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Topographical Topics: Faulknerian Space

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT CONCEPTS TO GRASP, perhaps we never really get it, is the space-time continuum itself, starting with the least accessible calculus of location—the solar system, with its “nine planets, 10,000 known asteroids, and countless comets revolv[ing] around a central star” (“The Solar System” 20). But light years closer to home than the seven bands of Saturn, or the companion star of Supernova 1993J (Kluger 52-61; de Elvira 22), the entire aspect of the risen world—that link of structure on structure, crossing one roadway after another, in an endless array of things and commodities—strikes the child mind in us as an incredible unfathomable—how *did* the world get here, and don’t its present arrangements seem sacrosanct, somehow, impressed with the divine seal of permanence? In another sense of the spatial, we just escape understanding why the salt flats, off Salt Lake City, are actually terrifying, even as one cruises past them at 70 mph, or how it is that six and a half miles up the sky a constellation of stars, spied over the North Atlantic, opens up in the airplane passenger gulfs of loneliness. If, as David Herman proposes, “storytellers use deictic points and other gestures to map abstract, geometrically describable spaces onto lived, humanly experienced places,” then the subjective component of space turns it into an infinite series of authorships—or so it seems—wherein speaking subjects both define it and are defined by it. Still, the relationship between space/place, and as we are concerned with it here, topography/place, remains the problematic encounter that both exceeds the map and remains representable by it.

From one point of view, fictional narrative inhabits the only spatio/temporal sequence that is reversible. (By contrast, experiential space, or the realm of historical time, allows the subject to “return” on a given point, but in doing so, he will not be able to annul the lapse of time, which alters the point. The mathematician’s and the astronomer’s spaces must be as riddled with the capacity of return as the fiction writer’s, but in either case, we could say that her spaces-as-cognizable-object offer a complex picture of superimposed layers of space-time not unlike the writer’s: for the person of

the writer, space and time pose the straitening limit, while the project of writing might well abrogate the ineluctable.) This useful motility that grants license to the "writing writer" brings out the three ways in which, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, time and place/space are related: 1) "time as motion or flow and place as a pause in the temporal current"; 2) "attachment to place as a function of time"; 3) "and place as time made visible, or place as memorial to times past" (Tuan 179). The more or less pleasing aspect of fiction's embeddedness in place, perhaps more than any other trait, suspends our cognizance of its illusive spell and triggers the act of acceptance of an elaborate masquerade. Because it is rather like human habitation as performance and process, fiction seems to hand over the body of the world as immediately graspable substance. William Faulkner's spaces, in such a handover, show an especially dense survey of "place as memorial to times past," as well as allegiance to place as a function of time. But something else is at stake in Faulkner that relates to place and topography but does not have its full articulation in either, is not exhausted by either, however dependent it might be on the locational—and that is to say, the capacity of place to resoundingly "announce" the human; Faulkner's spatial practice is so thoroughly inflected by a "grammar of motives" that their inter-articulation descends with the force of the inevitable. As J. Hillis Miller contends, Faulkner has a "strongly topographical imagination. The events of his novels take place within an elaborately mapped mental or textual landscape in which characters are associated with places" (211). Shattering the allegorical homology between *place* and *personae*, the modern novel broaches "reality," whose specialized analytical properties divide the human scene into disciplinary "regions" that require space to stand apart from speaking subject; modernist Faulkner seems to renegotiate the old split in a new way by generating a fictional discourse that "speaks" place through character and character through place, except that his enormous gifts tend to conceal how he does it. There is a clue to the method, however, in the strategies of Faulknerian space insofar as they yield a saturation of layered elements, as his narrators often obey no clear distinction in their attitude between "now" and "then," "here" and "there." Perhaps Faulkner's most mercurial presence regarding spatio-temporal collapse, Quentin Compson of *The Sound and the Fury*, spends the entire passage of the day of his suicide suffering the erasure of intrapsychic boundaries between past and present, the Mississippi countryside and the urban spaces of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The spatial factor for Quentin is not a pause. It is the continual

pulse of his freighted bearing as the embodiment of a "commonwealth" (Faulkner, *Absalom* 7).

If Quentin's itinerary unfolds a brilliant program of disparately juxtaposed spaces, converging on a single poetic moment, then we could say that Faulknerian narrative stakes out the figurative and material resources of the topographical along its various lines of stress; our purpose in this writing is to examine some of those moments of Faulknerian spatial practice in their demonstration of *topoi* as 1) psychic location, 2) material ground of identification, and 3) the site of creative intervention. Interestingly, Quentin combines in his fictitious agency all three varieties of the topographical—the intrapsychic, the locational, and the inventive. Quentin's odyssey in the first of these displays remarkable consonance with psychoanalytic investigation as we understand it in its Freudian echoes.

In configuring the mental apparatus (LaPlanche and Pontalis 449-53), Freud borrowed from the figurative resources of optics and spatiality. The notion of the psyche as "region," or "province" (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* 96) with specialized and temporally successive functions assigned to each, recurs across the canon, from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which the kernel is systematically sketched, to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in which the archaeological metaphor, at least, is elaborately pursued in alliance with the thematic of the antiquity of Rome, only to be jettisoned midstream, and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, which offers a recapitulation of the entire system. Imbricated onto the image of psychical locality is the notion of the mental apparatus "as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus" (*Interpretation of Dreams* 536). Freud explains that psychical locality "will correspond to a point inside the apparatus in which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being" (536). But these preliminary stages, in both the microscope and the telescope, occur "at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated" (536). The difficulty with Freud's spatial and optical metaphors is that he makes no attempt to correlate psychic function with the anatomy of the brain, even though he hangs on to the idea of the "spatial order" of the psychical processes. Early on, Freud defends his speculative venture of the first topography by acknowledging its flaws—in brief, pointing out its limitations beforehand. Having recourse to figurative play, or taking what might have seemed too wide a poetic license, Freud, the

scientist, is for students of literature and culture as much a "man of letters" as a practicing psychoanalyst: perhaps it is the former, after all, who most captures our interest. In any case, Freud himself appears rather defensive about his application: "We are justified, in my view, in giving free rein to our speculations so long as we retain the coolness of our judgment and do not mistake the scaffolding for the building" (536).

Freud goes on to unfold the topographical arrangement of the first protocol, the *psi*-system made up of the *preconscious*, the *unconscious*, and the *conscious*. Freud will recontextualize the *unconscious*, when, in *The Ego and the Id*, he proposes the second topographical scheme. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud elaborates on psychical "agencies" in complementarity with his "districts" and "provinces," one of which is called "the *ego* proper (*das Ich*) and another which we name the *id* (*das Es*)" (*Moses and Monotheism* 96). The third element of the second topography is the *superego*, apparently a residual feature of the Oedipus Complex. Older than the *ego*, the *id*, the "region" of the instincts, holds the key to the *ego*, the argument goes, insofar as it engenders the latter, which operates "like a cortical layer" and as such "lies in the perceptual system." In turn, the perceptual system is regarded as "cortical both in anatomy and in Freud's metapsychology" (96, 97 n3).

Even though Freud does not develop the "Rome" of the psyche in the opening pages of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he nevertheless concludes that the fact "remains that only in the mind" is the preservation of the earlier stages of mental forms, "alongside of the final form possible, and that we are not in a position to represent this phenomenon in pictorial terms" (71). Backing away from the impressive idea that the mind is a sort of vertical stack of archaeological transformations and displacements, he suggests that the past of mental life "*may* be preserved and is not *necessarily* destroyed" (71, emphasis added). Leaving room in his narrative of preservation for the exceptional, i.e., trauma, inflammation, Freud believes that he has uncovered the rule, and that is to say, "for the past to be preserved in mental life" (72). The preservational economies of psyche seem especially apt for the stacking metaphor or the horizontal spread of a surface; in any case, even if we cannot have our "Rome," what we carry away from the inquiry on the "alongsideness" of the mental past is the notion of punctualities in place.

So, what is Quentin's "problem"? That the past not only sits next to the present, or that Mississippi is brought over to the Bay State, but that the continuum so invades his contemporaneity that we would not be wrong to say that Quentin is "out of his mind"? Or is it that he is too much "in" it? That his "border patrols"—one way that we might think of ego's duty, at Freud's suggestion—are out to lunch? Whatever the psychoanalysts might officially conclude about a mind state like Quentin's, it seems clear that his character is overwhelmed by sensory data that he is absorbing indiscriminately. Moreover, the data are given to him in spatio-temporal sequences that adopt their raw material from Quentin's own psychic content, but the latter, now transposed into an ambulatory dream, is returned to him as symptoms of alienation. As the passages of his odyssey can only suggest, since the narrative cannot "show" the superimposition of the space-time layers so implied, Quentin's sense of things as a *succession* of events is here translated into time as a *simultaneity* of disparate content and space as a directionless morass that marks it. At some point in Quentin's experience that day, space and time so blend that what is "outside" himself—objects in space—becomes an elaboration of what is "inside" himself—the subjective register of time that his father Jason appears to understand, even though what Quentin recalls of his discourse to his son is signed by ironical mockery: "I give [Grandfather Compson's watch] to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it" (SF48). Having made of time the enemy, Quentin attempts to objectify it, as his odyssey inscribes nothing less than the pulsing or spacing of a crisis.

In their discussion of "Topography" in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, LaPlanche and Pontalis point to a possible connection that might be explored between the philosophy of metaphysics and the relatively new science of psychoanalysis; in a note at the end of their entry, the editors expand on their observation that Freud's argument for "'psychical locality' implies the mutual exclusion of the different parts [the different components of the mental apparatus] and a specialization of each one of them. The idea also allows us to apply a fixed order of succession to a process evolving along a temporal scale" (451). Furthermore, they confirm the significance of psychical extension for Freud, strikingly, in contrast to Kant's view: this extended character of the psychical apparatus is such a basic fact for Freud that he goes so far as to reverse the Kantian perspective

by seeing it as the origin of the *a priori* form of space . . . (n[Delta] 453). What they are referring to comes from Freud's "Findings, Ideas, and Problems"¹ that appears in the *Moses and Monotheism* volume; Freud made the entry on 22 August 1938: "—Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant's *a priori* determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it" (300). Neither Freud nor his commentators indicate *which* Kant they mean; this lapse rather puts us up a creek without a paddle but, venturing a little way, we might take a few risks.

What Kant might have made of "psyche" in its modern and modernist sense that fully emerges in the Freudian canon at the end of the nineteenth century seems closer to Freud, if Freud were referring to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, than Freud implies, even though such proximity, after all, might not have been very close. As far as I can tell, there is no "psyche" in the *Critique*, to say nothing of a "psychical apparatus," while the philosopher elaborates a "soul," a "rational psychology," and an "organon" of a "transcendental philosophy" that articulates an ontology, an epistemology, and a cosmology. What is most interesting for our purposes here, however, is that Kant opens his organon with *space* and *time* as the *a priori* determinants of experience that commences with cognition. In the introduction to the *Critique*, Kant looks far ahead to the hoped-for destination, and that is a solution, or systematic response, to the "real problem of pure reason": "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* [judgments made independent of experience] possible?" (146). The "unavoidable problems of pure reason" are as basic and, consequently, as critical as one might imagine and adhere, *mutatis mutandis*, to human progression like the human form itself—God, freedom, and immortality (139). But the scene of the big picture traces back elsewhere and builds "architectonically" to the pure air of Reason. It is interesting to note, as LaPlanche and Pontalis suggest, that Kant, after the Ancient philosophers, applies the concept of the *topoi* or the location in elaborating his project (449). In the "Appendix On the amphiboly [confusion] of the concepts of reflection . . ." Kant "maps"

¹The editors of the *Standard Edition* of Freud's writings point out that these "short disconnected paragraphs were printed at the end of the volume of posthumous works published in 1941" (XXIII, 299 n1).

the concepts: "Allow me to call the position that we assign to a concept either in sensibility or in pure understanding its **transcendental place**" (381). The "transcendental topic," however, seems to cover wider ground:

In the same way, the estimation of this position that pertains to every concept in accordance with the difference in its use, and guidance for determining this place for all concepts in accordance with rules, would be the **transcendental topic**, a doctrine that would thoroughly protect against false pretenses of the pure understanding and illusions arising therefrom by distinguishing to which cognitive power the concepts properly belong. (381)

If the notion of the *topoi* traces all the way back to Greek Antiquity, and in particular to the Aristotelian rubrics "with a logical or rhetorical value from which the premises of the argument derive," then we have at least one clear path of connection between modern epistemologies and their philosophical precedents, and certainly between Freud and some of his philosophical predecessors (LaPlanche and Pontalis 449). LaPlanche and Pontalis go on to say that it "is tempting to place the Kantian use of the notion of topography midway between the logical or rhetorical sense it has for the Ancients and the conception of mental localities that was to be Freud's" (453, n[Alpha]1).

In any case, locality as an organizing motif of thought and conceptualization apparently lends itself to a heterogeneous mix of textual and epistemic protocols across time, which width of application imitates the inherent notion of spatiality. Enroute to "pure reason," Kant opens "The Transcendental Doctrine of Elements" with a "metaphysical exposition" on the concept (*Critique* 174; 174-78). In concluding the first section of "The Transcendental Aesthetic," Kant draws two fundamental conclusions: 1) that space "represents no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other, i.e., no determination of them that attaches to objects themselves and that would remain even if one were to abstract from all subjective conditions of intuition"; 2) that space "is nothing other than merely the form of all appearances of outer sense, i.e., the subjective condition of sensibility under which alone outer intuition is possible for us" (176-77). But from these conclusions, he warns, we cannot say that space is *only* subjective, rather, that it has *reality*, or objective validity in "regard to everything that can come before us externally as an object . . ." (177). At the same time, space is an *ideality* with "regard to things when they are considered in themselves through reason, i.e., without taking account of the constitution of our sensibility" (177). The convergence of the ideality and

reality of space allows Kant to assert that space is an *empirical reality*—"with regard to all possible outer experience"—and a *transcendental ideality*—"that it is nothing as soon as we leave aside the condition of the possibility of all experience, and take it as something that grounds the things in themselves" (177). Lastly, the

transcendental concept of appearances in space . . . is a critical reminder that absolutely nothing that is intuited in space is a thing in itself, but rather that objects in themselves are not known to us at all, and that what we call outer objects are nothing other than mere representations of our sensibility, whose form is pure space, but whose true correlate, i.e., the thing in itself, is not and cannot be cognized through them, but is also never asked after in experience. (178)

Space, then, is one of the forms "of which we can have *a priori* knowledge" (Eds., *Critique* 7). Space and time, "neither subsistent beings nor inherent in things as they are in themselves," are, "rather only forms of our sensibility, hence conditions under which objects of experience can be given at all and the fundamental principle of their representation and individuation" (Eds., *Critique* 7). Now for Kant, *receptivity* in the subject [or "the capacity . . . to acquire representations"] "to be affected by objects necessarily precedes all intuitions of those objects," as "the form of all appearances can be given in the mind prior to all actual perceptions, thus *a priori* . . ." (172, 177). Space "is a necessary representation, *a priori*, that is the ground of all outer intuition" (175).

Freud might have been alluding to these passages in Kant, and if so, then it is somewhat clearer what his sententious objection might have consisted in: instead of the psychical apparatus taking its cues from spatiality, spatiality is projected from the psychical apparatus, especially by way of conscious ego. Substituting the "psychical apparatus" for Kantian "cognition" or "experience" does not quite work, but it is as close as we can come to effecting an intersection between the two systems designed not only to explicate different processes, but also explanation by way of contradistinctive discourses: Freud, commencing his career as a clinical and research neurologist, shifted "in his thinking from neuropathology to psychopathology" (Blum 94) in his attempt to understand the phenomenon of hypnosis. The "articulation of a medical language and its object," in Michel Foucault's reading, will emerge precisely within the century and three decades that separate Kant's and Freud's births and the century that lapses between the project of Transcendental Philosophy and Psycho-

analysis, or the era of the Enlightenment and the final quarter of the nineteenth century (*Birth of the Clinic* xi). Though Foucault is as concerned to elaborate the *role of discourse* in the reorganization of medical knowledge and the redistribution of the "corporeal space" as he is the pathological phenomena of "the clinic," his observations are generally instructive, to my mind, of the shift of scenery that enabled the emergence of the Freudian project in light of advances in neurological medicine:

[T]he clinic appears . . . as a new outline of the perceptible and stable: a new distribution of the discrete elements of corporal space (for example, the isolation of *tissue*—a functional, two-dimensional area—in contrast with the functioning mass of the organ, constituting the paradox of an 'internal surface') a reorganization of the elements that made up the pathological phenomenon (a grammar of signs has replaced a botany of symptoms), a definition of the linear series of morbid events (as opposed to the table of nosological species), a welding of the disease onto the organism (the disappearance of the general morbid entities that grouped symptoms together in a single logical figure, and their replacement by a local status that situates the being of the disease with its causes and effects in a three-dimensional space). The appearance of the clinic as a historical fact must be identified with the system of these reorganizations. (xviii)

Perhaps it would be correct to say that the Kantian thematic was no longer available to Freud's era, although we distantly hear tintinnabulations from one end of this historical sequence to the other. For instance, both Freud and his commentators use the concept of the "mind" nearly synonymously with mental faculties and processes, but on occasions when Freud is exercising the exactitude of a differentiation he insists that, for him, there is no commensurability between "mind" and "consciousness." Freud makes use of other inquiries to support his own contention that "mind" and "consciousness" are not co-extensive, given inferences drawn from dream life:

'The problem of the nature of the mind evidently calls for a preliminary investigation as to whether consciousness and mind are identical. This preliminary question is answered in the negative by dreams, which show that the concept of the mind is a wider one than that of consciousness, in the same kind of way in which the gravitational force of a heavenly body extends beyond its range of luminosity.' (*Interpretation of Dreams* 612 n1)

The psychical apparatus, as set out in the first topography, seems strictly confined to the systematic analysis of a survey of perceptual *inputs*—we might say—or the internal and external stimuli that enter the perceptual

end of the apparatus and that travel "across" the *psi*-system to the motor end of it, or the *outputs* of energy that initiate the motor behavior or "action." A map of the entire network of a subject's signifiers, as Lacan would put it (44), the psychical apparatus covers a territory of activity of which a considerable portion is supposed to be obscure and eludes the lights and claims of "Reason." Moreover, the Freudian mental survey or field does not pose an *ontological* hierarchy of values and functions—some future inquiry might examine in detail whether or not this assertion stands up—because in Freud there is no summit, as it were, to be reached, even though consciousness is ethically obligated to bring to exposure as much of its obscurity as it can. As Freud argues, the task of psychotherapy is "to bring the Ucs. [the unconscious] under the domination of the Pcs. [the preconscious]" (*Interpretation of Dreams* 578). In this system, the *unconscious*, not the conscious (or what would be for the Enlightenment "cognition" or "mind"), "must be assumed to be the general basis of psychical life" (612). The larger of the two spheres, the unconscious "includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious. Everything conscious has an unconscious preliminary stage; whereas what is unconscious may remain at that stage and nevertheless claim to be regarded as having the full value of a psychical process" (612-13).

While the wish to quickly summarize Freud's investigations here cannot be easily gratified because of the revisionary elements in his work, as well as a certain continuity of the psychoanalytic problematic that he staked out over the decades, we attempt, nonetheless, the following conclusions: what Freud had to say about consciousness is only one example of a canonical rubric that he continued to supplement. The topography of the psychical apparatus that he lays out in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is revisited in a few of the subsequent volumes, *The Ego and the Id* among them, in which he describes a "synthesis" of positions taken in earlier work. In *The Ego and the Id*, consciousness is not entirely withdrawn but joins its resources to *ego*, which is defined as a "coherent organization of mental processes. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached" and it is the ego that controls "the approaches to motility" (17). If we think of the individual as a "psychical id, unknown and unconscious," then we are called on to imagine the ego as a surface or, more graphically, "as the germinal disc [that] rests upon the ovum" (24). The ego, the closest of the psychical apparatus to the external world, is said to be "first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface

entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (26). Furthermore, "the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body . . . representing the superficies of the mental apparatus" (26 n1). In the "intermediate position between the external world and the id" (149), the "conscious ego" seems to be a body plus, or as close to an "outside" and, thus, *spatiality* as the mental processes come. Quite specifically, this formulation appears to answer Kantian space by proposing "the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus" (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* 300).

If we think of Quentin Compson's odyssey as the symptom of a crisis, then perhaps it could be put down to his having a psychotic episode, powerfully signaled in the poetics of his tale; Freud suggests that a neurosis is the outcome of a conflict between the ego and id, "*whereas psychosis is the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relations between the ego and the external world*" (*Ego and Id* 149, emphasis added). For the lay person, there is apparently not much to choose between these states; in elaborating the "transference neurosis," Freud points out that the ego, in refusing "a powerful instinctual impulse in the id," develops a mechanism of repression; the repressed material, struggling against its fate, "creates for itself . . . a substitutive representation," or the *symptom*. The embattled ego, enlisting the offices of repression, comes to follow "the commands of its super-ego," whose imperial authority, Freud argues, has "more strength than the instinctual demands of the id" (150). The ego, then, is said to have come "into conflict with the id in the service of the super-ego and reality . . ." (150). But in both the psychoneurosis and the psychosis, the etiology, he contends, "always remains the same: It consists in a frustration, a non-fulfillment, of one of those childhood wishes which are for ever undefeated and which are so deeply rooted in our phylogenetically determined organization" (151).

In any case, the "problem" of the character of Quentin Compson must be solved within the poetics of his narrative, which seems to rehearse in its syntactical endeavor certain psychoanalytic features, i.e., the repeating reel of episodes from Quentin's life in Jefferson, especially his involvements with his sister Caddy; the endless round of circular movement from a central point; Quentin's apparent withdrawal from affect—breaking the watch

crystal and drawing blood, but not "registering" it as other than a more or less disposable "object" of his person. Quentin's journey on the day of his suicide has no goal beyond *movement* itself, which thematic is critical: in this case, a topographical itinerary over the streets of Cambridge perfectly mirrors, in its poetic and dramatic function, the actual path of a regression. What might have been relegated in the mental economy to sleep and dreaming now makes its appearance in the waking world as the erratic motions of a character who is dreaming, as it were, on his feet. The psychoanalytic explanation of such a condition is that the subject is caught slipping back and back toward the perceptual system of the mental apparatus; the "watchman" in this set up, the "censorship" between the Ucs. and the Pcs., is "overpowered," as "the unconscious excitations overwhelm the Pcs., and thence obtain control over our speech and actions . . ." (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* 567, 568). The vivid content of Quentin's stream of thought in its visual, auditory, and kinetic appeal invites rapt attention in part because of its fragmented vocation, i.e., sentences that break across periods and thus, in the midst of thoughts; it would seem that in both the actual world and the fictive one, "hallucinatory regression," in a case like Quentin's, describes what occurs when "unconscious excitations" "direct the course of the apparatus (which was not designed for their use) by virtue of the attraction exercised by perceptions on the distribution of our psychical energy. To this state of things we give the name of psychosis" (*Interpretation of Dreams* 568). Quentin's poetic "twin," Darl Bundren, demonstrates the coin flip of this "invasion," when, falling to sleep either in or outside a strange house, he knows, exactly, what his *ego* is/not; that it is an "is/not" that presides over its own location:

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not . . . (80)

In attempting to decipher what this play of predication might mean, I traced something of an analogy between it and the Socratic "Parmenides" that Hegel referred to as "the greatest literary product of ancient dialectic" (129). An inquiry into the beauty of truth, the "Parmenides" displays the deconstructive and analytical resources of the dialectic, step by step, through a single proposition, for example: "Therefore the one in no sense is," the Socratic voice points out: "It cannot then 'be' even to the extent of

'being' one, for then it would be a thing that is and has being. Rather, if we can trust such an argument as this, it appears that the one neither is one nor is at all . . ." (Plato 935). It seems that Darl is exercising a kind of dialectical logic in running through the scales of predication; his "inquiry" looks like both nonsense in that it mimics the bizarre string of words and images that overtakes a mind falling off to sleep (a form of sheep-counting, really, or doodle-making with the fingers) and poetic sense in the following through on a series of propositions that Darl might well ponder in his waking hours. For all its resemblance to the Socratic "Parmenides," with its vertiginous citation of the dialectic, Darl's hymn to sleep also suggests that it is the conscious ego "which goes to sleep at night" (Freud, *Ego and Id* 17). If Quentin, turning Darl Bundren downside up, or flipping his condition on its heels, really should be sleeping in his bed at the moment that we encounter him on the street, then we would regard the space of his journey as the horizontal survey of a mind "outing" its material, emptying back into the external world what it once possessed as an aspect of "inner" being.

The closing pages of Quentin's narrative partially proceed under the auspices of the "river," but in this case, the latter shimmers across various locational references—the Charles on the Boston-Cambridge border, as well as the Mississippi, coursing the belly of the land—while, in its broadest resonance, the river is the timeless current of mythical means—the Mississippi tributary of *As I Lay Dying*, for instance—that marks, if not mocks, human limitation. Relatedly, it is perhaps not happenstance that Quentin's wandering mind trips over, in proximity to the imagistic clusters that subtend references to the river, a Latin version of Darl Bundren's what-am-I (or the Lacanian "'I' is another"): "*Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum*" (SF110). Dense with associative figures, the passages occasionally give way to what feels like synaesthetic translation, when, "feeling" the water, for example, Quentin begins to "smell" "it." Not pointedly referenced, this errant pronoun, one of Faulkner's favorite devices of ambiguity, alternates between the Mississippi honeysuckle, loaded with valences of Caddy, and the rain, an obsessive noise, registering in Benjy's head, as the reader, recalling Benjy's olfactory acumen, suspects inchoately that the "it" of the "smell" that Quentin signals also intimates the aromas of mortality, with vaguely sexual overtones. To my mind, one of the most remarkable features of *The Sound and the Fury* is that the reader never actually experiences Quentin's suicide by drowning but collects clues along the trajectory of his narrative that

indicate its imminence. The flat irons that he purchases, the letter home about which there is much ceremony but whose content remains unrevealed, the packed trunk, the withdrawal of affect, all announce a character on his way out, who wants to put a stop to the terrific ceaseless flow that has already drowned him. The closing passages, in their mix of mundane and mournful psychic material, have already planted the notion that the river is back there waiting. In this specific fictional instance, the "back there" marks a location on the map of urban Boston-Cambridge, but it is also the way back for Quentin to a piece of psychic life that has gotten away from him.

Thus, it might be said that the river, an aspect of background and a symptom of continuity across tide and generation, is foregrounded as a lead actor on the human stage. A deictic point, located at the crossroads, on the boundary, it is for Faulkner a value within itself and the spatial context that situates the intersubjective motives of character on the solid ground of the social. Keenly aware of spatial representability, Faulkner sets out to reconstitute the plenitude of an abstract topography in the creation of fictional ontologies that bring a world to stand. But Faulkner was so successful in transforming ideally empty spaces, as it were, into scenic apparatus, or the movement of character through a material scene, that he could incorporate in his fiction a "return" to the abstract; in other words, the maps that supplement *Absalom, Absalom!*, extratextually, not without humor, and sketchily hand-drawn by the author himself, telescope the locations of his fiction that we know as the interior movement of agents. Assuming that the map of the novel comes after the "fact" of Yoknapatawpha, we could think of topographical location here as that that generates its own self-reflexivity. To that extent, Faulkner projects as an entire fictional project "an interpretive human geography, a spatial hermeneutic" (Soya 2). At work in the intersection of history and geography, the "'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of being" (Soya 12), Faulkner infuses the topographical with the full range of its resources, as we have already seen instanced in the narrative of Quentin Compson; we are reminded of Miller's observation that *event* and *place* in Faulkner are closely concatenated (211). The interarticulation of the spatio-temporal juncture in Faulkner, where event running along a temporal sequence cuts across the bias of location or a social "field," might in fact do more to enhance our understanding of geography as a living agent than the official study of

geography itself. There is no disciplinary name for such a conceptual habitation, but the coinage offered by a pair of interlocutors on the place of the geographical figure in the work of Michel Foucault creates an approximation of the intent: "geo-history" or "anthropo-geography" try at announcing the encounter between geography and the human sciences, geography and culture ("Questions on Geography" 65). Aspects of the geographical, the topographical, of place, and space in Faulkner come to signify three overlapping angles on the *locus* or the *situatedness* that we should try to disentangle. The river encompasses all three aspects of locality.

Discriminating in an adequate and a plausible way between the space of the river as a poetics and the river as a geographical totality would seem to lose itself in qualification that fritters away the sight of the object. Often enough the poetic figure borrows from the resources of the latter; among U.S. writers, Faulkner joins a number of other creative intellectuals for whom geography and its expression in the topographical element is the inaugurating moment of a new mythos: certainly for Mark Twain, Langston Hughes, Hart Crane, Richard Wright, Jean Toomer, and William Carlos Williams, among others, places that could be mapped in the imagination, as they actually were in space, are the inscription of critical moments in national literary development. But we could think of these individual and collective discursive performances as the "up" side of the spatial concept—the tendency to memorialize the topographical feature as an aesthetic instance; perhaps the *representability* of the spatial, both for the writer and the map maker, and perhaps the only thing that they have in common, is that *demarcation*, in the respective medium, "naturalizes" the object in view. An odd word for the river (since it in fact exists in nature), to "naturalize" means in this case the erasure or the suppression of a mapped location's place in the capillaries of power, as we will see with the Mississippi. What the river as a geographical totality never allows us to forget is exactly how its resources have been wielded and by what force, to what ends. We could think of the poetics of the river as the picture postcard, the Kodak moment, that traps the object in a memorable calm, even when the topic is devastation. For Faulkner, the poetics of the river, as a framing device for fictive Yoknapatawpha, might be described as a topographical obsession.

Even though Faulkner's hand-drawn sketch of his fictional places suggests a parody of the cartographical and topographical vocation, it offers nonetheless another mode of "seeing" and "reading" his fiction, alongside the range of critical commentary. In Noel Polk's corrected edition of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the "Map of Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi" trails a series of appendicular matter that takes in a "Chronology" of the events of the narrative, a "Genealogy" of its agents, and in this case, an "Editor's Note," which explains that this edition of the novel is based on "the original typescript which Faulkner prepared for publication" (AA 311). The placement of these documents in the aftermath of the narrative might be thought of as its metacritical aperçu and an affirmation of its status as fiction. The "Editor's Note" is especially sobering here in "returning" the novel to real time in the life of its readership. It presumably intervenes on the fictional flow of the narrative by exhibiting some of the props and hardware that the reader has already witnessed in another way, but its imperial gesture, having the last word, is actually undermined by the drawing that follows it, which placement would suggest that the tension between lived history, the time and space of the writing of the novel, and Faulkner's reinventions of aspects of the historical sequence will remain as sinuous and sinewy as ever. Faulkner's readers would become familiar with his appendices from *The Sound and the Fury*, or from *Absalom, Absalom!*, even though "Appendix Compson 1699-1945" was not composed before the Fall of 1945. I first read the novel (as a sixties undergraduate) in an edition that carried the Appendix in the position of a *preface* (New York: Vintage, 1956). I can well imagine that by having some things explained beforehand, the publishers were trying to head off the blooming buzzing confusion that the novel provokes in readers. In any event, it is possible, then, that the Appendix as a feature of Faulknerian creation would have been known to his readership from *Absalom, Absalom!*, whose publication succeeds *The Sound and the Fury* by nearly a decade. For sure, the supplemental modalities of the novels not only exploit the porosity of the historical, its shapability by acts of signification, but also extend the fictional world into spaces made for it by history. Martin Heidegger pointed out that space is "something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely a boundary. . ." (154).

A simple square, marked by intersecting axes, and signed "William Faulkner, sole owner & proprietor," the map of *Absalom, Absalom!* both

imitates a topographical survey and mocks it by identifying its points of reference according to an ontological tag, or one saturated with a feeling tone: "Bridge which washed away so Anse Bundren and his sons could not cross it with Addie's body," for example, in the lower southeast quadrant of the map, looking toward the Tallahatchie River, or the "Church which Thomas Sutpen rode fast to" toward the lower east corner of the northwest quadrant, looking from the same vantage. Bounded by the Tallahatchie River on the north and the Yoknapatawpha Drainage District on the south (Blotner 1: 182), Jefferson is partially carved out of "Issetibbeha's Chickasaw Grant" with a relatively unpopulated site off the Pine Hills on its southwest quadrant; its center, interestingly, where the axes intersect, is especially dense with claimed and named spaces on or near the main road that leads north to Memphis or south to Mottstown. Not unexpectedly, critical mass, the sign of civilization and culture that conduce to the city, is engendered at the center where, among other institutional sites, the Courthouse is located, as is the "Confederate monument which Benjy had to pass on his *left* side." The commons of Jefferson, the Courthouse, the Church, the hotelier's, the bridge, etc., are enhanced in the attention because of the social resonance that attaches to them, specifically, their association with the proper name of a character. An idea in Faulkner's head, a compound of real and fictitious places, a space of play and replay, this map would be utterly useless as a directional guide, or as a reproduction, faithful or otherwise, of landscape—in fact, it might even be misleading, if one tried to locate and match up the coordinates that it proposes—but as a kind of "representational space," as LeFebvre defines it, it is priceless to the imaginative economy that the Faulkner corpus rehearses. As "representational spaces," these sites would constitute one of the moments of the conceptual triad that LeFebvre contemplates: Such spaces are "directly *lived* through [their] associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users,' but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do more than describe" (39, emphasis added). With regard to symbolic representability, the map defines space, even in its fictional occurrence and because it is fictional, we can see it better, not as an abstract emptiness, or a hollow to be filled up in the center of my brain, or yet, what we think or envision when we land on "void," but, rather, as a punctuality that becomes spatial only insofar as it is inscribed by a social practice, a social register, topographical and otherwise. In that sense, space is a series of markings and

clearings that are interstitial to known points or conceptual ones and in that regard stands in for infinity. Made ready for a specific use, it might be thought of as a version of the future, even open space with apparently "nothing" in it.

As space, the river, like Faulkner's big woods, is doubtlessly sacralized, though the ceremonial character of the sacred is here displaced onto a discourse of secular transformations, with overtones of awe; when the funeral party of *As I Lay Dying* confronts the desolation of the flood, time and space appear to converge on the eyeball in a complex geometry of the boundless. Darl and his brothers, Cash and Jewel, wait, with Addie's body, on one side of the devastation, looking across it at the rest of the family on the other:

The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and [they] are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left. . . . Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between. (AILD, 146)²

²One of my former students and a superb reader of Faulkner, David Markus, once proposed a quite elegant theory of the looping string in this passage, which theory has the added bonus of apt critical complementarity to the scene at hand: Markus suggested that the river "stands figuratively and literally perpendicular to the family's resolution" to get Addie Bundren buried. The struggle that they wage against time might be thought of as a "matter of arriving at the end of a linear course (like an unraveled string)." Markus further holds that the scene in question is an "isolated repetition of the temporal landscape of the novel itself," insofar as the timeline of the novel "loops back on itself during the overlapping moments in time when one narrator ends and another begins." In order for the string to loop, "it must first deflect in a manner perpendicular to its initial course, before back-tracking slightly at its highest pitch and rolling round again to continue its initial path." He describes Darl's "doubling accretion of the thread" as a "sort of wrinkle in time that often occurs in the temporal structure of the book when narration shifts, doubles back on itself and then continues forward. For the reader, too, this wrinkle is more complicated than a simple loop suggests; one must not only regain a sense of where one has been relocated in time, but must also use prior associations made about the narrating character (if such associations exist) to situate oneself, with some degree of comfort and understanding, within the consciousness of the new character." Mr. Markus lives in Manhattan and is writing himself.

Even though the passage is couched in the subjunctive, it seems to describe with awful precision what might be imagined if time "turned" spatial, if it dramatically *materialized* as an actual goal to traverse, at least in the disturbed poetically gorgeous head of Darl Bundren. In this case, a few well-chosen adjectives would not have been sufficient (as they never are for Faulkner), as it seems that he wanted to attempt to articulate the most difficult idea that he could think of about the world of mathematical relations (or in Kantian terms, a pure *synthetic a priori*) here set down on the flooded ground of a human enough dilemma, however mock heroically it might strike the imagination. The river not only suits the purpose as efficient cause, but metaphorizes the notion of the Divine itself (where the science of mathematics might have originated) in a momentary and momentous fluttering of the veil. In Heideggerian terms, the river would qualify as a "thing" that "installs" or allows "a space into which earth and heaven, divinities and mortals are admitted" (155). Even though Heidegger in this instance is actually addressing a bridge as his example of *das Ding*, taken back to its original "presencing," or standing forth in its appeal to Being, Faulkner's river nevertheless conforms to the philosopher's claims concerning the "fourfold." In Heidegger, we go from locations to spaces to sites and places, in the always-dwelling of Being. In any event, Faulkner's river in its topographical, spatial, and ontological properties becomes the chief term of an unstated contract between his characters and the "dark diceman" (SF 112).

It is rather surprising that the river identified on the Jefferson map is actually the Tallahatchie, and not the Mississippi, although the former belongs to the Mississippi River System. What is identified as the Yoknapatawpha appears to have been a drainage point, for, among other small rivers and creeks of the region, the Yocona. Emptying into the River of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the Tallahatchie flows into the Yazoo River, located in the west-central portion of the state; running southwest, the Yazoo spends its waters into the "Old Man" just above Vicksburg (*Houghton-Mifflin Dictionary* 384, 435). Faulkner does not always say which river his narrators mean, but his map induces a doubletake so substantial that one checks the geographical facts: the Tallahatchie is described as a "dark slow-moving river," about 300 kilometers long, with "black bottom land and stand of trees . . . thickets and swamps," "meandering across the county's northern border. . ." (Blotner 1: 72). Faulkner's parents moved from Ripley,

Mississippi, to Oxford in LaFayette County on 22 September 1902, shortly before William Faulkner's fifth birthday. Even somewhat distant from the town of his growing up, the Mississippi, to my mind, is likely the waterway that he is envisioning when, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a concealed narrator links Quentin Compson to Shrevlin McCannon/MacKenzie³ by an act of geographical contagion that originates, again, in *the River*. On an occasion when the Faulkners were visited by a distinguished professor and his wife from New Jersey, the couple remarked that they had traveled along the Mississippi on their way to "Ole Miss" to see a friend. Faulkner is said to have replied: "That big river flows through the lives of all of us . . . even though it's seventy-five miles away" (Blotner 2: 1060). But in a real sense, the Mississippi was as "presenced" to him as any overwhelming idea.

Not even named in the *National Geographic Atlas of the World*, the Tallahatchie on Faulkner's map curls across the northern border of Yoknapatawpha like a big red banner; in fact, if one alters her angle of vision ever so slightly and regards as a flagpole the diagonal line that cuts sharply eastward across the field and identifies the location of Sutpen's Hundred, then the tag for the river, intersecting the pole, looks rather like the standard of an advancing army. Such a style of military presentation would have matched the moving columns of troops engaged in Civil War battle. While the caprice is mine, it is certain that the map itself, along with the Chronology and Genealogy of *Absalom, Absalom!*, completes the universe of the fiction in all the relevant points: the chronology in its claims on a natural historical sequence; the genealogy as the play of the proper name and its modes of transference across the generations; the topography as a figurative reduction of the *situatedness* of genealogy and chronology. In the broadest sense, the topography represents global connection by virtue of the waterways and faultlines in the earth; in Faulkner's case, the imaginative locus that frames and describes Yoknapatawpha brings together a large chunk of it across what we know as the Americas. Edward Glissant goes so far

³Though the "facts" about the character are fully delineated in the Genealogy of *Absalom, Absalom!* as "Shrevlin McCannon," Mrs. Bland, in *The Sound and the Fury*, visiting her son Gerald, who has matriculated at Harvard (and is one of Quentin's chums), refers to Shreve as "Mr. MacKenzie" several times during the scene that unfolds on a street in Cambridge; taking in the sights of Boston-Cambridge in Gerald's roadster, along with some of her son's running mates, Mrs. Bland and party encounter Quentin in the midst of comic confusion concerning the little Italian girl who has attached herself to a meandering Quentin (SF 92-93).

as to contend that Faulkner's writings inscribe a "frontier," with the Mississippi as its "invigorating current" (*Faulkner* 227). In Glissant's reading, the Yoknapatawpha and the Tallahatchie "rather than tributaries and branches are its mythic daughters" (228). It is this "family," then, that gathers in its currents "movement, hesitation, transition, uncertain identities, and truths that cannot escape the charm of the possible and the impossible all mixed together" (228).

That "postage stamp of native soil," a deliberate pitch for the locale and the most familiar sites from which the widest possible spaces are pried open to uncanny view, demonstrates a paradigmatic instance of the workings of synecdoche. From this place, we touch the other and its immeasurable limit; there is perhaps no more poignant an evocation of a well-articulated extensivity than the figure of geographical contagion that we mentioned earlier; the map identifies "Compson's. Where they sold the pasture to the golf club so Quentin could go to Harvard." As we have seen, Quentin at Harvard bears Mississippi with him, right into his dorm room, shared with his Canadian roommate, Shreve: "Born, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 1890. Attended Harvard, 1909-1914. Captain, Royal Army Medical Corps, Canadian Expeditionary Forces, France, 1914-1918. Now a practising surgeon, Edmonton, Alta." (AA, the "Genealogy" 309). But on the other side of that "now," Shreve not only shares his freshman year with the young melancholy Mississippian but becomes with him a kind of co-worker in the kingdom of narrative and the creation of the biography of Thomas Sutpen; in the process, the pair erects a viewing stage from which to see the field of U.S. History, by way of its southern tier, and its "high and impossible destiny." The shell of the novel is set between September 1909 and February 1910, but the novel itself ranges quite freely in its dense interior from the childhood of Thomas Sutpen, in the early years of the new Republic (it is interesting to think that an infant born c. 1808, as Sutpen might have been, would have taken his first breath of post-natal air during Thomas Jefferson's second term of office and come to maturity under "Old Hickory"), to the opening years of Reconstruction in the aftermath of the Civil War. In brief, the sixty-year span that the events of the novel either imply or directly reference chronicles, by indirection and the centrality of a single paternal line, the post-colonial growth of the South and its entry into the social and material flows of the American future. No one has ever called Thomas Sutpen a Jacksonian democrat, but we might think of him as precisely the

kind of white man that the Jacksonian era is supposed to have made room for: a faceless anonymity, which class would not be immediately extended the suffrage, to say nothing of even a bit of simple humanity, but, once purged of its filth, and having become property holders and "respectable," would socially count for quite a lot more than the human waste it once was and still disavows.

With virtually shocking consistence, this tale of "upward mobility" snakes through the mythemes of the nation's history, predicated on the extermination of its native populations and the enslavement of its African ones; it is probably not an accident that Sutpen's adventures in the good offices of capitalism and "private property"—Sutpen calls it his "design"—eventuate in vast land holdings, which acquisition bisects the "Trail of Tears" and the occasions that lead up to it with chilling exactitude (Zinn 123-48). Sutpen enters Mississippi out of nowhere, as it were, in 1833, according to Rosa Coldfield's account, based on what she is told, and within five years of that mysterious eruption on the face of Jefferson, Sutpen is quite literally a man to his manor born. On 1 October 1838, seventeen thousand Cherokees, out in the world of *realpolitik*, are "rounded up and crowded into stockades" (Zinn 147). Years later, survivors recall "halting at the edge of the Mississippi in the middle of winter, the river running full of ice, 'hundreds of sick and dying penned up in wagons or stretched upon the ground'" (Zinn 147). By 1838 in the fiction, Thomas Sutpen will have acquired, additionally, a wife, Ellen Coldfield, who, one day, will fold "small plump ringed unscarified hands" "on the damask before the Haviland beneath the candelabra" (AA 51). A narrative obsession that adheres to every character of *Absalom, Absalom!*, its capital object of desire, "Sutpen" engenders a number of narrative theories, which the writing mines, but he is in his absence the surpassing fullness that is irrecoverable, but for all that, the tellers, Quentin and Shreve among them, as consumed here by the possibilities of narrative as Rosa Coldfield or Quentin's father, unrelentingly ravel and unravel the lines of force that traverse it.

It is on just such an occasion that Quentin and Shreve are engaged on a long winter night of talk "about the South," about Thomas Sutpen and his surround. The Harvard chapters of the novel encompass numbers six through nine, and the passage in question appears in Chapter 7 (AA, 176-234), highlighted by the tale of Thomas Sutpen's psychically violent

accession to "double consciousness." One of the key moments in Sutpen's development, the tale is related by Quentin in Shreve's hearing from stories passed down to Quentin from his father from his grandfather; though a third-hand relay to ears of a non-invested party, the information that comes through is graced with the authority of the seemingly inevitable; in other words, we cannot imagine that things could have happened any other way. Given the whole ensemble of conjecture about Sutpen's origins, it would be right to say that his biographical survey begins in an unspecified, unsituated time and place—perhaps it was the mountains of Virginia, since, as Shreve maddeningly interrupts Quentin to explain, there was no state of *West Virginia* in 1808. In any case, we deduce from the lack of certainty that Sutpen, in effect, is robbed of a chronology, a genealogy, and a topography, since, as the story filters down, he cannot pinpoint a place or time of birth, which makes his tellers uncertain about his age, even though he might have been twenty-five years old in 1833, when he entered Mississippi. The ambiguity of the "factual" concerning his birth and its circumstances testifies that being born, if it is strictly or merely the fruition of a natural process, might not count with either the census-taker or the wider social order. "To be born" is, thus, an act of social recognition, of a social register. Whoever the Sutpens might have been, they are viewed here from the perspective of a social and human vestibularity, nowhere more powerfully signaled than in the notion of the family's perpendicular descent from point A to point B in a stunning instance of the paradox of motion (persistently figured in the Faulknerian canon) and the loss of agency. Instead of passing through time and space, the latter pass over them in a sort of "dreamy and destinationless locomotion . . . suspended while the earth itself altered, flattened and broadened out of the mountain cove where they had all been born" (AA 182).

There is, perhaps, a clue here to self-consciousness/knowledge itself, which would argue that Sutpen, without *time*, *place*, and *paternity* (for what it is worth, a "father" appears, but with questionable viability, and the mother figure is reported already dead), he is given no basis for a *self-epistemology*, if we could say so, or ground for self-understanding until the utter jolt of insult; as a "scene of instruction," the front door entrance, which access is blocked to him, paradoxically marks Sutpen's entry into modes of "self-fashioning," the making of *place* for oneself, a location in time and space that belong to knowing. Sutpen's dawn of self-difference, the

"twoness" that *thinks*, feels hunger, is suddenly aware of its "looks," and takes on the capacity for self-objectification, propels him to the West Indies with one overwhelming drive—to eventually "own things" in houses, land, and people. Having carried the burden of narrative for forty pages of print "Quentin ceased" (AA 208). When Shreve enjoins him to continue, Quentin replies that Sutpen, in "real" time, or what would amount to the diegetic time frame of the narrative, stopped telling his grandfather the story at that point and would only take up the slack thirty years later. But in the meantime, an embedded narrator fills up the narrative pause with a descriptive aperçu:

... the two of them not moving except to breathe, both young, both born within the same year: the one in Alberta, the other in Mississippi; born half a continent apart yet joined, connected after a fashion in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough, that River which runs not only through the physical land of which it is the geologic umbilical, not only runs through the spiritual lives of the beings within its scope, but is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature, though some of these beings, like Shreve, have never seen it. . . . (208)

This sweeping prospect, in its grandeur of proportions, offers no point from which the human eye might comprehend it, could see the whole of it, "broken by countless rivers [that] converge and flow into the Big River, which, almost like entrails, keeps the vast alluvial plain fertile running through the valley down to the Gulf of Mexico" (Tatsuaki). The virtual infinity implied by this continental gaze configures space as a disjunctive and continuous flow of places and loci that belong to a topographical unity, which sums up, across degrees of latitude and longitude, meteorological patterns, types of flora and fauna, an infrastructure of food stocks and the water supply, in brief, the means and modes of production and reproduction: "Traversed now by pathways and patterned by networks, natural space changes: one might say that practical activity writes upon nature . . . and . . . this writing implies a particular representation of space. . . ." (LeFebvre 117-18). Spatial practice, written on by climate and ideology, as well as history and geography, is so impressed by human bodies *in relations* that it is fair to say that, given the year, one could tell how he or she "felt" about the Mississippi, either vicariously or experientially—the Mississippi of the "Trail of Tears," 1838, the Mississippi of the great floods of 1927 and 1993, the Mississippi of summer 1980, when I crossed the river from the west, enroute to Memphis, at the end of a honeymoon, the

Mississippi of the Golden Arch of St. Louis, the Mississippi of 2003 and the official opening of the Louis Armstrong Memorial, Algiers Landing, New Orleans. Of the three dimensions of *locatedness*, the *place* of the Mississippi, as of any other topographically representable space, would express its thickest solidity of meaning because it is the scenic apparatus that bristles with "man"/"woman," "race," "class," "region," and the long arcs of desire in which the sexualities are prolonged and declared; the site of the emblematic and mystic chords of the memorial, *place* therefore defines what Hannah Arendt calls "the location of human activities" (73), the closest space, the *topos* with an intimate name. The location of the "*vita activa*," labor, work, and action" (73), the place of the River not only enables Yoknapatawpha as a mode of mimetic production but also identifies the writer's body in space crossed by the Environment in which his characters are suspended.

The narrator's "spiritual lives" and "very Environment" address, then, these invisible currents of place that punctuate the space of the Mississippi; Tatsuaki calls the formation the Mississippi Trough, Faulkner's narrator calls it The Continental Trough, while some geographical dictionaries recognize neither, nor does it seem that the narrator was offering a synonym for the Continental Divide, or the Great Divide, hundreds of miles to the west. The term apparently demarcates a Faulknerian neologism, and the narrator's naming it a "trough," capitalized, no less, signals the River's vast alimentary function, the "good" and "bad" breast that "feeds" human life and socio-political and material production/reproduction all along the line. A very famous nineteenth-century visitor to the young Republic noted this: "The valley which is watered by the Mississippi seems to have been created for it alone, and there, like a god of antiquity, the river dispenses both good and evil" (Tocqueville 19).

In an initial encounter with the passage in question, one might regard the link between Quentin's and Shreve's respective birthplaces as something of a cosmic stretch, and while it is a remarkable stroke of imagination that the Southerner and the Canadian would be brought so intimately together into the same space, the pair represents either end of a network 3,895 nautical miles long. It runs from the Gulf of Mexico, into which waters the Mississippi empties, to southwest Montana, near the Canadian border, where the Missouri, meeting the Mississippi at St. Louis,

fractures into a series of headstreams. If the traveler is a motorist, then the distance between Jefferson (Oxford), Mississippi, and Edmonton, Alberta, is 2,232.75 land miles and would exhaust approximately 36 hours and 48 minutes of driving time.⁴ One itinerary takes us right up the belly of the continent, following the River's course, past Memphis, Little Rock, St. Louis, out across the Midwestern United States, across the border to Winnipeg, Manitoba; from Winnipeg, the driver would connect onto the Trans-Canadian Highway West, Route 1, to Brandon, Manitoba, across the province of Saskatchewan into Alberta, north to Edmonton. Quentin only took a car ride somewhere in Italian Boston in Gerald Bland's roadster, and it isn't clear how Shreve might have gotten to Cambridge from his home in Edmonton in September 1909—for sure, it would not have been by car or airplane, but possibly a series of rail and ferry connections—as Quentin reaches Harvard by train; it is fair to say, then, that the distance between the two points closed, gradually, from 1909, the year of the setting of the novel, to 1936, the year of its publication, and to the early twenty-first century. But the sense of distance and difference is exactly the point that the narrator drives home, suggesting, consequently, that the act of creation and re-creation, which the pair performs on the pulse of the nerve, engenders a new space—a found space—set in motion by the river's emotional and sentient commerce. If in Quentin and Shreve's case, it takes two, it is noteworthy that their cultural, geographical, and historical difference is strategically crucial, insofar as it poses, at a metaphorical level, the point/counterpoint of interlocution.

"Joined, connected after a fashion," "by a sort" (unusual hesitations in Faulkner's writing) imply that the unfolding underway invites a look askance, a modicum of skepticism, but all the more reason to embrace the idea; if a raindrop that falls in Lake Itasca, where the Mississippi is said to have its source in northern Minnesota, will arrive at the Gulf of Mexico within ninety days ("Mississippi River"), then by a leap of social logic, Quentin and Shreve are "joined" by a similarly mysterious law that travels according to subterranean influences. The idea of an underground route of transmission is conveyed in "the geologic umbilical," which manages to

⁴I must thank Ms. Hilary Emmett, a Ph.D. candidate in the graduate program in English and American literatures at Cornell University, for meticulously mapping this itinerary for me.

conjoin the notion of mineral and rock substrata with the softer, anthropomorphic image of an umbilical cord. The force of the combination exceeds the locution itself because it gives way almost immediately to an idea that pursues the function of the umbilicus—to feed the new life in the womb—so that those “beings,” Shreve and Quentin, among them, are the properly named subjects, born into the Environment. For all the figurative cruces of the entire passage, however, its “geographical transubstantiation” is the most striking not only because of its catachrestic effects but also because of its irreverent reverence that dares to collocate “transubstantiation” with any objects or processes outside the Eucharist and its utterly unique significance. In fact, we can think of no occasion that summons use of the term outside the exegetical traditions of writing generated by the warrant and context of the New Testament, even though some scholars have persuasively argued that for a contemporary audience, as well as for the audiences of the Synoptic Gospels, the Eucharist itself “would necessarily provide the constant type in terms of which to understand all the other recapitulations of the body” (Bishop 51)—individual, erotic, metaphoric, and cosmic. Still, the appearance in Faulkner’s text of the name of the strategy or gesture of the Eucharist, hedged round albeit by demurral and explicit re-direction, sends tremors through the reading body, and while it is not at all unusual to wonder at worrisome length what Faulkner’s narrators are up to, this linguistic usage seems ripe for a bypass. Why is it there? And what could it possibly mean?

Though “geographical” situates “transubstantiation” in the line, the space where we might begin an inquiry could be thought of as something immeasurably smaller than a geographical entity, a space that would be analogous to the nuclear unit of a cell, in this case, two bodies in the “world” of a university on a continent that links individuals and institutions by way of its multiple networks and relations. At the heart of this tremendous span—on an analogy with the elephant, lipping a peanut in *The Sound and the Fury*—we are conducted inside a “warm and rosy orifice above the iron quad” (AA 176). Even before the space is claimed (by someone who seems to be simultaneously inside and outside the room), an arm appears—it is Shreve’s, sleeveless, “smooth cupid-fleshed forearm and hand coming back into the lamp” (176). In brief, intimacy is unfolding, as we are told later on that if one looked at Shreve from his head to his waist, he would get the impression that Shreve was naked. The point is that the pair is not only

comfortably installed in their place but fixed in it in such a way that their kinetic behavior, their body language, is customary in each other's regard, even ritualistic; the few descriptive passages of the segment are very telling in this sense because they position the agents as though they were in *confrontation*, while in the midst of a familiar kind of rhythm to them—Shreve's pipe-smoking, deep breathing exercises in the window of the room, fetching the coats for warmth, etc. (206). Given that Shreve offers the "ear" to the scene, driving Quentin on and on, insisting that he not cease telling it, it is as if his interlocutor were translated into the role of confessor or analysand, in either case, relieving, or curing, or purging himself with *talk*. That there are no witnesses to the scene reinforces the absolute privacy of the moment as though secrets were being revealed, and in fact *these things* have not been said before in this space. If "orifice," which suggestively crosses its wires with female and male sexuality, verges on a discourse of the erotic, then the latter comes to rest beside another kind of devotional resonance because Quentin and Shreve are "facing one another across the lamplight table . . . in this snug monastic coign. . ." (208). Given what is at stake in the props of the scene, the single engine of its generation is words, words, words, both in the sense of the enactment of the narrative itself and insofar as the word is the subject of the action.

That word play and production occur in the scene under the auspices of a "geographical transubstantiation" asserts not only the melding of bodies across regional spaces but also the magical property of words to effect conversion. As things are choreographed, the words of the passage are literally layered—atop an "open textbook," Quentin's father's letter, both objects introduced in Chapter 6, lies open but proximate to a "fragile pandora's box of scrawled paper" that released into the atmosphere of the room, now or at some other point in time, "violent and unratiocinative djinns and demons" (208). Whether or not the djinns and demons pertain to the open textbook, or by implication, other texts that belong to Quentin and Shreve is probably less important than the notion of the transformative power of writing, the speakers' capacity to create and alter a space by virtue of imagination: shortly the pair will *become* Henry and Bon—"while both their breathing vaporised faintly in the cold room where there was now not two of them but four, the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more and less than twins, the heart and blood of youth . . ." (236). With the elements of the scene fracturing across image clusters

like a rapidly panning camera, the reader can hardly focus on a single sequence before a contrastive and contradictory one interrupts it, but we might isolate alongside the geographical transfer of substances the "monastic coign" as the secular displacements of sacramental and sacrificial nuances that overtake the scene. In a sense, Sutpen's story, which occupies the lion's share of the narrative space, is actually secondary and pretextual to what it allows, and that is to say, the showing, the *making*, the *fabricating* narrative, the systematic play of signification that engenders a reality beyond the normative; as "monks" Quentin and Shreve are rendered *preservers* of the word, as well as a pair of its *makers*. And from this coign-of-vantage, we see a bit of daylight back to that scandal of the play of substances.

In his impressive work on the body of the Eucharist, Jonathan Bishop reviews "the problem of the real presence" in the opening pages of his argument that examines the exegetical traditions of scholarship and writing on the question of transubstantiation from the early church fathers to contemporary investigations in Sacred Theology (10ff). What is most useful for our purposes here is Bishop's inquiry into the action of the Eucharist as *sacrifice* and *sacrament*, more precisely, the economy of their dispensation. What begins, as Erich Auerbach pointed out, as a culture-specific movement ends in a universal meaning and appeal as one of the world's great religions. Bishop retraces the path of these contending interpretive strategies by way of a comparative reading of the Eucharist as remembrance and the Eucharist as a "reproduction" of an "historical antecedent." In both the memorial and the replicative outlines, the Eucharist involves an "original" and the "recipient," or a "testator" and his "heirs." A childless and successorless Jesus "did have several potential 'siblings'" as the visionary company of the disciples represented "the whole of an ideal Israel" (22). The "transfer" that the supper effected was, therefore, *lateral*, across a generation and the generations of the future, descended from the first; the transference is schematized in the following way: we are asked to imagine a "line in the shape of an arrow passing . . . from left to right" (21). We could think of this axis as "the trajectory of the body as a whole" (21). But intersecting it at intervals are three vertical lines, labeled, in the first instance, "blood" at the upper pole, "flesh" at the lower; at the second interval, the vertical would be labeled in the same way, with "wine" at the top and "bread" at the bottom, and the third interval, "Spirit" in the upper position, "community" in the lower (21). In the *sacrificial*

outline, "the sins of many are indeed representatively expiated by the chosen individual," while, in the *sacramental*, the "spiritual privilege" is "transferred to the many who will ever receive it," however undeserving and bereft of understanding (23). On one side of the interpretive axis, the movement travels "from the many to the one" and on the other, "from the one to the many" (23). This reversal of the elements in the relationship—"from sin (first actual, then ritual) to blessing (first ritual, then actual)"—generates an entire series of parallel shifts: "from passion to resurrection or human to divine, and so most generally from negative to positive" (23). But the sacramental and sacrificial dimensions of the performance correspond "as well to the semantic distinction between the literal and the metaphoric" (24). These "words of institution," spoken from the same point of origin as the "words of creation," and, thus, the establishment of the "body of Christ," or the Church, show, quite remarkably, an enunciation "within the order of signs rather than the order of existence" (24). The Son in this scheme is situated in the "order of signs"—perhaps it would be more accurate to assert the copulative here—He is the "order of signs"—in complementarity to the Father. And if the Son of the Father "has in fact been revealed," then a complicated transference of properties proceeds from this moment of creation become sign, word-made-flesh-made-sign: signification "must be as blessed as being; and if signification, then the human order that corresponds to and is produced by it—which is to say, the eventual community" (24). Not too surprisingly, Christ, the wordsmith, is an "artist," "but after the Spirit rather than the flesh" (24).

In the heat of creation, we might say, Faulkner was likely not remembering the complexities of the catechism, as it is just as likely that his religious sentiments were hardly official or systematic, but rather would have been quite compatible with any number of Romantic tendencies that displaced a religious structure of feeling onto other conceptual forms, from the Emersonian "oversoul" to the Coleridgean "esemplastic power." But Judeo-Christian heritage, despite its decline in the modern and postmodern world, still exerts such powerful force over the cultures that have hosted it that the entire panoply of its epistemic, literary, conceptual, enunciatory, mythic, and ethical resources belongs to believers and nonbelievers alike; it is in the spirit, I believe, of this cultural osmosis of religiously inflected and widely available forms that the Faulknerian passage inscribes its energy,

yet it is tempting to try and make more of this passage, which enters with a roar and has been greeted by the reader with about as much noise: in the broadest sense, the passage contemplates the vocation of the artist—in their virtual solitude, in the intimacy of a pair of bodies, acting in this instance as a single force, and in withdrawal from the world, the agents of the scene are rendered a disembodied voice, an unhinged ear, as medium of the word; it travels through them, by way of them, as they, for extended periods of time, “forget” that they are freezing, that time is even passing. It is this going to *another place* in this room that might be called the space of art and its potential revocation of time and the limitations of space. The “transubstantiation” here is the translating, the “overpassing” into another, right across the regional gates that, like “race,” “nationality,” and the repertoire of figures of division, impede the very fellowship that the believer believes the sacred dinner signaled; the homoerotic signatures of the scene, by “confusing” the traffic directions, only seem to complement the version of “joining” that the dual act of creation declaims. These two, now one or four or multiple, in an exchange of the mortal moment for a momentarily transcendent one that brings back to life an entire departed world, war and all, have inaugurated the dissolution or exhaustion of difference—Quentin, the Mississippian, Shreve, the Canadian, joined in the same undertaking; that is to say, the act of signification that Bishop calls “blessed” by virtue of the oldest of warrants. That “eventual community,” touched off by the signifying act/performance and still reverberant, may well be constituted by those of us Faulkner readers not only across the generations but the generations at sites as disparate as Nagano, Japan, and upstate New York.

One is not surprised to find an affirmation of the artist in a Faulkner novel, one of the most compelling in the language. But we had not expected to trip over it in quite the way we have: religious talk in Faulkner tends to be a tongue of derangement, with the effect of whiplash, as it is in the narrative of Joe Christmas and the sacrificial motifs that course through *Light in August*. Here in *Absalom, Absalom!*, centered, in its allusive densities, on a man, who like David, had two sons, the religious nuance is more subtly inhabited; we might even say that it is a single strata in the mix of tectonic plates whose fierce movements have shifted the landscape of the American novel. At Faulkner’s location, all the species of the spatial episteme appear—the physical/topographical, the psychic/psychological, and the

creative/imaginative. What joins them is the intersubjective scene that measures its own import in space and time.⁵

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⁵For Hilary Emmett, who showed the way.

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