason was five" (84). As regards the Quentin↔Candace relationship, there is no trace or hint of an incestuous attachment. In him there is yet no trace of obsession with Candace, there is no foolish and self-destructive idealism. Despite the father's ineffectiveness and the mother's coldness there is no blatant indication in the text that this is a self-

³ In the Faulkner canon several other short stories are finished before he establishes the fact that acts of violence will take place: for example, "Red Leaves," "Dry September," "Mountain Victory"

destructive family. Yet, as we shall see, through the interaction of the three Compson children Faulkner is able to show, with as much naturalistic subtlety as possible, that the seeds of their respective future fates are buried in their genes and psychology. Four other characters from the novel round out the familiar setting of the Compsons—all of them are black figures: Dilsey appears in flesh and blood, Roskus, Frony, and T.P. are briefly mentioned.

[8] Authorial lapses: “inconsistencies”

The co-ordination of “That Evening Sun” and *The Sound and the Fury* is rather shaky. Indeed, in adjusting the two texts, Faulkner—as he is known to have done dozens of times throughout the canon—took a rather cavalier approach to his task of weeding out chronological errors and other inconsistencies. He did not concern himself very much with adherence to logical and real-life adjustments either. For instance, Quentin Compson, the narrator, is nine years old at the time of Nancy’s terror; the date, therefore, to judge from *The Sound and the Fury*, is 1899. He is telling about it, however, fifteen years later (“But fifteen years ago, on Monday morning the quiet, dusty, shady streets would be full of Negro women [...]” {78}) when, according to the novel’s text, he has been dead three (or four) years. It would not be surprising if fertile critics were to build a big case to prove the special (though nonexistent) ramifications of the story’s “dead narrator” speaking “from beyond the grave.” In addition, as Stephen E. Whicker notes, the picture Quentin is made to sketch in the first two paragraphs “does not sound like 1913, but more like the time the story was written, a fact which throws the events of the story into the period when the author himself was growing up” (255). However, these minor lapses do not really prevent the intertextual juices from flowing.

[9] Keeping the murder off-stage—a “clear but unspoken possibility”?

There emerges, however, a prominent issue—both central and controversial—which is ultimately contributory to fundamentally uncertain interpretive options of Faulkner’s text. This crucial ambiguity concerns the ultimate fate of the black prostitute and supposed cocaine addict Nancy beyond the temporal and spacial

parameters of the story. The fact is that Faulkner indeed fails actually to spell out Nancy's death. Nor does he show—visually, imagistically—the physical evidence of the anticipated/imminent violent act. What I am talking about could perhaps be diagnosed as an undesirable lapse or a somewhat disconcerting oversight on Faulkner's part. This seems, however, an unlikely option.

As I have indicated earlier, in the Faulkner canon several other short stories are finished before the author establishes the fact that acts of violence will take place (“Red Leaves,” “Dry September,” “Mountain Victory,” “Wash,” “Pantaloon in Black,” etc.). Thus it is equally unlikely that Faulkner was “inconsistent” when he choreographed Nancy's ultimate fate. If he was “inconsistent,” his inconsistency was the result of a conscious and deliberate authorial decision, rather than of oversight. In choosing not to show the ultimate conclusive act of Nancy's virtual execution, Faulkner could manipulate the reader to experience the impact of those modernistic devices of “not telling” that are normally associated with generating intentional obscurity: suppressed reference, unexplained gaps, withholding of information, refusal to furnish descriptive segments as conventionally expected, burial or temporary suspension of authorial voice (and hereby denying the reader certain basic knowledge of crucial additions), etc. Yet it seems clearly implied at the end of the story that Nancy is about to be murdered for her infidelities by her jealous husband. A close look at the incriminating final scene will make this quite clear.

We left her sitting before the fire.

“Come and put up the bar,” father said. But she didn't move. She didn't look at us again, sitting quietly there between the lamp and the fire. From some distance down the lane we could look back and see her through the open door.

“What, father?” Caddy said. “What's going to happen?”

“Nothing,” father said. [...] We went down into the ditch. I looked at it, quiet. I couldn't see much where the moonlight and the shadow tangled.

“If Jesus is hid here, he can see us, can't he?” Caddy said.

“He's not there,” father said. “He went away a long time ago.”
[...]

We went up out of the ditch. We could still see Nancy's house and the open door, but we couldn't see Nancy now, sitting before the fire with the door open [...].

But we could hear her, because she began just after we came up out of the ditch, the sound that was singing and not unsinging. "Who will do our washing now, father?" I said.

Quentin the narrator looks back from adulthood; he has had fifteen years to ponder what actually expired a decade and a half ago; he was given more than a sufficient amount of time to meditate over the validity and dramatic significance of his ominous question. He appears to be a reliable narrator, and there is no reason to suspect that his memory should have failed him in such a crucial matter.

Yet Faulkner's insinuation of Nancy's actual death as her ultimate fate has had a rough passage in the interpreting community. For instance, Olga Vickery claimed, very firmly, more than four decades ago that in "That Evening Sun"

the situation is so vividly rendered and Nancy's fears so powerfully communicated that her death has, at times, been taken for granted and her corpse identified with the bones picked clean by buzzards in *The Sound and the Fury*. But in view of her disconcerting resurrection in *Requiem for a Nun*, a careful re-reading discovers how much emphasis is placed upon the foolishness of her fears. As in "That Evening Sun" so in "Dry September" or "Wash," Faulkner's refusal to dramatize the conclusive action serves both to intensify the dominant emotion and to project it beyond the story itself. By this last Faulkner makes the reader implicitly accept the possibility of future continuation of the narrative and recognize that his characters' lives extend beyond the formal confines of individual works. Questions remain unanswered as to the fate of young Sartoris Snopes fleeing from his barn-burning father, Dewey Dell still carrying her child as the Bundren family begins its homeward journey, or Byron Bunch whose inept but earnest advances are firmly repelled by Lena Grove.

With the buzzards, that "other Nancy,"⁴ and the sundry "unanswered" questions aside, this argumentation actually hinges on three clusters of allegations: [1] as to Nancy's ultimate fate: her terror is unfounded ("the foolishness of her fears"), the adult Compsons are right in refusing to take her fears seriously, thus Jesus is *not* about to slit her

⁴ See this issue clarified in Whicher 253–254.

throat; [2] concerning the resurrection of Nancy: indeed she does become a central fictional character as Nancy Mannigoe two decades later in Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), thus she stays alive beyond the temporal and spatial parameters of "Evening Sun." [3] Re Faulkner's refusal to dramatize the conclusive action: the blurred outlines of the story's conclusion potentially enrich the text's meaning structure through emotional intensification and projection (that is, extension of plot segments and characters beyond and outside the text).

What can be said in answer to these propositions? One, Vickery works on the assumption that Nancy managed to fool everyone, including even those who refused to go out of their way to extend a helping hand. But it is unlikely that she should also be able to fool the narrator, Quentin, who, as I mentioned earlier, had fifteen years to check his facts and get them straight about Nancy and Nancy's part of and in the story before he begins his narrative. Two, for the very same reason, it is hardly likely that the reader should be justified in thinking of Quentin as a fallible narrator: the oldest Compson son does not appear to have any limitations of perception or understanding. He may lack compassion but not intelligence. Moreover, the Nancy story has registered in his memory as a time- and community-tested residue. Operating through an unreliable narrator was a risk Faulkner knew he had better avoid in a short-prose narrative; besides, the unrequired epistemological gaps in the communicated information would have weakened a text of such subtle nuances substantially. Three, in discussing who has fooled whom, it is unlikely that Nancy could fool Dilsey. On the evidence of the black-and-white and the black-and-black interactions in *The Sound of the Fury* we are probably not wide of the mark to think that Dilsey is never fooled. Dilsey would immediately spot a false note out of Nancy. To accept this, of course, one has to have read the novel. No "innocent" reader would understand Dilsey's special role in the Compson household. Four, should we accept Vickery's arbitrary reading of the absence of the story's conclusive action, Faulkner's best-known lynching story, "Dry September," would cease to be a lynching story.

Commentators of the persuasion that Nancy is indeed murdered within a few minutes after the story comes to an end, have, as we have seen, an abundance of clues both inside and outside the text. The most

conclusive proofs have been mentioned, and there are several more of these clues. For instance, if there was nothing to be afraid of when somebody frightened Dilsey in the Compsons' kitchen ["Was it Jesus?" Caddy said. "Did he try to come into the kitchen?" (86)], why does Mr. Compson find it necessary to take a pistol with him ["father came back up from the kitchen, with his pistol in his hand" (86)]? The reader may also wonder why two further unmistakable warnings from Jesus are disregarded by the Compsons? In the first one Mr. Compson himself announces that "[s]ome Negro sent her [Nancy] word that he [Jesus] was back in town" (83). The second warning, though somewhat more ominous, is also dismissed:

"He in the ditch," Nancy said. "He waiting in the ditch yonder."
"Nonsense," father said. He looked at Nancy. "Do you know he's there?"
"I got the sign," Nancy said.
"What sign?"
"I got it. It was on the table when I come in. It was a hogbone, with blood meat still on it, laying by the lamp. He out there. When yawl walk out that door, I gone." [...]
"Nonsense," father said. (97)

Moreover, in describing the Nancy-and-Jesus story, Faulkner's biographers report, he was writing about something that actually happened; a real-life scene was also a given. Blotner: "A Negro named Dave Bowdry cut his wife's throat and threw her behind their bed." Furthermore, "there is a ditch like the one Nancy had to cross behind the place where the Faulkners used to live." Again, a source reports to Blotner, "Dave [Bowdry] committed the murder a short distance from the Falkner home" (566). These additions may have a biographical relevance but they can hardly serve as conclusive proof of anything. Faulkner obviously decided not to describe the violent act because he saw the killing itself was secondary to other more dynamic novelistic factors. Like in Greek drama, the murder is kept off-stage. However, the deployment of modernistic devices aimed at "not telling" can sometimes be hazardous.

[10] The hazards of resurrection

Before we proceed, we have to answer the question of whether or not it is likely that extratextual input such as critical, philological or

biographical information of the kind that “resurrects” a fictional character assumed dead within a fictional frame of reference will change the way a given text is read? On first analysis, it probably is. The reader can test their attitude with analogous literary examples. For instance, let us look at the potential impact of the link between Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961) and a work by the same author published well over three decades later: *Closing Time* (1994).

The intertextual ties between these two works by Heller are somewhat analogous with the link (through Nancy) between “That Evening Sun” and *A Requiem for a Nun*. At the end of *Catch-22* Captain Yossarian, fed up with the madness of the war, decides to run away to Sweden, rowing in a tiny boat, from the unidentified Mediterranean island where he is stationed with the U.S. Air Force. The last four words of the novel (“...and he took off” [478]) launch him on his risky voyage. Fictional logic, reason, experience, geographical facts, etc. would jointly insinuate that Yossarian will never make it; he escapes his island without any hope of survival. Thus to most readers his death is taken for granted. The question is whether this reading of the novel is radically changed, disrupted even, when Heller publishes *Closing Time*, in which he “surprises” his readers with a kind of belated and unexpected rescue operation: we are told that Yossarian did not die after the end of *Catch-22*. He is older, suffering from bouts of depression, but he is alive and kicking.

Arbitrary resurrections of this sort are likely to elicit a host of contradictory responses: joy, disbelief, confusion, annoyance; most probably these last two. Although Vickery does not believe Nancy is murdered, it is not by accident that she speaks about the “disconcerting” resurrection of the black washerwoman. Of course, radical interventions in implicated texts are always “disconcerting,” even disturbing and annoying, for the simple reason that metamorphic interventions of this nature are likely to subvert reader anticipation, which, from the cultural consumer’s point of view can be disorienting and seldom easy to handle.

There may be further reasons for annoyed reactions. A happy conclusion of the Nancy story (she remains alive) can be disturbing also because the reader wants to know whether he is investing—intellectually and emotionally—in reading a tragedy or a farce. If “Evening Sun” is a story of how a black woman fooled everyone, it is

a farce we are reading. Or a riddle at best. Moreover, the reader may easily feel cheated, and the story may immediately lose its pathos, its sombre and heartbreaking quality, its cathartic reverberations. It seems a safe bet to hypothesize that most discerning readers would instinctively wish to resist the alternative of a facile conclusion—a happy ending or an arbitrary (even if delayed) resurrection—for the simple reason that they would not want to see the emotions of pity, fear, compassion, awe and tragic certainty trivialized. As these would be trivialized in subsequent postmodern texts. Indubitably, in Faulkner's story, bridging the distance between tragic doom and cheap hysterics is insurmountable.

Yet the dilemma remains. It may be intriguing to ponder at this point that perhaps *theory* could be called upon to help. Even so, however, it is unlikely that the core of the dilemma could be removed once and for all. On the one hand, it is certainly true that aesthetic views about the artifact as a sealed and autonomous product with a self-contained world of its own sound helpful and appealing. In this logic, we could even arbitrate the separation of the two Nancies from each other; we might even wish to claim that, ontologically, the Nancy of "Evening Sun" has nothing to do with the Nancy Mannigoe of *Requiem for a Nun*. Which, in the final analysis, happens to be a more than valid claim. On the other hand, however, how can theory persuade the reader to disregard "resurrected" characters? Who are either resurrected or not? In other words, how can you instruct the reader, one, to "unlearn" incriminating information, and, two, to continue reading "innocently," rather than intertextually, just because the theory of the autonomous artifact advises not to worry about unpleasant ramifications?

Despite these question marks and dilemmas I am convinced that it was Faulkner's intention to portray Nancy as a haunted and existentially doomed woman who meets her violent death beyond story's end. When Mr. Compson and the three children escort Nancy back to her own cabin they are also conducting her to the death which will follow. This is the unspoken but clear indication. Faulkner was too great a writer to want to write a case history of trivial hysterics. Or cheap melodrama.

As regards the identity of the "two Nancies" and Faulkner's writerly intentions with "them," subsequently the author himself had

this to say: “She is the same person. These people I figure belong to me and I have the right to move them about in time when I need them” (qtd. in Blotner 1309). This statement clearly chimes in with Faulkner’s oft-quoted pertinent formulation in the *Paris Review*: “I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too” (Stein 82). There is yet another related statement of Faulkner’s which Blotner reports: “They’re horses in my stable and I can run them whenever I want to” (qtd. 1309). These formulations are interesting, but in the present context not necessarily helpful, beyond the fact that they reinforce Faulkner’s solid conviction that he is absolutely sovereign in his literary kingdom. Beyond that claim, these words are silent when it comes to the actual conclusion of “Evening Sun.” It is also easy to see some of the risks and hazards of modernistic games focusing on “not telling.” The lesson is obvious that intertextual transactions generate filters that open up larger horizons of sense-making. However, these added filters may also tend to function as blinders. They may determine—sometimes *over-*determine—the process and substance of interpretation. We are dealing here with a case of overdeterminacy that is seldom useful. Or necessary.

[11] “Evening Sun”: whose story?

At certain junctures “innocent” and intertextual readings can radically diverge. Nancy’s tragic ordeal and prominent role in the story may easily lull one into believing that “Evening Sun” is Nancy’s story. This is one of the two options and this interpretation comes, characteristically, from an “innocent” reading of the text. However, the other, intertextual, option is this: it is not because of Nancy that Faulkner is revisiting the Compson clan. She may be just an alibi, a red herring. Intertextual channels of communication are likely to convey determinisms—from the fathering text to its satellite—that are capable of a thorough realignment of the linkage of the latter’s functional elements. If we give the story an intertextual reading within the Yoknapatawpha canon, the Nancy part of the story—despite the horror of Nancy’s unspoken murder—is negligible, almost irrelevant. Viewed in this light, Nancy is primarily a narrative device: she is a mirror in which the Compsons are shown. Especially one of the

Compson family, to whom Faulkner is known to have been especially attached at the time the two intertexts—the *Sound* and its satellite—were composed: Candace (“Caddy”) Compson. When read intertextually, “Evening Sun” is Caddy’s story. It is her story that Faulkner wanted to tell in *The Sound and the Fury*. It is her image as a child—the doomed and lost woman as a seven-year-old girl—that Faulkner is telling in “Evening Sun.”

We have biographical and autobiographical evidence of the powerful impact of Caddy on Faulkner. The struggle he went through while writing the *Sound*, the work that “caused me the most grief and anguish” (Stein 72) was primarily dominated by the image of Caddy. “The novel” [the *Sound*], Bleikasten contends, “is Faulkner’s first descent into Hell, and Caddy remains his ever-elusive Eurydice” (56). We also know from the relevant literature that the various versions of the three “Evening Suns” were written at a time Faulkner was very much preoccupied with the “symbology of the soiled drawers.” In the *Paris Review* interview he offered this comment on the circumstances of the composition of Caddy’s story in *The Sound and the Fury*:

I wrote it five separate times, trying to tell the story, to rid myself of the dream which would continue to anguish me until I did. It’s a tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter. [...] It began with a mental picture. I didn’t realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl’s drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother’s funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book. And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape from the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding.

I had already begun to tell the story through the eyes of the idiot child [...]. I saw that I had not told the story that time. I tried to tell it again, the same story through the eyes of another brother. That was still not it. I told it for the third time through the eyes of the third brother. That was still not it. I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman. It was still not complete, not until fifteen years after the book was published, when I wrote as an appendix to another book the final

effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it. It's the book I feel tenderest towards. I couldn't leave it alone, and I never could tell it right, though I tried hard and I would like to try again, though I'd probably fail again. (Stein 73–74)

Elsewhere he talked in a similar vein of what Caddy meant to him. In the *Southern Review* version of his introduction (“An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*”) he commented that “[...] in the Sound and The Fury [sic!] I had already put perhaps the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much: Caddy climbing the pear tree to look in the window at her grandmother’s funeral while Quentin and Jason and Benjy and the negroes looked up at the muddy seat of her drawers” (227). In the same text, by way of conclusion, he said this: “So I, who had never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl” (227–228).

In the *Mississippi Quarterly* version of his introduction (“An Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*”) Faulkner wrote:

[...] Whereupon I, who had three brothers and no sisters and was destined to lose my first daughter in infancy, began to write about a little girl.

I did not realise then that I was trying to manufacture the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose, though the former might have been apparent from the fact that Caddy had three brothers almost before I wrote her name on paper. [...] I saw that [the children] had been sent to the pasture to spend the afternoon to get them away from the house during the grandmother’s funeral in order that the three brothers and the nigger children could look up at the muddy seat of Caddy’s drawers as she climbed the tree to look in the window at the funeral, without then realising the symbology of the soiled drawers, for here again hers was the courage which was to face later with the shame which she was to engender, which Quentin and Jason could not face. (230–231)

To the end of his life, Faulkner spoke of Caddy with deep devotion. She was, he suggested, both the sister of his imagination and “the daughter of his mind” (qtd. in Minter 347) “To me she was the beautiful one, she was my heart’s darling [...]”

[12] A repeated telling?

In the *Paris Review* interview thus Faulkner was talking of writing “five separate times” to tell the story. By that, he meant not only the four published versions in the original version, but the appendix he prepared. In *The Sound and the Fury* the four tellings mean four different voices: Benjy’s, Quentin’s, Jason’s, and the “objective” author’s. According to Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* was not finished until fifteen years later, when he made “the final effort to get the story told and off my mind.” Linked to this—the four or five tellings—are the approximately half dozen versions of an introduction to *Sound*. The fact is that Faulkner’s introduction—the one he wrote during the summer of 1933 for a new edition of the novel that was to be published by Random House—survives in several partial and complete manuscript and typescript drafts, of which two have been published, these two respectively and familiarly known as the *Southern Review* and the *Mississippi Quarterly* versions.

What is important and surprising here is that Faulkner did not consider “Evening Sun” as yet another telling, and it is difficult to see why he should have thought so. At the time of the interview, for all practical purposes, he seems to have forgotten about the special significance of his (perhaps) best story. This is surprising, for several reasons: [1] beyond a shared family background, a joint cast of characters, a shared genesis, the short story grew out of the novel’s central experience; [2] “Evening Sun” itself is a repeated retelling several times over; [3] both texts are pervaded by the same particular poignancy, emotional intensity and symbology. [4] This is the only text in the Faulkner canon in which the image of Caddy is directly accessible, where she is not a fiction within the fiction. In the novel she is separated from the reader by a double wall. Since she exists only in the minds of her brothers and because she is not accessible in the now, she is merely an optical illusion, a haunting memory.

Because the novel’s Caddy is conjured up only by indirection and because she is enveloped in a thick fog, she is only vaguely accessible to the recipient. “We can find out what she represents for Benjy, Quentin, and Jason; we never discover what she actually is” (Bleikasten 65). Thus, paradoxically, Caddy, who is the very soul of the novel and without whom *The Sound and the Fury* could not exist,

cannot be regarded the heroine of the novel in any traditional sense. Her elusive figure, the triumph of Faulkner the conjurer's art, is the product of a game of illusion. No wonder she generated a plethora of names, labels, metaphors, and dichotomous pairs in the relevant literature. She has been identified as a myth, a mirage, a bewitching image, an empty signifier, virgin and whore, sister and mother, angel and demon, the figure par excellence of the Other, a blank screen, a chimera, a pure figure of absence, a focal and vanishing point, the novelist's ever-elusive Eurydice, "a name in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning" (Bleikasten 56), etc.

In "That Evening Sun" we finally see Faulkner's "secret Muse" in direct presentation. Intriguingly, Faulkner still keeps his distance from her: he chooses to say nothing about her physical appearance. Thus we never learn whether or how this "beautiful and tragic little girl" is beautiful; we are not even told whether she was sloe-eyed or a brunette, or both, or neither. The only thing we know is that we see her years before her fall from Paradise; before "the dark, harsh flowing of time" swept her away, sweeping her into "dishonor and shame too" (Faulkner, Introduction to 230), before even the reader feels obliged to ponder where the courage came from with which she was "to face later with honor the shame which she was to engender" (231). Thus, while reading "Evening Sun," intertextually and with a Caddy filter, the reader will find it hard to dismiss those haunting questions that Faulkner himself was brooding over in the *Mississippi Quarterly* version of his introduction to the novel, especially these three: [1] what is it that sweeps Caddy to where she could not return from? [2] what sweeps her into dishonor and shame too? [3] Is there, perhaps any indication of the courage inherent in facing the shame which she was to engender, which Quentin and Jason could not face? The answers are hidden in the interstices of the novel. To a searching intertextual reading, however, "That Evening Sun" is not silent either. Faulkner chose to shed light on these, his own, dilemmas through making the three children talk.

[13] Verbalizations: the Compson children speaking

So let the children talk. The larger bulk of the story is made up of their oral utterances, with most of these presented in dialogue. Owing

to the fact that most of the interpersonal transactions are projected as units of oral verbalization, the differences between the Compson children are masterfully portrayed through their speech acts. The nine-year-old Quentin, who in the novel grows up to be a sophisticated and suicidal intellectual who—because of Faulkner’s carelessness—is telling the story “from beyond the grave,” is a surprisingly silent and dispassionate boy. Perhaps even a cold and heartless one. As a child in the story, he speaks no more than a dozen times. Despite his seniority among the children, he does not have much authority and he is definitely not a decision-maker for the group. When he speaks for a rational option, which he always does, he is easily overruled by Caddy. Here is the scene rendering Nancy’s desperate attempt to take the *white* children to her cabin as protection against the intrusion of Jesus with his razor.

“Let’s go down to my house and have some more fun,” Nancy said.

“Mother wont let us,” I said. “It’s too late now.”

“Don’t bother her,” Nancy said. “Don’t bother her now.”

“She didn’t say we couldn’t go,” Caddy said.

“We didn’t ask,” I said.

“If you go, I’ll tell,” Jason said.

“We’ll have fun,” Nancy said. “They wont mind, just to my house. I been working for yawl a long time. They won’t mind.”

“I’m not afraid to go,” Caddy said. (90–91)

Despite his taciturnity, Quentin utters the story’s most often quoted sentence—“Who will do our washing now, father?” (100)—which, in a compositional sense, seals Nancy’s fate. As a child witnessing the scene, Quentin knows that Nancy is going to be murdered. As a narrator he also knows—should know—that the violent act has been accomplished.

The five-year-old Jason is a near-exact replica of the adult Jason IV. Already as a child, he is insensitive, selfish, disloyal, accusatorial, even vicious. He is the one who is ready to blackmail anyone and who will tell on most of the others. Although the reader has no

confirmation that Jason will be the only one who is “sane”⁵ and who will be able to compete (and while competing he will lose soul). Even as a child, he is the master of extortion. His pragmatic ethos is well reflected in some of his loaded sentences, for example this: “I’ll stop [crying] if Dilsey will make a chocolate cake” (89). Among the three children, he is the easiest to identify by the sentences he utters: “I bet you’re drunk,” Jason said. “Father says you’re drunk. Are you drunk, Nancy?” (80). His crude ego trips foreshadow the bigoted adult’s way of thinking in a racialized community: “Jesus is a nigger,” Jason said. [...] “Dilsey is a nigger too.” [...] “I ain’t a nigger” (this last sentence repeated in the story four times). The seeds of the future adult whiner’s personality are clearly present in the young boy. Some further typical utterances of Jason’s:

“I didn’t have any fun.” “If you go, I’ll tell.” “I don’t think that’s a good story.” “I am going to tell.” “I don’t like popcorn,” Jason said. “I’d rather have candy.” “I’m going to tell,” Jason said. “Yawl made me come.” “I didn’t have fun,” Jason said. “You hurt me. You put smoke in my eyes. I’m going to tell.” [...] “Caddy made us come down here,” Jason said. “I didn’t want to.” [...] “I am not a tattletale,” Jason said.

The champion verbalizer of the story, however, is the seven-year-old Caddy. The phrase “Caddy said” occurs in the text fifty-eight times! There is hardly anything talked about or otherwise happening in the story that she would fail to comment on. She is possessed of a unique capacity of empathy and extraordinary curiosity—this latter beyond the point of inquisitiveness—and she has instinctual interpretive powers. She is also mentally alert and intellectually observant, as well as receptive to every nuance. There is no sexual implication, no matter how veiled, that would escape Caddy’s furtive notice. Her curiosity appears to be insatiable. She overwhelms her environment with statements and she bombards people with questions. Especially the latter. Typical is the kitchen scene involving Jesus, Nancy, and Caddy:

[...] [Jesus] said it was a watermelon that Nancy had under her dress.]
“It never come off of your vine, though,” Nancy said.

⁵ In the “Compson Appendix” (1945) Faulkner described Jason IV as “the first sane Compson [...] and [...] the last” (212).

“Off of what vine?” Caddy said.

“I can cut down the vine it did come off of,” Jesus said.

“What makes you want to talk like that before these chillen?” Nancy said. “Whyn’t you go on to work? You done et. You want Mr Jason to catch you hanging around his kitchen, talking that way before these chillen?”

“Talking what way?” Caddy said. “What vine?”

Some of her observations are uncanny: she knows more than one would expect, and she is capable of sensing the importance—especially the unusual quality—of events and human situations that she is yet unable to fathom. Moreover, most of Caddy’s sentences are questions: she is the one who wants to see and know. Indeed, she asks more questions than all the other characters combined. Indeed, we should think of Caddy Compson as the archetypal inquirer: she is ready to climb the tree of knowledge, however hazardous that climb should be, while her brothers are merely watching her do so. Here is a further sample of typical Caddy-ish utterances:

[*Mr. Compson to Nancy: “And if you’d just let white men alone.”*]
Caddy: “Let what white men alone? How let them alone?” [*Later:*]
“Slit whose belly, Nancy?” Caddy said. [...] “Nancy,” Caddy whispered, “are you asleep, Nancy?” [...] “Was it Jesus?” [...] “Did he try to come into the kitchen?” [...] “Can you see us, Nancy?” [...] “Can you see our eyes too?” [...] “What did you see down there in the kitchen?” Caddy whispered. “What tried to get in?” [...] “Why is Nancy afraid of Jesus?” Caddy said. “Are you afraid of father, mother?” [...] “What have you done that made Jesus mad?” Caddy said. [...] “What’s Jesus going to do to you?” Caddy said. “I’m not afraid to go,” Caddy said. [...] “What are you talking so loud for, Nancy?” Caddy said. [...] “You talk like there was five of us here,” Caddy said. “You talk like father was here too.” [...] “Nancy called Jason ‘Mister,’” Caddy said. [...] “We’re not talking loud,” Caddy said. “You’re the one that’s talking like father—” [*In Nancy’s cabin*] “What are we going to do?” Caddy said. [...] “You said we would have some fun,” Caddy said. [...] “Tell us a story,” Caddy said. “Can you tell a story?” [...] “Tell it,” Caddy said. [...] “You dont know any stories.” [...] “What ditch?” Caddy said. “A ditch like that one out there?” [*Sensing Nancy’s obsession with the idea that someone is hiding in the ditch outside:*] “Why did she want to go home and bar the door?” Caddy said. [*Caddy senses that something is out of the ordinary with Nancy*] “Your hand is on that

hot globe," Caddy said. "Dont it feel hot to your hand?" [Then:] "Look at Nancy putting her hand in the fire," Caddy said. "What is the matter with you, Nancy?" [She is in command] "We ought to go home anyway," Caddy said. "Come on, Quentin." [Nancy: "When yawl walk out that door, I gone."] "Gone where, Nancy?" Caddy said. [Nancy: "I reckon what I going to get aint no more than mine."] "Get what?" Caddy said. "What's yours?" ["We left her sitting before the fire."] "What, father?" Caddy said. "What's going to happen?"

The novel's version of Caddy's figure is seen through a thick fog. Yet, despite the fuzzy contours a consensus is likely to emerge among readers to the effect that Caddy possesses the vitality, the tenderness, the empathy, the capacity for love, the compassion—and yes, the courage—which her self-centered brothers and parent so sadly lack. Against this background, the short-story satellite is not a coda but a projective component enhancing the dramatic intensity of the inner chemistry of a doomed family in the making. In this sense "Evening Sun" represents, despite Nancy's violent end, the sinister calm before the storm. For the duration of a dramatic episode, when she is but seven years old, Caddy apparently ceases to be a chimera. We witness Faulkner's triumph both in liberating her from the obsessive memory of her brothers and in negotiating the risky business of "objectifying" Caddy without the resultant image blotting out the mystery of her bewitching portrait. While we hold our breath as spectators of the author's precarious game, we also come to understand the reason for the lack of a Caddy section in *The Sound and the Fury*. Clearly and indubitably, Caddy would have been eligible for the position to serve an objective narrator; after all "she had survived from the pastness which makes up much of the novel" (Karl 323). But Faulkner wanted no direct exposure; elusiveness was his key insight into Caddy. And for this reason he was determined not to give the final segment of *Sound* over to her. In the final analysis, Caddy is elusive to her brothers in the novel, and so she must remain to the reader. And, most importantly, she never ceased to be elusive to her creator. The image of Caddy as reincarnated in "That Evening Sun" was the furthest risk Faulkner was willing to take.

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