

**FLAUBERT AND FAULKNER:
MOURNING THE COUNTERFACTUAL**

Thesis submitted by Rachel Benoît, New College
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford,
Trinity Term, 2022

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers the first extensive comparison between the work of Gustave Flaubert and William Faulkner. It is a study not only of the stylistic parallels of their texts, but also of two periods in time: the cultures of defeat that marked France after the events of 1848 and their aftermath, and the American South in the wake of the Civil War. Through close-readings of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Madame Bovary*, and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August*, I explore how these authors respond to the question of history's place in the novel. Over the course of three chapters, I demonstrate that failure, both historical and narrative, incites and necessitates the imagining of alternatives, and that the process of mourning the impossibility of these alternatives is an aesthetic end unto itself.

The comparative approach enables a new understanding of the counterfactual mode in Flaubert and Faulkner. Their use of counterfactuals permits a rendering of events which might have happened, but did not, allowing these imagined scenes to linger and provoke novelistic consequences despite their unreality. In the novels of Flaubert and Faulkner, these unrealized counterfactuals leave their protagonists, like their societies, caught in an interminable process of mourning for events that never occurred, so that the alternate histories, lovers, children, and selves emerge as those that matter most.

For these texts to become not just analysed material, but also tools with which to read, each chapter reads across both authors. The overarching argument of the thesis is that the oeuvres of Flaubert and Faulkner are not only symptomatic of their respective cultures of defeat, but also orchestrate a reading process that replicates the experience of living through histories defined by failure. I show that comparative projects between authors that transgress place, time, and language are valuable exercises to identify thematic undercurrents that cut across the specifics of cultural and linguistic contexts, allowing us to use metrics beyond genre and period to address the breadth of their influence. Throughout, I address the challenge of bringing together such disparate authorial personalities, and the friction created by the contextual and structural mismatch between the 1848 Revolution in France and the American Civil War. This friction awakens us to new readings of these heavily studied authors, and moreover to the comparative exercise in which we are always engaged – between the fictions we read and those we live.

LONG ABSTRACT

A radical experimenter in the novel form, William Faulkner exaggerated and pushed to new extremes literary disruptions inaugurated by Gustave Flaubert a century prior. This thesis argues that these novelistic innovations did not occur in a historical vacuum: atmospheres of failure during the French Second Republic and in the American South after the Civil War informed and motivated the stylistic breaches that define the work of each and account for the cross-pollinations a comparative reading can reveal. Given their stylistic and historical congruencies, it is surprising that, until now, no extended work dedicated exclusively to the comparison of these two authors has yet been undertaken. Offering the first extensive comparison between the work of Gustave Flaubert and William Faulkner, this thesis sheds new light on how history functions in their novels. It examines the relationship not only of two authors and their texts, but also of two periods in time, to explore the literary residues of defeated ideals.

Close readings of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Madame Bovary*, and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August* reveal how both authors respond to the question of history's place in literary fiction: a counterfactual realm takes hold, dethroning traditional modes of writing history into fiction. These novels paint oblique representations of historical events that appear obscured beyond recognition by fragmented perspectives, disrupted chronologies, disparate and conjoining narrative voices, and saturnine protagonists who, unable to engage with the real, are instead consumed by the loss of impossible pasts.

The comparative approach thus enables a new understanding of the counterfactual mode in Flaubert and Faulkner. As literary tool, the counterfactual permits a rendering of events which might have happened, but did not, allowing these imagined scenes to linger

and provoke novelistic consequences despite their unreality. With these definitions as anchor, this thesis demonstrates how Flaubert and Faulkner use the counterfactual mode to write the histories of defeat. Over the course of three chapters, I demonstrate that failure, both historical and narrative, incites and necessitates the imagining of alternatives, and that the process of mourning the impossibility of these alternatives is an aesthetic end unto itself. Unlike other works of fiction that prioritize the progression of a plot and the conventions of a readable novel, Flaubert and Faulkner allow the redundancy, boredom, delusion, and disenchantment of melancholia to govern the bodies of both character and text. Indulging what might have been becomes an exercise in accessing what might yet be – alternatives not only of histories, but of fiction-making and modes of reading.

Understanding that both authors wrote in milieus which saw a heightened production of counterfactual history narratives provides illuminating context to their novels of stagnation and failure. As a hermeneutic device, counterfactuals place pressure upon *les idées reçues*, to use Flaubert's term, and destabilise the central moments of a narrative. In the novels of Flaubert and Faulkner, these unrealized counterfactual events and desires leave their protagonists, like their societies, caught in an interminable process of mourning for events that never occurred, so that the alternate histories, lovers, children, and selves emerge as those that matter most.

While post-1848 France and the post-Civil War South might seem incomparable, I argue that their brand of unprocessed and unspoken societal grief and frustration required and inspired similar literary strategies. Just as Flaubert used the 1848 Revolution and Faulkner the Civil War to reflect upon their own presents, this thesis suggests that texts and ideas can transgress their spatiotemporal origins and inform our larger experience as readers.

Indeed this thesis enacts this transgression by identifying moments in these texts where the use of stylistic devices (such as *style indirect libre* or stream of consciousness) arises from the nature of the historical moments they relay. Foregoing the novelistic conventions which preceded and surrounded them, these authors sought alternative modes of narrative as a means of addressing histories defined by failure and haunted by the might-have-been. This thesis is particularly concerned with the dialogue between the stylistic innovations in these works and the historical climates they depict to demonstrate how comparative work across periods and languages puts pressure on received ideas about such influential texts.

For these texts to become not just analysed material, but also tools with which to read, each chapter reads across and moves between both authors. The chapter titles, ‘Defamiliarizing History’, ‘Aborted Filiation’, and ‘Black Blood; Black Bile’, refer to history’s relation to the body, both corporeal and textual. ‘Defamiliarizing History’ focuses on *L’Éducation sentimentale* and *Absalom, Absalom!* to demonstrate how the absence of the overtly historical counterintuitively happens through tactical exaggerations and theatrical framing devices which, in turn, heighten the reader’s sensibilities to the unsaid. In this mode of (not) writing history, Flaubert depicts the failure to engage with the real by moving his characters through a defamiliarized hyperreality, whereas Faulkner draws our attention to the unreliability of historiographies by spectacularizing the processes of narration and the inherent speculation involved in the transference of history. In both cases, framing devices position the reader as one of many spectators engaged in watching and listening to (hi)stories.

The second chapter reads failure through the lens of the family metaphor and isolates scenes in *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Absalom, Absalom!* where family lineage is disrupted, and/or corrupted: instances of miscarriage, abortion, sterility, and incest. I situate their use of 'failed' reproduction within a larger genealogy of the leitmotif of dead children in literature that spans from Chateaubriand to Toni Morrison. Ultimately, counterfactual children, mothers, and bloodlines are shown to overtake the factual in both the narrative and metanarratives of these texts. I finish by reading *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* as one text to expand upon the incest plots that weave them together, reading incest as site for intertext.

The third chapter examines historical mourning as it manifests itself in the mechanisms of the body - digestion, blood circulation, abjection, and ejaculation. This final chapter is distinct in that it pivots away from the more overtly historical settings of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* to focus exclusively on *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August* - two novels preoccupied with the private somatic manifestations of mourning, showing what happens to a body left to writhe in the factual/counterfactual, with Emma Bovary perpetually dreaming of an alternative life from the one she leads with Charles, and Joe Christmas tortured by his racial ambiguity. For Emma and Joe, bodily fluids of mourning become the pent-up toxic by-products of lives not lived. I anchor my argumentation around the parallel images of spewing black liquids to map black bile and its Aristotelian opposite, white foam, onto a white/black binary to discuss the racial implications of this imagery, and its writerly echoes of the text at work: black ink upon white page. In paying particular attention to the depictions of the body in Faulkner, this chapter demonstrates the extent to which Flaubert's example loomed in his mind as he wrote. Both Flaubert and Faulkner, masters of conveying provincial regionalism, brought

the corporeal to life by depicting the struggle of the alienated person against its environment.

The overarching argument of the thesis is that the *œuvres* of Flaubert and Faulkner are not only symptomatic of their respective cultures of defeat, but also orchestrate a reading process that replicates the experience of living through histories defined by failure and inaction. I show that comparative projects between authors that transgress place, time, and language are valuable exercises to identify thematic undercurrents that cut across the specifics of cultural and linguistic contexts, allowing us to use metrics beyond genre and period to address the breadth of their influence. Throughout, I address the challenge of bringing together such disparate authorial personalities, and the friction created by the contextual and structural mismatch between the 1848 Revolution in France and the American Civil War. This friction awakens us to new readings of these heavily studied authors, and moreover to the comparative exercise in which we are always engaged – between the fictions we read and those we live.

To my grandmothers,

Annie Benoît and Sheila Simon,
for their bravery, generosity, and steadfast belief in education – both their own, and mine.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Gustave Flaubert:

Correspondance (C)

L'Éducation sentimentale (ES)

Madame Bovary (MB)

William Faulkner:

Absalom, Absalom! (AA)

Light in August (LIA)

The Sound and the Fury (SF)

*'[T]here is a might-have-been which is more true than truth'.
- William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!*

INTRODUCTION

'[I]l y a une chose dont je suis sûr, c'est que personne n'a jamais eu en tête un type de prose plus parfait que moi; mais quant à l'exécution, que de faiblesses, que de faiblesses mon Dieu!'

- Gustave Flaubert, letter to Louise Colet (1852)

*'All of us failed to match our dream of perfection. So I rate us on the basis of our splendid failure to do the impossible. [...] If I could write all my work again, I'm convinced I could do it better.'*²

- William Faulkner, interview with Jean Stein (1956)

Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) present narrative worlds where facts are dethroned, and counterfactuals - imagined alternative realities - gain narrative authority. 'Mourning the Counterfactual' argues that the counterfactual overtakes the factual in both the narrative and metanarrative of these works, as they stubbornly remind us of the literary models they reject. History, superficially absent from the central content of these novels, nonetheless directs the pacing, tone, and syntax of their distinctive prose. Both Flaubert and Faulkner respond to the question of history's place in literary fiction with oblique representations of events, obscured beyond recognition by fragmented perspectives, disrupted chronologies, disparate and conjoining narrative voices, and saturnine protagonists who, unable to engage with the real, are instead consumed by the loss of hypothetical realities: '*a might-have-been which is more true than truth*' (throughout the italics are Faulkner's, unless otherwise indicated).³ As a hermeneutic device, counterfactuals place pressure upon *les idées reçues*, to use Flaubert's term, and throw off balance both the central and peripheral moments of a narrative, or of history. To indulge counterfactuals - as these

¹ Letter to Louise Colet, 22 July 1852, in Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau and Yvan Leclerc, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), II, 136. Further references to this edition will appear as *C*.

² William Faulkner quoted in *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*, ed. by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 238.

³ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 115. Further references to this edition will appear as *AA*.

authors do – is a form of rebellion since, as Catherine Gallagher puts it in her seminal work on counterfactual history narratives, they ‘resurrect and redeem side-lined possibilities as guides for the future. They are acts of retrieval and attempts to reanimate unrealized possibilities’.⁴ Imagining what might have been becomes an exercise in accessing what might yet be – alternatives not only of histories, but of fiction-making.

‘Flaubert is an indispensable reference for the modernists who follow’, Philip Weinstein writes, ‘serv[ing] as virtually a tombstone on which is written for those who come after: *proceed otherwise*’, and indeed Faulkner was no exception.⁵ Often given in a state of inebriation, Faulkner’s interviews are not particularly informative sources about the writer at work. Even when sober, his answers often reflect the pressures of a political motive, whether his own or that of the American government when he was sent on tour as a spokesperson after winning the Nobel Prize in 1949. He often engaged in ill-advised tirades setting out his views on Civil Rights, or gawkily tried to unsay that which ‘no sober man would say’.⁶ With this caveat, it is nonetheless worth giving more serious consideration to Faulkner’s repeated veneration for Flaubert:

I was influenced by Flaubert, in *Bovary* I saw, or thought I saw, a man who wasted nothing [...] whose approach towards his language was almost the lapidary’s [...] a man who elected to do one book perfectly, in the characters, and in the method, in the style. [...] With the *Bovary* it’s as though you know from the very first as soon as you see what he’s going to do that he will never disappoint you, that it’ll be as absolute as mathematics.⁷

⁴ Catherine Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn’t: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 50.

⁵ Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p.100. Alan Raitt meticulously demonstrates what sets Flaubert apart from his predecessors in *The Originality of Madame Bovary* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁶ From Faulkner’s letter to the editor in the 19 April 1956 issue of *The Reporter*, in which he sought to retract statements about integration in the South made to Russell Warren Howe during an interview that appeared in the *London Sunday Times* (4 March 1956) and *The Reporter* (22 March 1956). Faulkner’s further attempt to manage the backlash from the Howe interview fell flat with his essay for the December 1956 issue of *Ebony* magazine. Borrowing strategies best left to his fiction, he titled the essay with a tone-deaf counterfactual: ‘If I Were a Negro’. See ‘Interview with Russell Howe’ and ‘Faulkner’s Letter to the Editor of The Reporter’ in Meriwether and Millgate (eds), *Lion in the Garden*, p. 257 and p. 265; ‘A Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race’, in *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, ed. by James B. Meriwether (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), pp. 107-12.

⁷ Meriwether and Millgate (eds), *Lion in the Garden*, pp. 55-56 and 72.

This thesis takes its cue from Faulkner's choice of words to describe Flaubert's prose: 'absolute as mathematics'. The mythologies of Flaubert as writer, perpetuated by his own correspondence in which he describes his writing process as methodical, pedantic, and at times masochistic, cast the role of the 'authentic' author not as a whimsical artist, but as a meticulous and dedicated craftsman. As Roland Barthes put it: 'le travail du style est chez lui une souffrance indicible (même s'il la dit souvent), quasi-expiatoire'.⁸ Flaubert himself would use a mathematical analogy when he wrote to Louise Colet, his mistress and literary colleague, in 1853: 'La poésie est une chose aussi précise que la géométrie'.⁹ This language of precision is revealing of Flaubert's and Faulkner's relentless attention to the grammar and syntax of their prose, just as they demolished its rules and protocols; as an early critic complained of Faulkner: 'the nerve of the man in supposing that he is exempt from the normal conventions of writing'.¹⁰ This 'nerve' did not happen in a vacuum: the failure of the Second Republic and the loss of Southern identity after the American Civil War respectively inform and motivate the stylistic breaches that define the work of each.

From the outset I want to acknowledge the inevitable inconsistencies that arise while comparing two figures from such disparate spatiotemporal contexts. The American Civil War (1861-65) was in its last year as Flaubert set to writing *L'Éducation sentimentale*, and Faulkner was not born until seventeen years after Flaubert died of a stroke in 1880. The French author wrote of historical events he had lived through (however passively), whereas Faulkner dove into the spectral remnants of histories that began and finished long before he put pen to paper. Of course, the very scale and nature of the 1848

⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Flaubert et la phrase', *Word*, 24.1-3 (1968), 48-54 (p. 48).

⁹ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 392 [14 August 1853]).

¹⁰ Joseph Warren Beach as quoted in Arthur L. Scott, 'Faulknerian Sentences', *Prairie Schooner*, 27.1 (1953), 91-8 (p. 94).

Revolution in France and the American Civil War make them seemingly incomparable events, and yet their brand of unprocessed and unspoken failure required and inspired similar literary strategies. Just as Flaubert used the 1848 Revolution and Faulkner the post-Civil War South to reflect upon their own presents, the very nature of this thesis suggests that texts and ideas can transgress their spatiotemporal origins and inform our larger experience as readers. This thesis enacts this transgression by seeking to identify moments in these texts where stylistic devices (such as *style indirect libre* or stream of consciousness, to name the most obvious) arise from the unthinkable nature of these historical moments.¹¹ These authors sought alternative modes of narrative as a means of addressing histories defined by failure and haunted by the might-have-been.

This thesis opens Flaubert and Faulkner up to new readings by bringing into relief each author's particularity, while demonstrating how comparative work across periods and languages puts pressure on received ideas about such influential texts. Faulkner, one of the modern novel's most radical experimentalists, exaggerated and pushed to new extremes many of the literary disruptions Flaubert, arguably its father, initiated and fantasized might follow in his wake:

J'en conçois [...] un style qui serait beau, que quelqu'un fera à quelque jour, dans dix ans, ou dans dix siècles, et qui serait rythmé comme le vers, précis comme le langage des sciences [...] un style qui vous entrerait dans l'idée comme un coup de stylet, et où votre pensée enfin voguerait sur des surfaces lisses, comme lorsqu'on file dans un canot avec bon vent arrière.¹²

Whether or not Faulkner would have satiated this fantasy, Flaubert understood himself as a steppingstone towards a poetic ideal. Such idealism, Faulkner believed, is why every novelist is a failed poet, because if 'he matched the work to the image, the dream, nothing

¹¹ I repeatedly refer to Flaubert's use of the *style indirect libre*, a term first used in 1912 by Charles Bally in 'Le style indirect libre en français moderne I et II,' *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 4 (1912), 549-56 and 597-606. Ann Banfield explains that '*Libre* means "independent", in the syntactic sense'. See Ann Banfield, 'Where Epistemology, Style, and Grammar Meet Literary History', *New Literary History*, 9.3 (1978), p. 415.

¹² Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 79 [24 April 1852]).

would remain but to cut his throat, jump off the other side of that pinnacle of perfection into suicide'.¹³ Given this congruence, it is surprising that, until now, no extended work dedicated exclusively to the comparison of these two authors has yet been undertaken.¹⁴ This thesis thus offers the first extensive comparison between Flaubert and Faulkner. It explores the historical and stylistic contingencies not only of two authors and their texts, but also of two periods in time: the psychic and literary residues of defeated ideals. Before proceeding with this comparison, however, this Introduction will lay out my approach to mourning and the counterfactual, and the historical contexts that influenced both writers.

I: Mourning the Counterfactual in Cultures of Defeat

'To give an accurate description of what has never occurred is not merely the proper occupation of the historian, but the inalienable privilege of any man of parts and culture'.¹⁵

- Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist'

'[M]ight-have-been which is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality'.¹⁶

- William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

'[I]t is not just triumphs and glory but also, and perhaps more so, defeats and trials that make the nation'.¹⁷

- Krishan Kumar, *The Idea of Englishness*

¹³ Faulkner to Jean Stein for *Paris Review* (1956), quoted in Meriwether and Millgate (eds), *Lion in the Garden*, p. 238.

¹⁴ The few examples of comparative work on these authors are article-length studies: Philip Cohen, 'Madame Bovary and *Flags in the Dust*: Flaubert's Influence on Faulkner', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 22.3 (1985), 344-36; Margaret Yonce, "'His True Penelope was Flaubert': *Madame Bovary* and *Sanctuary*", *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 29.3 (1976), 439-42; Caroline Gordon, 'Notes on Faulkner and Flaubert', *The Hudson Review*, 2 (1948), 222-31; and Arthur Kinney, 'Faulkner and Flaubert', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 6 (1977), 222-47.

¹⁵ Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 341-407 (p. 349).

¹⁶ *AA*, 120.

¹⁷ Krishan Kumar, *The Idea of Englishness: English Culture, National Identity and Social Thought* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 48.

Both Faulkner's South and Flaubert's France were societies defined by failure.¹⁸ Implicitly explored in this thesis, then, are the impact and reverberations a particular event can have on the literary culture of a society, and more specifically, how a climate of defeat can be expressed in language. How does one write about defeat and failure, rather than victory and action? This challenge, I argue, provided fertile ground for literary creation, because embedded within failure is the necessity to imagine what could have been.¹⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that mythmaking is a defining feature of cultures mourning defeat. Across France and the American South (as well as Germany) he notes 'a state of unreality - or dreamland' and endeavours to rewrite defeat as something other than loss.²⁰ Flaubert wrote *L'Éducation sentimentale* after a period that included two *coup d'états*, several shifts in leadership, and significant colonial losses. He finished the novel shortly before the French defeat during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and the Paris Commune (1871), yet another internal collapse. Counterfactual histories depicting France as it might have been surrounded him, just as Faulkner was born into the revisionist culture of the Lost Cause.²¹ Defeat, rather than victory, incites counterfactualism - that both Flaubert and Faulkner, citizens of defeated peoples and witnesses of repeated revolutionary

¹⁸ Supporting my argument that parallels might be drawn between the historical consciousness of the post-Civil War American South and the France in which Flaubert was writing, Wolfgang Schivelbusch uses these historical examples to construct his argument about commonalities found in the cultural consequences of defeat in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (London: Granta Books, 2003).

¹⁹ The Civil War historian David W. Blight argues that the Lost Cause 'forced a confrontation with the past that bred a Faulkner'. See David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 293.

²⁰ Schivelbusch, p. 10

²¹ In 1911, Colonel Lee (the grandson of the Confederate leader) presented the counterfactual logic of Lost Cause revisionism: 'If the South had been heeded, slavery would have been eliminated years before it was. It was the votes of the southern states which finally freed the slaves'. See Anonymous, 'Gray Warriors Extolled by Grandson of Leader', *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 April 1911. For an early example of this Lost Cause literary output which indulges in the fantasy of Southern victory and ongoing paternalistic slavery, see Frank Williams, *Hallie Marshall: A True Daughter of the South* (New York: Abbey Press, 1900).

failures, addressed these histories through melancholic characters unable to engage with reality is testament to the power of the imagined to make sense of the real.²²

Deriving conceptual inspiration from theories of the counterfactual and the poetics of mourning, this thesis explores the vibrant thematic dialogue between these two historical climates. Comparative studies which confine themselves to authors who exist in the same language, place, or time risk losing sight of the intrinsic correlation between style and the historical moment of a work.²³ Rather than a unidirectional study of influence, this thesis uses thematic lenses to organize its investigation of how texts written in different periods and languages nonetheless resonate in surprising ways. ‘Mourning’ and the ‘counterfactual’ are both ideas that have specific associations and are used loosely and liberally within and outside the bounds of robust theoretical frameworks. I have selected these terms to take advantage of their associations, yet also to use them more thematically as a framing device to capture the shared moods of these texts.²⁴

Mourning appears in this thesis primarily to denote this shared textual mood, rather than over-relying on a specifically Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalytic lens.²⁵ However,

²² To make sense of a declining political and economic situation in 1930, Winston Churchill turned to the counterfactuals the Civil War inspired, imagining he was writing a counterfactual from a world in which the South had won. Originally published in *Scribner's Magazine*, Churchill ironically wrote: ‘The quaint conceit of imagining what would have happened if some important or unimportant event had settled itself differently has become so fashionable that I am encouraged to enter upon an absurd speculation. What would have happened if Lee had not won the battle of Gettysburg? Once a great victory is won it dominates not only the future but the past.’ See Winston Churchill, ‘If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg’, *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 44.4 (1961), 243-51 (p. 243).

²³ On the inseparability of history and narrative, see Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983).

²⁴ The idea of a textual mood will be developed further in Chapter One.

²⁵ On the rich theoretical legacy of mourning, I would first point my reader to the vast range of research that has been conducted on the topic in realist and modernist literature, and specifically in Flaubert and Faulkner. See most notably Ross Chambers, *Mélancolie et opposition: les débuts du modernisme en France* (Paris: José Corti, 1987); Patrick Coleman, *Reparative Realism: Mourning and Modernity in the French Novel, 1730-1830* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998); and André Bleikasten, ‘Mississippi Blues: Faulkner, le deuil, la mélancolie’, *Europe*, 70.753 (1992), 5-20.

Freud's seminal *Mourning and Melancholia* gives useful language to the pivot from a real to an imaginary lost object which will be a key idea in my discussion of the counterfactual.²⁶ In Freudian terms, mourning allows for *decathexis*, the successful detachment from a real lost object, while melancholia sits as its pathological failure, clinging onto an imagined loss. Subsequent thinking around mourning has complicated Freud's neat distinction.²⁷ For Jacques Derrida the work of mourning is itself a creative force, and one might speak of 'working *at mourning* as one would speak of a painter working *at a painting*'.²⁸ Flaubert and Faulkner capitalize upon the aesthetic potential of mourning to fuel the imaginary and supplant the real. Rather than a ritualistic means to a redemptive end, a coping mechanism for releasing a real lost object, mourning becomes a mechanism to obsessively prolong the imagined loss of a non-existent yet desired object, dragging an already lost past into the present.²⁹ Melancholia allows for an imaginative creative process that enables an unreal lost past to continue to exist in the present; through 'failed' mourning, the unreal aerates and expands definitions of the real. This construal of melancholia reveals its generative and creative potential.³⁰ Here, I am concerned with the literary strategies that allow the mourning for desired and imagined people, outcomes, and events to feel more textually tangible than their real counterparts,

²⁶ See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), XIV, 243-58.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida sees Freud's 'successful' mourning as a betrayal to the deceased. He offers instead a 'demi-deuil' which succeeds (by preserving a connection to the deceased), through its failure to fully release the lost object. See 'Circonfession', in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), pp. 5-291, translated into English as 'Circumfession', in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. By Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 3-315.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'By Force of Mourning', trans. By Pascale Anne Brault and Michael Nas, *Critical Inquiry*, 22.2 (1996), 171-92 (p. 172).

²⁹ Giorgio Agamben emphasizes that if 'mourning is for an unobtainable object', then 'the strategy of melancholy opens a space for the existence of the unreal and marks out a scene in which the ego may enter into relation with it and attempt an appropriation such as no other possession could rival and loss possibly threaten'. See Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. by Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 20.

³⁰ Coleman argues that French 'realist perspectives originate[d] in melancholy experiences of powerlessness and loss' and that these produced 'art through the writer's work of mourning'. See Coleman, *Reparative Realism*, p. 12.

mirroring the delusional exercises in place during 1848 and in the South after the Civil War.

To now define what is meant by the *counterfactual* in this thesis, and discuss its relevance to Flaubert and then Faulkner, I employ the influential work of Catherine Gallagher and Christopher Prendergast.³¹ The counterfactual permits a linguistic rendering of the event which *might have* happened, but did not, yet nonetheless lingers and has consequences, despite its unreality. These counterfactual events, desires, and ideas are lost, leaving these characters, like their societies, caught in an interminable process of mourning for events that never occurred. In his volume on counterfactuals, Christopher Prendergast cites Walter Rathenau's remark that 'History does not conjugate in conditionals, it speaks of what is and what was, not what would have been'.³² Flaubert and Faulkner, this thesis argues, reverse this claim - in their novels, history can only be told through conditionals: what *was* is evoked by *what might have been* or *what would have been*, and the alternate histories a society continues to recount are those that matter most. The counterfactual is a conceptual framework which allows the *might-have-been* to be discussed as something real and concrete that exists not only parallel to, but in relation to, that which really did happen - all while destabilizing the certainty of that claim to reality. This relationality is key; as Prendergast puts it, the existence of the counterfactual 'is entirely derivative, held in a relation of parasitic dependency on the term from which it not only stems but in turn morphologically incorporates: the factual'.³³ Thus, when we speak of counterfactual histories, it is not a negation or replacement of factual events, but a concomitant escape

³¹ Christopher Prendergast, *Counterfactuals: Paths of the Might Have Been* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

³² Quoted in Prendergast, *Counterfactuals*, p. 20.

³³ Prendergast, *Counterfactuals*, pp. 49-50.

route from the tyranny of written history – as Rosa Coldfield calls it, the ‘maelstrom of unbearable reality’.³⁴

Suggestively, Catherine Gallagher has found that ‘the first alternate histories were French’, and they appeared to help express ‘disappointment about the nation’s early nineteenth-century reversals of military and political fortunes’.³⁵ The appearance of the alternate history genre coincided with Flaubert’s literary career, with the most well-known spanning from Charles Renouvier’s 1857 *Uchronie (l’Utopie dans l’histoire)*, which reimagined the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, to Auguste Blanqui’s 1872 *L’Éternité par les astres* about the 1871 Paris Commune.³⁶ Such alternate histories were often written from prison cells, providing their authors with figurative escape and a means to revolt. Thus, as Gallagher argues, by allowing the creator and reader ‘to imaginatively experience such as-if choices, alternate histories could provide vicarious training in the habits of liberty’.³⁷ I suggest we link the rebellious nature of the alternate history genre with the literary defiance we see in Flaubert. As Nathaniel Wing writes, the historical ‘crépuscule’ in which Flaubert found himself was one of change and transition, and this created an ‘imperative to invent a new language’.³⁸ Flaubert and Faulkner found artistic liberation by giving supremacy to the dream. Thus Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet:

Mais comme chaque chose a sa raison, et que la fantaisie d’un individu me paraît tout aussi légitime que l’appétit d’un million d’hommes et qu’elle peut tenir autant de place dans le monde, il faut [...] monter dans sa tour d’ivoire et là, comme une bayadère dans ses parfums, rester, seul[s], dans nos rêves.³⁹

³⁴ AA, 120.

³⁵ Gallagher traces the establishment of counterfactual mode to late eighteenth and early nineteenth French and Prussian military historians. This mutated into the French alternate history narratives of the mid-nineteenth century (p. 4).

³⁶ See Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (l’Utopie dans l’histoire): esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu’il n’a pas été tel qu’il aurait pu être* (Paris: Bureau de la critique philosophique, 1876) and Auguste Blanqui, *L’éternité par les astres: hypothèse astronomique* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1872).

³⁷ Gallagher, p. 64.

³⁸ Nathaniel Wing, *The Limits of Narrative: Essays on Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 116.

³⁹ Letter to Louise Colet (C, II, 76-77 [24 April 1852]).

Sartre notes that in Flaubert the imaginary and the real become tangled, such that 'l'événement réalise la déréalisation du réel et lui montre l'espèce humaine comme un produit de son imagination'.⁴⁰ Like these alternate histories, fiction provides, as Diana Knight writes it, 'the freedom to negate'.⁴¹

The need to negate becomes more understandable when we consider that nineteenth-century France was the scene of many defeats, and defeats that were denied. After the humiliation at Sedan during the Franco-Prussian War, rather than face defeat, crowds in Paris displaced a difficult reality by reenacting a consoling revolutionary narrative. 'Within hours' of the defeat, Schivelbusch explains, 'before national malaise could set in, the revolutionary past was being reenacted. [...] Gambetta assumed the role of Danton by proclaiming the republic. The crowds were not just following the models of 1789, 1792, 1830, and 1848; they had become the very reincarnation of those earlier events. Or rather, the reenactment of revolution was a triumph that erased the experience of defeat'.⁴² In this sense, reenactment – a theatrical form of repetition and the invention of alternatives – becomes a means of coping with loss: 'France's crushing defeat produced an astonishing capacity among the citizenry to invent an alternate, more comforting reality'.⁴³ Karl Marx evokes the Revolution of 1848 as a similarly performative reenactment: 'the revolution of 1848 could come up with nothing better than to parody 1789'.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), II, 1564.

⁴¹ Diana Knight, *Flaubert's Characters: The Language of Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 8.

⁴² Schivelbusch, p. 108.

⁴³ Schivelbusch, p. 109.

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. by Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 31-127 (p. 32).

Responding to this series of re-enactments, Flaubert found sense and meaning in a conception of history that organized itself in waves of repetitions, re-creations, and retellings. ‘In the upheaval of 1848’, Anne Green explains, Flaubert ‘could find a parallel with the Revolution of 1789, which in turn had its links with the Middle Ages; later, he was to discern the same disturbing pattern in the Commune [...] This tendency to see history as a series of repetitions [...] is an essential element in Flaubert’s view of the historical process’.⁴⁵ Just as France sought to define itself in the decades following the 1789 Revolution, moving through a series of growing pains as it shifted from Monarchy to Republic to Empire within the twenty-year span of *L’Éducation sentimentale*, its protagonist Frédéric tries on a slew of identities (poet, novelist, painter, law student), yet fails to land on any concrete conception of self. Instead, longing, desire, and languishing become mechanisms to structure his time, to choose what clothes to buy, and ultimately to dictate his movements in relation to historical events.

Schivelbusch argues that France experienced what he calls a period of ‘doom and gloom’ between 1840 to 1860 due to ‘a delayed reaction to the French collapse of 1814-15, which, far from being acknowledged as a national trauma, had rather been dismissed as the personal failure of Napoleon I’.⁴⁶ Set during the disappointments of the 1848 Revolution, *L’Éducation sentimentale* replicates this atmosphere of denial – the protagonist can never fully engage with events as they occur in the sphere of the real; reality occurs as a set of events he has always already missed. Through an examination of the novel’s theme of mourning for unrealized possibilities and its portrayal of missing histories, this thesis argues for the importance of the literary as a mode where unwritable

⁴⁵ Anne Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel: Salammbô Reassessed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Schivelbusch, p. 105.

histories are obliquely but resonantly explored. The revolution that might have been, but was in many ways lost before it began, is relegated to the realm of the historical non-event, unwritable and unmourned.⁴⁷ Robert Tombs notes that during the events of 1848, ‘France’s special extra problems were the fears and also the expectations that it inherited from the [1789] Revolution [...]. France was caught in the trap of its own spectres’.⁴⁸ In *L’Éducation sentimentale*, three forms of imagined loss become interwoven: Frédéric’s imagined loss of Madame Arnoux, the failed political aspirations of 1848 which could only be imagined within the language of 1789, and Flaubert’s own artistic loss of the unwritten prose he idealized, destroyed by the existence of the novel he in fact did write.

This political mourning manifests itself at the syntactical level through repetition and the past conditional verb tense – the conjugational mode of mourning that allows the possible and the impossible to coexist. For example: ‘il raconta comment il serait mort le 15 mai, sans le dévouement d’un garde national’.⁴⁹ The tense creates two realms: that of the lost possibility and that of the realized event, placing them in opposition to one another. The result is that the realized event is understood in terms of the non-event it prevented. Thus, the ‘dévouement d’un garde national’ is made subordinate to his death, which did not occur. The counterfactual mode is intensified in such acts of doubling: both revolutionary action and ordinary events occur more in the imaginary than in the real. With the past conditional mode, Flaubert wrote against the neat notion of progress found in nineteenth-century utopian reflections by writers such as Fourier and Saint-Simon.

⁴⁷ Freud specifies that the lost love object need not refer solely to the loss of an individual: ‘mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on’ (*Mourning and Melancholia*, p. 243).

⁴⁸ Robert Tombs, *France, 1818-1914* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 394.

⁴⁹ Gustave Flaubert, *L’Éducation sentimentale: Histoire d’un jeune homme* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1891), p. 390. Further references to this edition will appear as *ES*.

Instead, he created an aesthetics of stagnation with a cyclical narrative structure, and the verb tense of impossible pasts.⁵⁰

In Faulkner, this longing for a counterfactual existence is underpinned by a societal mourning for a South that never existed, one partially constructed out of sentimental myths of chivalry derived from historical fiction – with only a hint of irony, Mark Twain presents the counterfactual: ‘we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter’, with his ‘jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead’.⁵¹ The ‘counterfactual hypotheses’ of the American South took several forms, as Gallagher observes: ‘If we had been allowed to secede ...’; ‘If we had been left to ourselves after the war’.⁵² Or again, as Casey Cep notes: ‘What if the North had won the Civil War? That technically factual counterfactual animated almost all of William Faulkner’s writing’.⁵³ The perpetual rewriting of mythologies within the South took its most institutionalized form in what is known as Lost Cause revisionism, which sought to retroactively recuperate a lost sense of Southern morality. Crucially to understanding Faulkner’s work, this ‘Lost Cause revisionism appeared everywhere, from the textbooks that Faulkner was assigned growing up to editorials in local newspapers, praising the paternalism and the prosperity of the

⁵⁰ While there is not time here to discuss in depth, it is revealing to note the unusual prevalence of the past conditional tense in French translations of *Absalom, Absalom!*. For example, Rosa says to Quentin: ‘la plupart des jeunes gens que j’aurais pu connaître dans les circonstances normales étaient morts sur des champs de batailles perdues’. See William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, in *Ceuvres romanesques*, trans. by R.N. Raimbault, ed. by André Bleikasten and François Pitavy, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), II, pp. 611-938 (p. 622).

⁵¹ Walter Scott did ‘measureless harm’, Twain wrote, ‘more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote’. This was because he created a ‘Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilisation’ which set ‘the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and degraded systems of government’ and ‘sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society’. He wrote that unlike the North, ‘the Southern writer still clings to [...] romanticism, sentimentality – all imitated from Sir Walter’. This ‘old inflated style’ and ‘dead language’ of the traditional historical novels is what Faulkner convolutes (rather than fully rejects) by retaining baroque and romantic imagery and references. See Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), pp. 418-20.

⁵² Gallagher, p. 107.

⁵³ Casey Cep, ‘William Faulkner’s Demons’, *The New Yorker*, 23 November 2020. <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/11/30/william-faulkners-demons>> [accessed 25 November 2020] (para 1 of 26).

slavery economy, jury-rigging an alternative justification for secession [...]. In contrast with those delusions, Faulkner's fiction revealed the truth: the Confederacy was both a military and a moral failure'.⁵⁴

Counterfactual histories were, then, a part of Southern history, the stories of what might have been were just as often recounted as what actually occurred, and reveal the historical atmosphere of the South in the 1930s: one of regret, rewriting, and compulsive rumination. During Reconstruction, these counterfactuals helped circumvent the awkward transition at the end of the war: to facilitate unification, the white Southerner had to be reframed, once again, as brother and member of the union.⁵⁵ This required an unwriting of the anti-Confederate narratives in the North, and a burying of the Southern nationalism, the 'noble cause', which had been exaggerated and heightened to fuel the war effort. The North was forced to 'accept the South's version of the history leading up to and following the Civil War', as Gallagher explains: 'while still mourning their own war dead, white Northerners came to share the South's nostalgia for an idyllic plantation culture and adopted the lost-cause analysis of its defeat'.⁵⁶ The success of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1935) is proof of the nationwide appeal of this counterfactual myth.⁵⁷

Absalom, Absalom! and *Gone with the Wind* were two of at least eighty Civil War novels published between 1930 and 1939.⁵⁸ Blight observes that both were published 'during the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ For a detailed account of this process, see Michael T. Gilmore, *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ Gallagher, p. 112.

⁵⁷ Other commercially successful texts bolstered this myth, including the insolent racism of Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Klu Klux Klan* (New York: Doubleday, 1905).

⁵⁸ Schivelbusch, p. 99. Virginius Dabney published 'If the South had Won the Civil War' the same year as *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which he suggests that Southern populism, without the North, would have been more susceptible to fascism. Like Churchill's piece, counterfactuals allowed for commentary on the

Great Depression, when an astonishing American appetite re-emerged for the nostalgia and the Lost Cause of the Old South'.⁵⁹ Yet the two novels present drastically different iterations of the Lost Cause Revisionism in which they were submerged, and they were received on very different terms:

Millions would flock to buy the story of Scarlett O'Hara's struggle [...] to cope with the crushed but ennobled South in the aftermath of the war; not nearly as many would embrace so eagerly Thomas Sutpen's fierce ambitions [...] on the real and psychological landscapes of Mississippi.⁶⁰

Confabulation, conjecture, misunderstandings, and sentences that move between alternative outcomes, often saying and unsaying ideas in a single breath, create the unique and confounding effect of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s prose. An onslaught of 'doubtlesses' (mirrored by Flaubert's 'sans doute') creates a sense of faux-certainty which spawns the reader's perpetual doubts. If we understand all this in the context of revisionist histories, which claimed truth by openly writing about untruths, or rather, writing about already lost truths, we understand that such doubtful prose is symptomatic of a society that never successfully mourned its defeat, because this defeat was immediately denied.

Faulkner was born into the Southern historiographic atmosphere described above that intentionally confused distinctions between the factual events and desires, and the counterfactual chapters, even sentences, that stud his prose can be understood in a different light given this context. The chapter in which *Absalom, Absalom!*'s plot clicks into place is narrated by Quentin and Shreve, who reconstruct, or reconceive (or misconceive), a history which neither witnessed to build Faulkner's novel: 'two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people

author's present. See Virginius Dabney, 'If the South Had Won the Civil War', *American Mercury*, 39.154 (1936), 199-206.

⁵⁹ Blight, p. 393.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

who perhaps never existed anywhere'.⁶¹ This form of Faulknerian narrative forces into relief the literary exercise the population was engaged in as it sought to further solidify an imaginary South and an imaginary war whose loss it could mourn. This piecemeal form of narration shared between friends mirrors the final conversation between Frédéric and Deslauriers in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, as they conclude the narrative 'prolixement, chacun complétant les souvenirs de l'autre'.⁶² Seeking an overarching meaning, or point of origin, they attempt to 'résum[er] leur vie' (there is not much to tell), only to realise: 'ils l'avaient manquée tous les deux'.⁶³ Their inability to live life as they might have expected is explained away with external historical circumstances: 'ils accusèrent le hasard, les circonstances, l'époque où ils étaient nés'.⁶⁴ 'Le hasard', or as Faulkner writes it, the 'turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs' welcomes a less linear, less causal, and more circumambient approach to history.

II: The Place of History in the Novel

Central to this thesis is the idea that both authors encode and frustrate traditional formulations of the historical novel genre as it was understood by their predecessors and contemporaries. Flaubert and Faulkner write amputated versions of historical events that redirect attention away from the actual to give weight to a counterfactual zone of reality.⁶⁵ Their mourning of events that never occurred serves as a necessarily oblique expression of historical non-events, where actions failed to happen. The close readings in this thesis

⁶¹ *AA*, 243.

⁶² *ES*, 520.

⁶³ *ES*, 555. Unlike the political events they have lived through, this botched adolescent visit to the local brothel 'fit une histoire qui n'était pas oubliée trois ans après' (*ES*, 557).

⁶⁴ *ES*, 518.

⁶⁵ In *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Frédéric dodges the June Days uprisings in Paris (from 22 to 26 June 1848) by fleeing with Rosanette to Fontainebleau. For a reading of this scene, see Victor Brombert, *The Hidden Reader: Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Baudelaire, Flaubert* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 141.

gravitate towards the novels where these authors most boldly commit their style to the covert evocation of history. Bleikasten points out that despite *Absalom, Absalom!*'s ceaseless 'questioning of narrative practices', the novel's 'ultimate stake is nothing less than History'.⁶⁶ *L'Éducation sentimentale* is an appropriate pairing for *Absalom, Absalom!*. Their melancholic protagonists – Frédéric Moreau and Quentin Compson – are demographically parallel: both are white, unmarried, nineteenth-century men in their twenties, awaiting a family inheritance with a vague sense of entitlement, and little to no political engagement. The major events of the 1848 uprisings barely appear in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, just as the Civil War battlefield is always just beyond *Absalom, Absalom!*'s stage.

This fragmentation of events in the texts is replicated syntactically: sentences are repeatedly dismembered by schisms in typeface, verb tense, page alignment, and point of view – Faulkner had wanted to push this further with ink in different colours.⁶⁷ Without warning, both novels skip over years that remain unaccounted for, rendering any attempt to match a historical timeline to the fictional events of the novel (though tempting) unrewarding.⁶⁸ Their unruly and nimble use of verb tense (what one Faulkner critic called 'monsters of grammar') renders time so elastic that it often feels artificial – an inconvenience or illusion rather than a legitimate structuring logic with which to order

⁶⁶ André Bleikasten, 'Faulkner from a European Perspective', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. by Philip M Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 75-95 (p. 85).

⁶⁷ Faulkner wrote to his editor, Ben Wasson, that he wanted to further exaggerate this effect by having his novels printed in different colours: 'I wish publishing was advanced enough to use colored ink [...]. I'll just have to save the idea until publishing grows up to it'. Quoted in *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. by Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 44-45.

⁶⁸ René Dumesnil attempted a diligent chronological schema of all events in the novel and the month and year in which he surmises that they take place. I use his and Stratton Buck's later amendments to help date events in the novel. I used Faulkner's genealogies to date events. See *L'Éducation sentimentale*, ed. by René Dumesnil, 2 vols (Paris: Société des Belles Lettres, 1942); Stratton Buck, 'The Chronology of the Education Sentimentale', *Modern Languages Notes*, 67.2 (1952), 86-92; and William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. by David Minter (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 203-15. Further references to this edition will appear as *SF*.

private moments alongside historical events.⁶⁹ The narratives of both novels move between the minds of characters, and back and forth through time periods, engaging in an intentionally obfuscating dance between the real and the imagined.

In neither text do we find an authorial voice telling us what is true and what is imagined, what happened and what might have happened. In Flaubert this is often achieved by means of the *style indirect libre* that forces us to see events as they are understood by his less-than-perceptive characters, and in Faulkner by forcing us to try and piece together a coherent history from inherited and confabulated stories which present conflicting facts, and divided narrative streams that interrupt and corrupt each other. These are played out across syntactic choices which challenge the pace of reading. As Laurence M. Porter shows, *style indirect libre* ‘slows our reading. [...] [I]t intrudes a phantom presence of the implied author or narrator beside the character. We do not know which words to ascribe to whom’ and thus it ‘forces readers to pay closer attention’.⁷⁰ In a momentary aside to discuss the legacy of Flaubert’s toolbox, Porter evokes Faulkner’s ‘[adaptation of] Flaubert’s *style indirect libre* in his use of interior monologue. [...] Faulkner follows Flaubert as a novelist of consciousness who seeks to represent the impressions of a perceiving mind’.⁷¹ Yet this analysis does not go far enough – Faulkner arrives at a similar effect by asking readers to doubt and question to whom they should attribute a thought or speech by feigning that he is providing clarifications. Playing on Flaubert’s invisibility, Faulkner calls out precisely who is speaking, only to demonstrate the artificiality of the very distinction:

⁶⁹ Conrad Aiken, ‘William Faulkner: The Novel as Form’, in *The Dixie Limited: Writers on William Faulkner and his Influence*, ed. by M. Thomas Inge (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), pp. 100-06 (p. 102).

⁷⁰ Laurence M. Porter, ‘The Art of Characterisation’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 122-44 (p. 125).

⁷¹ Laurence M. Porter, *A Gustave Flaubert Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 121.

It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and use of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible.⁷²

Just as there is always more than one voice in a work of fiction, there is always a battle of narrative ownership in the transference of history.

Beyond shedding light on how the modernist sensibility developed from Flaubert to Faulkner, this thesis will show that when it comes to the integration (or disintegration) of history in the novel, there is a technical compatriotism between these two authors that might have surprised Faulkner himself. Both consciously wrote against the traditional model provided by Walter Scott, replacing men defined by action with those defined by inaction, all while paying homage to his legacy.⁷³ Michael Millgate highlights in Faulkner the influence of Scott and other historical or regional novelists, such as James Fenimore Cooper and Thomas Hardy.⁷⁴ The intertextuality of his regional collection of novels, at once creating and dismantling the illusion of (to quote Faulkner's own description of Balzac) 'a bloodstream running through twenty books', motivates his reader, and this thesis, to seek connections between his novels.⁷⁵ Millgate reinforces the connection between Faulkner and Scott not only in terms of their approach, but also in terms of the afterlife they saw for their work: 'Faulkner may have been too conscious of standing in

⁷² AA, 243.

⁷³ Faulkner's grandfather had a generous Walter Scott collection on his shelves, like (according to Faulkner) most Southern households that 'pretended to be literate'. Many Southerners were of Scottish heritage, and Elmo Howell offers the argument that both the American South and Scotland had important similarities: '[both are] pastoral [... and] racially homogeneous, with a close-knit family organization; and both have a way of looking back towards a better time in their past'. See Elmo Howell, 'Faulkner and Scott and the Legacy of the Lost Cause', *The Georgia Review*, 26 (1972), 314-25 (p. 314). Walter Scott is of course the butt of many jokes in Flaubert, and Green notes Frédéric's rather pathetic aspirations to become a 'French Scott' when he is seen 'reading medieval and Renaissance historians and chroniclers - Froissart, Commines, Pierre de l'Estoile and Brantôme'. For more on Walter Scott's legacy in Flaubert, see Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Michael Millgate, *Faulkner's Place* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), p.121.

⁷⁵ Said to Jean Stein vanden Heuvel for the 'The Art of Fiction No. 12', in *The Paris Review* (1956). Cited in Millgate, p. 39.

opposition to the historical traditions associated with Scott to have recognized him as a master, but [...] he came in the end to develop a genial Scott-like antiquarian interest in his own accomplished work, considered both as a series of interrelated narratives and quasi-historical'.⁷⁶ Philippe Desan demonstrates how Flaubert deviated from realist novels of the nineteenth century in which 'historical facts are consciously blended with fiction to render a more convincing effect'.⁷⁷ According to Desan, *L'Éducation sentimentale* asks: 'How do you recount history when you have the intention to place your hero outside of it? How do you reconcile the movement of the masses (history) with Frédéric's inaction (fiction)?'.⁷⁸ I would reverse Desan's causality: rather than 'disassemble a bothersome history and replace it with one that is more appropriate to the atmosphere sought by the novelist', the novel's atmosphere and its protagonist's obsession with 'inaction' emerged as Flaubert sought to recount a true history of his generation.⁷⁹ This thesis argues that what emerges in the absence of a 'real' history is the presence of counterfactual realities, which sit in perpetual tension with the traces of history that survive in the novel.

To say that Faulkner and Flaubert fully reject the conventions of the historical novel, that for them 'History' with its oppressive capitalized 'H' is purely an illusion or that historical evidence is a futile pursuit, would be to overlook the nuances of their work. History is problematized rather than removed, and the metrics for establishing acceptable historical truths are blurred as the reader negotiates the private desires of the characters with the repeated gesturing towards historical events beyond the action of the novel.⁸⁰ Of course, it

⁷⁶ Millgate, p.118. He writes that *Absalom, Absalom!* is 'a historical novel on the pattern made familiar by Scott and seized upon as a model for historical fiction by critics such as Georg Lukacs' (Millgate, pp. 4-5).

⁷⁷ Philippe Desan, 'From History to Fiction: A Reading of Flaubert's "L'Éducation sentimentale"', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 18 (1983), 108-13 (p. 109).

⁷⁸ Desan, p. 110.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Michael Gorra puts it well when he writes that in the historical fiction of Walter Scott, such as *Waverley* (1815), the characters of the novel 'serve as witnesses. Faulkner does it differently, does it backward. History

would also be an oversimplification to suggest that these novelists grapple with the question of history in identical ways. However, when they are approached on the syntactic level, and compared side by side, we discover a striking shared approach to representing the experience of defeat, which leaves its traces across period, language, and nation.⁸¹ The traces of defeat – of absence, lack, and non-event – will be of import throughout this thesis. The thesis asks: what might Flaubert, the father of the anti-historical novel, teach us about how to read Faulkner’s style and prose? How and why do both manage to invite historical readings while hiding the presence of the very history that informs their narrative? And how might Faulkner’s more aggressively modern, deconstructed, and disturbed syntax illuminate Flaubert’s own fraught relationship with the depiction of history?

III: Comparing Flaubert and Faulkner

‘Instead of endlessly reading Faulkner into American contexts, why not read him out of them for a change? [...] The time has come, I think, for a broader and more distant perspective, allowing us to relate him, beyond regional and national boundaries.’⁸²
– André Bleikasten, ‘Faulkner from a European Perspective’

The few comparative studies dedicated exclusively to Flaubert and Faulkner appear in comparative or modernist literature journals, most often written by Faulkner rather than Flaubert scholars. Flaubert’s writing becomes a sort of literary given – a framing device for Faulkner studies, not in need of further exploration. This oversight (or disinterest) leaves Flaubert’s work in stasis as a point of reference closed off from further exploration. It is precisely within the act of revisiting what made Flaubert revolutionary to the novel form

in his work stands as but a border or a fringe to his characters’ individual lives, their psychic lives above all.’ See Michael Gorra, *The Saddest Words* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), p. 202.

⁸¹ Schivelbusch’s comparative use of examples of defeat in France, the American South, and Germany in order to derive a wider thesis about the culture of defeat across periods, languages, and nations supports my argumentation.

⁸² Bleikasten, ‘Faulkner from a European Perspective’, p. 78.

(the pervasive use of *style indirect libre*; the refusal to distinguish between high and low imagery and subjects; a drifting yet directed narrative movement measured by rhythmic pulsations rather than a sequence of events) that we can identify the extent to which he was interested in pushing his writing towards something aggressively modern, and that leads to the deep connection with Faulkner that I explore here.

The earliest comparative piece on Flaubert and Faulkner is Caroline Gordon's 'Notes on Faulkner and Flaubert' (1948).⁸³ A contemporary of Faulkner and member of the Southern Agrarians, she reduces the comparison to one of master and disciple (with greater interest in the disciple): '[Faulkner's] "ground-work"', Gordon writes, 'is an extension of the method Flaubert used. [...] [H]e has accomplished what Flaubert himself longed to accomplish, the union of concrete historical detail with lyricism'.⁸⁴ Gordon's emphasis on their shared desire to bring history and style into 'union' is useful to the approach of this thesis. She presents a trajectory that runs from Balzac through Flaubert to James, and arrives at Faulkner, focusing on imagery and tricks of perception: 'The achievement of the one master rests upon that of the other. [...] The achievements of Flaubert and James constitute a challenge to all fiction writers who have come after them. [...] William Faulkner seems to have responded most fully to this challenge'.⁸⁵ Gordon reads Faulkner as a response to Flaubert - even an improvement on, or completion of, the latter's literary ambitions.

⁸³ In Paul V. Murphy's *The Rebuke of History*, he points out that Agrarians like Gordon 'were also shaped by the modernist trends in European and American thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', which might account for her motivation to seek a connection with Flaubert and James. See Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 4.

⁸⁴ Gordon, p. 226.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

A series of comparative articles followed in the 1970s and 1980s: Albert Guérard briefly, though convincingly, examined *Madame Bovary's* influence on *Sartoris*, and Robert Neiss wrote a focused piece on hunting allegories in Flaubert and Faulkner – an unusual instance in which Flaubert is prioritized in the balance of the comparison.⁸⁶ Arthur Kinney's article compares *Madame Bovary* with *Sanctuary* (1931) and Philip Cohen's later 1985 piece examines *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874) alongside *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).⁸⁷ Kinney and Cohen are both Faulkner scholars – their engagement with Flaubert is limited to the value he lends to their understanding of Faulkner's work. Like Gordon, they note a shared manipulation of perspective, without ever delving into the mechanics of how or why these stylistic similarities exist. Kinney writes:

Faulkner found – how consciously we cannot now tell – both informing idea and accommodating technique in the Flaubert in which he claimed to read each year. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. What is at bottom is Flaubert's insistence, in all that he wrote, that truth lodges not in experience but in the *perception* of experience [...] Fluid time and space are everywhere in Faulkner's novels of consciousness. That he learned his lessons at least in part from Flaubert I have no doubt; but he transforms them, too, like so much else, as the boldest experimenter in fiction.⁸⁸

Faulkner's prose is erudite, challenging, aggressive, and unhelpful. In response to criticism and dwindling sales, Malcolm Cowley released *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), a revised edition of Faulkner's works that added genealogies, chronologies, and maps to concoct a friendlier, more palatable Faulkner.⁸⁹ In a sense, Cowley reinserted the elements of a historical novel which Faulkner had removed. Indeed, much of what is seen today as his literary virtuosity (the phrases which say and unsay, the bold use of conditionals) was regarded as inconsiderate treatment of his readers. John Hastings of the

⁸⁶ Albert J. Guérard, *The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Robert Neiss, 'Flaubert et Faulkner: deux allégories de la chasse', in *Essais sur Flaubert en l'honneur du professeur Don Demorest*, ed. by Charles Carlut (Paris: Nizet, 1979), pp. 363-80.

⁸⁷ Also appearing that same year was Bleikasten's essay on the explicit evocation of *Madame Bovary* in *Sanctuary* in "'Cet affreux goût d'encre": Emma Bovary's Ghost in *Sanctuary*', in *Intertextuality in Faulkner*, ed. by Michel Gresset and Noel Polk (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), pp. 35-36.

⁸⁸ Kinney, p. 246.

⁸⁹ For a discussion of the 'Appendix: Compson: 1699-1945' written in 1945 for Cowley's anthology, see Mary Jane Dickerson, "'The Magician's Wand": Faulkner's Compson Appendix', *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 28.3 (1975), 317-37.

Saturday Review wrote with exasperation: ‘I [...] have been unable to view with pleasure his increasing penchant for treating as an asset what is, rather too clearly, a liability and refusing to do the decent thing by ending a sentence somewhat prior to exhausting all possible participial phrases, conditional clauses, and the reader’s patience’.⁹⁰ Another critic wrote: ‘Faulkner simply let his typewriter rattle and took no trouble to prune, revise, or rewrite. If a first essay failed to get across the meaning, he simply added another brace of phrases, so that finally the meaning not only would not get across but reversed itself several times’.⁹¹ Critical regard for Faulkner has varied across time, nations, and literary trends, with numerous attempts to discredit and re-establish the man behind the work. For example, in ‘Faulkner and Desegregation’ (1956), James Baldwin memorably held Faulkner accountable for his hazardous political outbursts.⁹² More recently, exemplifying the unease of many white scholars on how to reckon with Faulkner, Michael Gorra’s *The Saddest Words* (2020) settles on the stance that the novels themselves are more progressive than the views of the man who wrote them.

While Flaubert’s legacy (fuelled by the reverence of writers such as Henry James, Ford Maddox Ford, Virginia Woolf, and Vladimir Nabokov) is as the ‘novelist’s novelist’, the severe condemnation *Madame Bovary* faced in France upon publication is testament to the innovation of his style. The transcripts from the *Madame Bovary* trial (1857) reveal that it was not only the novel’s adulterous content but also the style itself that was deemed threatening to nineteenth-century French morals. The prosecutor, Ernest Pinard,

⁹⁰ John Hastings, ‘Faulkner’s Prose’, *Saturday Review*, 38 (1954), 23.

⁹¹ George Snell, *The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1961), p. 94.

⁹² Baldwin’s March 1956 essay for the *Partisan Review* responds unequivocally to Faulkner’s suggestion that Civil Rights activists should ‘go slow’ with progress in the South: ‘After more than two hundred years in slavery and ninety years of quasi-freedom [...] it is hard to think very highly of William Faulkner’s advice to “go slow”’. See James Baldwin, ‘Faulkner and Desegregation’, in *The Dixie Limited: Writers on William Faulkner and His Influence*, ed. by M. Thomas Inge (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), pp. 114-19 (pp. 114 and 119).

considered the novel an ‘offense à la morale publique’ due to its refusal to differentiate between high and low: ‘l’offense à la morale religieuse dans des images voluptueuses mêlées aux choses sacrées’.⁹³ As is well known, Flaubert’s ambition was to be ‘présent partout, et visible nulle part’.⁹⁴ Pinard seems to intuit this in his accusation, which reads almost as literary criticism:

Qui peut condamner cette femme dans le livre? Personne. [...L’]opinion publique est personnifiée dans un être grotesque [...]. Le condamnerez-vous au nom du sentiment religieux? Mais ce sentiment, vous l’avez personnifié dans le curé Bournisien, prêtre à peu près aussi grotesque que le pharmacien [...]. Le condamnerez-vous au nom de la conscience de l’auteur? Je ne sais pas ce que pense la conscience de l’auteur.⁹⁵

Pinard thus inadvertently congratulates Flaubert on his success: ‘Le seul personnage qui y domine, c’est madame Bovary. [...] Voilà, messieurs, les situations que M. Flaubert aime à peindre, et malheureusement il ne les peint que trop bien’.⁹⁶

Just as we can see Flaubert and Faulkner as stylistic innovators whose innovations caused controversy, we can also compare the historical contexts that shaped them. Bleikasten observes that Faulkner’s major novels ‘belong as much to the history of the European novel as to that of American fiction’.⁹⁷ Implicit throughout my comparison is a linguistic comparison between English and French grammar, a historical comparison between early nineteenth-century France and antebellum America, and the reciprocal influence of French and American literature as the modern novel developed across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the likes of Chateaubriand, Henry James, Ford Maddox Ford, and Jean-Paul Sartre pollinating this cross-Atlantic interchange. Rare is the study on Faulkner that does not mention the import of the French influence in one degree or

⁹³ Ernest Pinard, ‘Réquisitoire de M. L’Avocat Impérial M. Ernest Pinard’, in *Madame Bovary: Mœurs de province* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910), pp. 558-78 (p. 562).

⁹⁴ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 204 [9 December 1852]).

⁹⁵ Pinard, p. 577.

⁹⁶ Pinard, p. 571.

⁹⁷ Bleikasten, ‘Faulkner from a European Perspective’, p.77.

another.⁹⁸ Cohen and Kinney and Millgate suggest that Faulkner is a meeting of Balzacian, Flaubertian, and French Symbolist influences.⁹⁹ In *Placing Faulkner*, Millgate dissects Faulkner's novels to find potential influences (overlooking Flaubert), concluding: 'Faulkner must have contemplated very early on the Balzacian example of a systematically organized fictional world.'¹⁰⁰ The effect of Faulkner's intertextuality – whether referencing his own works or those of others – both shatters and constructs the illusion of his own *Comédie humaine*. Millgate continues: 'for all the extraordinary variety of his own novels – each distinct in technique [...] they do establish, in whatever sequence they are read, something of that same sense of imaginative coherence that he himself so much admired in Balzac [...] an effect established, as in Balzac, by an extensive use of recurrent characters and recurrent setting'.¹⁰¹

In Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, Vautrin is fixated by 'la vie patriarcale [...] aux États-Unis, dans le Sud. Je veux m'y faire planteur, avoir des esclaves [...] en vivant comme un souverain, en faisant mes volontés, en menant une vie qu'on ne conçoit pas ici [...]. Je suis un grand poète. Mes poésies je ne les écris pas: elles consistent en actions et en sentiments'.¹⁰² His dream resembles a caricature of Sutpen's design: 'avec ce capital noir, en dix ans j'aurai trois ou quatre millions [...] je serai monsieur Quatre-Millions, citoyen des États-Unis'.¹⁰³ Even Alexandre Dumas's desire to tour the American South, where his

⁹⁸ Gorra includes an anecdote about Faulkner's first trip to Paris in August of 1925, where he supposedly saw (but did not speak to) James Joyce in a café (Gorra, p. 7). See also Ladd's analysis of *A Fable* (1954) in Barbara Ladd, 'Faulkner's Paris: State and Metropole in *A Fable*', 26.1 (2012), 115-28.

⁹⁹ For discussions of structural and thematic similarities between Balzac and Faulkner, see Merrill Horton, 'Balzacian Evolution and the Origin of the Snopeses', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 33.1 (2000), pp. 55-81 and Philip Cohen, 'Balzac and Faulkner: The Influence of *La Comédie humaine* on *Flags in the Dust* and the Snopes Trilogy', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 37.3 (1984), pp. 325-51. For a longer discussion, see Merrill Horton's *Hunting the Sun: Faulkner's Appropriations of Balzac's Writings* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ Millgate, p. 39.

¹⁰¹ Millgate, p. 124.

¹⁰² Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p. 58.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

novels were immensely popular, indicates the degree to which the Plantation Myth had infiltrated the French nineteenth-century psyche.¹⁰⁴

While Faulkner's American reputation did not fully develop until the 1950s, French thinkers and writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and André Malraux sought to elevate Faulkner's reputation in France amongst the intellectual community in the 1930s.¹⁰⁵ A wide range of French novelists such as Claude Simon, Pierre Guyotat, and Pierre Michon cite Faulkner as a primary influence.¹⁰⁶ In France, Faulkner's novels were divorced in a sense from the man and a specific Southern culture, and perceived as raw material that could be rewritten and reinterpreted, such as when Albert Camus wrote a play of *Requiem for a Nun* in 1962. Faulkner also resonated with the *Nouvelle Vague* film aesthetic: he worked as a screenwriter with Jean Renoir on *The Southerner* (1945), and Godard quoted from *The Wild Palms* in his film *À bout de souffle* (1960).¹⁰⁷ Godard's fandom even went so far as to suggest that Faulkner should have a cameo appearance in one of his films, though the author did not survive long enough for us to find out if he would have indulged this idea.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Though his novels were exceedingly popular amongst the Southern aristocracy, his advisors suggested he cancel his book tour of the American South in 1865 due to his own black Haitian heritage and the racism in the American South. See Nelson Manfred Blake, 'Franco-American Relations during the Civil War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Brown University, 1931).

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre wrote effusively about Faulkner and obsessively about Flaubert. He published essays on *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sartoris* in 1938 and 1939, in which he famously compares Faulkner's convolutions of time to those of Marcel Proust (see Gisèle Sapiro, 'Faulkner in France', *Journal of World Literature*, 1.3 (2016), 391-411). On Flaubert, see Sartre's dedicated three-volume *L'Idiot de la Famille* (1971). For a discussion of the merits to Flaubert studies of Sartre's contentious and rambling work, see Diana Knight, 'Sartre for Flaubertians: The Case for "L'Idiot de la famille"', *Neophilologus*, 69.1 (1985), 46-58.

¹⁰⁶ Faulkner resonated with a French readership not for his Southern colloquialism but for his universalism. His political and racial views, which suited neither Northern nor Southern American sensibilities, were less relevant in France (Shapiro, p. 392).

¹⁰⁷ Antoine de Baecque, *Godard: Biographie* (Paris: Grasset, 2010), p. 186.

¹⁰⁸ Godard joked that he would have wanted the film's protagonist 'to get hired as a maid, or a gardener [...] by Faulkner', quoted in Richard Brody, *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), p. 142. On Godard and Faulkner, see Lauren Du Graf, 'What is a Digital Author? The Faulknerian Author Function in Jean-Luc Godard's *Film Socialisme*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 51.4 (2014), 533-56.

Faulkner is rare in his work's ability to transcend cultural, linguistic, and geographic lines, which greatly motivates the framework of this study that seeks to breach similar barriers. Caribbean novelists like Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant (whose only work of criticism dedicated to a single author is *Faulkner, Mississippi*) cite him as an influence and share his preoccupations with memory and the past. In South America, Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Carlos Onetti, and Mario Vargas Llosa are equally vocal about the influence Faulkner has had on their work; Borges even translated *The Wild Palms* (1939) into Spanish a year after publication.¹⁰⁹ Faulkner's popularity in the Middle East grew after an influential translation by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra of *The Sound and the Fury* into Arabic.¹¹⁰ Even Faulkner's English reader is already engaged in an act of translation as they work through his invented words and recalcitrant grammar, creating an unusually even playing field for his translators.¹¹¹ While Faulkner's 'indebtedness to the popular traditions of Southern oratory and Southwestern humor', Bleikasten argues, 'has been established beyond dispute', he is 'nonetheless a novelist of European descent. [...] Reading a great Faulkner novel like *Absalom, Absalom!* is reading the entire palimpsest of Western culture'.¹¹² The multinationalism and multilingual scope of Faulkner's audience and influences (despite his own thematic and linguistic regionalism) does not

¹⁰⁹ See Earl E. Fitz and Ezra E. Fitz, 'Faulkner, Borges, and the Translation of "The Wild Palms": The Evolution of Borges's Theory Concerning the Role of the Reader in the Game of Literature', *The Faulkner Journal*, 24.1 (2008), 29-61.

¹¹⁰ Hosam About-Ela, 'Faulkner as/and the postcolonial writer', in *William Faulkner in Context*, ed. by John T. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 288-97 (p. 296).

¹¹¹ For more work on translations of Faulkner in Slavic languages, German, Romanian, Spanish, Turkish and Japanese respectively, see Sanja Bahun 'Faulkner, Фолкнер, Folkner, Fokner: A Case Study of Slavic-Anglophone Translatability', *Faulkner Journal*, 24 (2008), 11-27; Peter Nicolaisen and Daniel Göske, 'William Faulkner in Germany: A Survey', *The Faulkner Journal*, 24.1 (2008), 63-81; Ana-Karina Schneider 'William Faulkner and the Romanian "Criticism of Survival"', *The Faulkner Journal*, 24.1 (2008), 99-117; Ilan Stavans, 'Beyond Translation: Borges and Faulkner', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 40.4 (2001), p. 268; Gülsüm Canlı and Ayşe Banu Karadağ, 'Retranslations of Faulkner's *Sanctuary* in Turkish Literature', *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9.3 (2018), p. 173; and Ikuko Fujihira, 'Translating Faulkner: Can a Translator be Androgynous?' in *William Faulkner in Context*, ed. by John T. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 298-306.

¹¹² Bleikasten, 'Faulkner from a European Perspective', p. 75.

just invite comparative projects such as this one, but renders them a necessary way of engaging with his work.¹¹³

IV: Corpus

Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) present history as it is lived, rather than retrospectively written. *L'Éducation sentimentale* (as Henry James called it, a 'large, laboured' and 'immensely "written"' novel) exemplifies Flaubert's 'hunger for style and history', and here I show how inextricably he relates the two.¹¹⁴ Of all Faulkner's novels, *Absalom, Absalom!* most directly engages with and expounds upon the ideals of the Flaubertian project and is therefore the most apposite novel for this study. In response to Flaubertian impartiality, Bleikasten points to how Faulkner's prose, 'in pluralizing narrative voices and narrative codes, and in insisting on the conjectural nature of what is being told' leads to:

[A] fictional practice in which the claims to truth of any narrative utterance appear highly problematic, and in which the authority of any narrative agency is brought under constant suspicion. *Absalom, Absalom!* is, of course, the paradigmatic text here: through its use of intradigetic narrators and narratees, the novel clearly builds on the tradition of oral storytelling, but simultaneously deconstructs it by using it in such a way as to make the successive narratives cancel one another out and leave the reader with the diverse threads of a story yet to be told.¹¹⁵

While *Absalom, Absalom!* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* take centre stage for their particular attention to questions of history as it relates to narrative, I shall contextualize the development of Flaubert's style by means of reference to *Madame Bovary*.¹¹⁶

Faulkner's intertextuality and constructed regionalism render it more difficult to speak of one novel of his without invoking others. I therefore include *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and

¹¹³ The last section of Chapter Two of this thesis, 'Incest as Intertext', will explicate this idea further.

¹¹⁴ Henry James, *Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: L'Hermé, 1902), pp. 78 and 45.

¹¹⁵ Bleikasten, 'Faulkner from a European Perspective', p. 85.

¹¹⁶ As Arnold Weinstein puts it, 'Flaubert's book is an unavoidable *point de repère*, and it is particularly intriguing as a restatement of the eighteenth-century romance looking toward the modernist experimental fiction' (Weinstein, p. 37).

Light in August (1932) to provide important illustrations for discussions of race and mourning in Faulkner's work, and treat *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) as a necessary prequel/sequel to Quentin Compson's story in *Absalom, Absalom!*, paying particular attention to their intertextuality, which induces the reader, as Millgate notes, to 'move on from one text to another (as Scott and Hardy had done)'.¹¹⁷ I have sought to avoid some of the pitfalls of previous comparisons, such as Cohen's streamlined corpus in which *Madame Bovary* (one of modern literature's most heralded and studied novels) outweighs *Flags in the Dust* (one of Faulkner's lesser-known works); however, Flaubert's novels exist as independent entities in a way that Faulkner's do not.

In dealing with such heavily-studied authors, to incorporate all the secondary criticism would bog down both the flow of the argumentation and the joy of comparison, and there is thus worthy and valuable criticism that has not made its way into this thesis. Readers might bemoan the absence of obvious works which could have found voice and purpose in this discussion, such as *A Fable* (1954) or *Salammbô* (1862), which overtly engage with the historical.¹¹⁸ Their exclusion here is due partly to scope, but mostly because *Absalom, Absalom!* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* uniquely comment upon history and narrative in equal measure. These novels came relatively late in their two authors' respective careers, and thereby acquired self-reflective tendencies that prompt discussions of their meta-narratives.

Rather than relying on tropological borrowing to anchor the comparison, this thesis reads Flaubert and Faulkner into one another. Instead of tracing a continuous line of influence,

¹¹⁷ Millgate, p. 31.

¹¹⁸ See Ladd's *Resisting History* for an insightful discussion of memory and history in *A Fable*, and Anne Green's exemplary treatment of history in *Flaubert and the Historical Novel: Salammbô Reassessed*.

Yuri Tynyanov's evocation of a 'struggle' or 'pushing away from the known' more aptly captures the literary reinventions and uprisings that happened along the way from Flaubert's pioneering use of perspective to Faulkner's unruly prose.¹¹⁹ The progression of their shared stylistic devices from innovation to exaggeration and the correlation of these devices with the failed histories that characterize their subject matter reveal the unique stagnation of time in their work as the result of their more flexible use of verb tense and sentence structure. Bleikasten presents Faulkner's reading as participatory to his writing suggesting that within that writing, we might find a (re)reading of Flaubert:

If *The Sound and the Fury* was a revelation, it was first of all the revelation of Literature, through the sudden (re)discovery of all the major novelists with whom Faulkner had just joined company. [...] *The Sound and the Fury*, then, may be considered a rereading of Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Conrad - a reading at once attentive and forgetful, fascinated and treacherous, and, by virtue of its very infidelity, creative. The gesture of appropriation is also a gesture of dismissal.¹²⁰

Following the surge of projects placing Faulkner in comparison to Flaubert in the 1970s and 1980s, studies dedicated exclusively to these two authors run dry. Though not brought into immediate comparison, critics have continued to place them in a shared critical space, using Flaubert and Faulkner as milestones in projects invested in tracing the progression of modern writing.¹²¹ However, to present Faulkner as a literary extension of Flaubert would be to subject these authors to a critical approach that seems at odds with their non-linear narrative achievements. Instead, this comparison is concerned with how the two authors are stylistically analogous and ideologically concomitant in their approach

¹¹⁹ See Yuri Tynyanov's description of waves of influence and literary uprisings in *Dostoevsky i Gogol*, in which he argues that, instead of a 'direct line uniting the younger and older representatives of a known literary branch', 'there is rather a departure, a pushing away from the known point - a struggle'. Cited in Boris Eichenbaum, 'The Theory of the "Formal Method"' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, 2nd edn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 925-51 (p. 946).

¹²⁰ André Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels, from 'The Sound and the Fury' to 'Light in August'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 42.

¹²¹ They appear together within broader more generalist works, such as Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984); Dominique Rabaté, *Vers une littérature de l'épuisement* (Paris: Corti, 1991); and Philip Weinstein's *Unknowing*. Bourdieu uses Flaubert to open and Faulkner to close his discussion in Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992).

to the role of history in the novel. Rather than dealing exclusively with reception, a study of two authors from different countries, languages, and periods can and should be synergetic. This thesis sees itself as operating within both Flaubertian and Faulknerian scholarship.

In her comparative work on Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire, Kathryn Oliver Mills notes that while Flaubert scholarship situates him ‘on the cusp of a traditional era and a modern one’, it tends to focus on the literary structures he was ‘looking back at, and moving away from, rather than on new forms toward which [he] might be moving’.¹²² This critical counterfactual serves as a ‘call to arms’ for this thesis: to imagine where Flaubert might have taken his prose, had he continued to write beyond *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and had he been able to read the modernism that followed. Yet also, as T.S. Eliot puts it in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), to show that ‘what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it’.¹²³

V: Chapter Summaries

For these texts to become not just analysed material, but also tools with which to read, each chapter pays due attention to both authors. This thesis moves through three thematic movements to stage the comparison and guide the readings: ‘Defamiliarizing History’, ‘Aborted Filiation’, and ‘Black Blood; Black Bile’. These terms are meant to be understood somatically as referring to history’s relation to the body, both corporeal and

¹²² Kathryn Oliver Mills, *Formal Revolution in the Work of Baudelaire and Flaubert* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), p. 4.

¹²³ T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, 2nd edn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 955-61 (p. 956).

textual. Chapter One explores the mechanisms that allow history to be represented as an absent presence in these novels – both everywhere and nowhere, it is as hard to argue for its dominance as for its irrelevance in these texts. I demonstrate how this is achieved by the defamiliarization of historical events, in which reality appears as a series of farcical exaggerations. I employ a discussion of ‘mood’ to draw attention to the unspoken and unwritable space in which history exists in these novels. Flaubert’s and Faulkner’s characters are doomed and contaminated by an air that is thick with history; despite their greatest efforts, these authors and characters are unable to escape its omnipresence.

Chapter Two links the literary metaphors of infanticide, abortion, and miscarriage to the political rhetoric of 1848 and the American South. The rejection of chronology, the obsession with the mixed-race figure, the leitmotif of the dead child, and questions of lineage, all seep their way into literary formulations such as incest, adultery, and miscegenation. Chapter Three examines historical mourning as it manifests itself in the mechanisms of the body – digestion, blood circulation, abjection, and ejaculation. This final chapter is distinct in that it pivots away from *Absalom, Absalom!* and *L’Éducation sentimentale* to focus exclusively on *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August* – two novels preoccupied with bodily fluids and the digestive tract, whose respective protagonists, in their denial of any maternal loss, both close their lives with suicide and a release of black liquid. Joe Christmas’s and Emma Bovary’s cycle between gorging and starvation are shown to be ways in which historical mourning enters the body, making itself felt and known through digestion and indigestion. I map black bile and its Aristotelian opposite, white foam, onto a white/black binary which uses the racial implications of this imagery, and its writerly echoes of the text at work: black ink upon white page.

Flaubert and Faulkner are both fascinated and compelled by subjects, moments, and people (like themselves) that do not slot comfortably into categories. Like their protagonists, they were misfits, and critics have recategorized them in and out of literary doctrines, yet they continue to defy such classifications.¹²⁴ ‘During Faulkner’s life’, writes Julian Murphet, ‘his work was insistently understood as romantic, or at best as a field of dynamic aesthetic interplay between romance and realism, tricked out with modernistic style elements’.¹²⁵ His contemporaries saw him as ‘a writer pulled back and forth between the aesthetic ideology of romance and the formal protocols of realism’.¹²⁶ Similarly, Flaubert felt *Madame Bovary*’s readers misunderstood him as a realist: ‘On me croit épris du réel, tandis que je l’exècre. Car c’est en haine du réalisme que j’ai entrepris ce roman’.¹²⁷ Flaubert and Faulkner have been so inexhaustibly revisited precisely because they resist these critical labels. It is this discomfort that defines and sources the unsettling energy of their work. The disparate personalities, circumstances, and eras of Flaubert and Faulkner, as well as the contextual and structural mismatch between the 1848 Revolution in France and the American Civil War, and the markedly different state of the political, publishing, and cultural worlds in which they were situated as they wrote these works, will

¹²⁴ On perspectives of social class in relation to these authors, see Bourdieu’s aforementioned *Les Règles de l’art* (1992); Alan Raitt, *Gustavus Flaubertus Bourgeoisophobus: Flaubert and the Bourgeois Mentality* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005); and Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

¹²⁵ Julian Murphet, *Faulkner’s Media Romance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 10. Martin Kreiswirth also notes the unhelpful ‘binary thinking’ and ‘reductionism that has marked’ the ‘modernism/postmodernism’ debate around Faulkner. See Martin Kreiswirth, ‘Intertextuality, Transference, and Postmodernism in *Absalom, Absalom!*: The Production and Reception of Faulkner’s Fictional World’, in *Faulkner and Postmodernism*, ed. by John N. Duvall and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), pp. 109-23 (p. 120).

¹²⁶ Murphet, p. 6. Nabokov viewed Faulkner’s work as a form of ‘stale’ and ‘belated’ romanticism, with disdain for Faulkner’s biblical storylines and sprawling prose: ‘I detest these puffs of stale romanticism, coming all the way up from Marlinsky and V. Hugo [...] Faulkner’s belated romanticism and quite impossible biblical rumblings [...] seem to me so offensive [...]. I imagine that this kind of thing (white trash, velvety Negroes, those bloodhounds out of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* melodramas, steadily baying through thousands of swampy books) may be necessary in a social sense, but it is not literature ... (and especially those absolutely ghastly italics). [...] it is essentially Jean Valjean stealing the candlesticks from the good man of God all over again’. See Vladimir Nabokov, Letter to Edmund Wilson of November 21 1948, in *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*. ‘Letter to Edmund Wilson’ in *The Dixie Limited: Writers on William Faulkner and His Influence*, ed. by M. Thomas Inge (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), pp. 94-95.

¹²⁷ Letter to Edma Roger des Genettes (*C*, II, 643 [30 October 1856]).

inevitably mean that at times these authors resist comparison – but the act of trying to address and appease that friction motivates the endeavour. There will be moments of friction in any comparative project, but it is precisely this discomfort that awakens our reading. It enlivens our awareness of the comparative exercise in which we are always engaged – between the fictions we read and those we live.

1.

DEFAMILIARIZING HISTORY

*'I never read any history [...] if I got it straight it's because I didn't worry with other people's ideas about it.'*¹²⁸
– William Faulkner, to a reporter (1938)

*'Je regarde comme très secondaire le détail technique, le renseignement local, enfin le côté historique et exact des choses. Je recherche par-dessus tout, la Beauté, dont mes compagnons sont médiocrement en quête.'*¹²⁹
– Gustave Flaubert, letter to George Sand (1875)

Introduction: Incomplete Histories

¹²⁸ Quoted by Robert Cantwell, 'The Faulkners: Recollections of a Gifted Family', in *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 57.

¹²⁹ Letter to George Sand (*C*, IV, 1000 [end of December 1875]).

Cemented in historical consciousness as the military action that propelled the loss of the ‘Southern cause’ at the Battle of Gettysburg, Pickett’s Charge remains unnamed in Faulkner’s evocation of this lethal action in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948):

For every Southern boy fourteen years old [...] there is the instant when it’s still not yet two o’clock on that July afternoon in 1863 [...] it hasn’t happened yet, it hasn’t even begun yet, it not only hasn’t begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin.¹³⁰

Faulkner presents the catastrophic battle as a non-event, an imaginary ‘still not’, and creates a retrievable imagined reality in which the South had not yet descended the path of assured defeat. When I went to Gettysburg in July 2013, the same Pennsylvania fields were flecked with white tents, men in grey and blue uniforms waving infantry flags, and anachronistic abandoned water bottles. ‘Soldiers’ had been camping out for days, while spectators shuttled to and from hotels for the 150th anniversary re-enactment of Pickett’s Charge. Diligently following the steps of their ‘forefathers’ to repeat their same doom, reenactors (mostly white Southern males depicting soldiers on both sides) occasionally broke character to thank the crowds for coming. ‘Gettysburg in particular’, Gallagher writes, ‘continues to fascinate counterfactualists. Its imperfections and incompleteness invite constant imaginative revision, and in this regard it stands for the Civil War conflict as a whole, lamented as it was being fought and regretted in recollection’.¹³¹ Flaubert and Faulkner fabricate such ‘incompleteness’ to ‘invite constant imaginative revision’ – both on the part of the characters who build the narration, and the reader who aids them to achieve coherence.¹³²

¹³⁰ William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: New American Library, 1956), p. 148. On the significance of the 150th Anniversary of Gettysburg, see Alan Taylor, ‘The Battle of Gettysburg: 150 Years Ago’, *The Atlantic*, 3 July 2013 < <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2013/07/the-battle-of-gettysburg-150-years-ago/100545/> > [accessed 04 May 2022].

¹³¹ Gallagher, p. 107.

¹³² Blight notes the role of romanticism in the logic of Lost Cause Revisionism: ‘[T]he Lost Cause not only absolved Southerners of responsibility for slavery, but made them the truest abolitionists. Protected by such mists of sentiment, the past could be anything people wished’ (Blight, p. 283).

Reenactment – a theatrical form of repetition and the invention of alternatives – is a useful framework with which to examine how Flaubert and Faulkner depict history. A reader seeking an explanatory or privileged moment of origin for the events of 1848 or the motivations of the Civil War will be disappointed. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the Battle of Shiloh (1862) (the Confederate Army’s first significant defeat) appears through the sieve of Quentin and Shreve’s distorted memories of this event they never witnessed, fragmented beyond recognition.¹³³ In *L’Éducation sentimentale*, Frédéric abandons Paris with Rosanette during the June Days Uprisings of 1848, with the bloodshed relayed through descriptions of the forest of Fontainebleau which are ‘quickly transmuted into images of violence’.¹³⁴ Travellers from Paris rudely bring unwanted news of upheaval to their countryside retreat, and Frédéric learns of Dussardier’s injury through a newspaper clipping. Or, as Barbara Vinken emphasizes: ‘The great, unspoken – and therefore also most conspicuous – absence is Napoleon III, who is never once mentioned in the novel, as though he were already no more than an infamous memory’.¹³⁵

In obfuscating the explicitly historical from their reader, these authors prolong the moment of recognition of history in the novel, and in this sense render known events unfamiliar – or as Viktor Shklovsky’s formalist manifesto, *Art as Technique* (1917),

¹³³ Quentin and Shreve place Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon’s regiment, the University Greys, at the Battle of Shiloh, which John B. Padgett points out is historically inaccurate. Whether this is Faulkner’s or Quentin and Shreve’s error is unclear, but the historical inaccuracy is one of several which highlight the irrelevance of such historical milestones to the cadence and plot hierarchies of the novel. See John B. Padgett, ‘War and History in the Fiction of William Faulkner’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Mississippi, 2004).

¹³⁴ For a discussion of the Fontainebleau episode, see Victor Brombert, *The Hidden Reader: Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Baudelaire, Flaubert* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 132-34 and pp. 140-41: ‘It is as though the key words (*désespoir, menaces, furibondes, Titans, colère*) were there to remind the two lovers who have escaped from the city that a terrible and crucial battle is being fought there at that very moment, that their escape is illusory, that one cannot escape from events and deny history’ (p. 141).

¹³⁵ Barbara Vinken, *Flaubert Postsecular: Modernity Crossed Out* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 213.

explains it, history becomes defamiliarized.¹³⁶ ‘The purpose of art’, according to Shklovsky, ‘is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known’.¹³⁷ Art renders ‘objects “unfamiliar”’ by increasing ‘the difficulty and length of perception’ and removing objects (or historical events) ‘from the automatism of perception’.¹³⁸ In conjunction with defamiliarization, what I am naming the ‘spectacularization’ of history, renders the historical moment unfamiliar through an exaggerated theatricality. This chapter suggests that in such defamiliarizations and spectacularizations of history, the reader’s ability to discern and identify it as such is prolonged, and in that prolongation, the very recognition of the event is thrown into question. Instead, the imaginary emerges as more reliable, as the reader clings to the unreal to find a stabilizing narrative coherence.

To do this, I shall focus on the oblique representation of the two most historically significant scenes in *L’Éducation sentimentale: la fusillade des Capucines* (1848), which led to the abdication of the king, and the death of Dussardier during the *coup d’état* of 1851. To pull apart the techniques employed in these scenes, I shall contextualize them with strategies Flaubert uses in *Madame Bovary*: framing devices such as windows and theatres that function as multidirectional boundaries between the real and the unreal. In Faulkner, I explore the theatrical role of the house in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and the ways in which the transference of historical narratives is revealed (and concealed) incrementally through narrative framing devices, and omissions which invite the reader to engage in

¹³⁶ The Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky’s idea of *ostraneniye* is most often translated as ‘defamiliarization’, though can also be known as ‘making strange’. See Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 15-21.

¹³⁷ Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 16.

¹³⁸ ‘After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it – hence we cannot say anything significant about it.’ See Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 16.

futile hunts for certainty and knowledge. I then offer a sustained close reading of the early sentences of *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, which adumbrate the stifling and melancholic mood that develops over the course of the novels, concluding with the importance of atmospherics (including fluvial imagery) to render this absent yet omnipresent version of history. While I have drawn distinctions between these devices, they often appear in unison, and manifest themselves differently across Flaubert's and Faulkner's disparate thematic material. It is striking to see when and where their methodologies resonate: the dead-end fate of the characters, the spiralling cycles of their plot, and the refusal to land on any kind of satisfying or definitive morals together serve to refute any convincing notion of progress – all while their syntax and rhetorical innovations boldly drive language and literature forwards.

I: Circumventing History (in and with *L'Éducation sentimentale*)

Flaubert wrote to his friend Jules Duplan: 'j'ai bien du mal à emboîter mes personnages dans les événements politiques de 48! J'ai peur que les fonds ne dévorent les premiers plans. C'est là le défaut du genre historique'.¹³⁹ His solution was to push the recognizable figures and events to the periphery of his protagonist's consciousness. With the wandering perspective of his *style indirect libre*, he shifts his reader's focus away from Victor Hugo's barricades and plunges it into Frédéric's fantasies. *L'Éducation sentimentale*, a story as uneventful as its protagonist is insipid, is therefore a discomfiting read. Frédéric Moreau, a young bourgeois living in Paris during the politically tumultuous years of 1830 to 1851, is numb to realities beyond those he creates for himself.¹⁴⁰ The

¹³⁹ Letter to Jules Duplan (C, III, 734 [14 March 1868]).

¹⁴⁰ The novel spans across a period of revolution and reform in France that abolished the monarchy and slavery, and in 1848 established the Second Republic. Initial unity quickly gave way to division amongst

protagonist and narrative compulsively revisit desired but unrealized events, so that each narrative step forward is undermined by a countercurrent that looks backwards to what might have been. The novel misleadingly opens with the sanguine thoughts of its protagonist:

Frédéric pensait à la chambre qu'il occuperait là-bas, au plan d'un drame, à des sujets de tableaux, à des passions futures. Il trouvait que le bonheur mérité par l'excellence de son âme tardait à venir. Il se déclama des vers mélancoliques.¹⁴¹

He spends most of the novel fashioning his life into 'vers mélancoliques', and very little time achieving any of his fickle ambitions.¹⁴² His writerly aspirations 'd'être un jour le Walter Scott de la France', law studies, and dalliance with painting, are all subordinated to his stalking of Madame Arnoux, a married woman he meets aboard a ship in the opening scene.¹⁴³

For Frédéric, mourning is an aesthetic ideal. Consumed by his fantasy of a counterfactual marriage and the family he might have had with Madame Arnoux, Frédéric uses his devotion to their potential union as an excuse to evade reality. Rather than mourn the loss of the child he fathers with a *courtisane* named Rosanette, or the death of his friend Dussardier during the political upheaval, Frédéric wallows in the imaginary loss of a counterfactual life he might have had with Madame Arnoux. In their last encounter, after twenty-seven years of longing, it is Madame Arnoux who comes to find Frédéric, he suspects 'pour s'offrir'.¹⁴⁴ Repulsed by her now whitened hairs and faced with the reality of

revolutionaries and the regime ended in failure when President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte carried out a *coup d'état* in 1851 to crown himself emperor.

¹⁴¹ *ES*, 5.

¹⁴² Just as Flaubert is composing his own 'petits vers', Frédéric recites his own 'vers mélancoliques' as the voyageurs drink from their 'verres'. Moments like these are what Gérard Genette calls 'those musical moments when the narrative is lost and forgets itself in the ecstasy of an infinite contemplation'. See Gérard Genette, 'Flaubert's Silences' in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. by Marie-Rose Logan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 183-202 (p. 196).

¹⁴³ *ES*, 17.

¹⁴⁴ *ES*, 514.

her desire for him, he casts their romance back to the less threatening realm of the unreal with a lamentation in the past conditional, the tense of impossible futures: ‘quel bonheur nous aurions eu’.¹⁴⁵ The use of this tense confirms what the reader has long suspected: Frédéric is far less interested in the reality of an ageing woman than he is in the melancholic retrieval of the memory of his fantasies. In one of literature’s more underwhelming scenes, Flaubert curtly concludes both the chapter and their romance with: ‘Et ce fut tout’.¹⁴⁶

These professional, artistic, and romantic failures are shrewdly set amid the political disappointments of France’s 1848 uprisings. Deslauriers exemplifies the misguided hopes of 1848 when he confidently declares at the novel’s outset: ‘Patience! un nouveau 89 se prépare!’¹⁴⁷ Remembered as an awkward false-start in French historical consciousness, the Revolution of 1848, haunted by its own potentiality, was defined by the promises it failed to keep.¹⁴⁸ Instead, the memory of the revolution that might-have-been dissipates into a haunting absence. The last pages show Frédéric wistfully recalling to his childhood friend Deslauriers their adolescent failure to enter their local brothel, neatly tying the end of the novel to its beginning in a closed circuit of aborted intentions: ‘Et ils résumèrent leur vie. Ils l’avaient manquée tous les deux’.¹⁴⁹ These contexts of historical frustration and disillusion underpin the dominance of the counterfactual mode in the novel and dictate the currents of its melancholic progression.

¹⁴⁵ *ES*, 513.

¹⁴⁶ *ES*, 515.

¹⁴⁷ *ES*, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Writing just after the *coup d’état* of Louis-Napoleon, Marx was vehement about the inability of the 1848 Revolution to bring tangible change to the lives of France’s working class. He highlights the disparity between what was imagined and the disappointing reality [original emphasis]: ‘What [the republican faction of the bourgeoisie] had imagined as the *most revolutionary* event occurred in reality as the *most counterrevolutionary*.’ See Marx, p. 42.

¹⁴⁹ *ES*, 518.

Flaubert disrupts traditional modes of historical fiction by presenting an amputated rendition of the events of 1848. By removing the explicitly historical and focusing instead on private melancholic yearnings, Flaubert's narrative lingers on the moments that fall just beyond the reach of recognizable dates or political figures: familiar scenes such as Alphonse de Lamartine addressing an unruly crowd in front of the *hôtel de ville* appear on the plot's periphery.¹⁵⁰ Flaubert repeatedly shifts the novel's attention away from the public historical stage to the flippancy of private concerns. On the day of Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état*, which exchanged the Second Republic for a Second Empire, he writes: 'L'état de siège était décrété, l'Assemblée dissoute [...]. Les affaires publiques le laissèrent indifférent, tant il était préoccupé des siennes'.¹⁵¹ During one of the most violent nights of 1848, *la fusillade des Capucines*, Frédéric's thoughts are again pointed inward: having devotedly prepared a room for a failed rendez-vous with Madame Arnoux, he spitefully brings Rosanette to 'le logement préparé pour l'autre' as an act of private revenge.¹⁵² Distraught that he has spent the night with the wrong woman, he sobs for himself in his pillow as the text alludes to the sound of carts carrying the bodies of dead insurgents through the streets below.¹⁵³ By confining his reader within Frédéric's disinterested perspective, Flaubert frustrates attempts to isolate the important events of 1848.

¹⁵⁰ During the February days, Alphonse de Lamartine addressed the mob surrounding the *hôtel de ville* as the newly formed Provisional Government met inside (I shall return to this scene in Chapter Two). As Richard Sennett explains, in 1848 'Lamartine becomes the emissary of the government to quell the mob'. See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 229. The scene has frequently been visually rendered as a focal point of the Revolution, for example in Henri Félix Philippoteaux, *Lamartine refusant le drapeau rouge devant l'Hôtel de Ville*, 1848, oil on canvas, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

¹⁵¹ *ES*, 506. Louis-Napoleon staged a *coup d'état* on 2 December 1851, marking the end of the French Second Republic.

¹⁵² *ES*, 346. After days of unrest, King Louis Philippe abdicated on 24 February 1848, and a Provisional Government was established between February and May. This crucial date appears euphemistically in a parenthetical mention: '(vers le milieu de février)' (*ES*, 334).

¹⁵³ This scene is one of several instances where the use of *style indirect libre* allows Flaubert to let the reader in on the historical events that Frédéric ignores.

Rather than a linear movement towards an ideal of human progress, like those that motivate his friends to join the uprisings of 1848, Frédéric is locked into a melancholic orbit around the idea of Madame Arnoux. She provides an organizing principle to his time, financial expenses, and thoughts:

Il se demanda, sérieusement, s'il serait un grand peintre ou un grand poète; – et il se décida pour la peinture, car les exigences de ce métier le rapprocheraient de Mme Arnoux. Il avait donc trouvé sa vocation! Le but de son existence était clair maintenant, et l'avenir infaillible.¹⁵⁴

When Deslauriers writes '*nous comptons sur toi*', imploring him to join the protests, Frédéric uses Madame Arnoux as a means of escape: 'Oh! Je les connais, leurs manifestations. Mille grâces! J'ai un rendez-vous plus agréable'.¹⁵⁵ Frédéric is persistently missing history as he pursues Madame Arnoux, who is cast as the alternative route to the novel's historical storyline. When Frédéric witnesses the violent arrest of young protesters, he is distressed only by an alternative reality in which his involvement might have kept him from her: 'on aurait pu le prendre avec les autres, et il aurait manqué Mme Arnoux'.¹⁵⁶ Frédéric creates instances of loss to justify the act of mourning and evade the real. Like France, Flaubert's characters are haunted by the spectres of their own counterfactual existences.¹⁵⁷

The novel's elision of the character Dussardier's death and political involvement exemplifies the novel's oblique portrayal of historical events. Thinking he has lost Madame Arnoux forever, Frédéric leaves Paris on the day of Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état*, returning just in time to witness the brutal murder of his friend Dussardier. Flaubert counts a beat by ending the chapter with Frédéric standing 'béant'.¹⁵⁸ Opening

¹⁵⁴ *ES*, 62.

¹⁵⁵ *ES*, 337.

¹⁵⁶ *ES*, 338.

¹⁵⁷ Marx writes: 'The period 1848 to 1851 saw only the spectre of the old revolution on the move' (Marx, p. 33).

¹⁵⁸ *ES*, 509.

the following chapter with a brief paragraph that nimbly spans a decade, the novel nonchalantly skips from 1851 to 1867, with no mention of Dussardier:

[Frédéric] voyagea. Il connut la mélancolie des paquebots [...]. Il revint. Il fréquenta le monde, et il eut d'autres amours encore. Mais le souvenir continuel du premier les lui rendait insipides [...] Des années passèrent; et il supportait le désœuvrement de son intelligence et l'inertie de son cœur.¹⁵⁹

The languid imperfect tense mimics Frédéric's obsessive and melancholic rhythms. Time passes without mention, he leaves and returns and loses all motivation other than the obstructionist 'souvenir continuel du premier', which resists expulsion, preventing him from finding a new love object. The novel obscures the real loss of Dussardier with an immediate transition to Frédéric's melancholic yearning for Madame Arnoux. Even as Frédéric and Deslauriers take stock of their lives and think back to their friends and what has become of them, Dussardier is never mentioned.¹⁶⁰

It is worth lingering over Dussardier's death – even if the novel does not – because he exists as a figuration of the alternative revolution 1848 might have been. Regarded as perhaps the only earnest symbol of the efforts of 1848, Dussardier, like the Revolution, is repeatedly patronized by the text.¹⁶¹ Neither he nor his revolutionary ideals are allowed to survive, or even to be mourned. The novel's omission of this act of mourning confirms that his belief in progress and revolutionary idealism stands neatly against the circular current of the novel. Dussardier himself participates in the novel's cycles of mourning, bemoaning the impending failure of the revolutionary effort to Frédéric: 'Je suis tellement désespéré! Est-ce que tout n'est pas fini, d'ailleurs? – J'avais cru, quand la Révolution est

¹⁵⁹ *ES*, 510.

¹⁶⁰ The absence of any mourning for Dussardier, speaks to Frédéric's inability to mourn any *real* loss or event in this novel.

¹⁶¹ Albert Thibaudet names Dussardier the novel's only 'vrai révolutionnaire de 1848': 'Préface', in Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 10-17 (p. 13).

arrivée, qu'on serait heureux. Vous rappelez-vous comme c'était beau! comme on respirait bien! Mais nous voilà retombés pire que jamais'.¹⁶²

It is only with a sardonic stroke that Flaubert will paint the hero of 1848 as an earnest figure. In the description of Dussardier's posture as he speaks of his despair ('écartant les bras comme dans une grande détresse'¹⁶³) the use of 'comme' tinges the fatalistic words that follow with the narrator's scepticism: 'Et il n'y a pas de moyen! pas de remède! Tout le monde est contre nous! [...] J'ai envie de me faire tuer'.¹⁶⁴ Dussardier's lamentations and political sincerity are continuously dipped in Flaubertian irony, pathetic in their passive self-victimization and yet simultaneously achieving moments of political poignancy that are uncharacteristic of this novel. The narrative weight of Dussardier's death, in both its placement near the novel's end and the rare drama of an event that Frédéric witnesses in real time, is such that his demise cannot be dismissed as yet another instance of Flaubert's defeatist portrayal of the aspirations of 1848.¹⁶⁵ Instead, the opportunity to weave irony into sincerity suggests the character is designed to point beyond his own political beliefs towards a wider aesthetic of doom. The novel's refusal to mourn Dussardier's death suggests that such a frank and political figure must remain primarily in the realm of the unsaid.

The figure of Dussardier straddles sincerity and the ridiculous, and this coexistence might suggest that Flaubert views political sincerity *as* ridiculous. The first account of Dussardier

¹⁶² *ES*, 521.

¹⁶³ *ES*, 485. With ironic sentimentalism, this image prefigures the more explicit evocation of Christ at his death.

¹⁶⁴ *ES*, 522.

¹⁶⁵ Marion Schmid notes that setting this scene during the *coup d'état* allows Dussardier's assassination to signify 'the final liquidation of the Second Republic. His end is the end of an era; Frédéric's disillusionment is that of his whole generation'. See Marion Schmid, *Processes of Literary Creation: Flaubert and Proust* (Oxford: Legenda, 1998), p. 85.

demonstrates this contradiction. An initially Herculean description – ‘Alors parut le robuste visage de Dussardier’ – is immediately undermined by a belittling docility: ‘le désordre de sa chevelure, avec ses petits yeux francs et son nez carré du bout, rappelait confusément la physionomie d’un bon chien’.¹⁶⁶ Though Flaubert portrays Dussardier’s dedication to the republican cause with pathos, it is inflected with a farcical martyrdom. When Dussardier is deemed a hero during the uprisings for his bravado atop a barricade, it is retold to Frédéric with all the pomp of Delacroix’s ‘La Liberté guidant le peuple’, but only retrospectively: ‘Dussardier avait jeté bas son fusil, écarté les autres, bondi sur la barricade, et, d’un coup de savate, abattu l’insurgé en lui arrachant le drapeau’.¹⁶⁷ In contrast to Dussardier’s death, this scene of heroism, like most of the action of this novel, is told and retold before it reaches Frédéric or the reader. Dussardier is unable to relish his heroic revolutionary moment: ‘on exaltait sa belle action. Ces hommages paraissaient l’importuner. Il avoua même à Frédéric l’embarras de sa conscience’.¹⁶⁸ Instead, he becomes consumed by alternative renditions of what he might have done:

Peut-être qu’il aurait dû se mettre de l’autre bord, avec les blouses; car enfin on leur avait promis un tas de choses qu’on n’avait pas tenues. [...] et le brave garçon était torturé par cette idée qu’il pouvait avoir combattu la justice.¹⁶⁹

‘Brave garçon’ reads with a patronizing glint, his earnest motivations launching him backwards rather than forwards with the past conditional tense (‘peut-être qu’il aurait dû’) to relive an alternative, perhaps equivalent, act of heroism; rather than lauding the action he did achieve, he mourns the alternative course he might have taken.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ *ES*, 23.

¹⁶⁷ *ES*, 444. See Eugène Delacroix, *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, 1830, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

¹⁶⁸ *ES*, 444.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Dussardier’s dance between alternative political affiliations takes on a different tone when we consider Flaubert’s own views on such distinctions: ‘je défie qu’on me montre une différence essentielle entre ces deux termes. Une république moderne et une monarchie constitutionnelle sont identiques. – N’importe! on se chamaille là-dessus, on crie, on se bat!’ Letter to George Sand (*C*, IV, 376 [8 September 1871]).

Set near the Opéra, with an audience in place, the stand-off between the ‘vrai révolutionnaire’ and the fanatic, Sénécral, happens when the street is made into theatre:

Des bourgeois occupaient le trottoir du côté de l’Opéra. [...] Personne aux fenêtres. Dans toute la largeur du boulevard, des dragons galopèrent, à fond de train, penchés sur leurs chevaux, le sabre nu; et les crinières de leurs casques et leurs grands manteaux blancs soulevés derrière eux passaient sur la lumière des becs de gaz, qui se tordaient au vent dans la brume. La foule les regardait, muette, terrifiée.¹⁷¹

Flaubert’s choice to stage this *coup d’état* as operatic (with lighting, costumes, and an audience) is befitting since, as Schivelbusch explains, ‘Napoleon III’s political and military activities never transcended the symbolic realm of operatic adventure; indeed, they gave concrete form to the discrepancy between grand gestures and great politics’.¹⁷² The grand gestures of Dussardier’s martyrdom reach their pinnacle in his Christ-like death atop ‘les marches de Tortoni’, crying “Vive la République!” before ‘il tomba sur le dos, les bras en croix’.¹⁷³ To become the political martyr he dreams of being, Dussardier must become *archetype* – or architecture.¹⁷⁴ In this final staging, Dussardier is described as a pillar supporting the structure: ‘un homme, – Dussardier, – remarquable de loin à sa haute taille, restait sans plus bouger qu’une cariatide’.¹⁷⁵ The image of a caryatid (redolent of Victor Hugo’s use of the classical figure to evoke an enslaved populous in ‘Les Cariatides’) evokes Dussardier’s symbolism (anonymized as ‘un homme’).¹⁷⁶ The narrative’s moment of hesitation before recognizing him (‘un homme, -- Dussardier’) defamiliarizes this character so that for a brief moment, we see history.

¹⁷¹ *ES*, 312.

¹⁷² Schivelbusch, p. 106. I suspect Flaubert’s decision to stage Dussardier’s death as a theatrical moment derives in part from Théophile Gautier’s ‘Vieux de la veille’, in which he chooses the theatre district to stage the *coup d’état* of December 2, 1851: ‘Et là je vis, spectacle étrange, / échappés du sombre séjour, / Sous la bruine et dans la fange, / Passer des spectres en plein jour’. See Théophile Gautier, ‘Emaux et Camées’ in *Selected Lyrics*, ed. by Norman R. Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 2-262 (p. 92).

¹⁷³ *ES*, 314.

¹⁷⁴ Kate Rees argues that Dussardier’s death signals ‘the suppression of any idealism associated with the revolutionary dream attempted in 1848’. See Kate Rees, *Flaubert: Transportation, Progression, Progress* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 14.

¹⁷⁵ *ES*, 314.

¹⁷⁶ See Victor Hugo, ‘Les Cariatides’ in *Les Quatre vents de l’esprit*, 4th edn (Paris: J. Hetzel & A. Quantin, 1884), p. 263.

II: Spectacularizing History

*'[T]he spectacle [...] exhibits the essence of all ideological systems: the oversimplification, impoverishment, and the very negation of real life.'*¹⁷⁷

- Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

*'[The] ideal is still the performance of classical theatre: the narrator is there only to raise the curtain; the play is really performed [...] in some sense without him; he does not tell; he shows; and the reader does not read - he looks, attending, taking part without participating.'*¹⁷⁸

- Maurice Blanchot, *The Narrative Voice*

*'L'Histoire est hystérique: elle ne se constitue que si on la regarde - et pour la regarder, il faut en être exclu.'*¹⁷⁹

- Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida*

Defamiliarization takes on a historical agenda in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, where the manipulation of perception becomes, as Shklovsky argued, 'an aesthetic end in itself'.¹⁸⁰

As we have already seen, when the violence escalates on the streets of Paris the night of *la fusillade des Capucines*, Frédéric opts out of participating per Deslauriers's request to instead spend a romantic evening with Madame Arnoux. Just as Frédéric has missed history, Madame Arnoux misses their meeting, and Rosanette provides an alternative companion with whom to bury his disappointment within this series of alternatives.

Rather than the mention of weapons, the first sound of the outbreak of violence is described with an incongruously intimate image: 'un bruit, pareil au craquement d'une immense pièce de soie que l'on déchire'.¹⁸¹ The narrative winks, informing its reader of what Frédéric cannot yet know: 'c'était la fusillade du boulevard des Capucines'.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Guy de Bord, 'Ideology Materialized', in *The Society of the Spectacle*, ed. and trans. by Ron Adams (Cambridge, MA: Unredacted Word, 2021), pp. 191-200.

¹⁷⁸ Maurice Blanchot, 'The Narrative Voice', in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Essays*, ed. by P. Adams Sitney, trans. by Lydia Davis (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1981), pp. 133-44 (p. 137).

¹⁷⁹ Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), p.102.

¹⁸⁰ Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p. 16.

¹⁸¹ *ES*, 378.

¹⁸² *ES*, 346.

Therefore, his offhand remark ('Ah! on casse quelques bourgeois, dit Frédéric tranquillement') rings crass in its obliviousness.¹⁸³ The narrative seizes the opportunity to whisper a more moralistic observation to its reader: 'car il y a des situations où l'homme le moins cruel est si détaché des autres, qu'il verrait périr le genre humain sans un battement de cœur'.¹⁸⁴

A new chapter introduces the following morning, and Frédéric abandons Rosanette to observe the chaos. The narrative moves indiscriminately, without an organizing scale of gravity, from Frédéric's 'amusement' to the embarrassment of the failed attack on the Château-d'Eau, to bodies strewn face-down in puddles. To present a historical event as it is 'perceived' and not as it is 'known', events are defamiliarized, appearing in the confused immediacy of revolutionary upheaval. With a series of short phrases, tentatively held together by semi-colons, he pieces together a chaotic mixture of fragmented military imagery:

[D]e toutes les fenêtres de la place, on tirait; les balles sifflaient; l'eau de la fontaine crevée se mêlait avec le sang, faisait des flaques par terre; on glissait dans la boue sur des vêtements, des shakos, des armes; Frédéric sentit sous son pied quelque chose de mou; c'était la main d'un sergent en capote grise, couché la face dans le ruisseau.¹⁸⁵

The metallic 'balles' and 'armes' are swept up in the flood of liquid imagery ('l'eau', 'mêlait', 'sang', 'flaques', 'glissait', 'la boue', 'mou', 'ruisseau') evoking not only a city in turmoil, but one slipping through political transitions, with history dissolving before Frédéric's eyes: 'la monarchie se fondait dans une dissolution rapide'.¹⁸⁶ The *style indirect libre* mimics this political slippage, by sliding in and out of Frédéric's perspective - like

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ *ES*, 378.

¹⁸⁵ *ES*, 352.

¹⁸⁶ *ES*, 350. Frédéric's confusion recalls Fabrice's experience at the Battle of Waterloo in *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839), in which Fabrice is sickened by a corpse he comes across that is stripped of his boots, the novel focusing on the detail of its dirtied feet, and he is repulsed by the mixture of blood and mud. The shock of the event leaves him wondering: 'Ai-je réellement assisté à une bataille? Il lui semblait que oui'. See Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), p. 130.

blindness that prevent the reader from understanding beyond what he can immediately ascertain. To create this sense that reader, writer, and Frédéric discover that there is a corpse beneath his feet in one unified instant, the sentence delays the process of recognition: from ‘quelque chose de mou’ to the fragmented image of ‘la main d’un sergent’. The descriptions mimic these cognitive schisms: the broken fountain is described by the angular ‘crevée’, but a bleeding body in the street is merely softly ‘couché’.¹⁸⁷

Richard Sennett describes the effect of revolutions ‘[i]n the minds of those who live through them’ as distorted so that ‘immense changes appear to be wrought in the social fabric overnight’ and ‘it is almost impossible to judge the meaning of events, to know whether they are of cataclysmic importance or may mean nothing a day later’.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, Frédéric, unable to know *la fusillade des Capucines* would be a turning point in the events of 1848, pushing the king to abdicate, can only observe that ‘[l]a veille au soir, le spectacle du chariot contenant cinq cadavres recueillis parmi ceux du boulevard des Capucines avait changé les dispositions du peuple’.¹⁸⁹ The reality of this violence is constantly undermined, notably by repeated comparisons to a theatrical performance: ‘Frédéric, pris entre deux masses profondes, ne bougeait pas, fasciné d’ailleurs et s’amusant extrêmement. Les blessés qui tombaient, les morts étendus n’avaient pas l’air de vrais blessés, de vrais morts. Il lui semblait assister à un spectacle’.¹⁹⁰ The events take place within an enclosed space, like a theatre: ‘Frédéric s’arrêta forcément à l’entrée de la place’.¹⁹¹ The smoke in the air, which has in a sense been floating in and off stage since

¹⁸⁷ *ES*, 350.

¹⁸⁸ Sennett, p. 229.

¹⁸⁹ *ES*, 349.

¹⁹⁰ *ES*, 351.

¹⁹¹ *ES*, 350.

the *Ville-de-Montereau* ‘fumait à gros tourbillons’, becomes like stage curtains, opened to allow the actors to enter: ‘La fumée qui se balançait à sa crête s’entr’ouvrit, des hommes couraient dessus en faisant de grands gestes’.¹⁹² Everyone around Frédéric appears to be in costume (‘un homme en bonnet grec et portant un giberne par-dessus sa veste de tricot se disputait avec une femme coiffée d’un madras’); even the soundscape of the scene is organized by intervals: ‘On entendait, par intervalles, une détonation.’¹⁹³ Just as ‘la fusillade devenait plus pressée’, the next sentence describes a sort of intermission: ‘les marchands de vins étaient ouverts; on allait de temps à autre y fumer une pipe, boire une chope, puis on retournait se battre’.¹⁹⁴ At times, the audience even laughs: ‘Cela faisait rire.’¹⁹⁵ Yet from one sentence to the next, Frédéric is back on stage, seemingly shocked by his own participation in the reality of the drama: ‘Frédéric fut ébranlé par le choc d’un homme qui, une balle dans les reins, tomba sur son épaule, en râlant [...]. À ce coup, dirigé peut-être contre lui, il se sentit furieux.’¹⁹⁶

These descriptions render one of the novel’s few historical scenes fraudulent and performative, and this spectacularization of history works hand in hand with its defamiliarization, at once confusing the reader’s ability to even recognize bloodshed or military action, and distancing *L’Éducation sentimentale* from the epic legacies of the historical novel.¹⁹⁷ Frédéric’s perspective distorts or exaggerates the lingering tropes of

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ *ES*, 350 and 349.

¹⁹⁴ *ES*, 352.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Lukàcs lamented the loss of these legacies, arguing that ‘the really honest and gifted *bourgeois* writers who lived and wrote in the period following upon the upheavals of 1848 [...] remained mere spectators of the social process’. Lukàcs argues that after 1848, ‘the real, dramatic and epic movement of social happening disappears and isolated characters of purely private interest [...] stand still, surrounded by a dead scenery described with admirable skill [...] the author either stresses this shallowness of life with angry or sentimental irony’. See György Lukàcs, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p. 143.

historical fiction beyond recognition, suspending the tone of the scene in an uncomfortable limbo between tragedy and farce.¹⁹⁸ For instance, the familiar revolutionary barricade appears, but without any of its usual gravitas in a sentence of casual understatement: '(Frédéric) *remarqua* trois pavés au milieu de la voie, le *commencement* d'une barricade, *sans doute*' [my emphasis].¹⁹⁹ 'Sans doute' signals the limitations of Frédéric's knowledge, undermining the reliability of what comes both before and after. The measly 'trois pavés' hardly evoke the dignity of a Delacroix painting, and the befuddled 'jeune homme pâle' who emerges on the scene 'tout à coup', wearing 'une espèce de maillot à pois de couleur' makes his 'long fusil de soldat' feel like a gimmick, especially as he runs 'sur la pointe de ses pantoufles, avec l'air d'un somnambule et leste comme un tigre'.²⁰⁰ The half-conscious automatism of 'sommambule' deprives the young man of any of the intentionality required for heroism, while the tiger reinforces the surrealism of the scene.

Even the ousting of the monarch is undermined by omitting the descriptions of revolutionary action that might have caused it, and the effort to liberate prisoners from the Château-d'Eau is mockingly written as a futile performance of misplaced bravery: 'D'elle-même, sans secousses, la monarchie se fondait dans une dissolution rapide [...] on attaquait le poste du Château-d'Eau, pour y délivrer cinquante prisonniers, qui n'y étaient pas'.²⁰¹ The spectacularization of these real historical events, written as farcical and surreal, allows Flaubert to write history as Barthes describes it in *Camera lucida*: 'L'Histoire est hystérique: elle ne se constitue que si on la regarde - et pour la regarder, il faut en être

¹⁹⁸ Gaston Bachelard's concept of *exaggeration* is useful here, where to access an image the reader must 'prolong the exaggeration' so as to avoid 'the habits of reduction'. See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 234.

¹⁹⁹ *ES*, 349.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *ES*, 350.

exclu'.²⁰² In other words, history only becomes 'History' if there is a spectator.²⁰³ Flaubert has allowed the historical to become a spectacle, to be viewed, and thereby to be seen anew. By writing the dead soldier on the blood-filled streets of revolutionary Paris as 'quelque chose de mou', the trope can once again return to, as Gaston Bachelard writes it, 'the original amazement of a naïve observer'.²⁰⁴ By adding an audience within the novel, Flaubert stages the historical and reveals its artifice: 'the conventions of theatricality have assured us that the real has been subdued and transcended'.²⁰⁵ Flaubert writes an event that is far more *hystérique*, not only in Frédéric's disjointed and detached experience of it, but also in our frantic reading of unrecognizable bloodshed, in which 'quelque chose de mou' is just one semi-colon away from becoming a corpse beneath our feet – the sentence prolongs the *perception* of violence, and the reader is forced to read through the process of identifying death amongst chaos.

That Flaubert wrote *la fusillade des Capucines*, one of the few historical events in the novel where Frédéric is present and immersed, as a theatrical pantomime is unsurprising in light of Green's observation that 'Flaubert first became interested in historical fiction through the theatre'.²⁰⁶ Alan Raitt has written at length about the continued influence theatrical writing had on Flaubert's prose, even if it was ultimately, like so many of

²⁰² Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), p.102.

²⁰³ 'Histoire' is given feminine gender in French, which places Barthes's idea of history as hysterical with the psychoanalytic legacy of 'hysteria' and women, and with Baudelaire's notion of 'le poète hystérique' in Charles Baudelaire, 'Madame Bovary par Gustave Flaubert', in *Ceuvres complètes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980), pp. 477-82 (p. 481).

²⁰⁴ Bachelard, p. 57.

²⁰⁵ Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 34.

²⁰⁶ Flaubert's absorbed many of the platitudes of the Romantic stage, which appear in his early literary experiments. According to Green, he would see the 'historical dramas, much in vogue in the 1830s – works such as Alexandre Dumas's *Catherine Howard*, Victor Herbin's *Jeanne de Flandre*, Casimir Delavigne's *Les Enfants d'Edouard*, Victor Hugo's *Marion de Lorme* and *Ruy Blas*'. See Anne Green, 'History and Its Representation in Flaubert's Work', in Unwin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, pp. 85-104 (pp. 85-86).

Frédéric's endeavours, an interrupted aspiration.²⁰⁷ Flaubert's early ideas about the representation of historical events likely took place at his local theatre in Rouen, where he frequently attended performances of the highly popular historical dramas of the 1830s.²⁰⁸ What is striking about the theatricality of the aftermath of *la fusillade des Capucines* is that it is Frédéric (not the reader) who becomes the audience, and thus functions as a play-within-a-play; the reader is just as much watching Frédéric's reaction, as the events themselves. In literature's most famous play-within-a-play (a personal favourite of Flaubert's), Hamlet's play for his uncle becomes an opportunity for revelation, for the 'truth' (as Hamlet understands it) to be revealed through the fiction of his staging.²⁰⁹ The play-within-a-play feels hyperbolic, rendering Shakespeare's play world more real in contrast. In other words, it is yet another method of complicating and extending the moment of perception, in which the real and the spectacle are muddled.

Before returning to Flaubert, I want momentarily to pivot to *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which *Hamlet* ('that dramatization of failed action, *Hamlet*²¹⁰) is repeatedly evoked, to show how the layers of narrative voices framing one another is used to similar effect:

'No,' Shreve said; 'you wait. Let me *play* a while now. Now Wash. Him (the demon) standing there with the horse, the saddled charger, the sheathed saber [...] then the voice of *the faithful grave-digger who opened the play and would close it*, coming out of the wings like Shakespeare's very self [my emphasis].²¹¹

²⁰⁷ According to Raitt, Flaubert's interest in theatre continued with sincerity later in his life, and that he even 'saw his future as a dramatist rather than a novelist'. In an attempt to impress his father before he passed, Flaubert spent six months in 1845 'on a detailed study of Voltaire's theatre, taking hundreds of pages of notes, summarizing and commenting on thirty-three of Voltaire's tragedies and comedies' despite finding them 'pitoyable'. See Alain Raitt, 'The Theatre in the Work of Flaubert', in Unwin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, pp. 196-207 (pp. 199-200).

²⁰⁸ Green links this influence to moments in the novel, such as the costume ball in which Flaubert 'stages an oblique dramatisation of the Revolution as guests dressed as royalty, aristocrats, soldiers and workers come together in a swirling, confused mass' ('History and its Representation', p. 98).

²⁰⁹ See William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, ed. by Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), pp. 1683-1784, especially pages 1739-41.

²¹⁰ Patrick O'Donnell, 'Sub Rosa: Voice, Body, and History in *Absalom, Absalom!*', *College Literature*, 16 (1989), 28-47 (p. 35).

²¹¹ AA, 225.

‘Now Wash,’ reads like a stage direction (‘enter: Wash’), and ‘play’ is used twice – once to denote the act of narration, and once to denote a piece of theatre – making the two equivalent. Quentin, Frédéric, and Hamlet are all young men of inaction, who can only live in the unreal narration of the play-within-the-play, rather than in the reality off-stage. When Quentin ‘walked out of his father’s talking at last’, it is as though he has walked off-stage, out of history, lost, bemused, and unable to take action: ‘that gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotized youthful face like the tragedian in a college play, an academic Hamlet waked from some trancement of the curtain’s falling and blundering across the dusty stage from which the rest of the cast had departed last Commencement’.²¹²

The theatricality and defamiliarization I have been describing meet in Shklovsky, when he uses an episode set at the theatre from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* to illustrate how defamiliarization functions in literary texts. Written from her perspective, Natasha’s inability to see the actors as characters motivated by rules of a fictional world confuses the reader’s ability to understand the contents of the play, and results in a passage that reads remarkably similarly to *la fusillade des Capucines*: ‘[M]any people appeared from right and left wearing black cloaks and holding things like daggers in their hands. [...] Then some other people ran in and began dragging away the maiden who had been in white and was now in light blue’.²¹³ I want to compare this episode to Emma’s famous visit to the theatre in Rouen. Like Natasha, Emma is unable to distinguish between the ‘reality’ of her world, and that of the stage. However, it is not just a confusion between the stage-world and the audience: the theatre becomes a taunting device depicting an alternative

²¹² *AA*, 174.

²¹³ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, ed. by Amy Mandelker, trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2010), p. 604.

and more passionate life that she might have led in a passage replete with mournful past conditionals:

[E]ntraînée vers l'homme par l'illusion du personnage, elle tâcha de se figurer sa vie, cette vie retentissante, extraordinaire, splendide, et qu'elle aurait pu mener cependant, si le hasard l'avait voulu. Ils se seraient connus, ils se seraient aimés! [...E]lle aurait voyagé de capitale en capitale [...]; elle eût recueilli, béante, les expansions de cette âme qui n'aurait chanté que pour elle seule; de la scène, tout en jouant, il l'aurait regardée. Mais une folie la saisit: il la regardait, c'est sûr! Elle eut envie de courir dans ses bras [...] de s'écrier: 'Enlève-moi, emmène-moi, partons! À toi, à toi! toutes mes ardeurs et tous mes rêves!' Le rideau se baissa. L'odeur du gaz se mêlait aux haleines; le vents des éventails rendait l'atmosphère plus étouffante. Emma voulut sortir; la foule encombrait les corridors, et elle retomba dans son fauteuil avec des palpitations qui la suffoquaient.²¹⁴

Tony Tanner notes the temporal transition from 'il l'aurait regardée' to 'il la regardait, c'est sûr' – that is, where counterfactual becomes fact:

She has been imagining their life together in the appropriate tense of the past conditional, in which the impossible not-experienced is forever silently enacting itself. The folie is a shift from that tense to the imperfect, so that 'would have' and 'would' become 'was,' and fantasy takes over the ontological priority of fact [...]. The curtain falls, leaving Emma palpitating in the smoky atmosphere.²¹⁵

Splintered by the applause ('La salle craquait sous les bravos'²¹⁶), the stretta (Flaubert chose a musical device that mirrors the overlapping confusion of perspectives), and Emma's life begin to intertwine, overlap, and interrupt one another – her voice joining with theirs in climax: 'La voix de la chanteuse ne lui semblaient être que *le retentissement de sa conscience, et cette illusion qui la charmait quelque chose même de sa vie.* [...] on recommença *la stretta* entière; [...] quand ils poussèrent l'adieu final, Emma *jeta un cri aigu, qui se confondit avec la vibration des derniers accords*' [my emphasis].²¹⁷

Affronted by its mockery of her pain ('Emma voulait ne plus voir dans cette reproduction de ses douleurs qu'une fantaisie plastique bonne à amuser les yeux'), Emma distances herself from the action on stage, and the spectacle moves to her 'real' world in the

²¹⁴ *MB*, 313.

²¹⁵ Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), p. 342.

²¹⁶ *MB*, 311.

²¹⁷ All from *MB*, 311.

audience: ‘au fond du théâtre, sous la portière de velours, un homme apparut en manteau noir’.²¹⁸ This is Léon, practically in costume, with the music on stage now serving to accompany his movements: ‘Son grand chapeau à l’espagnole tomba dans un geste qu’il fit; aussitôt les instruments et les chanteurs entonnèrent le sextuor’.²¹⁹ The action in the audience and that on stage compete for veracity – as Emma converses with Léon they are interrupted: ‘Silence! cria une voix du parterre, car le troisième acte commençait’.²²⁰ Flaubert omits a transition to announce the movement from reality to unreality, blurring the two, and removing the divide between stage and audience. The play-within-a-novel model lends itself to the blurring of these divides, and brings into relief the potential for the fictional to reveal the real.

The opera Emma and Charles go to see is a French translation of Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, based on Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*, about a woman who descends into hysteria, having married the wrong man.²²¹ Hoping for an escape from the boredom of her father’s provincial farm, Emma had married Charles Bovary in search of the romance from the historical fiction she had devoured in her youth. Instead, she finds she has also married the ‘wrong’ man, plunging her within a ‘série des mêmes journées [...] à la file, toujours pareilles, innombrables, et n’apportant rien! [...] L’avenir était un *corridor* tout noir, et qui avait au fond sa porte bien fermée’ [my emphasis].²²² Flaubert’s

²¹⁸ *MB*, 312. Derrida asks ‘what is a stage’, before answering his own question: ‘It is the place where the spectator, presenting himself as spectacle, will no longer be either seer (*voyant*) or voyeur, will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator, the represented and the representer, the object seen and the seeing object’. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 306.

²¹⁹ *MB*, 312.

²²⁰ *MB*, 315.

²²¹ For a discussion of how and why Flaubert might have encountered French translations of this opera, which were popular in France in the 1820s, see Cormac Newark, ‘The Novel in Opera: Residues of Reading in Flaubert’, in *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 78-109.

²²² *MB*, 88.

choice of words feels significant: in *Madame Bovary*, history appears in the theatrical *corridors* rather than directly on stage, and it is through Lucie that Emma ‘se retrouvait dans les lectures de sa jeunesse, en plein Walter Scott. Il lui semblait entendre, à travers le brouillard, le son des cornemuses écossaises’.²²³ It was ‘avec Walter Scott’ that she ‘s’éprit de choses historiques [...]. Elle aurait voulu vivre dans quelque vieux manoir [...] *le coude sur la pierre et le menton dans la main, à regarder venir du fond de la campagne un cavalier à plume blanche qui galope sur un cheval noir* [my emphasis]’.²²⁴ This image of Emma, resting on an elbow, daydreaming from a windowsill, mirrors the wince-worthy early descriptions of her marriage with Charles: ‘Emma se mettait à la fenêtre pour le voir partir; et *elle restait accoudée sur le bord, entre deux pots de géraniums* [...]. Charles, à cheval, lui envoyait un baiser; elle répondit par un signe, elle refermait la fenêtre, il partait [my emphasis]’.²²⁵ Framed not only by the border of the window, but also between the geraniums, the scene resurrects yet another dream of an alternative husband (like Léon and the man upon the horse, he is also dressed in black): ‘Que ne pouvait-elle s’accouder sur le balcon des chalets suisses ou enfermer sa tristesse dans un cottage écossais, avec un mari vêtu d’un habit de velours noir’.²²⁶ Flaubert has created a stance for daydreaming: ‘s’accouder’, a gesture that must occur while or in between doing something else.

Like the theatre’s stage, these windows become framing devices, and Emma places herself on the ledge, sitting in suspension at the border between two realms: ‘Emma était accoudée à sa fenêtre (elle s’y mettait souvent: la fenêtre, en province, remplace les

²²³ *MB*, 310.

²²⁴ *MB*, 51.

²²⁵ *MB*, 46.

²²⁶ *MB*, 56.

théâtres et la promenade)'.²²⁷ During her hysteria at the theatre, Emma seems to exist both within and outside the performance, just as Frédéric sits both within and outside historical events. Drawing from Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), Laura Marcus expounds upon their use of the 'private theatre', which denotes a 'sphere of fantasy, reverie and "systematic day-dreaming" which becomes intimately linked to literary fiction-making'.²²⁸ Mourning missed opportunities and alternative lives provides escape from the monotony of her marriage with Charles because the act of writing these imagined realities gives her creative agency. Unlike her real affairs with Léon and Rodolphe, the past conditional fastens these alternative worlds to a historical realm that can always be written and rewritten in her imagination:

Elle se demandait s'il n'y aurait pas eu moyen, par d'autres combinaisons du hasard, de rencontrer un autre homme; et elle cherchait à imaginer quels eussent été ces événements non survenus, cette vie différente, ce mari qu'elle ne connaissait pas [...]. Il aurait pu être beau, spirituel, distingué, attirant, tels qu'ils étaient sans doute, ceux qu'avaient épousés ses anciennes camarades du couvent.²²⁹

Emma becomes both writer and reader while daydreaming, poised on a threshold (both grammatical and architectural) between the private and the public, fantasy and reality, fiction and history.²³⁰

Flaubert's characters in *L'Éducation sentimentale* also enjoy resting upon their elbows, thinking of counterfactuals: 'Les deux coudes au bord de la table, et penché très bas, Arnoux, en le fatiguant de son regard, lui confiait ses imaginations'.²³¹ To 's'accouder' becomes a state of being, rendering inaction into action: 'le coude sur l'espagnolette de la fenêtre, il lui parla pendant longtemps, d'un air mielleux'; '[T]andis que son compagnon,

²²⁷ *MB*, 176.

²²⁸ Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 10.

²²⁹ *MB*, 63.

²³⁰ At the scene of her death, as Emma prepares to exit the novel, she exclaims: 'ouvre la fenêtre [...] j'étouffe!' (*MB*, 235).

²³¹ *ES*, 331.

posé sur le coude, considérait la carafe’; ‘[i]l se sentait le cœur dur comme la table où ses coudes posaient’; ‘Mme Arnoux avait le coude sur le comptoir et roulait une plume entre ses doigts, tranquillement, quand le teneur de livres ouvrit la portière’.²³² And, in perhaps one of the most Flaubertian sentences possible, Frédéric looks out from his moving boat to see ‘des terrasses où l’on pouvait s’accouder’: the narration is daydreaming about the possibility of daydreaming.²³³

Windows become gateways for the historical to enter the private: ‘De toutes les fenêtres de la place, on tirait; les balles sifflaient’.²³⁴ Despite Frédéric’s desire to be perpetually daydreaming, while ‘accoudé’, history seems to get in the way: ‘La foule inoffensive se contentait de regarder. Mais, de temps à autre, un coude trop à l’étroit enfonçait une vitre’.²³⁵ The ‘coude’, which appears throughout the novel as the buttress of the daydream and desire, here belongs to the history Frédéric wishes he could ignore; history has smashed through narrative. Flaubert uses windows to create multidirectional boundaries between private and public histories: ‘des rumeurs s’échappaient des caves; il se passait aux fenêtres des choses suspectes [...]. Comme si les horreurs de l’insurrection n’eussent pas été suffisamment nombreuses, on les exagérait’.²³⁶ The window between Frédéric and *la fusillade des Capucines* both separates and connects him to the parallel life available on the street below; perhaps his corpse might have also been amongst those rolled through the street that night. The ‘pour l’autre’ and ‘et si’ of the counterfactuals he establishes between a night with Madame Arnoux and one with Rosanette become figurative

²³² *ES*, 44, 51, 135, and 327.

²³³ *ES*, 4.

²³⁴ *ES*, 282.

²³⁵ *ES*, 283.

²³⁶ *ES*, 254. On the trope of glass in nineteenth-century French literature, see Patrick McGuinness, *Poetry and Radical Politics in Fin de Siècle France: From Anarchism to Action Française* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): ‘glass – broken or intact, windows closed and open [...] – plays an important role in the way poetry expresses its imaginative space in the late nineteenth century. From Baudelaire’s ‘Mauvais vitrier’ to Gautier’s ‘vitre fermée’ [...] glass provides a rich variety of tropes’ (McGuinness, p. 13).

windows to gaze through at unfulfilled desires.²³⁷ A window functions in Flaubert as it does in Baudelaire's 'Les Fenêtres', as a 'trou' latent with possibilities, both lived and imagined: 'Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie'.²³⁸

III: Ceremony and Spectacle in *Absalom, Absalom!*

'[I]n the South art, to become visible at all, must become a ceremony, a spectacle'.²³⁹
- William Faulkner, 'Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, 1933'

'And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!'.²⁴⁰
- The Bible, *King James Version*, II Samuel 18. 33

In any study of *Absalom, Absalom!* comes the necessary evil of summarizing its plot. To critically discuss this work one must undermine the novel's very project and reintroduce precisely that which Faulkner worked so hard to remove: chronological ordering and a logic of cause and effect. Metaphors of the family as nation before and during the Civil War were pervasive, and the war was cast as a fratricide, a war amongst brothers, and the dissolution of a household.²⁴¹ In this light, the fratricide that takes place at the gate of Sutpen's Hundred between two half-brothers - Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon - becomes a staged metaphor for the Civil War.²⁴² In a candid summary of the plot in a letter to his publisher, Hal Smith, he wrote that the novel tells 'the more or less violent

²³⁷ Knight has noted the window framing Frédéric's last view of Madame Arnoux, watching another life walk away: '[T]he last view of her is presented through the open window, as she climbs into a carriage and moves out of the picture [which] underlines her function (for Frédéric and the reader) as an artistic representation, in that it quite literally turns her into a picture' (*Flaubert's Characters*, p. 93).

²³⁸ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 198.

²³⁹ William Faulkner, 'Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, 1933', in Meriwether (ed.), *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, pp. 289-300 (p. 290).

²⁴⁰ II Samuel 18.33, pp. 394-96 (p. 396) in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 396.

²⁴¹ Lincoln's "House Divided" speech of 1858 depicted the nation as family. See Alan G. Gross, 'Lincoln's Use of Constitutive Metaphors', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 7.2 (2004), 173-89.

²⁴² On how the 'Sutpen tragedy' and fratricidal conflict of the Civil War are analogous, see Ilse Duso Lind, 'The Design and Meaning of *Absalom! Absalom!*', *PMLA*, 70.5 (1955), 887-912.

breakup of a household or family from 1860 to about 1910 [...]. Roughly, the theme is a man who outraged the land, and the land then turned and destroyed the man's family'.²⁴³ He continued: 'The story is an anecdote which occurred during and right after the civil war; the climax is another anecdote which happened about 1910 and which explains the story'.²⁴⁴ 'The climax' in 1910 is Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson's journey to 'Sutpen's Hundred', the dilapidated remnant of a bygone era, built by the opportunistic Thomas Sutpen before the Civil War. Echoing the Gothic legacies of *Jane Eyre* or Edgar Allen Poe, Rosa ominously warns Quentin: 'There's something in that house. [...] Something living in it. Hidden in it. It has been out there for four years, living hidden in that house'.²⁴⁵ Indicative of the importance of 'Sutpen's Hundred', Faulkner considered 'Dark House' for the title of *Absalom, Absalom!*, echoing both Lincoln's 'House Divided' speech (1858) and the novel's literary Gothic grandfather, Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839).²⁴⁶ Faulkner opted instead for a title that evokes the story's biblical intertext – a choice that prioritizes the paternally-induced fratricide of the novel. The title paraphrases David (see epigraph), distilling the original quotation into precisely that which is absent from this novel: the father's cry of grief.

These architectural framing devices – like the narrative gaps in these texts – function to imply withheld information and incite a desire for discovery and knowledge in the reader. Interest lies less in the spectacularism of events, but in the secrecy, the act of discovery

²⁴³ Faulkner to Hal Smith about *Absalom, Absalom!* in February 1934, in *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. by J. Blotner (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 78-79.

²⁴⁴ Blotner, *Selected Letters*, pp. 78-79.

²⁴⁵ AA, 172. On the influence of the Gothic tradition and the figure of the 'mad woman in the attic', see Kristy Butler, 'Kristeva, Intertextuality, and Re-Imagining "The Mad Woman in the Attic"', *The Literary Imagination*, 47.1 (2014), 129-47.

²⁴⁶ The original working title for *Light in August* was also 'Dark House'. Mary Paniccia Carden reads a racial interpretation into the choice, since the phrase 'connotatively links patrilineage (the house) to race (darkness)'. See Mary Paniccia Carden, 'Fatherless Children and Post-Patrilineal Futures in William Faulkner's "Light in August", "Absalom, Absalom!" and "Go Down, Moses"', *The Faulkner Journal*, 2.2 (2013), 51-75 (p. 52).

itself.²⁴⁷ The historian Jill Lepore points out that the nineteenth century witnessed ‘the growing fetish for privacy in an age of domesticity’.²⁴⁸ ‘Nineteenth-century Americans’, she argues, ‘were obsessed with the idea of privacy and the physical boundaries that marked it, like the walls of a house, and, equally, with the holes in those walls’.²⁴⁹ Descriptions of ‘Sutpen’s Hundred’ focus on such holes, such as when, in its final dilapidated moment, Faulkner writes it was ‘as if the house were of one dimension, painted on a canvas curtain in which there was a tear’.²⁵⁰

Class dynamics are described in terms of thresholds: Thomas Sutpen, a white man born into poverty in the hills of West Virginia, is first made aware of his low social rank in antebellum society when he is turned away from a neighbouring plantation and told ‘never to come to that front door again but to go around the back’.²⁵¹ Sutpen, who ‘had sprung from a people whose houses didn’t have back doors but only windows and anyone entering or leaving by a window would be either hiding or escaping’, returns home to the cabin he shares with his father and sisters with a new understanding: ‘like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before’.²⁵² This is the effect the reader experiences: this

²⁴⁷ Windows are a central device in *Light in August*, where characters are constantly fleeing and entering through windows. During her romance with Joe, Joanna insists on ‘a place for concealing notes, letters’ and ‘for a whole week she forced him to climb into a window to come to her’ (*LIA*, 259). Lucas Burch flees potential paternity through a window when he sees Lena Grove holding a child. For more on windows in *LIA*, see: Kenzaburo Ohashi, ‘*Light in August*: The Spell of the “Window” and the Tragedy of the “Earth”’, trans. by Ikuko Fujihira, in *Faulkner Studies in Japan*, ed. by Thomas L. McHaney (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 116-47; Ralph Watkins, “‘It Was Like I Was the Woman and She Was the Man’: Boundaries, Portals, and Pollution in *Light in August*’, *The Southern Literary Journal*, 26 (1994), 11-24; and Virginia V. James Hlavsa, *Faulkner and the Thoroughly Modern Novel* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. 117-22.

²⁴⁸ Jill Lepore, ‘The Prism: Privacy in an age of publicity’, *The New Yorker*, 17 June 2013. <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/06/24/the-prism>> [accessed 4 September 2019] (para 13 of 27).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *AA*, 293.

²⁵¹ *AA*, 233.

²⁵² *AA*, 232.

childhood scene at the door of the plantation gives new meaning to the murder at the gate. It is provided to Quentin as an explanatory event for the ambition and 'design' that consume Sutpen, to explain why he left for Haiti as a young man to earn his fortune on sugar plantations and returned to Mississippi to erect his own plantation with a front door from which others might be turned away. The dramatic irony of this novel occurs when the man who is refused entry at the gate of the house is Thomas Sutpen's own son, Charles Bon - an inversion and nullification of the scene from Sutpen's childhood. Thomas Sutpen has replicated for his son the same experience he vowed to erase for his lineage.

The house is an important element in the traditional American Gothic tale as site of mystery and secrecy, with bodies and objects hidden in walls.²⁵³ Rosa is determined to find 'whatever it was that was upstairs', though she does not tell Quentin 'in the actual words because even in the terror she kept the secret'.²⁵⁴ Poe's narrator in *Fall of the House of Usher* remarks that '[i]t was a mystery all insoluble', yet *solubility* is precisely what happens: the manor house dissolves.²⁵⁵ Lepore points out that 'to detect is, etymologically, to remove the roof of a house', and in both Poe and Faulkner, the house collapses just as the hidden body within is revealed (Henry is said to be 'the son who had repudiated the very roof under which he had been born').²⁵⁶ I want to underline the word 'soluble' as at once a mystery to be solved, and a substance to be dissolved, which resonates with the

²⁵³ Nineteenth-century American fiction was often obsessed with cryptography, and remnants of this exist in the fetishization of Bon's letter, which closes the novel as the final object of revelation. For example, see Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Purloined Letter', in *Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings: Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 281-300.

²⁵⁴ AA, 35.

²⁵⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, 'Fall of the House of Usher', in *Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings: Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 90-109 (p. 90).

²⁵⁶ AA, 10.

principal idea of the text: the dissolution into nothing of the structures of the antebellum South, of material matter, but also of that which matters.

Doorways and corridors create a lexicon of imagery that mirror the narrative exercise of reading the novel. Miss Rosa's childhood, Faulkner writes, 'was passed [...] listening beyond closed doors, or lurking in dim halls filled with that presbyterian effluvium of lugubrious and vindictive anticipation [...] which could penetrate the walls of a house'.²⁵⁷ When the secret that Henry Sutpen has been hidden, rotting in the house ever since he fled the murder of Charles Bon, is finally revealed, Quentin is also finally able to enter (through the window) the house that haunts the town in which he was raised:

[Quentin] came to a window. The shutters were closed and apparently locked, yet they gave almost at once [...] a flimsy and sloven barricading [...]; he had already inserted the hatchet blade beneath the sash before he discovered that there was no glass in it, that all he had to do now was to step through the vacant frame.²⁵⁸

Inside the house, Quentin and Rosa discover Sutpen's 'illegitimate' daughter Clytie, still living in the house years after her father and sister's death, safeguarding the house and secrets which live within - notably her fugitive brother, Henry Sutpen. The discovery of Henry and Clytie living in 'Sutpen's Hundred' in this final scene recalls the staging of Clytie's first introduction as a child early in the novel.

Michelle Massé argues that the Gothic stages 'what Freud calls the beating fantasy, in which a spectator watches someone being hurt by a dominant other'.²⁵⁹ This 'peep show of terror' constructs a stage and an audience, and separates out within the novel a spectator and performer.²⁶⁰ Sutpen's second wife Ellen (mother of Henry and Judith),

²⁵⁷ AA, 60.

²⁵⁸ AA, 368.

²⁵⁹ Michelle A. Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 3.

²⁶⁰ Massé, p. 40.

learns of Clytie's existence in a scene recounted to Quentin by Rosa. Hearing commotion in the stables on the property, Ellen leaves the main house to discover her children watching as their father fights with the enslaved men of 'Sutpen's Hundred'. The entire scene, relayed by Rosa to Quentin years later, is laced with 'doubtless' and 'perhaps', words that frame the scene and remind the reader that this too is a play-within-a-play:

[O]n occasion [Sutpen] *doubtless* pitted his negroes against one another and *perhaps* even at this time participated now and then himself – that *spectacle* which, *according to* Miss Coldfield, his son was unable to bear the sight of while his daughter looked unmoved. [my emphasis]²⁶¹

Caveated with the doubt of Rosa's perspective, Sutpen looms in her memory as an actor on stage:

[T]hat ogre-face of her childhood seen once and then repeated at intervals [...] like the mask in Greek tragedy, interchangeable not only from scene to scene, but from actor to actor and behind which the events and occasions took place without chronology or sequence, leaving her actually incapable of saying how many separate times she had seen him.²⁶²

Faulkner layers spectators in this scene – from the men from the town who fill the stables to watch the show, to Ellen observing in horror, trying to find her two children amongst the crowd, and uses overt imagery of the theatre: 'at the end of the evening, the spectacle, as a grand finale'; 'before the spectators knew that she was there'; 'the spectators falling back to permit her to see Henry plunge out from among the negroes who had been holding him, screaming and vomiting – not pausing, not even looking at the faces which shrank back away from her as she knelt in the stable filth to raise Henry and not looking at Henry either'.²⁶³ Horrified to have discovered her young, vomiting son in this environment, Ellen searches amongst the 'spectators' for her daughter. The chapter then ends abruptly with Rosa's confession: 'But I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time – once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her – looking

²⁶¹ AA, 30.

²⁶² AA, 48-49.

²⁶³ AA, 30.

down through the square entrance to the loft'.²⁶⁴ The 'I' reminds the reader that the story has come from someone who was not a witness, and the true spectators of the scene, those who close it, watching from above, are revealed to have in fact been not Rosa, nor Ellen, but Judith and Clytie, who had been watching from above as Ellen watched the spectacle: '[W]hile Henry screamed and vomited, [Judith and Clytie] looked down from the loft that night on the spectacle of Sutpen fighting halfnaked'.²⁶⁵ The principal revelation of this early scene is not that Sutpen stages these fights that seem to presage the war to come, but that Sutpen has another, 'illegitimate', and mixed-race daughter - and this in turn presages the principal foil to the plot: the existence of Charles Bon.

Crucially, the murder of Charles Bon is absent from the present-time of the novel.

Instead, the reader accompanies Rosa, who hears of the murder right after it has taken place, arriving at 'Sutpen's Hundred' to find Henry, shotgun in hand, telling his sister Judith that her fiancé is dead. The gate from the biblical version reappears in Faulkner's rendition (and in Quentin and Shreve's fabrication of the missing scene):

It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them, facing one another at the gate. Inside the gate what was once a park now spread [...] to a huge house where a young girl waited in a wedding dress [...] the house partaking too of that air of scaling desolation. [...] *Don't you pass the shadow of this post, this branch, Charles; and I am going to pass it, Henry.*²⁶⁶

These omissions, or as Toni Morrison refers to them in her essay on narrative gaps in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), 'withholdings at critical moments', can also be seen as 'entrances, crevices, gaps, seductive invitations flashing the possibility of meaning. Unarticulated eddies that encourage diving into the novel's undertow - the real place where writer captures reader.'²⁶⁷ Narrative gaps, absent scenes that define the events

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ AA, 95.

²⁶⁶ AA, 133.

²⁶⁷ Toni Morrison, 'This Amazing, Troubling Book', in Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. by Thomas Cooley, 3rd edn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), pp. 385-92 (p. 388).

that happen in their wake, can be read as thresholds – moments of opportunity to explore alternative narratives and invite imaginative exploration.²⁶⁸

The amputation of the major historical events leaves residue. Like a phantom limb, alluded to and remembered but jarringly absent from the foreground of the novel, these missing events linger in the reader's mind, becoming spectres of a hypothetical narrative realm of desire and fantasy, where characters feel the presence of imagined action which never occurred in reality.²⁶⁹ Yet the device of 'the gaping void', as Benjamin Nugent argues, is not just denying its history but demonstratively performing its history:

[The gaping void] is part and parcel of Faulkner's depiction of the white South, the culture that produced him. That culture, during Faulkner's lifetime, from 1897 to 1962, was so determined to look away from its own crimes that its narratives were fragmentary by necessity, avant-garde via denial. Faulkner created narrators who told redacted stories of the South because he sought to dramatize the way in which the white South redacted its own story.²⁷⁰

This act of redaction is where Faulkner waves his hand in the narrative. As Wanda Raiford argues, it is ultimately in 'indulging' the imagined components of the narrative that Quentin, Shreve, and the reader find the most historic coherence:

As Quentin and Shreve sit together in their dormitory and Quentin labors to tell Shreve the fragmented story told to him on his last visit home to Mississippi, Shreve's interruptions mediate the central problem of the novel: the costs and benefits of fantasies indulged.²⁷¹

In the act of reassembling this plot and finding a point of origin to explain the novel, the reader becomes engulfed in the very processes that the novel undermines: remembering and assembling historical myths. Thus far I have shown how Flaubert and Faulkner draw attention to this act of assemblage, remembering, imagining, and inventing history – but I

²⁶⁸ There are more examples in Flaubert's and Faulkner's novels, such as Emma and Léon's carriage ride through Rouen in *Madame Bovary* and Joe Christmas's murder of Joanna Burden in *Light in August*.

²⁶⁹ On the 'phantom limb' in a phenomenological context, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 94.

²⁷⁰ Benjamin Nugent, 'The Still Center of Destruction: On the Secret of Faulkner's Literary Form', *Harper's Magazine*, May 2021. <<https://harpers.org/archive/2021/05/the-still-center-of-destruction-william-faulkner-michael-gorra/>> [accessed 04 March 2022] (para 4 of 16).

²⁷¹ Wanda Raiford, 'Fantasy and Haiti's Erasure in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, *South: A Scholarly Journal*, 49.1 (2016), 101-21 (p. 109).

shall now finish by showing how the dissolution and obfuscation of history, transforming it from tangible event to a vague atmosphere and tone, counterintuitively elevates its importance.

IV: The Dissolution of History

*‘Toujours là, l’air n’est ni absent ni présent.’*²⁷²
- Luce Irigaray, *L’Oubli de l’air: Chez Martin Heidegger*

*‘À me voir d’aspect, on croirait que je dois faire de l’épique, du drame, de la brutalité de faits. Au fond, je suis l’homme des brouillards.’*²⁷³
- Gustave Flaubert, letter to Louise Colet (1852)

While these texts work hard to conceal the conventional indicators of the presence of history, they nonetheless reveal its ubiquity. ‘Fiction and history interact’, Martin Kreiswirth writes, ‘where the provable merges into the fantasized, and where past and present dissolve into each other’.²⁷⁴ Though writing about Faulkner, his use of ‘dissolve’ is fitting for *L’Éducation sentimentale*, whose imagery, from its first sentence, is filled with ‘brume’ and ‘nuage’, and in which the abdication of France’s king in 1848 is described in one fleeting phrase: ‘la monarchie se fondait dans une dissolution rapide’.²⁷⁵ An interplay between the specific and the vague dissipates the experience of history into the atmosphere of these texts. Instead of acting, recounting, or participating in historical events, the protagonists are subsumed by a collective atmosphere of historical mourning. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the American Civil War is omnipresent, its characters either staring weakly at its inevitability, or haunted in its aftermath. Yet the war itself appears only tangentially, and the scenes that take place in the years of fighting are in fact

²⁷² Luce Irigaray, *L’Oubli de l’air: Chez Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), p. 148.

²⁷³ Letter to Louise Colet (C, II, 140 [26 July 1852]). This image of ‘brouillard’ in his mind is found throughout his letters - and of course, in *Madame Bovary* as Chapter Three will discuss further.

²⁷⁴ Kreiswirth, p. 120.

²⁷⁵ *ES*, 350.

suppositions, fantasies, and deductions pieced together by Quentin and Shreve in their dormitory room fifty years after the fact. In his recent book on Faulkner and the Civil War, Michael Gorra remarks:

The war is everywhere in the Mississippi-born Faulkner, both an inescapable point of reference in his characters' speech and lives, and a determining factor in the very form of his fiction [...]. But the war is also nowhere, in that he rarely makes it an explicit subject. At times it seems an ellipsis in his work, a lacuna; the eye of a hurricane, the still center of destruction.²⁷⁶

The reverberations of the American Civil War, as well as the events themselves, exist in Faulkner's novels on an atmospheric level. To evoke a history that is perpetually mourned, yet only ever fleetingly described, Faulkner uses the atmospherics of his text to write about the reverberations – or as Daniel Aaron writes it, rather than the Civil War itself, Faulkner's novels investigate its 'aftereffects'.²⁷⁷ This atmospheric omnipresence resonates with the elliptical presence of history in Flaubert's novels.

What Flaubert and Faulkner most obviously share is also what is most difficult to pin down: a shared mood, a textual atmosphere of mourning. Writing on Faulkner, John T. Matthews notes that '[t]o begin to write, to mark the page, produces the mood of bereavement, as if the use of language creates the atmosphere of mourning'.²⁷⁸ Character and plot, the usual frontrunners, are asked to stand aside to give time for this atmosphere to amalgamate and create a tonal continuity which remains consistent and omnipresent from beginning to end. The characters experience personal failure and stagnation which not only mirrors that of the societies in which they live, but is created precisely because they are contaminated by the time and place in which they exist. Flaubert's letters that span the years of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune are heavy with references

²⁷⁶ Gorra, p. 1.

²⁷⁷ Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American writers and the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), p. 311.

²⁷⁸ John T. Matthews, 'The Discovery of Loss in *The Sound and the Fury*', in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. by David Minter, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 370-93 (p. 371).

to a societal mood of defeat as something tangible in the air.²⁷⁹ ‘La Bêtise publique me submerge’, he wrote to Ivan Turgenev; ‘[l]a Prusse peut démonter ses fusils. Pas n’est besoin d’elle pour nous faire mourir. La Bourgeoisie est tellement ahurie qu’elle n’a plus même l’instinct de se défendre’.²⁸⁰ He bitterly lamented that Théophile Gautier ‘est mort du dégoût de la vie moderne; le 4 septembre l’a tué. Ce jour-là [...] est le plus maudit de l’histoire de France’ and that Gautier had told him “‘Je crève de la Commune!’”.²⁸¹ In his language these events are molecularized and dissipated into a historical mood that can contaminate: ‘J’étouffe. [...] L’odeur des cadavres me dégoûte moins que les miasmes d’égoïsme s’exhalant par toutes les bouches’.²⁸² More specifically we find in these letters an obsession with contamination and the transmissibility of inner emotions. Even when shrouded in irony (such as when he wrote to Louise Colet that ‘ma misère est contagieuse. J’ai la gale! Malheur à qui me touche!’) they reveal an anxiety of contagion between public and individual histories: ‘L’esprit public me dégoûte tellement que je m’en écarte’.²⁸³ When Flaubert opens his novel with his ‘fumait à gros tourbillons’ we might wonder what historical conditions, what collective mood, are held within.

Dussardier uses air to describe the lost optimism before 1848 (‘comme on respirait bien!’²⁸⁴), and Frédéric tells Madame Arnoux ‘[j]e ne peux pas plus vivre sans vous que sans *l’air du ciel!* Est-ce que vous ne sentez pas *l’aspiration* de mon âme monter vers la

²⁷⁹ See Teresa Brennan’s work on the transmissibility of emotional states between people by dint of sharing the same space and atmosphere. She notes how these ideas began before the nineteenth century, such as in the work of Nicolas de Malebranche who, in the seventeenth century, ‘thought that emotions such as sadness could circulate among people’. See Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 18.

²⁸⁰ Letter to Ivan Turgenev (*C*, IV, 604 [13 November 1872]).

²⁸¹ Letter to Princess Mathilde (*C*, IV, 597 [28 October 1872]) and letter to George Sand (*C*, IV, 598 [28 October 1872]).

²⁸² Letter to George Sand (*C*, IV, 331 [11 June 1871]).

²⁸³ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, I, 298 [13 August 1846]) and letter to Élisabeth Schlésinger (*C*, IV, 585 [5 October 1872]).

²⁸⁴ *ES*, 485.

vôtre, et qu'elles doivent se confondre' [my emphasis].²⁸⁵ When Flaubert writes that, even after Madame Arnoux has left Frédéric's presence, 'quelque chose d'elle circulait encore autour de lui; la caresse de sa présence durait encore', he suggests that human emotions suffuse, linger, and can be absorbed by proximate bodies. Jean-Pierre Richard recognized this hormonal transmission when he wrote that 'Frédéric n'atteint jamais Marie, mais il vit dans son *atmosphère*. Il baigne tout entier dans le rayonnement de sa tendresse'.²⁸⁶ He writes:

[L]'espace est devenu le milieu communicant à travers lequel s'établit un mystérieux contact à distance. Et l'on voit Flaubert multiplier les métaphores – vapeur, fumée, parfum, transpiration, exhalaison – pour tenter de traduire l'incompréhensible phénomène en vertu duquel un être absent peut, de toute la profondeur de son absence, nous devenir d'une certaine façon présent.²⁸⁷

Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman write that 'mood is like the weather', and French does us a service by sharing *temps* between 'time' and 'weather', a connection that allows us to further understand descriptions of atmosphere as a visualization of time.²⁸⁸ The moments Frédéric spends with Madame Arnoux are divorced from history (and reality), and they are perpetually pressed for *temps* and engulfed in *temps*: 'À cause du pavé glissant, ils oscillaient un peu, il lui semblait qu'ils étaient tous les deux comme bercés par le vent, au milieu d'un nuage. [...] L'éclat des lumières, sur le boulevard, le remit dans la réalité [...] le temps pressait'.²⁸⁹ While Flaubert's characters swim through fog, mist, and the smoke of ships, trains, and gunpowder, Faulkner's struggle to breathe through an oppressive Southern air that is hot, dusty, and thick with death. These textural elements coagulate to create a melancholic mood that becomes a literal atmosphere.

²⁸⁵ *ES*, 329.

²⁸⁶ Richard, p. 217.

²⁸⁷ Richard, p. 218.

²⁸⁸ Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman, 'Introduction', *New Literary History*, 43.3 (2012), p. v.

²⁸⁹ *ES*, 105.

The omnipresence of death contributes to the materiality of Faulkner's atmosphere. *Absalom, Absalom!* is set in 'a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it', reflecting a scale of loss specific to the Southern experience during the Civil War.²⁹⁰ The Southern concern with counterfactuals that so influenced Faulkner was the result not just of defeat, but of the experience of mass death. 'In the middle of the nineteenth century', as the historian Drew Faust explains, 'the United States embarked on a new relationship with death'.²⁹¹ Pragmatically, this meant 'Americans had to identify - find, invent, create - the means and mechanisms to manage more than half a million dead: their deaths, their bodies, their loss'.²⁹² Concomitant with this new scale of death was a new understanding of mourning. The magnitude and prevalence of death in the South was unlike those in the Northern states - much of the war was fought on Southern land where it could be witnessed, smelled, and felt by civilians. The specifically Southern experience of death came with a culturally distinct understanding of the role of mourning - and specifically, a feminine mourning of lost men. *Absalom, Absalom!* opens with Rosa Coldfield's mourning. Dressed in 'the eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father or husband none knew', she becomes at once sister, daughter, and wife - the archetype of the mourning Southern widow: 'I, a woman young and at the age for marrying and in a time when most of the young men whom I would have known ordinarily were dead on lost battlefields'.²⁹³ As Barbara Ladd puts it: 'the problem in Yoknapatawpha County [...] is that many become obsessed with mourning the past, to the point that the transformation of memory for life in the present is no longer possible'.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ *AA*, p. 14.

²⁹¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2008), p. xi.

²⁹² Faust, p. xviii.

²⁹³ *AA*, 7 and 12.

²⁹⁴ Barbara Ladd, *Resisting History: Gender, Modernity, and Authorship in William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), p. 90.

Similarly, Faulkner gives significant time and attention to describing the texture and feel of the air of his universe. Shreve, Quentin's Canadian roommate at Harvard, evolves over the course of the novel to become both his co-narrator and shrink. In trying to understand the Southern identity, Shreve imagines Quentin's experience in environmental terms:²⁹⁵

I would sure hate to have come from the South [...] What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago?²⁹⁶

History is a climate that permeates the bodies living within it: 'Shreve, the Canadian, the child of blizzards and of cold [...] [;] Quentin, the Southerner, the morose and delicate offspring of rain and steamy heat'.²⁹⁷ Quentin carries within him historical knowledge and information because of his 'twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk'.²⁹⁸ The muscle memory not only of hearing, but of 'telling' becomes an integral component of how the past functions in Faulkner, one that is exercised in the processes of narration. 'We need to talk', Faulkner explained of the South, 'to tell, since oratory is our heritage. We seem to try in the simple furious breathing (or writing) span of the individual [...] to escape [...] into a makebelieve region of swords and magnolia and mockingbirds which perhaps never existed anywhere'.²⁹⁹ Quentin, with 'that voice with its tense suffused retrained quality', is suffocated by the act of narration itself:

'I am telling' *Am I going to have to have to hear it all again* he thought *I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever.*³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Shreve's Canadian nationality both exaggerates his northern identity and places him in a neutral zone outside of the fratricide depicted by Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon.

²⁹⁶ AA, 289. General Sherman was known for the ecological destruction he waged on Southern land. 'Shermanization' denoted the tactic of burning plantations, cities, and large stretches of agricultural land as he moved Union troops through the South (notably South Carolina). Civil War era letters and newspaper articles often describe the ash and dust in the air after such practices. Shreve's example thus invokes atmospheric imagery (Schivelbusch, p. 38).

²⁹⁷ AA, 276.

²⁹⁸ AA, 7.

²⁹⁹ Faulkner, 'Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* (1933)', p. 292. On voice in *Absalom, Absalom!*, see Patrick O'Donnell, 'Sub Rosa: Voice, Body, and History in *Absalom, Absalom!*', *College Literature*, 16.1 (1989), 28-47 (p. 28).

³⁰⁰ AA, 222.

The opening sentences of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* depict radically different climates to introduce distinct universes: one is set in a breezy bustling exterior cityscape, the other in a hot stifling interior. In Flaubert all is humid, in Faulkner it is dry and dust-filled, yet in both cases, the first pages adumbrate the rest of the novel by establishing the foundational mood of mourning: a feeling of stagnation, sense of impending doom, and fixation on that which is already dead.³⁰¹ 'Mood', which I have thus far used interchangeably with 'atmosphere', merits greater demarcation.³⁰² To do so, I take advantage of the slippery nature of 'mood' to capture connections between body and its surrounding atmosphere – both historical and thermic.³⁰³ Heidegger's elusive and multivalent term, *Stimmung*, helps give shape to the intangible way in which history functions in these novels as an omnipresence: 'it seems as though a mood is in each case already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through'.³⁰⁴ He suggests that a mood is a historically specific circumstance that comes from outside, rather than within, the body.³⁰⁵ *Stimmung* is a shared, collective experience that belongs to both the public and private realms. Under this formulation, one is conditioned into a mood by virtue of the specifics

³⁰¹ Sartre felt Faulkner captured the fatalism of the end of the 1930s: 'We are living in a time of impossible revolutions, and Faulkner uses his extraordinary art to describe our suffocation and a world dying of old age'. See Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Time in the Work of Faulkner', in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. by David Minter, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 265-71 (p. 271).

³⁰² While a full discussion of the theoretical traditions of these terms is beyond the scope of this thesis, Jonathan Flatley provides a useful glossary at the start of his book *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) which investigates the use of 'mood' in theoretical discussions about melancholia from Galenic to modern approaches.

³⁰³ For an analysis of the history of 'mood' in anglophone philosophy, see René Rosfort and Giovanni Stanghellini, 'In the Mood for Thought: Feeling and Thinking in Philosophy', *New Literary History*, 43.4 (2012), 395-417. For a recent phenomenological discussion of 'atmosphère' and 'ambiance', see Bruce Bégout, *Le Concept d'ambiance: essai d'éco-phénoménologie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2020), p. 17.

³⁰⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana State University Press, 1995), p. 67

³⁰⁵ Foucault's *Genealogy* also provides a useful framework for thinking about how a historical atmosphere can penetrate the body and suffuse not only the emotional state of mind, but also its bodily functions (an idea that will be explored further in Chapter Three).

of the place: ‘As a concept, mood provides a way to articulate the shaping and structuring effect of historical context on our affective attachments [...] It is on the level of mood that historical forces most directly intervene in our affective lives’.³⁰⁶ The commonly used French translation (‘la tonalité’) speaks to the phenomenological poetics of a text.³⁰⁷ By ‘tone’ I am referring to its sonority and musicality, an element which was important to both Flaubert and Faulkner.³⁰⁸ Their heavy use of dialogue (and, in Faulkner’s case, dialect), and sensitivity to the role of breath in a sentence, illustrates the way air links body to text.³⁰⁹ Take the openings of these texts: Flaubert opens with the ‘bruissement de la vapeur’, the sound of air, emphasizing an atmosphere’s ability to be sonorous and thus tangible, while Quentin’s ‘very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names’.³¹⁰

While acknowledging their striking differences, the parallels between these two openings are unexpected, and significant. Flaubert privileges his first terse sentence by starting a new paragraph for his second – a dribbling series of images woven together with semicolons. The ringing bells reverberate through Flaubert’s opening: ‘tandis que la cloche, à l’avant, tintait sans discontinuer’.³¹¹ The sound of the ‘t’ repeats through ‘tandis’, ‘tintait’, and ‘discontinuer’, so that the sonority of the phrase mimics what it describes. Faulkner’s first sentence is long, extends itself with a dash, and collapses into the sentence

³⁰⁶ Flatley, p. 19.

³⁰⁷ See Martin Heidegger, trans. by Emmanuel Martineau, *Être et Temps* (Paris: Authentica, 1985). ‘Tonalité affective’ is another common translation – an affective tonality which alters beings and their surroundings.

³⁰⁸ Faulkner came from a Southern legacy of oral storytelling, and the importance of Southern dialects is made apparent by his choice to exaggerate and represent shifts in sound in his texts. Flaubert would allegedly read his sentences aloud through his *épreuve du gueuloir*. For more on assonance and alliteration in Flaubert, see Michael Fried, *Flaubert’s ‘Gueuloir.’ On ‘Madame Bovary’ and ‘Salammbô.’* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012).

³⁰⁹ Flaubert wrote: ‘Une bonne phrase de prose doit être comme un bon vers, *inchangeable*, aussi rythmée, aussi sonore.’ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 135 [22 July 1852])

³¹⁰ *ES*, 4 and *AA*, 7.

³¹¹ *ES*, 4.

that follows so clumsily that we barely notice that the first has ended and the next begun. Flaubert throws around words like ‘vers’ while Faulkner opens with a woolly phrase about time and duration: ‘From *a little* after two o'clock until *almost* sundown’ [my emphasis].³¹² Both begin with a lie to their reader: the suggestion that time might be a useful metric with which to discern what is important in these novels. Time, dates, the facts of history, are subsumed by the vapours, yet this illusion of vagueness, haziness, and negligence of detail at the beginning of these texts only further exposes the precision, pedantic linguistic exactitude, or as Faulkner described Flaubert’s prose, the sheer ‘mathematics’ of their writing.

The first twenty words of *Absalom, Absalom!* are infused with death: the air is ‘still hot weary dead’; ‘long-dead object’; ‘flecks of the dead old dried paint’; ‘coffin-smelling’.³¹³ The ‘still’ of ‘they sat in what Miss Coldfield *still* called the office’ [my emphasis] and the constant reference back towards the past creates the quintessential stillness of Faulknerian air and sets the scene for the story of a society that is halted, like Rosa Coldfield, by ‘impotent and static rage’: ‘what Miss Coldfield still called the office *because her father had called it that*’; ‘fastened for forty-three summers *because when she was a girl someone had believed*’. Even the wind of the scene is hypothetical: ‘yellow slashes full of dust notes which Quentin *thought of as being* flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds *as wind might have* blown them’ [my emphasis]. This image of dust floating in slashes of sunlight is redolent of the moment Charles handles Emma’s shoes, covered in dried mud from her outings with Rodolphe: ‘Et aussitôt il atteignit sur le chambranle les chaussures d’Emma tout empâtées de crotte – la crotte des rendez-vous – qui se détachait en poudre sous ses doigts, et qu’il regardait monter doucement dans un

³¹² AA, 3.

³¹³ AA, 3.

rayon de soleil'.³¹⁴ Flaubert's godly voice, present everywhere yet visible nowhere, finds playful form in the softly rising particles of dried mud. Dust, light, air – these are the places where the authors at work can be identified. *L'Éducation sentimentale* opens at the launch of a steamboat on the River Seine, and Quentin describes Rosa's oral narration as 'the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch'.³¹⁵ This fluvial imagery lends itself to a conception of narrative as undercurrent – one that is stronger than the will of any character: the undercurrents of historical forces, but also of the author as puppeteer – or as Flaubert and Faulkner modestly put it, like God: 'I created a cosmos of my own', Faulkner said of Yoknapatawpha County, 'I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too'.³¹⁶ This statement is redolent of Flaubert's now infamous line he wrote to Louise Colet, which has come to encapsulate his entire artistic endeavour: 'L'auteur, dans son œuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part'.³¹⁷ In addition to the shared lack of humility of their statements, they point to a significant similarity between their works: the authorial voice, like history, alters everything while remaining indeterminate. Fluvial imagery helps capture this effect, and I shall now end this first chapter with a direct comparison between two pivotal scenes – one from *L'Éducation sentimentale* and the other from *Absalom, Absalom!* – to illustrate how atmosphere, history, and narrative work together.

³¹⁴ *MB*, 638.

³¹⁵ *AA*, 4.

³¹⁶ See Meriwether and Michael Millgate (eds), *Lion in the Garden*, p. 255.

³¹⁷ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 204 [9 December 1852]). Arnold Weinstein reminds us of James Joyce's disinterested rendition of this idea in *Portrait of the Artist* when Stephen says: 'The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'. See Arnold Weinstein, *The Fiction of Relationship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 37.

In 1857 Charles Bon rides a steamboat from New Orleans up the Mississippi River to study law and join his unknowing half-brother, Henry Sutpen, at the University of Mississippi. In 1840, also bound for a degree in law via an indirect route, Frédéric Moreau journeys along the Seine from Paris to Nogent to visit his mother. While the comparison might initially seem tenuous, when read in conjunction, these two journeys by steamboat become twinned depictions of the burdens of inheritance – both financial and literary.³¹⁸ In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *L'Éducation sentimentale*, these journeys indicate a backward, rather than forward, trajectory: Frédéric 's'en *retournait* à Nogent-sur-Seine, où il devait *languir*', travelling away from Paris 'en *regagnant* sa province par la route la plus *longue*' [my emphasis].³¹⁹ The possessive 's'en *retournait*' presages the inward focus of his thoughts, while *languir* appears in Faulkner's prose as Charles Bon leaves the Southern baroque cosmopolitanism of New Orleans ('that city foreign and paradoxical, with its atmosphere at once fatal and *languorous*') for the 'obscure and small (though high class, high class)' university of Mississippi [my emphasis].³²⁰ Bon's regressive journey to the old rural South is also a retreat to his past in search of the paternal recognition he was denied, with the power to unravel Sutpen's paternalistic and racist design. Frédéric is embroiled in his own paternal usurpation, as he takes the journey of his literary forefathers in reverse, using the same waterway to move away from the city a Balzacian character would typically rush towards.³²¹ In his essay on rivers in three

³¹⁸ On the symbolism of the steamboat and 'metaphors taken from the ongoing transport revolution', see Rees, p. 3.

³¹⁹ *ES*, 4.

³²⁰ *AA*, 86. The description implies that the atmosphere of New Orleans incubated Charles Bon's ability to corrupt the Sutpen dynasty. For a discussion of how his time in New Orleans contributed to Faulkner's sense of cosmopolitanism and his artistic development, see Taylor Hagood, 'Cosmopolitan Culture: New Orleans to Paris', in *William Faulkner in Context*, ed. by John T. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 71-78. Both 'nouvellement reçu bachelier' and 'though high class' have a similar tone: these comments seem to come from a patronising voice sceptically poking fun at the educational accomplishments of Frédéric and Charles.

³²¹ Terdiman observes that while in Balzac and Stendhal streams 'figuratively [...] carry action from the rural toward increasingly larger centers of population and socio-economic activity' in Flaubert the novel 'reverses this movement'. Richard Terdiman, 'From City to Country: An Outline of Fluvio-Critique', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 41.1 (2007), 53-72 (p. 60).

nineteenth-century French texts, Richard Terdiman observes that ‘with characteristic irony, Flaubert sets the bearing of his narrative against the flow as if consciously subverting and satirizing a consecrated geographico-literary *topos*’.³²² This movement from urban to rural is its own riff on a literary prototype:

[W]hen you move from province to Paris in a nineteenth-century text, you enact [...] a diacritical displacement that the culture was processing and seeking to understand. In the *roman d’éducation*, particularly, the pairing of country and city forms something like a national myth.³²³

The mythological weight of these two waterways is heavy: Frédéric follows the Seine in the wake of many nineteenth-century heroes, and Bon travels along the same Mississippi River that once brought Jim to freedom aboard Huckleberry’s raft.

These histories are so embedded in our literary psyches that a reader might take for granted the sense of transit, anticipation, and movement conjured by the image of a steamboat coursing through a waterway. The act of anticipation, or waiting, is the narrative current (and currency) of these novels. Just as Frédéric stands on the deck believing that ‘le bonheur mérité par l’excellence de son âme tardait à venir’, Bon boards the ship in a suspended state of anticipation – he believes that this journey will give him the answer he needs, ‘leaning there in that solitude between panting smoke and engines and almost touching the answer, aware of the jigsaw puzzle [...] waiting, almost lurking, just beyond his reach [...] unrecognizable yet on the point of falling into pattern which would reveal to him at once [...] the meaning of his whole life, past – the Haiti, the childhood, the lawyer, the woman who was his mother’.³²⁴ In similar fashion the novel promises to eventually fall into pattern and reveal meaning which is always just beyond the reach of certainty. The narrative itself creates anticipation with the novel’s game of

³²² Terdiman, p. 60.

³²³ Terdiman, p. 54.

³²⁴ *ES*, 5 and *AA*, 313.

perpetually deferred answers to the questions it poses. The promise of adventure, purpose, and answers granted to Balzacian heroes is undermined by the sluggish crawl of the prose.³²⁵ As Terdiman puts it, aboard *La Ville-de-Montereau* (and I argue the same applies to this New Orleans vessel), ‘time devolves into a dead stasis, allowing neither action nor relaxation’.³²⁶

In Flaubert and Faulkner, fluvial and narrative streams flow against, rather than towards, progress and counterintuitively create a sense of stagnation in journeys away from modernity towards more rural venues – Bon watches ‘all motion cease, the boat suspended immobile and without progress’.³²⁷ Frédéric ‘restait auprès du gouvernail, immobile’ while ‘Paris disparaissa[i]t’, and Bon mirrors him, ‘alone, at the rail, with a cigar maybe, watching the city drift and wink and glitter and sink away’.³²⁸ The ‘maybe’ which introduces the detail of Bon’s cigar reminds us that it is Shreve or Quentin creating the scene, imagining the details, in a sense writing their own novel inflected by the tropes of romantic heroes.³²⁹ As Peter Brooks writes: ‘The energies associated with the Romantic hero and his avatars seem to dissipate quickly [...] as if the steam engine had sprung leaks in its valves’.³³⁰

Charles Bon and Frédéric Moreau set off on steamboats to follow this literary prototype: young men, awaiting a deserved inheritance, in search of love, leaving the provincial

³²⁵ As has already been noted, Flaubert writes that when Frédéric journeyed by sea in the last chapter, he learns of ‘la mélancolie des paquebots’, rather than any sense of adventure and discovery (*ES*, 547).

³²⁶ This lack of change goes against the associations readers historically have with moving bodies of water. Terdiman points out that, since Heraclitus, ‘the river has been the consecrated *topos* for the inevitability and irreversibility of change’ (‘From City to Country’, pp. 62-63).

³²⁷ Huysmans’s titles – (*À vau-l’eau* (1882), *À rebours* (1884), *En rade* (1887) – are also testament to this nineteenth-century fluvial thinking.

³²⁸ *AA*, 250.

³²⁹ On Balzac and Faulkner, see Merrill Horton, *Hunting the Sun: Faulkner’s Appropriations of Balzac’s Writings* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

³³⁰ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 176.

home. Neither protagonist journeys by their own volition – just as Frédéric’s movements are curated by ‘sa mère’ who ‘avec la somme indispensable, l’avait envoyé au Havre voir un oncle, dont elle espérait pour lui, l’héritage’, Bon’s journey, as Quentin and Shreve imagine it, is also prompted by a maternal push towards a due inheritance.³³¹ As he prepares to board the ship, Bon realizes he has become a pawn in a scheme concocted by his spurned mother, Eulalia Bon, and a New Orleans lawyer: ‘[a plan] created between this woman and a hired lawyer (the woman who since before he could remember he now realized had been planning and grooming him for some moment that would come and pass)’.³³² Bon and Frédéric quickly forego the pretence of studying law, and their journeys short-circuit and lead the protagonists towards fratricide and incest.³³³ Frédéric dedicates his time to stalking Madame Arnoux (rather than ‘recevoir son droit’), and when she finally makes herself available to him, he feels ‘l’effroi d’un inceste’ just as Bon’s journey leads him to an engagement to his half-sister, Judith.³³⁴

The atmospherics dominate the imagery of both scenes: Quentin and Shreve imagine Bon ‘maybe leaning there in that solitude between panting and smoke and engines’, fusing Bon’s breath with those of the engines and echoing Flaubert’s own panting imagery, in which the syntax replicates the effect of that which it describes: ‘des gens arrivaient hors d’haleine’ and ‘le tapage s’absorbait dans le bruissement de la vapeur, qui

³³¹ *ES*, 4.

³³² *AA*, 306.

³³³ Barbara Vinken is right when she notes that, like in *Absalom, Absalom!*, ‘*Sentimental Education* can be summarized in two words, which are progressively revealed: fratricide and incest. Both are perversions of family ties’. However, like in these Faulkner texts, ‘[t]he word “incest” appears when Frédéric does *not* sleep with Madame Arnoux’ [my emphasis]. Dussardier, a ‘bâtard’ like Charles Bon (doomed from the novel’s onset), is the, Vinken argues, ‘brother’ who is killed, yet while ‘Sénécal’s murder of his “brother” Dussardier actually does take place’ it is ‘without the actual word being necessary’. Similarly, Henry’s murder of Bon happens off-stage – we arrive after the fact. See Barbara Vinken, *Flaubert Postsecular: Modernity Crossed Out* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 212.

³³⁴ *ES*, 552.

s'échappant par des plaque de tôle, enveloppait tout d'une nuée blanchâtre'.³³⁵ Faulkner's 'two ropes of spark-filled smoke streaming upward from the stacks' recalls Flaubert's steamboat which 'fumait à gros tourbillons' and the 'deux berges, peuplées de magasins, de chantiers et d'usines, filèrent comme deux larges rubans que l'on déroule'.³³⁶ These two ropes, two ribbons, and four river banks invoke these two parallel narratives. Both ships become microcosms of bourgeois class dynamics, with the protagonists positioned apart as alien observers. Frédéric stands against the 'gouvernail' and Bon by the 'rail' as 'the ladies already gathered in the saloon for supper and the men in the bar, preparing for it, but not he', which recalls a similar gender divide aboard the *Ville-de-Montereau* with Frédéric positioned as onlooker rather than participant: 'autour des tables rondes, des bourgeois mangeaient'.³³⁷ 'Autour' emphasizes 'rondes' and Frédéric's own circularity as he orbits, maintaining a peripheral position on the circumference of society. Racial dynamics also appear aboard both ships: Quentin and Shreve go out of their way to include 'the new extra [negro]' as servant to Bon, and their desire to imagine this figure into their narrative, as signal of Bon's class and black counterpart to his own racial ambivalence, is redolent of Frédéric's fixation on the 'négresse, coiffée d'un foulard' who accompanies the racially ambiguous Madame Arnoux.³³⁸

These similarities can be read as coincidences, but they also reveal the homage both authors pay to *Bildungsromane* and Balzacian formulas. They share themes of bad inheritance – fiscal and historical – and the tensions between rural and urban, the jolt into modernity, and the flow of rivers and smoke in tales of backward filiation and stalling

³³⁵ *ES*, 3.

³³⁶ *AA*, 250 and *ES*, 3.

³³⁷ *AA*, 250.

³³⁸ Jennifer Yee notes that Madame Arnoux's 'darkness' is 'conferred on her metonymically' by this unnamed woman who cares for her child, who will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. See Jennifer Yee, *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism in the French Realist Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 159.

time. Perhaps, as Brooks suggests, this is because the intertext of inheritance slows down the pace of reading, constantly deflecting our attention away from Frédéric and back to the Rastignacs we might suddenly long for: ‘If we feel we need to pay attention to the long chronicle of Frédéric’s failure, it is because of the intertexts [...] subsumed for our purposes under the broad categories of the “the Balzacian novel” and “History” – and the energy that is generated by reading against them’.³³⁹

Conclusion

It is an oversimplification to say that in Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* and Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* historical facts and events are absent; rather, moments of historical failure and defeat appear, but they are distorted beyond recognition. Instead, private desires and confabulation drive the narrative reality, pushing the recognizable figures and events to the peripheries of the novels.³⁴⁰ This chapter has explored how these novels expose the fallacy of historical claims to objective truths. The defamiliarization, spectacularization, and dissolution of history brings attention to how the historical process of piecing together events that were shaped by failure is an inherently literary act: there is always an author in play who provides the stage, draws the window frame, or hides the obvious.

This chapter has also begun to show the comparative methodology of this thesis, which the ensuing chapters will develop further. Texts derive meaning relationally: the act of

³³⁹ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 178.

³⁴⁰ On the shifting tactics and wider alterations of the historical novel genre, see Green’s aforementioned *Flaubert and the Historical Novel*. On where Flaubert’s *Salammbô* sits in relation to these shifts over the course of the nineteenth century, see also Brian Hammett, *The Historical Novel in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Representations of Reality in History and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). On *L’Éducation sentimentale*, see Dominick LaCapra, ‘Collapsing Spheres in Flaubert’s Sentimental Education’, in *History, Politics, and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 83-110, and György Lukács, ‘The Historical Novel’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 909-21.

comparing is what allows the meaning of a work to become decipherable through its perceived difference from – or similarity to – another text. According to Kristeva’s ‘intertextualité’, embedded within a single text are many interacting voices, challenging the notion that a text has a fixed meaning determined by a single author or reader.³⁴¹ Influenced and altered by the intersubjectivity of all possible future readers and writers, the meaning of a text is ductile. Kristeva’s concept developed through Bakhtin’s Russian dialogism, which argues that not only do cultures reveal themselves through other cultures, nations, and languages, but that the outside perspective allows for greater understanding.³⁴² By discussing metaphors of society as family, and more specifically counterfactual mothers and children, my second chapter shall demonstrate how this comparative method is well-suited to texts that explore both external and internal relationships between bloodlines, narrative streams, and textual bodies.

³⁴¹ In 1966 Julia Kristeva first articulated her theory of ‘intertextualité’, however in 1974 she renounced the term she had coined claiming it had become a platitude for the study of influence. See Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), p. 60. See also Julia Kristeva, ‘Le mot, le dialogue et le roman’, in Kristeva, *Semiotike: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), pp. 82-112. Kristeva also spoke of the importance of reading Faulkner with his biblical intertext. See Julia Kristeva, ‘Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation’, in *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, ed. by Ross Mitchell Güberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 188-203.

³⁴² See Andrea Lesic-Thomas, ‘Behind Bakhtin: Russian Formalism and Kristeva’s Intertextuality’, *Paragraph*, 28.3 (2005), 1-20; Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); and Michael Holquist, ‘Bakhtin and the Formalists: History as Dialogue’ in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glimpse*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson and Stephen Rudy (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1985), pp. 82-95.

2.

ABORTED FILIATION:

(Mis)conceptions and Disrupted Lineage

*'[T]here is indeed an analogy between family line and story line in the modern novel: and the modern novelist and his sense of plot subverts both lines.'*³⁴³

- Robert L. Caserio, *Plot, Story, and the Novel*

*'Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is [...] situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.'*³⁴⁴

- Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'

³⁴³ Robert L. Caserio, *Plot, Story, and the Novel: From Dickens and Poe to the Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 234.

³⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Classics, 2020), pp. 76-100 (p. 82).

Introduction: Disrupted Lineage

In the works of Gustave Flaubert and William Faulkner, reproductive bodies are repeatedly doomed to failure. There is a strict commitment to a political and narrative stagnation: characters, plot lines, and revolutionary dreams are thwarted and forbidden from making progress. Just as the Revolution of 1848 is unable to fully germinate, and the American South remains bogged down by the drawn-out trauma of its defeat, so too are the family lineages in these novels short-circuited by incest and sterilized by celibacy and abortion. These models of familial implosions are replicated and echoed at the sentence level, where the past conditional verb tense creates a counterfactual space for aborted desires to fester. This chapter reads Flaubert's and Faulkner's convolution of reproductive imagery and traditional family mores as their rejection of both societal and narrative genealogical models of progression.

In Flaubert and Faulkner, families do not survive; they are created only to be dismembered. The Compson family deteriorates over the course of *The Sound and the Fury*, while Thomas Sutpen's dynasty withers away in *Absalom, Absalom!*, his lineage ending with a violent act of infanticide. In *Madame Bovary*, the novel itself loses interest in the fate of Emma's surviving daughter Berthe nearly as abruptly as her mother does, and Frédéric is never able successfully to reproduce the bourgeois familial bliss with Marie Arnoux that he fetishizes in his imagination. More minor characters also walk the reader through the pitfalls of the family ideal: Jacques Arnoux is an unfaithful husband who leads his wife and child to financial ruin, and Lena Grove's family is ruptured before it has even begun when she arrives pregnant in Jefferson in search of her infant's missing father at the opening of *Light in August* - examples of collapsing families overwhelm any

counterexamples.³⁴⁵ To understand the significance of the corruption of the family in their literature, it is first important to measure what was at stake in such a practice. In both nineteenth-century France and the Confederate South, the family was a useful and potent metaphor for society writ large.³⁴⁶ Politics were experienced through the myth of the family and expressed with imagery of the reproductive body, and thus I read the frequent appearance of failed reproduction – infanticide, miscarriage, sterility, incest, abortion – and dismembered families as a disruption of both societal *and* literary expectations.

This chapter relates the motif of the failed family and reproductive body to the political rhetoric of nineteenth-century France, to establish a parallel with its role in the articulation of the paternalistic ‘plantation myth’ during the antebellum and Reconstruction periods in the American South.³⁴⁷ I shall first examine the stakes of the family motif in the France in which *L'Éducation sentimentale* is set – how it entered and functioned within the rhetoric of the time, and what it meant to include and pervert it in literary representations. To this end, I pay particular attention to the doomed children of the novel: the death of Frédéric’s son with Rosanette, and the loss of a counterfactual pregnancy and family with Madame Arnoux. I contextualize these mourned and unmourned children – both real and imagined – in the abortive political and literary

³⁴⁵ ‘Failed’ family life surrounded Flaubert: he witnessed the aftereffects of his niece Juliette’s husband’s suicide in their home in 1865, and that same year he learned that Élixa Schlésinger – the idealization of the bourgeois mother on whom Madame Arnoux is most likely based – was moved from her family home to a mental hospital. These events took place just as Flaubert was submerged in the writing of *L'Éducation sentimentale*. On these events, see Anne Green, *Gustave Flaubert* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), p. 117. Both Flaubert and Faulkner spoke of their dislike for the institution of marriage (though Faulkner had several). On Faulkner and his distaste for marriage as institution, see James G. Watson, ‘Faulkner’s “What Is the Matter with Marriage”’, *Faulkner Journal*, 5.2 (1990), 69-72.

³⁴⁶ Lynn Hunt notes that the language of *fraternité* of 1789 is only one of several examples of how ‘the French had a kind of collective political unconscious that was structured by narratives of family relations’. See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. xiii.

³⁴⁷ The antebellum period is usually defined as running from the end of the War of 1812 to the start of the Civil War in 1861; the Reconstruction Period began in the aftermath of the Civil War in 1865 and was ended by President Hayes in 1877.

rhetoric of nineteenth-century France, and the temporal and structural miscarriages that define the novel.

Next, I investigate how the aborted history of the Confederate nation and its unprocessed defeat smothers Faulkner's protagonists. His convolution of the sentimentalized pre-war plantation legend with incest, sterility, and miscegenation sits in contrast to the literary models which preceded and surrounded his œuvre, and corrupts the social hierarchies on which the antebellum South depended.³⁴⁸ I investigate the parallels between the narrative structure of the text and Quentin's (counterfactual) incestuous relationship with his sister Caddy ('if we could have just done something so dreadful') as it appears across *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, and link this intertextuality to the incest it depicts.³⁴⁹

I: *Une littérature née morte*

*'La famille est le gage vivant, la responsabilité suprême,
la garantie en sentiments du cœur et de réflexion de l'homme'.³⁵⁰*
- Alphonse de Lamartine, *Le Passé, le présent et l'avenir de la République*

'[V]ous étoufferiez la République née de votre sang dans son berceau', Alphonse de Lamartine warned a mistrustful crowd of workers on 25 February 1848 - '(vers le milieu de février³⁵¹)' - outside the Hôtel de Ville in which a new-born Provisional Government

³⁴⁸ Examples include: John Pendleton Kennedy's *The Swallow Barn; or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1872); Anna Hardeman Meade, *When I was a Little Girl: The Year's Round on the Old Plantation* (Los Angeles: The Fred S. Lang Company, 1916); H.S. Fulkerson, *Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi* (Vicksburg, MS: Vicksburg Printing and Publishing Company, 1885); Louise-Clarke Pymelle, *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot, or Plantation Child-Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1916).

³⁴⁹ *SF*, 50.

³⁵⁰ Alphonse de Lamartine, *Le Passé, le présent et l'avenir de la République* (Paris: Au bureau du Conseiller du peuple, 1850), p. 268.

³⁵¹ *ES*, 334

was still in formation.³⁵² This violent image of infanticide is a salient example of metaphors of the family and reproductive body deployed not only by the radical republicans during the Revolution of 1848, but also across the political vernacular of the nineteenth century. According to James Livesey, this was partly because the language of the family ‘could ground the power of blood in legitimate reproduction and so supply a model for the meaning of the republic’.³⁵³ The political discourse during the years in which *L'Éducation sentimentale* is set was saturated with such language. For example, during the turbulence of that same February, the *Commission du Luxembourg* proposed a *Ministère du Travail et des Affaires Sociales* that would be presided over by the socialist Louis Blanc.³⁵⁴ Promising government-regulated workshops with equal pay and social benefits, Blanc sought to win over a crowd of workers by reprimanding ‘la République de *nos pères*’ in order to ‘défendre la République à *nos enfants*’.³⁵⁵ In April 1848, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin’s republican newspaper, *La Réforme*, declared that the new republic would respect and ‘create itself in the image of the family’, and echoed this language in his *Circulaire du ministre de l'Intérieur*: ‘La fraternité, c’est la loi de l’amour unissant les hommes, et de tous faisant les *membres d’une même famille*’ [my emphasis].³⁵⁶ In *De la famille et de la propriété*, Félicité de Lamennais, a Catholic Socialist who by 1848 had come to align himself with the radicals, sought to evoke the organizational simplicity of society-as-family:

³⁵² Alphonse de Lamartine, ‘Discours au peuple’ in *La France parlementaire (1815-1851): Œuvres oratoires et écrits politiques*, 6 vols (Paris: [n. pub.], 1864-65), v, 173.

³⁵³ James Livesey, ‘Speaking the Nation: Radical Republicans and the Failure of Political Communication in 1848’, *French Historical Studies*, 20.3 (1997), 459-80 (p. 470).

³⁵⁴ As Jacques Julliard and Grégoire Franconie phrase it, the ‘embryon’ of these efforts, like many promises made by the Provisional Government, were failed births in their own right, and came to pass ‘de façon maladroite et rapidement vouée à l’échec’. Jacques Julliard and Grégoire Franconie, eds, *La Gauche par les textes 1762-2012* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), p.167.

³⁵⁵ Louis Blanc, ‘Discours aux ouvriers (1848)’, in Julliard and Franconie, pp. 167-69 (p. 168).

³⁵⁶ *La Réforme*, 11 April 1848. Founded in 1843 by Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, many contributors of *La Réforme* were members of the Provisional Government, and therefore serves as a useful source for the ideas they sought to proliferate. See Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, ‘7 avril 1848’ in *Corps du droit français ou recueil complet des lois, décrets, ordonnances, sénatus-consultes, règlements, avis du conseil d’état, rapports au roi, instructions ministérielles, etc... publiés depuis 1789 jusqu’à nos jours*, ed. by C.M. Galisset, 10 vols (Paris: Cosse et N. Delamotte), ix, 509.

‘Le père y représente le principe actif [...], la femme représente le principe de forme, d’ordre interne [...], l’enfant [...] représente le principe d’union’.³⁵⁷ These metaphors of the family and reproductive body were a rhetorical means of establishing power: since the ‘body metaphor could fix *le peuple* within a rhetoric of order’, as Livesey explains, it ‘created a rationale for the exercise of executive power’.³⁵⁸ Thus, to undermine the family, specifically a patrilinear relation between the government and the governed, was to question this right to authority.³⁵⁹ From the republican left to the traditional right, the family was a constant rhetorical reference point and leading ideal of social infrastructure.³⁶⁰ Figures who destabilized the patrilinear order of the family – the prostitute, the celibate man (with his implied homosexuality), the unfaithful wife – in other words, the characters who most interested Flaubert, were thus implicit threats not only to the family, but to the order of society.³⁶¹ After the publication of *Madame Bovary*, Robert Tombs notes, ‘a friend warned Flaubert that he was “attacking society by one of its pillars” – the family’.³⁶² As Nicholas White notes of adultery as literary motif, the ‘metonymical relationship of family to state clearly raises the stakes in the fictional analysis of the transgression’.³⁶³

³⁵⁷ Félicité Robert de Lamennais, *De la famille et de la propriété* (Paris: Au bureau du peuple constituant, 1848), pp. 7-8.

³⁵⁸ Livesey, p. 472.

³⁵⁹ Andrew Counter rightly observes that much of this language in 1848 had an unsavoury similarity to that of the *Ancien Régime*: ‘The reinforcement of patriarchal power consequent on the use of the family metaphor lent more comfort to the authority of the father king than to the liberty of the brother citizens’ (*Inheritance*, p. 11).

³⁶⁰ For example, in 1864 Frédéric Le Play wrote: ‘La famille s’impose, dans toute organisation régulière, d’une manière encore plus impérieuse que la propriété’. See Frédéric Le Play, *La Réforme sociale en France, déduite de l’observation comparée des peuples européens*, 2 vols (Paris: E. Dentu, 1866), I, 244.

³⁶¹ Roddey Reid observes that prose fiction did not simply mirror the political discourse of the family, but ‘had a particularly powerful role to play as a social actor in constructing a discourse that rewrote the social body and cast social relations of postrevolutionary France into a language of family and sexuality’. See Roddey Reid, *Families in Jeopardy: Regulating the Social Body in France 1750 – 1910* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 3 and 110.

³⁶² Tombs, p. 224.

³⁶³ White, p. 3.

During the Second Empire, the pressure to deliver family morals fell within a larger network of expectations to please the bourgeois public, when writers were made financially dependent on their readership, an artistic constraint and mechanism for censorship which Flaubert deeply resented.³⁶⁴ He chastised Edmond de Goncourt for his preface to *Les Frères Zemganno*: ‘Qu’avez-vous besoin de parler directement au Public? Il n’est pas digne de nos confidences’.³⁶⁵ However, as the *Madame Bovary* trial made clear, Flaubert’s texts spoke only too clearly to the public, and his convolution of the family motif is an elliptical rebuttal of the moral exigencies of the bourgeoisie, and the aggressive censorship of its Emperor. Ross Chambers takes the argument a step further to suggest that Flaubert’s modernism emerged not only in reaction to, but as a result of, ‘a sense of being under surveillance or even censorship [...] whether legal, institutional, judicial, economic, or cultural – that a society like that of the Second Empire could bring into play’.³⁶⁶ Flaubert’s commentary exists between the lines – or the dates – of

L’Éducation sentimentale:

[Hussonet] venait de voir, au théâtre de Dumas, le *Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, et ‘trouvait ça embêtant’. Un jugement pareil étonna les démocrates [...]. Ils protestèrent. Sénécals, pour en finir, demanda si la pièce servait la Démocratie. – ‘Oui..., peut-être; mais c’est d’un style...’ – ‘Eh bien, elle est bonne, alors; qu’est-ce que le style? C’est l’idée’.³⁶⁷

This debate between Hussonnet and Sénécals, the novel’s representative of the French utopian thinkers of the nineteenth century, between ‘art for art’s sake’ and art in the name of political progress, echoes the debates in which Flaubert was embroiled with his contemporaries.³⁶⁸ Alexandre Dumas *filz* used his preface (1868) to his play *Le Fils*

³⁶⁴ [I]n the absence of true credentialing institutions specifically designed for the validation of prestige’, Pierre Bourdieu explains, ‘the political world and the emperor’s family exercised direct control over the literary and artistic field through sanctions on publishing (indictment, censorship, and so on)’. See Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Flaubert’s Point of View’, *Critical Inquiry*, 14 (1988), 539–62 (p. 552).

³⁶⁵ Letter to Edmond de Goncourt, (C, v, 625 [1 May 1879]).

³⁶⁶ Ross Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy: Modes of Opposition in Early French Modernism*, trans. by Mary Seidman Trouille (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 9.

³⁶⁷ *ES*, 322.

³⁶⁸ Though often called the ‘l’art pour l’art movement’, the term ‘movement’ hides the formless nature of the group of writers who, from the 1830s and into the Second Empire, purported, as Baudelaire famously wrote, that ‘[l]a Poésie [...] n’a pas d’autre but qu’Elle-même’. See Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*

naturel (1858) to denounce ‘les apôtres de *l’art pour l’art*’, writing that these were ‘*trois mots absolument vides de sens*. Toute littérature qui n’a pas en vue la perfectibilité, la moralisation, l’idéal, l’utile, en un mot, est une littérature rachitique et malsaine, née morte’ [original emphasis].³⁶⁹

A literature that is ‘vide de sens’ and ‘née morte’ is precisely what Flaubert (and later Faulkner) sought to create to convey these doomed societies. Flaubert used the same language of failed reproduction in his letter to George Sand in September 1871 when, referring back to the frustrations of 1848, he wrote: ‘nous partageons dans l’arrière-faix de la Révolution, qui a été *un avortement*, une chose ratée’ [my emphasis].³⁷⁰ Maria Scott highlights Baudelaire’s use of abortive imagery when complaining about the mutilating censorship of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and reads his prose poem ‘Mademoiselle Bistouri’ as a ‘satirical comment on the effects of censorship, for which abortion could serve as a metaphor’.³⁷¹ Baudelaire proudly wrote to his publisher that his prose poems were ‘des horreurs et des monstruosités qui feraient avorter vos lectrices enceintes’.³⁷² The reappearance of this imagery across political and literary contexts allows us to draw

(Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980), p. 598. For a discussion of the nuances of this aesthetic movement, and its distinction from the Parnasse group, which included apolitical writers such as Banville, Leconte de Lisle and Gautier, see Ross Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy: Modes of Opposition in Early French Modernism*, trans. by Mary Seidman Trouille (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), esp. pp. 12-14.

³⁶⁹ Alexandre Dumas *fils*, ‘Préface’ to ‘Le Fils naturel’ in *Théâtre complet avec préfaces inédites*, 8 vols (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1899), III, 5-204 (p. 31). Dumas *fils* wrote about improving conditions for illegitimate children, himself the offspring of unwed parents. See Sharon Le Fevre Christman, ‘Ideas of Dumas Fils for a More Perfect Society as Reflected in his Seventeen Major Plays and their Prefaces’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Montana, 1967).

³⁷⁰ Letter to George Sand (*C*, IV, 376 [8 September 1871]).

³⁷¹ Baudelaire ‘referred to the legal action taken against *Les Fleurs du Mal* as a surgical operation or mutilation’. Further reproductive language appears in his correspondence, such as when his defense lawyer compared *Les Fleurs du Mal* to a fetus in 1857. See Maria C. Scott, *Baudelaire’s Le Spleen de Paris: Shifting Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 70.

³⁷² Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), II, 465.

connections between these realms and lends significance to the failed child births in the novel.³⁷³

The appearance of the image of the dead infant in both political and literary parlance helps support my claim that Flaubert's commitment to literature that is 'née morte' places his work in firm opposition to the Saint-Simonian belief in human progress in both artistic and political terms.³⁷⁴ His use of the lexicon of unsuccessful birth in both his political language and literary imagery confirms the correlation in his work between this imagery, and an underlying belief in the futility of political progress. Flaubert's portrayal of Frédéric's doomed children – his child with Rosanette, the imagined alternative child this infant might have been had he lived, and the child he could have had with Madame Arnoux, lost before she can exist – are a commitment to create literature that rejects 'la philosophie du progrès' – as Baudelaire described it in 1855, that invention by 'l'homme civilisé [...] pour se consoler de son abdication et de sa déchéance'.³⁷⁵ As the following section explores, the refusal to progenerate was an embodied rejection of these bourgeois notions of progress.

II: *L'Impuissance*

³⁷³ The French defeat in 1870 was followed by a national rebirth – which became literal because of the pro-natalist movement that followed.

³⁷⁴ Flaubert made his own view on the utopian nineteenth-century thinkers quite explicit: 'Je suis indigné de plus en plus contre les réformateurs modernes, qui n'ont rien réformé. Tous, Saint-Simon, Leroux, Fourier et Proudhon, sont engagés dans le Moyen Âge jusqu'au cou'. See letter to Edma Roger des Genettes (C, III, 401 [summer 1864]).

³⁷⁵ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 580. Victor Hugo exemplifies the opposing perspective. He was heavily involved with the Provisional Government and wrote: 'L'art pour l'art peut être beau mais l'art pour le progrès est plus beau encore'. See Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare* (Paris: J. Hetzel et Cie, 1882), p. 253. He wrote to Baudelaire: 'Je n'ai jamais dit l'art pour l'art; j'ai toujours dit: l'art pour le progrès. Au fond c'est la même chose, et votre esprit est trop pénétrant pour ne pas le sentir. En avant! c'est le mot du progrès; c'est aussi le cri de l'art'. See Victor Hugo, *Correspondance*, 3 vols (Paris: Albin Michel, 1952), II, 314.

A group to which Flaubert proudly belonged was the *célibataire* – an unmarried, childless man. This figure was ‘the great ideological outcast of familialism’ who was perceived as hoarding resources without generating children for greater societal good.³⁷⁶ Adolphe Thiers’s *De la propriété* of 1848 exemplifies the ostracization of this figure when he asks his reader to: ‘Jetez les yeux sur cet homme riche et sans enfants, que la nature a privé de cette satisfaction profonde, [...] voyez son vide, son désenchantement, ses dégoûts, à mesure qu’il avance dans la vie’.³⁷⁷ In *The Amorous Restoration* (2016), Andrew Counter helps contextualize the vehemence found in Thiers’s language. He explains that the preoccupation with virility, ‘in which a question of human fertility seemed to carry political consequences’ under the Restoration, found its way from the political to the literary sphere over the course of the century.³⁷⁸ By the 1850s the cultural dominance of the bourgeoisie resulted in an increase in political interventions in the name of the family and over the individual, which culminated in the pro-natalist movement at the end of the century to increase a dwindling French birth rate. In her study of sexual and medical taboos in nineteenth-century France, Hannah Thompson notes that an increased awareness of eugenics, Darwinism, and sexology

[l]ed to the development of a way of talking about the state of France in which references to the physical body represented the nation and, more specifically, references to physical and sexual weakness or deviance were used to warn against the possibility of the breakdown of society.³⁷⁹

Thompson’s observation provides important insight for relating the breakdown of the Second Republic to the representation of Frédéric’s fecundity, which is repeatedly undermined throughout the novel. For example, the child he generates with Rosanette is

³⁷⁶ Counter, *Inheritance*, p. 34.

³⁷⁷ Thiers, Adolphe, *De la propriété* (Paulin Lheureux, 1848), pp. 72-73.

³⁷⁸ ‘[T]he birth of an heir to the Bourbon throne was just one, particularly conspicuous, episode’. See Andrew J. Counter, *The Amorous Restoration: Love, Sex, and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 78.

³⁷⁹ Hannah Thompson, *Taboo: Corporeal Secrets in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Legenda, 2017), p. 66.

physically unfit for survival, and even his sexual relations with her are described as duty rather than desire ('couchant *religieusement* chez la Maréchale'³⁸⁰ [my emphasis]). The text frequently infantilizes and desexualizes Frédéric, such as when he has forgotten his 'petit calepin en cuir bleu' and Arnoux suggestively asks "“Celui où vous mettez vos lettres de femmes?”": 'Frédéric, en rougissant *comme une vierge*, se défendit d'une telle supposition' [my emphasis].³⁸¹ Frédéric's anti-futurity is furthered by the erotic undertones of his relationship with Deslauriers, and his libido is generally most convincing when he is surrounded by men, rather than women. At one point, he thinks of Deslauriers and notes that 'un pareil homme valait toutes les femmes': 'en apercevant Deslauriers, [Frédéric] se mit à trembler comme une femme adultère sous le regard de son époux'.³⁸²

'Everywhere apparent between the lines in *L'Éducation sentimentale*', Mary Orr writes in her study of masculinity in the novel, 'is overcompensation for all shades of impotence and "non-successful" sexual activity'.³⁸³ Frédéric's only moment of true virility is after his release of anger when surrounded by men while dining at the vicomte de Cisy's: 'Depuis trop longtemps, il contenait son cœur. Il venait de le satisfaire enfin; il éprouvait comme un orgueil de virilité, une surabondance de forces intimes qui l'enivraient'.³⁸⁴ Cisy is initially described as 'féminin' and serves as a fertile counterpoint to the childless Frédéric at the end of the novel: 'Cisy, enfoncé dans la religion et père de huit enfants, habitait le château de ses aïeux'.³⁸⁵ As Orr observes, 'the ending of the novel, its anticlimactic and flaccid repletion of a mutually disappointing experience at the brothel, is crucial as moderation in a male-male key of Frédéric's non-consummation of his

³⁸⁰ *ES*, 471.

³⁸¹ *ES*, 53.

³⁸² *ES*, 54.

³⁸³ Mary Orr, *Flaubert: Writing the Masculine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.104.

³⁸⁴ *ES*, 273.

³⁸⁵ *ES*, 516.

idealized love with Madame Arnoux'.³⁸⁶ Folding Béatrice Slama's more euphemistic 'impuissance' in discussions of sterility and celibacy reveals the functionality of Frédéric's reproductive incompetence: 'Frédéric n'est pas le seul à tourner dans ses désirs comme un prisonnier dans son cachot [...] La grande fête Populaire tourne dans les chambres du palais, dans les rue, dans les clubs, dans son désir impuissant de justice et de vie meilleure'.³⁸⁷ '[L]'impuissance de Frédéric incapable d'action' matches that 'de la génération et de l'époque'.³⁸⁸

For Flaubert, desire is anticipation; the novel depicts a ship 'prêt à partir' and elongates similar moments in Frédéric's life: painstakingly preparing the room for a meeting with Madame Arnoux which never takes place, curling his hair and collecting flowers for the doomed visit to the brothel. Desire is always deferred – and the desired object always already lost. Yet Reid rightly suggests that this is also true of the family ideal – desired only because it is always already lost: 'The so-called modern domestic family [...] has been always already dysfunctional [...] [It] has existed only insofar as it has been lamented in discourse as loss or absence and thus desired'.³⁸⁹ When Madame Arnoux finally comes 'pour s'offrir' and he thinks of the 'embarras ce serait', this is given new meaning in the following scene when we learn of his unconsummated visit to the brothel, which also ended in 'embarras': 'toutes riaient, joyeuses de son embarras; croyant qu'on s'en moquait, il s'enfuit'.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ Orr, *Writing the Masculine*, p. 102.

³⁸⁷ Béatrice Slama, 'Une lecture de l'*Éducation sentimentale*', *Littérature*, 2 (1971), 19-38, p. 30.

³⁸⁸ Slama., p. 29.

³⁸⁹ Reid, pp. 8-9.

³⁹⁰ *ES*, 520.

This deferral of desire is replicated in the experience of the reader, who is made to await answers and actions that will never arrive. Like Frédéric's sexuality, the prose curls around the main events the reader is asked to anticipate – just like this final (or primal) brothel: 'on le désignait par des périphrases'.³⁹¹ The lasting impression of Frédéric is of a man who has circumvented the actions of the dutiful 'citoyen' Le Play and Lammenais evoked: he is unmarried, childless, reminiscing in his hometown with his friend about his trajectory around rather than through historic and narrative action. Walter Scott had a 'prophetic sense', Caserio argues, that in the literature that would follow, 'modern society would be organized and characterized by men of speculation and feeling who would not be able – easily or at all – to enact what they thought or felt'.³⁹² Frédéric epitomizes this figure. When he is finally in the company of Madame Arnoux, even she gives him 'de bons conseils: "Travaillez! mariez-vous!"'. However, as the narrator (rather than Frédéric) notes: 'L'action, pour certains hommes, est d'autant plus impraticable que le désir est plus fort'.³⁹³

It is desire without action – the failed sexual encounter at the brothel – with which Frédéric concludes: 'C'est là que nous avons eu de meilleur! dit Frédéric'.³⁹⁴ This failed sexual act becomes equated with Frédéric's failure, and that of the novel, which finds itself back where it started, with Frédéric and Deslauriers now reminiscing rather than dreaming forwards. The final scene encapsulates not only Frédéric's inability to act, but his outlier status: while the rest of the town participates in rituals ('pendant qu'on était aux

³⁹¹ *ES*, 519.

³⁹² Caserio, p. 285.

³⁹³ *ES*, 209. 'Si tu savais tous les invisibles filets d'inaction qui entourent mon corps', Flaubert wrote to Maxime Du Camp, speaking of his own inactivity, 'et tous les brouillards qui me flottent dans la cervelle. J'éprouve souvent une fatigue à périr d'ennui lorsqu'il faut faire n'importe quoi' (*C*, II, 10 [letter to Maxime Du Camp, 21 October 1851]).

³⁹⁴ *ES*, 520.

vêpres³⁹⁵), Frédéric spends his time in anticipation of desires ('Frédéric et Deslauriers, s'étant fait préalablement friser, cueillirent des fleurs dans le jardin de Mme Moreau'³⁹⁶), only then to fail to consummate them.³⁹⁷ Mirroring Frédéric's alienation, this idealized moment is set outside the time of the novel, before it began, and thus (like Quentin Compson who has killed himself before *Absalom, Absalom!*'s first page was written) Frédéric's sexuality, and the novel itself, ends before it begins.³⁹⁸ In other words, to use Dumas's language, the structure of the novel is '*née morte*' – doomed to land not far from where it set off. Frédéric's pent up and unconsummated physical desires echo Sénécal's (and a generation's) doomed political desires : 's'éveillant chaque matin avec l'espoir d'une révolution qui, en quinze jours ou un mois, changerait le monde'.³⁹⁹ As Said has noted in his rereading of Lukács's analysis of time in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, in Flaubert it is not just the protagonist whose generative abilities are undermined, but the very structure of the novel: 'Like the 1848 events, the time of Moreau leads nowhere: but unlike those events, the novel has compositional integrity which is ironically based upon sterility, celibacy'.⁴⁰⁰

L'Éducation sentimentale opens with a question of inheritance: Frédéric's mother 'sortait d'une vieille famille de gentilshommes, éteinte maintenant', and hopes that Frédéric will inherit his uncle's fortune – after all, 'elle nourrissait une haute ambition pour son fils'.⁴⁰¹ Inheriting from his uncle is one of the few ambitions Frédéric will actually achieve, and

³⁹⁵ *ES*, 519.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *ES*, 519. As Said points out, this placement outside the 'real time' of the novel only reinforces the patrilinear rejection: 'so complete is the disparity between genealogical continuity and novelistic continuity that Flaubert [...] places these infinitely rich and suggestive primary scenes outside the main action of the novel'. See Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 148.

³⁹⁹ *ES*, 313.

⁴⁰⁰ Said, p. 148.

⁴⁰¹ *ES*, 14.

fits with Shklovsky's distortion of the Freudian father-son struggle: 'in the history of art the legacy passes not from father to son, but from uncle to nephew'.⁴⁰² As Counter shows, this was also the case in nineteenth-century France and its literature, where 'an avuncular narrative pattern' exists 'over and against the patrilinear pattern'.⁴⁰³ Indeed, embedded within the question of Frédéric's financial inheritance is one of literary inheritance: will the novel ultimately inherit the realist course it resists, or can the avuncular route allow for a circumvention of the patrilinear? Facing financial ruin, the uncle's inheritance finally arrives just when Frédéric is overcome by 'des désirs d'action furieuse [...] il voulait se faire trappeur en Amérique, servir un pacha en Orient, s'embarquer comme matelot'.⁴⁰⁴ These quickly evaporate once he receives a letter announcing that 'Il héritait! [...] rien de plus vrai! Toute la fortune de l'oncle!', which frees him to return to Paris to do 'rien!'.⁴⁰⁵ Doing *rien* is, of course, precisely the point of this novel, and thus the avuncular inheritance allows Frédéric and Flaubert to disinherit a plot of action. It is not coincidental that Flaubert expressed his infamous desire to write 'un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style' at a time of heightened curtailments to the artistic autonomy of novelists.⁴⁰⁶ The severance from any 'attache extérieure' is thus not only a desire to disinherit a literary heritage, but also his historical context. However, 'the paradox of modernism', as Chambers writes, is that it 'calls attention to [...] its attempt to escape from history'.⁴⁰⁷

III: Reading against the Southern Renaissance

⁴⁰² Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography*, trans. by Irina Masinovsky (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), p. 33.

⁴⁰³ Counter, *Inheritance*, p. 53.

⁴⁰⁴ *ES*, 113.

⁴⁰⁵ *ES*, 119.

⁴⁰⁶ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 31 [16 January 1852]).

⁴⁰⁷ Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy*, p. 13.

Richard H. King argues that, for the writers of the Southern Renaissance, the “object” of their historical consciousness was a tradition whose essential figures were the father and the grandfather and whose essential structure was the literal and symbolic family’.⁴⁰⁸ To forge an identity within this overly historicized space, Faulkner had to unwrite the South’s nineteenth-century narratives about itself. Faulkner’s work depicts a burden of inheritance – both historical and literary – and his novels ‘misread’ themselves out of both legacies. These Faulknerian *misreadings* take the form of what I refer to as *misconceptions* – conceptions which corrupt the racial hierarchies that regulated the economic and social infrastructure of the antebellum South, such as incest and miscegenation, and narrative *misconceptions* – imagined conceptions which produce alternative, fictional realities. I suggest tying a relation between the literary ‘misreadings’ and the aborted, interrupted, or failed acts of reproductive conception in these texts. When Faulkner was born, King explains,

the society-as-family was the ideal toward which Southern society should strive. Individual and regional identity, self-worth, and status were determined by family relationships. The actual family was destiny; and the region was conceived of as a vast metaphorical family, hierarchically organized and organically linked by (pseudo-) ties of blood.⁴⁰⁹

This staunchly patriarchal conception of society was bolstered by the popular literature it generated. A ‘collective fantasy’, which King coins as the Southern family romance, helped to organize the ‘relationship between the races and sexes, and between the elite and the masses’ in the white Southern psyche, and crucially, the ‘plantation itself was conceived of and structured like a family’.⁴¹⁰ The family metaphor was a key tool in the

⁴⁰⁸ The ‘Southern Renaissance’ was a period defined by C. Vann Woodward in 1975 as a particularly fertile episode of Southern literary creation, starting the year *The Sound and the Fury* was published (1929). See C. Vann Woodward, ‘Why the Southern Renaissance?’, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 51.2 (1975), 222-39. King places ‘the end of the main phase of the Renaissance somewhere around 1955. [...] The apogee had been reached; the Renaissance had become a tradition’. See Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. by David Minter, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 246-55 (pp. 246-47).

⁴⁰⁹ King, p. 250.

⁴¹⁰ According to King, in the plantation myth, ‘slave-holding became emblematic of a higher concern for a helpless and uncivilized race whom the Southern “fathers” and “mothers” gently but firmly disciplined’ (King, pp. 259, 250-51). Hunt also uses the Freudian model in her book on the role of family during the

articulation of pro-slavery propaganda, which infiltrated the literature in the form of family narratives about plantation life.⁴¹¹ This nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, according to Cindy Weinstein, would ‘often imagine their disfigured families in relation to the institution of slavery, whose *donnée* is the fracturing of domestic order’.⁴¹² This sentimentalized literature was ‘shadowed by the fear of the family’s dissolution’, and this ‘dissolution’ is the lynchpin of Faulkner’s oeuvre.

The stakes of undermining patrilineage – and specifically, the white father figure – were economically motivated since, as Faust emphasizes, ‘the slave system of the American south rested upon the realities of paternalistic domination – upon the power of white males over both women and black slaves’.⁴¹³ The dissolution of the white father figure in Southern literature can be found as early as Twain who, nauseated by the myth of the Southern Cavalier – a pseudo-nobleman descended from the heroes of Walter Scott transposed to an antebellum context – wrote his famous tirade of the dangers of these family romances in the South, already referenced in the introduction. Twain repeatedly undermined this paternalism by writing failed (white) fathers into his work – most pointedly in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884).⁴¹⁴ Thomas Sutpen is Faulkner’s most extreme iteration of a white father devoid of parental affection yet obsessed by procreation: ‘You

French Revolution: ‘Freud’s own need to write a myth of human origins demonstrates the centrality of narratives about the family to the constitution of all forms of authority’ (Hunt, p. 8).

⁴¹¹ For an example of American historical texts from the 1930s which used the family structure as racist justification for slavery (‘in the slave there developed a sense of family loyalty, indeed an amusing tendency to identify himself with his master’s family connection’), see J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: Heath and Co., 1937), p. 73.

⁴¹² Cindy Weinstein, *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.

⁴¹³ Drew Gilpin Faust, ‘Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War’, *The Journal of American History*, 76 (1990), 1200-228 (p. 1213).

⁴¹⁴ *Huckleberry Finn*’s biological white father fails to ever assume this role – instead, Jim, an enslaved black man at the house where Huck was raised, becomes his adoptive father, replacing an absent white father-figure and thus subverting the bedrock of white paternity. As Morrison writes: ‘all of the white men who might function as father figures for Huck are ridiculed for their hypocrisy, corruption, extreme ignorance and/or violence’ (Morrison, ‘Amazing, Troubling Book’, p. 389).

see [...] all I wanted was just a son', Sutpen says to Quentin's grandfather, General Compson - 'like he might have been explaining arithmetic', Quentin adds to Shreve.⁴¹⁵ What Sutpen means, of course, is a white son.

Without power in a land 'all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own', Sutpen concocts a 'design' to reposition himself in this hierarchy.⁴¹⁶ This 'design' is what fuels 'the current of retribution and fatality which Miss Rosa said Sutpen had started and had doomed all his blood to'.⁴¹⁷ 'I had a design in my mind', Sutpen tells General Compson: '[t]o accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family - incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these'.⁴¹⁸ As Rosa Coldfield (re)tells Quentin, Sutpen came to Jefferson 'out of nowhere and without warning' and 'built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children - the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride'.⁴¹⁹ This fundamental plot is told and retold, with each reiteration moving his intention further away from the sentimentality of the Southern family romance model: '[Sutpen] built a plantation - (*Tore violently* a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) - *tore violently*. And married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which - (*Without gentleness begot*, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) - *without gentleness*' [my emphasis].⁴²⁰ Faulkner will not allow Sutpen to succeed in his design and will instead undermine the very hierarchy on which this design relies: these classifications of the antebellum South are precisely what *Absalom, Absalom!* dismembers through the

⁴¹⁵ AA, 292.

⁴¹⁶ AA, 179.

⁴¹⁷ AA, 216.

⁴¹⁸ AA, 263. When Frédéric overhears information about Madame Arnoux's life, he also uses this possessive language saying it felt like 'une acquisition' (ES, 8).

⁴¹⁹ AA, 5.

⁴²⁰ AA, 9.

family, and more specifically through ‘illegitimate’ children.⁴²¹ What is crucial is that, in so doing, the novel also disassembles literary hierarchies at play.

The story of the (mis)conception of Sutpen’s first son, Charles Bon, on the Haitian sugar plantation, years before he arrives in Jefferson, frustrates the sequential ‘design’ of the plot.⁴²² The linear narrative sequence begins fully to unravel, and stories reveal themselves in reverse order: ‘Grandfather said how he remembered then that he had seen Sutpen each time decline sugar for his coffee and he (Grandfather) knew why now’.⁴²³ When Sutpen declines having a white substance mixed with his black coffee, the reader understands that all of his actions since his arrival in Jefferson have been designed to unconceive the son born on the Haitian sugar plantation (the reader is forced to cling to details as fine as powdered sugar to follow the narrative; Chapter Three will show the same to be true in *Madame Bovary*). Despite his careful calculations, Sutpen learns that his first wife, Eulalia Bon, the daughter of a Spanish sugar plantation owner, might be mixed-race: ‘Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo’.⁴²⁴ The ‘mistake’, and moment of ‘misdo’, is one of (potential) *miscegenation*, due to a ‘mischancing of human affairs’. Sutpen’s conception of his son – the ‘wrong’ son, yet named the ‘good’ son, Charles Bon – was due to a *misconception* as to Eulalia’s origins:

[A]n arrangement which I had entered in good faith [...] while the other party [...] concealed from me the one very factor which would destroy the entire plan and design which I had been working toward, concealed it so well that it was not until after the child was born that I discovered that this factor existed.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ King, p. 254.

⁴²² AA, 264. Haiti had been the world’s largest sugarcane producer before the Haitian Revolution, during and after which many French planters relocated to Louisiana. The cane-growing business boomed in Louisiana in the decades between the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War (just at the time Charles Bon would have been living there). By the mid-nineteenth century, Louisiana produced a quarter of the world’s sugarcane supply. The literary motif of sugar straddles the economic bounties and moral evils of slavery, and Charles Bon’s journey – from Haiti to Louisiana – follows the history of this crop. Through sugar’s addictive, euphoric nature, its vacillating economic value, and the violence of its production, a web emerges between the histories of Haiti, France, and the United States.

⁴²³ AA, 201.

⁴²⁴ AA, 264.

⁴²⁵ AA, 274.

It is repeated that there ‘had been [...] actual misrepresentation on their part and misrepresentation of such a crass nature as to have not only voided and frustrated without his knowing it the central motivation of his entire design’.⁴²⁶ Charles Bon embodies the foil not only to Sutpen’s ‘design’, but also to that of the literary model of the Southern family romance: he threatens to enact and subvert ‘the incest and the miscegenation taboos’.⁴²⁷ When Henry introduces his friend from university, Charles Bon, to his sister Judith, they become engaged, a marriage threatening to thwart Sutpen’s design with *both* incest and miscegenation. As Barbara Ladd observes: ‘Ironically, Thomas Sutpen’s refusal to acknowledge his mulatto son, to give him the family name which would “place” him with respect to his lineage [...] is exactly what precipitates the dual threat of incest and miscegenation’.⁴²⁸ The potential merging of white with black blood was the underlying anxiety of Faulkner’s South as part of a wide, as Morrison calls it, ‘pervasive fetish’ of ‘black blood, white blood, the purity of blood’.⁴²⁹ The idea of whiteness as something to be preserved and protected, and the doubt and uncertainty around ascertaining the ‘purity’ of a lineage, is the driving force of *Absalom, Absalom!* – the *potentiality* of ‘black blood’ pulsates between every line. The very notion of blood lineages and racial inheritance was itself in part a creation of the nineteenth century.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ AA, 263.

⁴²⁷ King, p. 255.

⁴²⁸ Barbara Ladd, “‘The Direction of the Howling’: Nationalism and the Color Line in *Absalom, Absalom!*,” *American Literature*, 66.3 (1994), 525-51 (pp. 545-46).

⁴²⁹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 68. Ladd examines how the mixed-race character became an obsession of the white Southern writer after the Civil War: ‘William Faulkner’s Charles Bon is a white Creole for a long time before he is revealed (or “reconstructed”) as black. These “mistakes” or “indeterminacies” or “reclassifications” of characters, these shifting or obscured color lines, point to questions and anxieties that the white southerner had about his or her own future in a nationalistic and increasingly imperialistic United States’. See Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), p. 20.

⁴³⁰ The slow movement over the course of the eighteenth century from monogenism, which attributed racial difference to the influence of environment, to polygenism, which was dominant by the mid-nineteenth century and saw heredity as the source of racial diversity, provides important context. This shift in thought is underpinned by shifting relationships to heredity and lineage after the French Revolution, when laws came into place to undermine the economic and political powers of family and blood lineage. In the American South, the slave economy relied upon a caste system that placed heredity and aristocratic lineage

Sutpen's anxieties of origin (his own and those of his son) are underpinned by the experience of reading *Absalom, Absalom!*, where there is uncertainty around the origin of every fact, and the source of each narrative voice. Thus, questions of patrilineal uncertainty run along those of narrative credibility. Quentin and Shreve imagine Bon's lawyer plotting to send him to meet his half-brother Henry at the University of Mississippi, writing: '*Incest threat: Credible* Yes and the hand going back before it put down the period, lining out the *Credible*, writing in *Certain*, underlining it'.⁴³¹ The play on '*credible*' and '*certain*' (both italicized by Faulkner) draws attention to the lack of certainty about anything by this stage of the narrative, especially the incest narratives (discussed further in this chapter's final section). Nicholas White notes that in nineteenth-century French literature, '[i]ncest appears to offer the father what we may term hæmic certainty, in other words the supposedly secure knowledge that his partner's family history is as respectable as his own'.⁴³² Upon learning that his friend Charles Bon, who has become engaged to his sister Judith, is potentially his brother, Henry is able to accept the marriage because of its French aristocratic associations ('kings have done it! Even dukes! There was that Lorraine duke named John something that married his sister').⁴³³ However, when he learns of Bon's mixed race, he is unable to let Bon *pass*: '*Dont you pass the shadow of this post, this branch, Charles; and I am going to pass it, Henry*'.⁴³⁴ The threat of an

over environment or nurture. Jay Watson notes that in the nineteenth century, phrases like 'the race of Bourbons' or 'the blood of kings' became replaced with 'inherited Negro features' in the 'popular and scientific literature of the period' (Jay Watson, pp. 72-74). These conversations of race coincided with increased concern about the legitimacy of children after new legislation brought the risk that property and assets might go to an illegitimate child. For different reasons, questions of uncertainty and origin came to the forefront of discussions around succession in *both* nineteenth-century France and the American South. On the literary discourses emerging from the 312th article of the French Civil Code of 1804 ('*L'enfant conçu pendant le mariage a pour père le mari*') see Andrew Counter, 'Always Uncertain: The Presumption of Uncertainty': The Presumption of Legitimacy in Two "fins de siècle"', *Law and Literature*, 26 (2014), 65-85.

⁴³¹ AA, 310.

⁴³² Nicholas White, p. 100.

⁴³³ AA, 342.

⁴³⁴ AA, 133.

incestuous relationship in *Absalom, Absalom!* is not only compounded with, but eclipsed by, the possibility of racial passing.⁴³⁵ Bon understands that Henry can accept the incest of his marriage to their sister Judith, but not the possibility of miscegenation – of *passing*: ‘*So it’s the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear*’.⁴³⁶

IV: Repudiating the Father

‘[C]razy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be’.⁴³⁷
– Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

‘What is it to me that the land of the earth or whatever it was got tired of him at last and turned and destroyed him? What if it did destroy her family too? It’s going to turn and destroy us all some day, whether our name happens to be Sutpen or Coldfield or not’.⁴³⁸
– William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

In Faulkner, paternity has just as much to do with having produced narrative as offspring. James G. Watson observes that ‘focused in Charles Bon’s quest for paternal identity, the question “Who’s your old man?” resonates throughout the novel as a cognate of social standing and identity in the South, even in the frontier Mississippi of the 1830s’.⁴³⁹ Anxieties of racial origin play out alongside anxieties of narrative origin so that, as James G. Watson rightly adds, ‘narrative authority is at issue in paternal identity’.⁴⁴⁰ Charles Bon must insist on passing through the gate to Sutpen’s Hundred not to marry Judith, but (as Quentin and Shreve imagine it) in search of origin: ‘Jesus, think of him, Bon, who had

⁴³⁵ ‘Amalgamation is incest’, argues Henry Hughes’s *A Treatise on Sociology* (1854). Hughes exemplifies a subsection of Southern thought which reveal how interlinked these two concepts were in the postbellum psyche: Impurity of race is against the law of nature. Mulattoes are monsters. [...] The same law which forbids consanguineous amalgamation forbids ethnical amalgamation. Both are incestuous’: Henry Hughes, *Treatise on Sociology, Theoretical and Practical* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, Grambo & Co, 1854), p. 240.

⁴³⁶ *AA*, 356.

⁴³⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 80.

⁴³⁸ *AA*, 186.

⁴³⁹ James G. Watson, *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 124.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

wanted to know, who had had the most reason to want to know, who as far as he knew had never had any father'.⁴⁴¹ More than that of any other character, the information given to the reader about Charles Bon is conjecture and supposition. As *Absalom, Absalom!* unfolds, Shreve gains narrative confidence and fights for domination over Quentin: 'no, let me play a while'.⁴⁴² Quentin thinks he '*sounds just like father*' implying that to be the narrator is to be '*like father*'. The text reverses the order of filiation, and in the act of narration Shreve and Quentin somehow retroactively 'make' father: 'Yes, we are both father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us'.⁴⁴³

The Russian Formalists employed the lexicon of heredity as metaphor for the 'leaps' and detours of literary progression, complicating any pure notion of linearity - which lands neatly within the premise of this thesis, which reaches across a century, an ocean, and linguistic barriers to make its comparison.⁴⁴⁴ The Formalists had a looser understanding of the genealogical model. As Melissa Purkiss notes, they presented a 'family tree conceit' more 'attuned to discontinuities and "side steps" as essential components of the genealogical framework':

[This] more diffuse cast of 'relatives' as integral agents of the literary process implicitly expanded the potential range of interactions *between* those agents. In opening out the discussion from the narrow lens of parent-child relations, the Formalists paid attention to literatures of cultural traditions once or twice removed from an author's native tradition.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ AA, 340.

⁴⁴² AA, 206.

⁴⁴³ AA, 210.

⁴⁴⁴ Yuri Tynianov, 'Interlude (1924)', *Common Knowledge*, 24.3 (2018), 498-542, esp. pp. 516-17.

⁴⁴⁵ Melissa Purkiss, 'Intertextuality in Exile: The fusion of French and Russian language and literature in the works of Gaito Gazdanov' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), p. 27.

Yuri Tynianov's non-linear patrilineal chain of literary progression uses the grandfather metaphor to evoke the circumvention of the father's influence.⁴⁴⁶ This circumvention, or 'leap', can be likened to the narrative hierarchy in *Absalom, Absalom!*, which skips over Quentin's father (a fraught relationship explored in *The Sound and the Fury*) and positions his grandfather, General Compson (a contemporary and companion of Thomas Sutpen), as the most reliable source of the family and historical narrative. As King explains, in the postbellum South, '[m]easured against the heroic generation of the grandfathers, the fathers seemed rather unheroic and prosaic to their sons'.⁴⁴⁷ The family romance literature of the nineteenth century 'thus pitted son against father and often joined grandson and grandfather', and Faulkner's narrative decision pays homage to, as King calls it, this literary and cultural 'grandson-grandfather alliance'.⁴⁴⁸

However, in Faulkner, the authority of the father's and the grandfather's narratives are overthrown: "Your father", Shreve said. "He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick". Quentin replies to Shreve's scepticism with: "He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it." "Then who did tell him?" "I did."⁴⁴⁹ Quentin claims narrative authority over his father and grandfather to tell the story of Henry's own 'violent repudiation of his father and his birthright'.⁴⁵⁰ Just as Sutpen struggles to keep his lineage 'pure', so do the

⁴⁴⁶ Tynianov argued that the poetry of the twentieth century 'clings to the poetic culture of the nineteenth century, instinctively tries to be its heir; the poems are atoning for the guilt they feel toward their predecessors. We are still apologizing to the nineteenth century. But meanwhile the leap has already been made, and we more closely resemble our grandfathers than the fathers who struggled against them' (Tynianov, p. 516).

⁴⁴⁷ King, p. 252

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. See also 'Ernest Jones, "The Significance of the Grandfather for the Fate of the Individual", and "The Phantasy of the Reversal of Generations" in *Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (London: Ballière, Tindall, and Cox, 1918), pp. 652-57 and pp. 658-63.

⁴⁴⁹ AA, 266. A matrilineal rendition of this exercise is found in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, with stories passed down from Grandmothers to mothers and pieced together between sisters: "She never told me all of it", said Denver. "Tell me" (Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 90).

⁴⁵⁰ AA, 72.

plot's narrators become increasingly unable (or unwilling) to keep fact separate from supposition and maintain the hierarchy from General Compson (the grandfather's) 'first hand' account to Mr Compson (the father's) attempt to maintain narrative control. The narration of these older generations is in turn trumped by the grandson's (Quentin's) own needs within the story, and Shreve's desire to participate and drive the outcome.⁴⁵¹ To break free of the narrative 'father' is to repudiate the tellers of history. Shreve asks

Quentin:

What is the South? [...] a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forever more as long as your children's children produce children you won't be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas.⁴⁵²

Shreve, a Canadian, is free from these historiographical burdens in his storytelling and even carelessly confuses the date of Pickett's charge, which occurred during the battle of Gettysburg toward the end of the war, rather than during Manassas at the start. Yet beginnings and endings – of novels, wars, and lives – are made progressively irrelevant in this text. For Faulkner 'birthright' does not entitle you to nobility – instead, it condemns you to the burdens of history, to be forever 'partly responsible through heredity'.⁴⁵³

These questions of succession permeate the novels of Flaubert and Faulkner, just as they defined the historical moments of which they wrote. In the decades following the French Revolution, the question of inheritance saw significant legal reform and reinventions. Counter demonstrates how inheritance became a 'master-metaphor, a complex and shifting symbolic vocabulary allowing the [...] problematization of post-Revolutionary

⁴⁵¹ "Your old man", Shreve said. "When your grandfather was telling this to him, he didn't know any more what your grandfather was talking about than your grandfather knew what the demon was talking about when the demon told it to him, did he? And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there" (AA, 274).

⁴⁵² AA, 289.

⁴⁵³ This resonates with the humiliation and sense of social decline in France after the Franco-Prussian War, the loss of Haiti, and Napoleon's defeat.

society'.⁴⁵⁴ After the French Revolution, legislation shifted to prevent the hoarding of land between generations leaving 'a complex legislative legacy on the matter of successions' which elevated questions of inheritance 'to a position of obsessive importance during the century'.⁴⁵⁵ This fixation came to infiltrate the literary output, where the disintegration of the family 'acquires a symptomatic quality', White suggests, 'when we analyse a culture established by the disestablishment of 1789, and engaged in an obsessive quest for political legitimation through property'.⁴⁵⁶

The family metaphor and questions of succession are fruitful ground for observing literary cross-fertilizations between nineteenth-century France and the antebellum American South. David Minter notes that through repeated references to 'frenchness' '[*Absalom, Absalom!*] reaches back to Europe' and in so doing provides 'a sense not only of the people and history of Yoknapatawpha, but of its sources'.⁴⁵⁷ There was a mutual fascination between Southern aristocrats and French elites. Southern plantation owners gripped firmly onto an imported European-influenced notion of aristocracy, as King explains: 'the South prided itself on its aristocratic origins and bemoaned the destruction of the aristocratic way of life [...] middle-class white Southerners were obsessed with establishing their aristocratic credentials'.⁴⁵⁸ A letter from a Union soldier invading South Carolina is revealing of Northern distaste for the Southerner's sense of aristocratic right

⁴⁵⁴ Counter, *Inheritance*, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Counter, *Inheritance*, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Nicholas White, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ David Minter, *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 152. For example, the 'French architect' who builds 'Sutpen's Hundred' parades through Jefferson with 'a hat which would have created no furore on a Paris boulevard' to build Sutpen's 'dream of grim and castlelike magnificence' (*AA*, 35 and 38).

⁴⁵⁸ King, p. 251. Alexandre Dumas's success amongst white Southern elites, and Balzac's own references to the American South are testament to this interchange. Faulkner (like Twain's earlier tirade) seems to denounce the glorification of medieval chivalry in the South when he writes in *Absalom, Absalom!* that the war was lost in part because of: 'generals, who were generals not through training in contemporary methods or aptitude for learning them, but by the divine right to say "Go there" conferred upon them by an absolute caste system' like 'Roland or du Guesclin' with foppish 'plumes and cloaks lined with scarlet' (*AA*, 345-46).

when he observes that Carolina aristocracy ‘can talk of nothing but the purity of blood of themselves and their ancestors [...]. Their cant about aristocracy is perfectly sickening’.⁴⁵⁹ This obsession with ancestry and purity of blood is precisely what drives *Absalom, Absalom!*'s Thomas Sutpen: he is at once the progenitor of the story's principal characters, and the figure from whom the various storylines of supposition and hypotheses derive. The novel opens with Quentin hearing the Sutpen story (from Rosa) which he ‘already knew. It was a part of his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen’.⁴⁶⁰ In this way, the plot of *Absalom, Absalom!* is itself an object of inheritance: ‘a story that the Compson family has passed on like an heirloom’ – it is in and of itself a burden, one novel inherited by the other.⁴⁶¹

Just as Rosa Coldfield's father spent the war hidden in the attic ‘armed not with a musket but with the big family Bible’, Faulkner inherited his great-great-great uncle's genealogical family Bible.⁴⁶² This likely inspired his fantasy of writing ‘the Doomsday Book, the Golden Book, of Yoknapatawpha County’ as his last work, which would have developed further the region's fictional genealogical strands.⁴⁶³ This meta-counterfactual book is testament to Faulkner's entrancement with family histories, and the regionalism with which he constructed a character's fate. ‘Decline was an integral part of the Southern family romance’, King writes, which the Compson family exemplifies.⁴⁶⁴ ‘The first

⁴⁵⁹ George M. Wise to John Wise, March 13, 1865, in ‘Civil War Letters of George M. Wise’, ed. by Wilfred W. Black, *Ohio Historical Quarterly*, 46 (1957), p. 193.

⁴⁶⁰ AA, 11.

⁴⁶¹ Gorra, p. 246.

⁴⁶² On Faulkner's obsession with genealogies and family lineage, see Arthur F. Kinney, ‘The Family-Centered Nature of Faulkner's World’, *College Literature*, 16 (1989), 83-102 and John Pilkington, *The Heart of Yoknapatawpha* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981).

⁴⁶³ Said to Jean Stein vanden Heuvel in 1956, quoted in *Lion in the Garden*, ed. by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 255. On this unwritten work, see James B. Meriwether, ‘The Novel Faulkner Never Wrote: His *Golden Book* or *Doomsday Book*’, *American Literature*, 42.1 (1970), 93-6, (p. 96).

⁴⁶⁴ King, p. 252.

Compson', Faulkner said in an interview, 'was a bold ruthless man who came into Mississippi as a free forester to grasp where and when he could and wanted to, and established what should have been a princely line, and that princely line decayed'.⁴⁶⁵ Mary Jane Dickerson points out that the 'Compsons were on the losing side in each war, from the doomed Scottish uprising in 1745 to the conjecture surrounding Caddy's apparent liaison with the German military officer of World War II'.⁴⁶⁶ Quentin's great-grandfather crossed from Scotland to Mississippi by way of Louisiana, and bought the plot of land from Ikkemotubbe, a Chikasaw Indian chief.⁴⁶⁷ Ikkemotubbe travelled by steamboat from New Orleans to Mississippi several generations before Charles Bon made the same journey.⁴⁶⁸ Linking the Compsons and Yoknapatawpha to their French roots – both historical and literary – Ikkemotubbe was given the nickname 'Du Homme' by a Frenchman he met in New Orleans. This was then mispronounced (or *misread*) until it morphed into 'Doom' by the time of his arrival in Mississippi.

This early tale of a European aristocrat coming to Louisiana begs comparison with Chateaubriand's tales of René's transatlantic foray.⁴⁶⁹ Tortured by forbidden incestuous desire, René travels to the same territory where a century later Charles Bon will find himself engaged to his sister, a place where France and the United States merge

⁴⁶⁵ William Faulkner, cited in 'Class Conferences at the University of Virginia', in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. by David Minter, 2nd edn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 234-37 (p. 235). In 1945 Faulkner wrote an appendix that details the genealogical strands of the Compson family for Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* with explicative maps and family trees.

⁴⁶⁶ Dickerson, p. 328.

⁴⁶⁷ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Œuvres romanesques et voyages*, ed. by Maurice Regard, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), I, 549-50.

⁴⁶⁸ Ikkemotubbe reappears in several of Faulkner's short stories. 'William Faulkner's Indians are not history's Indians', writes Duane Gage. 'They are [...] created from fantasy, lore, and incidental history to suit the author's needs'. See Duane Gage, 'William Faulkner's Indians', *American Indian Quarterly*, 1.1 (1974), 27-33 and Bruce G. Johnson, 'Indigenous Doom: Colonial Mimicry in Faulkner's Indian Tales', *The Faulkner Journal*, 18.1/2 (2002), 101-27.

⁴⁶⁹ Also relevant to this discussion is the preface of *Atala* on the Napoleonic fantasy of 'la Nouvelle France', crushed by the French defeat in Haiti, in which Chateaubriand mourns a France that might have been. See Benjamin Hoffman, 'Chateaubriand and the Mourning of (New) France', *French Forum*, 42.2 (2017).

linguistically, politically, and culturally. René's monologue recalls Quentin's own stream of consciousness in *The Sound and the Fury*, echoing the same confessional language as he tries to force his desire into reality by telling his (literal) father: '*father I have committed*'. Like René, having not actually acted upon the incest, Quentin is confessing to desire itself. By the end of his monologue, René receives word that his sister has died in the convent – just as Quentin receives word by a wedding invitation that Caddy is to be married, and thus lost to him forever.⁴⁷⁰ The misreading and linguistic colonization of Ikkemotubbe's name predestines the Compson family (themselves a metaphor for the dilapidating aristocracy of the South). It is from Doom that Quentin's great-grandfather purchased the land that is eventually sold to pay for Quentin's tuition for Harvard – the institutional symbol of Northern cultural dominance.⁴⁷¹ The *Sound and the Fury* opens with reference to this loss of land: the pasture has been sold and transformed into a golf course, where the homophone 'Caddie' of the lost sister 'Caddy' is repeatedly shouted. Quentin and all the Compsons understand that by virtue of being born in the South: 'theres a curse on us its not our fault is it our fault [...] theres a curse on us'.⁴⁷²

Just before he proceeds to slaughter Thomas Sutpen, himself, his granddaughter, and his newborn great-granddaughter (Sutpen's last rejected heir), Wash Jones, a 'handy man about Sutpen's place while Sutpen was away between '61-'65' expresses this sense of doom for all those who fought for the Confederacy: 'Better if narra one of them had rid back in '65 thinking *Better if his kind and mine too had never drawn the breath of life on*

⁴⁷⁰ Quentin asks: '*Why must you marry somebody Caddy*' (*SF*, 77). Upon seeing Quentin's reaction to the invitation, Shreve asks: 'Is it a wedding or a wake?' (*SF*, 52).

⁴⁷¹ Blight explains that 'the full-blown myth of the Lost Cause' grew under the narrative of 'a glorious, organic civilization destroyed by an avaricious "industrial society" determined to wipe out its cultural foes' (Blight, p. 257). On the symbolic significance of New England intellectualism in the American South, see Lewis Simpson, 'Epilogue: Why Quentin Compson Went to Harvard' in *Mind and the American Civil War: A Meditation on Lost Causes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 96-105.

⁴⁷² *SF*, 100.

this earth'.⁴⁷³ Though Jones's dialect has removed the implied conditional, he creates a counterfactual in which the Southern man had never existed, rather than have had to live to see the defeat and 'see his whole life shredded from him and shrivel away like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire'.⁴⁷⁴ Infanticide, in this case, becomes an escape from the doom of the South and those who survived, those 'doomed to live' – it is an answer to Quentin's desire for things to be 'as if [they] had never been'.⁴⁷⁵

V: Mourning the Counterfactual Child

*'Je n'ai jamais vu un enfant sans penser qu'il deviendrait vieillard, un berceau sans songer à une tombe.'*⁴⁷⁶
 – Gustave Flaubert, *Pensées*

*'I shall never get born and therefore never get dead.'*⁴⁷⁷
 – Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*

Now that we have discussed the political and literary stakes of failed reproduction in nineteenth-century French literature and the Southern Family romance, we can begin to look at its appearances in Flaubert, and then Faulkner, with greater consequence.⁴⁷⁸ The leitmotif of the dead infant joins the political with the poetic, and sketches a genealogy from Chateaubriand through to those who wrote in Faulkner's wake, culminating in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), where an act of infanticide is the primal image from which

⁴⁷³ Rosa Coldfield describes Wash as: '[T]hat brute progenitor of brutes whose granddaughter was to supplant me [...] brute who was [...] to provide at the last the female flesh in which his name and lineage should be sepulchered' (*AA*, 107).

⁴⁷⁴ *AA*, 290-91.

⁴⁷⁵ Having survived the war and realizing he must now go through with his plan to marry Judith, Bon says to Henry: 'For four years now I have given chance the opportunity to renounce for me, but it seems that I am doomed to live, that she and I both are doomed to live' (*AA*, 132).

⁴⁷⁶ He also added: 'Je n'aurais pas été mauvais père, mais à quoi bon faire sortir du néant ce qui y dort?' Faire venir un être, c'est faire venir un misérable'. See Gustave Flaubert, *Pensées*, ed. by Caroline Franklin Grout (Paris: Louis Conard, 1915), p. 7.

⁴⁷⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), pp. 171-282 (p. 219).

⁴⁷⁸ There is a wealth of work on the symbolic role of the child in France which stands as testament to its complexity. For example, see Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant de la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960).

the novel emerges.⁴⁷⁹ Abortion and infanticide evoke the coexistence of death and birth, beginnings and ends, or death before life. In the hands of these authors, the image of the already dead or stillborn child becomes one of several tools to supplant real with unreal events, and renders histories of defeat unwritable.⁴⁸⁰

Illegitimate children in nineteenth-century France were not only doomed (their death rate was more than double that of legitimate children), but they were also of course a symbol of immorality: ‘it was difficult in a society that in principle idealized the patriarchal family officially to recognize its shortcomings by aiding single mothers or fatherless children’, who became instead ‘objects of fear and shame’.⁴⁸¹ Their neglect thus led to what Tombs refers to as ‘legal infanticide’, making Dumas’s choice of imagery indicative of a wider association between amoral literature and doomed children. During a revolution which, as Hayden White writes, ‘was predestined to defeat’, Frédéric looks to the child he bears with Rosanette and sees a doomed, illegitimate child: ‘ses yeux retombaient sur son fils [...]. L’illégalité de sa naissance l’opprimerait toujours; mieux aurait valu pour lui ne pas naître’.⁴⁸² With the past conditional tense, a grammatical means of creating an action that is *née morte*, Frédéric wishes to unbirth his son. The miscarriage, a loss of potential life, serves as metaphor for the exercise in which these characters are always entwined: the

⁴⁷⁹ While beyond the scope of this project, a future endeavour could flesh out the rich potential of this imagery as a connecting thread through the development of the modern novel.

⁴⁸⁰ *SF*, 112. The stakes of the ‘historically constructed’ figure of the child which ‘has come to embody for us the telos of the social order’ are explored more generally in a contemporary context in Lee Edelman’s influential *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 11.

⁴⁸¹ Tombs adds that the support of illegitimate children would have been perceived as ‘condoning immorality’ and therefore ‘only in 1869 did the law cease to forbid aid to be given to single mothers’. See Tombs, p. 177.

⁴⁸² *ES*, 508 and Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 40th-Anniversary edn (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 327.

failure and impossibility of potential futures.⁴⁸³ These temporal miscarriages, in which actions arrive to the reader stillborn, echo the imagery of these texts and their intertexts.

For example, in Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez* (1826), René writes upon the birth of his child that he is tortured by the idea that 'ma vie s'allait prolonger au-delà de moi'.⁴⁸⁴ René is later parroted by Flaubert when he describes his own relief upon hearing of Louise Colet's false (or we might infer aborted or miscarried) pregnancy:

Il faudrait tout un livre pour développer d'une manière compréhensible mon sentiment à cet égard. L'idée de donner le jour à quelqu'un *me fait horreur*. Je me maudrais si j'étais père. – Un fils de moi, oh non, non, non! que toute ma chair périsse, et que je ne transmette à personne l'embêtement et les ignominies de l'existence. [...] A 30 ans il y a peu de gens qui ne deviennent bourgeois, or cette paternité me faisait rentrer dans les conditions ordinaires de la vie.⁴⁸⁵

The letter makes unequivocal Flaubert's associations of fatherhood and bourgeois society, and that his philoprogenitive impulses were limited to his textual, not human, offspring. The unborn child would have created an alternate version of Flaubert, one trapped within bourgeois values he saw as separate from himself (only someone conventional and mundane could share Charles Bovary's reaction: 'l'idée d'avoir engendré le délectait').⁴⁸⁶

Like Flaubert, Frédéric is repulsed by the idea of procreation: 'l'idée d'être père, d'ailleurs, lui paraissait grotesque, inadmissible'.⁴⁸⁷ It is little wonder that in Flaubert procreation often finds its way into the realm of the grotesque given his own proximity to

⁴⁸³ Another example of a pregnancy that ends before it can begin is Joanna Burden's in *Light in August*. She tells Joe Christmas she is pregnant only to realize later that she has entered the menopause. When he understands this, he tells her 'you haven't got any baby [...] you never had one. There is not anything the matter with you except being old'. After this exchange, she gives voice to the same temporal miscarriage that we see elsewhere in Faulkner: "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead" (*LIA*, 278).

⁴⁸⁴ Chateaubriand, p. 538. Counter highlights several appearances of the leitmotif of the dead child: 'the hero René chooses to sleep on the grave of an unknown infant' and 'a choir of dead children who speak of falling from their mother's body into a tomb' (Counter, *The Amorous Restoration*, p. 92).

⁴⁸⁵ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 205 [11 December 1952]).

⁴⁸⁶ *MB*, 122.

⁴⁸⁷ *ES*, 439.

infant mortality – both in his life and family history – having been born, as Green puts it, ‘into a household still mourning the loss of their two young children’.⁴⁸⁸ Childbirth and death existed on a continuum in Flaubert’s mind, who once wrote: ‘Je n’ai jamais vu un enfant sans penser qu’il deviendrait vieillard, ni un berceau sans songer à une tombe’.⁴⁸⁹ The first descriptions of Frédéric’s son (‘au milieu des linges, quelque chose d’un rouge jaunâtre, extrêmement ridé, qui sentait mauvais et vagissait’⁴⁹⁰) recall M. Dambreuse’s yellowed corpse earlier in the same chapter: ‘couverte d’une serviette blanche [recalling the ‘linges’], trois flambeaux brûlaient. Frédéric prit une chaise, et regarda le mort. Son visage était jaune comme de la paille; un peu d’écume sanguinolente marquait les coins de sa bouche’.⁴⁹¹ The comparison is later reinforced when Frédéric observes the ‘reposoir’ of his now dead (still nameless) son:

[L]e petit mort était méconnaissable maintenant [...] sa tête reposait sur un oreiller de taffetas bleu, entre des pétales de camélias des roses d’automne et des violettes; c’était une idée de la femme de chambre; elle l’avaient ainsi arrangé tous les deux dévotement [...] Tout cela formait avec le berceau *une manière de reposoir*; et Frédéric se rappela sa veillée près de M. Dambreuse.⁴⁹²

The comparison brings into relief the opposition between his detachment from his son’s ‘reposoir’ and his zealous earlier preparation of the room for his missed rendez-vous with Madame Arnoux on the eve of *la fusillade des Capucines*: ‘[P]lus dévotement que ceux qui font des *repositoires*, il changea les meubles de place, drapa lui-même les *rideaux*, mit [...] des *violettes* sur la commode; il aurait voulu [even within this alternative, he laments another missed alternative] paver la chambre tout en or’ [my emphasis].⁴⁹³ Here it is

⁴⁸⁸ Flaubert was likely traumatized by the birth of his niece, a grotesque scene which coincided with the mental degradation of his brother-in-law, the grief of his mother, and the death of his sister, Caroline. Flaubert’s grandmother had died from giving birth to his mother amidst the peak of the French revolution – her life then was not unlike Berthe’s fate, parentless and moved from home to home. Flaubert’s mother had three other children who died as infants (Green, *Flaubert*, p. 11).

⁴⁸⁹ Flaubert, *Pensées*, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁰ *ES*, 553.

⁴⁹¹ *ES*, 542.

⁴⁹² *ES*, 584. Loulou’s *repositoir* is described with similar details (‘une couronne de *violettes* [...] des *roses*, ne laissait voir que son front *bleu*’ [my emphasis]) in Gustave Flaubert, ‘Un cœur simple’, in *Trois Contes* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910), pp. 1-74 (p. 63).

⁴⁹³ *ES*, 396.

Frédéric who is ‘dévotement’ arranging ‘violettes’, placing in crude contrast his dedication to his alternative imagined family with Madame Arnoux and his disengagement from his real dead child. These textual echoes of imagery establish a parallel between a ‘grotesque’ family with Rosanette, and an idealized counterfactual family with Madame Arnoux.

Rosanette’s pregnancy is announced after she has interrupted Frédéric’s visit to Madame Arnoux, in the third chapter of Part III, which sweeps from August 1848 to May 1850 in a mere twenty pages.⁴⁹⁴ The only breadcrumb Flaubert places with which to date the episode is a reference to the Rateau proposal (‘[Compain] tonna immédiatement contre la proposition Rateau, une manœuvre des aristocrates’).⁴⁹⁵ Jean-Pierre Rateau, a supporter of Louis-Napoleon, sought to expedite an election in favour of a conservative turn,⁴⁹⁶ and thus the conception of this doomed child coincides with an early political embryo of the further restriction of personal and artistic liberties brought about by the Second Empire. He wrote to Maxime Du Camp in 1870: ‘Nous payons le long mensonge où nous avons vécu, car tout était faux: fausse armée, fausse politique, fausse littérature, faux crédit et même fausses putains.’⁴⁹⁷ Indeed, Rosanette’s motherhood is consistently portrayed as fraudulent, if not overtly ‘grotesque’.⁴⁹⁸ Rosanette is said to be ‘faisant la bourgeoise’ and strives to perform the kind of motherhood she never received: ‘les femmes, selon Rosanette, étaient nées exclusivement pour l’amour ou pour élever des enfants, pour tenir un ménage’.⁴⁹⁹ Part of the horror of Rosanette’s infant is that Frédéric is confronted

⁴⁹⁴ On the chronology of the novel, see Stratton, Buck, ‘The Chronology of the *Education Sentimentale*’, *Modern Languages Notes*, 67.2 (1952), 86-92 (p. 90).

⁴⁹⁵ *ES*, 434. In typical fashion, ‘une manœuvre des aristocrates’ can be read as a statement made by Compain, a deduction inferred by Frédéric, and/or an opinion held by Flaubert.

⁴⁹⁶ For more on the motivations behind this manoeuvre and its effects, see James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), esp. pp. 14-34.

⁴⁹⁷ Letter to Maxime Du Camp (*C*, IV, 243 [29 September 1870]).

⁴⁹⁸ As Scott points out in her reading of the figure of the prostitute in Baudelaire’s prose poems: ‘in the nineteenth-century, prostitutes were frequently encoded as monstrous by the dominant discourse’ (p. 62).

⁴⁹⁹ *ES*, 411.

with an unwanted child with the wrong, or ‘faux’, woman, who can only exist in his mind in contradistinction to an alternative, desired child. When Frédéric wonders why he is horrified by the news of Rosanette’s pregnancy (‘Mais pourquoi?’), his mind wanders to an alternative reality, with the ‘right’ woman: ‘si, au lieu de la Maréchale...?’.⁵⁰⁰

In an episode from an 1820 work by the vicomte d’Arlincourt, *Le Solitaire*, a child is born from the ‘wrong’ woman, while birth and death are grotesquely interlinked: ‘Levant le drap mortuaire: “ce n’est point le lit nuptial de ton épouse”, me dit-elle, “c’est l’heureux berceau de ton fils”. Et j’aperçois au fond d’un cercueil l’affreux cadavre d’un enfant’.⁵⁰¹ I evoke this example in part for the striking thematic similarity, but also to place the first person narrative of this earlier work in contradistinction to the effect of Flaubert’s *style indirect libre*, which brings into disturbing (and sardonic) relief the misalignment between the father’s horror and Rosanette’s unsettling glee (‘Rosanette se mit à sourire ineffablement’) as Frédéric embraces his child ‘pour cacher sa répugnance’.⁵⁰² Like in *Le Solitaire*, the infant is revealed with a dramatic unveiling when ‘il écarta les rideaux’, with Rosanette exuding a similar mania to Arlincourt’s manic mother: ‘submergée sous les flots d’amour qui l’étouffaient, elle dit d’une voix basse: “Un garçon, là, là!” en désignant près de son lit une barcelonnette’.⁵⁰³ All the sentimentality of the bourgeois family is removed from this scene, and every platitude of joy feels misplaced, such as in the curt description of Frédéric’s formulaic paternal performance: ‘Alors, il baisa, du bout des lèvres, son enfant’ – it is difficult not to wince when reading the possessive ‘son enfant’ and Rosanette’s ‘Comme il te ressemble!’.⁵⁰⁴ The knowledge of Frédéric’s repulsion

⁵⁰⁰ *ES*, 439.

⁵⁰¹ Charles-Victor Prévost, vicomte d’Arlincourt, *Le Solitaire*, 2nd edn (Paris: Le Normant, 1821), p. 308.

⁵⁰² *ES*, 470.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

juxtaposed with Rosanette's sincerity ('toute la franchise de sa nature') implicates the reader in a mockery of Rosanette and of the joy of procreation.⁵⁰⁵

Flaubert initially ridicules Rosanette's maternal aspirations by having her give birth in the euphemistic 'établissement spécial', complete with 'une petite porte *bâtarde*' to ring home the theme of illegitimacy [my emphasis].⁵⁰⁶ Even the sign is written 'en grosses [vulgar] lettres' for the 'Maison de santé et d'accouchement tenue par Mme Alessandri'.⁵⁰⁷

Thereafter suggestively referred to only as *Madame*, this 'sage-femme de première classe' who delivers Rosanette's child dabbles in maternity amongst various passions: 'ex-élève de la Maternité, auteur de divers ouvrages, etc.'"⁵⁰⁸ In case his reader missed the suggestion, Flaubert ends his description with the 'bruit continu des pianos' wafting through this 'établissement spécial, à Chaillot'.⁵⁰⁹ Frédéric notes the second sign to the 'établissement spécial' as different from the first, this time 'sans le mot accouchement'.⁵¹⁰

'Sans' highlights all that is left unsaid in this scene, and in Rosanette's life. In Baudelaire's *Mademoiselle Bistouri*, Scott draws an interrelation between the figure of the prostitute and clandestine medical practices, notably abortion (which we might imagine occur at such an 'établissement spécial'). Scott explains that the figure of the *courtisane* was:

[D]esigned to provoke a desire for knowledge in the reader [...] If the narrator's conversation with the prostitute is "abortive" [...] this may be because the reader is implicitly invited to read between the lines of the text, to seek meaning in what has been cut out.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁵ The novel also discredits her pregnancy with the carelessness with which Flaubert tracks the pregnancy, as I shall discuss further along.

⁵⁰⁶ *ES*, 553.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Corbin points out that 'these demimondaines [...] invaded the world of fiction [...]. It was this milieu that Zola researched before writing *Nana*, which claims in part to be a portrait of it; it was also this milieu that Flaubert, who knew it well, describes at length in his correspondence'. See Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 135.

⁵¹⁰ *ES*, 553.

⁵¹¹ Scott, p. 67.

Indeed, when Rosanette recounts the story of her own childhood and absent mother to Frédéric during their trip to Fontainebleau, he wonders ‘surtout à ce qu’elle n’avait pas dit’.⁵¹² The entire episode is structured around the unsaid – as already discussed in my first chapter, the violence and upheaval they have left behind is left primarily unmentioned.

Not only do these pregnant gaps in language and knowledge become a meta-commentary on the tricks and turns of Flaubert’s (and Faulkner’s) prose, which use omission to create intrigue and desire in their readers, they also evoke the secrets of the bourgeois home, built around privacy, and the unspoken alternative home the prostitute provides.⁵¹³ ‘The quest of the adulterous spouse’, White argues, ‘is often a search for another place’, an alternative or counterfactual version of the lives already led.⁵¹⁴ The *courtisane* as literary trope of nineteenth-century literature is at once the foil of good bourgeois family morals, and an uncanny imitation of the family scene.⁵¹⁵ Scott notes that this figure is recognizable by this duality: ‘The courtesan would seem to be a virtual incarnation [...] of all that is artificial and misleading’, and thereby, she is inherently literary.⁵¹⁶ The prostitute, as a figure, is a counterfactual wife – always an impossibility, always already lost.

VI: Counterfactual Mothers

⁵¹² *ES*, 473.

⁵¹³ Balzac explores the alternative family trope in *Une double famille* (1830), in which Roger de Granville forms a second, happier family with a young *grisette* named Caroline. As Counter notes, ‘Affection, warmth, love, and indeed sexual desire [...] are only to be found in the illegitimate household’. See Counter, *The Amorous Restoration*, p. 86.

⁵¹⁴ On how the *maison de rendez-vous* was designed to replicate the bourgeois home see Corbin, *Women for Hire*, p. 175.

⁵¹⁵ Corbin explains the literary prevalence of this figure: ‘prostitution and its world had become essential themes in fiction and painting; symbolist and decadent literature and art testified to a collective neurosis that found expression through a vertiginous attraction for, as well as a morbid fear of, female sexuality’ (Corbin, *Women for Hire*, p. 126).

⁵¹⁶ Scott, p. 54.

Flaubert fashions Rosanette's (corpo)real pregnancy in opposition to an unreal conception of (and with) Madame Arnoux, who is made into the epitome of bourgeois femininity, first seen flanked by her daughter and repeatedly placed in set-pieces of family happiness: 'Presque toujours, il trouvait Mme Arnoux montrant à lire à son bambin'.⁵¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Richard writes that, 'face à la pudeur de Madame Arnoux', Rosanette incarnates, 'la plénitude impudique de la nature et de la chair'.⁵¹⁸ Her pregnancy reinforces her fleshy reality (in contrast to Madame Arnoux's ethereal unreality) with bodily manifestations: 'de petites tâches jaunes maculaient sa peau [...]. Frédéric ne nia pas l'évidence'.⁵¹⁹ This 'evidence' and its physicality sits in contrast to the dubious, ghostly nature of Marie Arnoux's very existence. In his investigation of the multivalent nature of the word 'apparition' first used to introduce Madame Arnoux, Daniel Sangsue notes the religious iconography of the image: '[L]a silhouette découpée sur le bleu du ciel, les doigts traversés par la lumière, l'ovale parfaitement dessiné du visage, plus loin l'enfant sur les genoux correspondent à l'iconographie traditionnelle de la Vierge Marie'.⁵²⁰ Indeed, Frédéric repeatedly describes her as 'une sorte de paradis sous forme humaine' and expresses his 'dévouement'.⁵²¹ As Lucette Czyba notes, 'la vertu de Madame Arnoux se fonde sur une conception religieuse du devoir maternel, sur un idéal de la maternité qui, conformément au modèle marial, privilégie la chasteté et l'abstinence'.⁵²² Flaubert positions Rosanette as real and Madame Arnoux as unreal: 'Frédéric hanta tout à la fois les deux maisons', and while Rosanette ('l'une') is 'fôlatre, emportée, divertissante,'

⁵¹⁷ *ES*, 201.

⁵¹⁸ Jean-Pierre Richard, *Littérature et Sensation: Stendhal, Flaubert* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), p. 220.

⁵¹⁹ *ES*, 473. The word 'évidence' ironically reinforces the 'reality' of this pregnancy which is otherwise undermined.

⁵²⁰ Sangsue, p. 257.

⁵²¹ *ES*, 385.

⁵²² Lucette Czyba, *Mythes et idéologie de la femme dans les romans de Flaubert* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983), p. 178. Marie Arnoux is understood to be largely based on Flaubert's infatuation with Élixa Schlésinger, he had become mesmerized by the sight of her breastfeeding her daughter: 'as if Venus had come to life and stepped down from her pedestal' (Green, *Flaubert*, p. 22).

Madame Arnoux (always ‘l’autre’) is ‘grave et presque religieuse’.⁵²³ Rosanette is the disappointing, yet decidedly corporeal, counterpoint to the saintly Madame Arnoux – a binary elevated by hyperbolic, animalistic descriptions of Rosanette: ‘Rosanette, plus turbulente que les autres, se distinguait par des inventions drolatiques, comme de courir à quatre pattes’.⁵²⁴ While Rosanette is explicitly sexualized (‘sans y prendre garde, elle s’habillait devant lui, tirait avec lenteur ses bas de soie, puis se lavait à grande eau le visage, en se renversant la taille comme un naïade qui frissonne’⁵²⁵), Madame Arnoux is constantly desexualized: ‘il ne pouvait se la figurer autrement que vêtue, – tant sa pudeur semblait naturelle, et reculait son sexe dans une ombre mystérieuse’.⁵²⁶ When Frédéric sees Deslauriers, he refrains from telling him about Madame Arnoux, ‘retenu par une pudeur’ – she is only desirable to him as an unspoken fantasy.⁵²⁷ Pellerin puts it well when he and Frédéric discuss ‘la femelle de l’homme’: ‘ce qui vous séduit est particulièrement ce qui la dégrade comme idée’.⁵²⁸ Sangsue is right to point out that ‘la Vierge est une forme de négation de la femme réelle’, and Frédéric precludes Marie (her given name should be stressed) from ever fully entering the realm of the real.⁵²⁹ By keeping Madame Arnoux safely as a desire (and then missed possibility at the end of the novel), rather than a reality, she is a counterfactual that can always be mourned, and thereby never be lost.

I shall now compare Frédéric’s two children (the real and imagined), in which we see the exaggerated dichotomy between the potential and the actual, the (f)actual and the

⁵²³ *ES*, 207.

⁵²⁴ *ES*, 243. Brombert connects this religiosity to Flaubert’s early writings such as the *Mémoires d’un fou*: ‘still writing under the recent impact of his meeting with Madame Schlésinger, the model for Madame Arnoux, [the narrator] feels guilt and shame because he has lost his virginity with a promiscuous creature, “as though my love for Maria were a religion that I had profaned”’. See Victor Brombert, *Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 139.

⁵²⁵ *ES*, 206.

⁵²⁶ *ES*, 177 and 85.

⁵²⁷ *ES*, 38.

⁵²⁸ *ES*, 91.

⁵²⁹ Sangsue, p. 257.

counterfactual. Frédéric creates instances of loss to justify the act of mourning and evade the real. Rather than engage with Rosanette's unwanted announcement that she is pregnant with their child, Frédéric fabricates an imaginary child to mourn:

[S]a rêverie devint tellement profonde, qu'il eut une sorte d'hallucination. Il voyait là, sur le tapis, devant la cheminée, une petite fille. Elle ressemblait à Mme Arnoux et à lui-même, un peu; – brune et blanche, avec des yeux noirs, de très grands sourcils, un ruban rose dans ses cheveux bouclants! (Oh! comme il l'aurait aimée!) Et il lui semblait entendre sa voix: 'Papa! Papa!'⁵³⁰

The past conditional tense here insists that the imaginary should be mourned, and reality silenced. Before this imagined child has ever been conceived, the verb tense ('il l'aurait aimée!') convinces Frédéric of her loss, as though she has been killed by the news of Rosanette's pregnancy. Whereas the imagined child lives and breathes, Frédéric's real child, as has already been noted, is a grotesque corpse from its birth.⁵³¹ Even the novel undermines the plausibility of Rosanette's pregnancy by carelessly extending it over two years.⁵³² Frédéric's child dies soon after its birth, yet he is unable to engage with the reality of this loss. While Rosanette becomes a weeping Niobe ('elle restait la bouche ouverte, avec un flot de larmes tombant de ses yeux fixes') Frédéric 'croyait presque rêver'.⁵³³

In the absence of a living child, Rosanette fashions an imaginary version of her son in the counterfactual mode. She is able to keep him alive by repeatedly moving through the patterns of grief:

Tous les quarts d'heure, à peu près, Rosanette ouvrait les rideaux pour contempler son enfant. Elle l'apercevait, dans quelques mois d'ici, commençant à marcher, puis au collège, au milieu de la cour, jouant aux barres; puis à vingt ans, jeune homme; et toutes ces images, qu'elle se créait, lui faisaient comme autant de fils qu'elle aurait perdus, – l'excès de la douleur multipliant sa maternité.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁰ *ES*, 473.

⁵³¹ *ES*, 506.

⁵³² Rosanette's pregnancy extends from January 1849 to the early months of 1851. See Samuel Sylvestre de Sacy, 'Notes', in Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 473.

⁵³³ *ES*, 535.

⁵³⁴ *ES*, 533.

The past conditional magnifies her loss: it is not only her child who is already dead, but also the multiple possible sons she might have lost existing in embryo within her imagination, lost in their very articulation. Almost despite herself, Rosanette becomes in this moment a poignant figure of lost maternity- both the mother she might have been, and the mother she might have had, resonate as absent figures.⁵³⁵ Like her dead infant ('il ne remue plus'), she momentarily becomes the 'véritable nature morte' that Pellerin will later fail to recreate:⁵³⁶

[L'enfant] était mort. Elle le prit, le secoua, l'étreignait en l'appelant des noms les plus doux, le couvrait de baisers et de sanglots, tournait sur elle-même, éperdue, s'arrachait les cheveux, poussait des cris; et se laissa tomber au bord du divan, où elle restait la bouche ouverte, avec un flot de larmes tombant de ses yeux fixes.⁵³⁷

Rosanette seeks to embalm her dead infant's corpse to preserve her lost maternity so that he might exist as an object of art, bringing failed creation and procreation in parallel with one another.⁵³⁸ This becomes all the more convincing when this scene is juxtaposed with Flaubert's own anguished descriptions of his 'maternal' grief when he fails to (pro)create: 'Quelquefois, quand je me trouve vide, quand l'expression se refuse, quand après [avoir] griffonné de longues pages, je découvre n'avoir pas fait une phrase, je tombe sur mon divan et j'y reste hébété dans un marais intérieur d'ennui.'⁵³⁹

As Rosanette moves through this sequence, the free indirect discourse pans to reveal Frédéric, across the room, equally frozen, deep in counterfactual thoughts:

⁵³⁵ Rosanette's mother is only ever evoked, even by her, fleetingly and as a negation: 'Quelle chance pour elle si elle n'a pas de mère! reprit Rosanette. [...] moi, sans la mienne' The only things we learn of Rosanette's mother is that she 'vendait tout pour aller boire', and that, eventually, 'tout' came to include her own daughter (*ES*, 434).

⁵³⁶ *ES*, 526.

⁵³⁷ *ES*, 525. It is worth observing the reappearance of a woman in despair *turning* - like Emma Bovary's sensation of infinite turning before she heads for the arsenic.

⁵³⁸ The horror of the scene and the evocation of an immobile statue recalls Flaubert's descriptions to Maxime Du Camp at the death of his sister, Caroline: 'Ma mère est une statue qui pleure. [...] Quelle maison! quel enfer! Et moi j'ai les yeux secs comme du marbre' (*C*, I, 257 [letter to Maxime Du Camp, 15 March 1846]).

⁵³⁹ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 75 [24 April 1852]).

Frédéric, immobile dans l'autre fauteuil, pensait à Mme Arnoux [...] Que deviendrait-elle? Institutrice, dame de compagnie, femme de chambre, peut-être? [...] Il aurait dû s'opposer à sa fuite ou partir derrière elle. N'était-il pas son véritable époux? Et en songeant qu'il se la retrouverait jamais, que c'était bien fini, qu'elle était irrévocablement perdue, il sentait comme un déchirement de tout son être; ses larmes accumulées depuis le matin débordèrent.⁵⁴⁰

Frédéric inserts himself into her life by mourning her hypothetical loss and positioning himself as her 'real' husband. As Rosanette mourns her lost maternity, and Frédéric the alternative family he feels he will now never know, they find common ground in the act of grieving: 'tous deux sanglotaient en se tenant embrassés'.⁵⁴¹ Yet the death of children and loss of family carry political weight. As Green notes, this child that might have been compounds in the novel with the lost illusions of 1848: 'that short-lived child of the revolution whose death shortly before the coup d'état embodies the end of so many ideals'.⁵⁴²

Emma Bovary's pregnancy is also haunted by a ghostly, alternative child. The chapter which summarizes in a paragraph or two the nine months of Emma's pregnancy opens from Charles's perspective: 'Charles était triste'.⁵⁴³ Yet his sadness about his professional failings is appeased by the immense pleasure he derives from seeing Emma as a reproductive body; her 'démarche paresseuse' and her 'hanches sans corset' remind him that her pregnancy is 'un autre lien de la chair' developing between them.⁵⁴⁴ Emma on the other hand 'ne s'amusa pas à ces préparatifs où la tendresse des mères se met en appétit'.⁵⁴⁵ Emma's interest in her unborn child and her body as reproductive vessel only extends to the imaginary realm – where her child becomes an alternative version of herself that might lead a more free existence. Rather than the neglected daughter, Berthe,

⁵⁴⁰ *ES*, 533.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² Green, *Flaubert*, p. 122.

⁵⁴³ *MB*, 121.

⁵⁴⁴ *MB*, 122.

⁵⁴⁵ *MB*, 123.

that she will raise, Emma imagines the child she would like to have: ‘Elle souhaitait un fils; il serait fort et brun; elle l’appellerait Georges; et cette idée d’avoir pour enfant un mâle était comme la revanche en espoir de toutes ses impuissances passées’.⁵⁴⁶ Berthe is thus (like Charles Bon for Sutpen and the child with Rosanette for Frédéric) a *misconception*, a *mistake*, a corrupted reality of the imagined, desired child that should have been. Just as Sutpen desires offspring to fulfill his self-redefinition in the social hierarchy, Emma’s imaginary male child is not only an offspring, but also a recreation of herself: ‘Un homme au moins est libre; il peut parcourir les passions et les pays, traverser les obstacles [...]. Mais une femme est empêchée continuellement’.⁵⁴⁷ When the child is born we are told that Homais ‘le trouva bien conformé’ – conformed to the nightmarish ‘dépendances de la loi’ Emma feels as a woman.⁵⁴⁸ To do her best to keep this ‘wrong’ child outside the restricted freedoms of the real and within the imaginary realm, she names her ‘Berthe’ after a woman from the Vaubyessard ball – a memory from Emma’s now lost alternative life.⁵⁴⁹

Despite their nonexistence, these counterfactual children leave traces – their loss feels like a moment of acute mourning because of the emotional toll of the imaginative effort that went into their creation. This is not so dissimilar to how Flaubert describes leaving behind ideas and pieces of his writing, such as the process of paring down the *comice agricoles* scene in *Madame Bovary*: ‘Je fais des sacrifices de détail qui me font pleurer’.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. Berthe’s neglected character inspired a recent novelist to explore what her character might have become. See Claude-Henri Buffard, *La Fille d’Emma* (Paris: Grasset, 2001).

⁵⁴⁷ *MB*, 123.

⁵⁴⁸ *MB*, 123.

⁵⁴⁹ ‘Emma has a double pregnancy’, Janet Beizer observes: ‘Berthe is the child of the second pregnancy, the Other child. The first or imaginary pregnancy would have yielded a son. [...] This boy child, conceived in the afterglow of the Vaubyessard ball, would have been the issue of the imaginary plot, the viscount plot – the positive pregnancy – while the baby girl, the child of the reality plot – the negative pregnancy – clearly belongs to Charles’. See Janet L. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 144-45.

⁵⁵⁰ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 462 [3 November 1853]).

This fixation on the artistic ideal that the real text fails to become relies on a concrete understanding of what is missing. Describing his 1845 *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Flaubert wrote: 'J'ai échoué. Quelques retouches que l'on donne à cette œuvre (je les ferai peut-être), elle sera toujours défectueuse; il y manque trop de choses et c'est toujours par l'absence qu'un livre est faible'.⁵⁵¹ He would then rewrite this novel nearly twenty years later, and this new version would take this absence as 'une absence qui aurait une puissance créatrice, d'un vide positif'.⁵⁵²

According to Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* also emerged from an 'absence qui aurait une puissance créatrice'. Evoking imagery of mothers and children to discuss his experience of writing (and rewriting) the novel, Faulkner told Stein van den Heuvel for *The Paris Review* in 1956:

[T]hat's how that book grew. That is, I wrote that same story four times [...] like the mother that had four bad children, that she would have been better off if they all had been eliminated, but she couldn't relinquish any of them. [...] 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.⁵⁵³

The 'lost women' to which Faulkner refers are the mothers, daughters, and sisters whose absence animates and drives the structure of several of his works. The present absence of these sister/mothers exceed the perimeters of the novel - Faulkner wrote into this text his own counterfactual sister, and the daughter his lost infant, Alabama, might have been: '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'.⁵⁵⁴ These counterfactual mothers are the conceptual womb from which these novels emerged.

⁵⁵¹ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 30 [16 January 1852]).

⁵⁵² Richard, p. 225.

⁵⁵³ *Conversations with William Faulkner*, ed. by M. Thomas Inge (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1999), p. 124.

⁵⁵⁴ On the death of Faulkner's firstborn daughter, Alabama, ten days after her birth, see Blotner, *Faulkner*, pp. 273-74. William Faulkner, 'An Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, 1933', in Meriwether (ed.), *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, pp. 289-296 (p. 293).

‘Maternity’, Philip Weinstein writes, is ‘an incoherent zone his fiction can lead up to and away from but which none of his women can traverse and still remain themselves’.⁵⁵⁵

Indeed, Mrs Compson’s motherhood exists only as a lost possibility – Quentin thinks ‘*if I’d just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother*’.⁵⁵⁶ Caddy, in turn, replicates this maternal absence, becoming yet another mother that might have been by disappearing to Europe, leaving behind her daughter (who inherits the name Quentin from her dead uncle) in Mississippi.

The archetype of the white mother in antebellum fiction, who ‘came to assume a quasi-Virgin Mary role as the asexual mother of the Southern male hero’, was set in opposition to the sexualized and nurturing black woman.⁵⁵⁷ Before returning to the ways in which Faulkner exaggerated those dynamics, I want to briefly note similarities between this figure and the pious conceptualization of Madame Arnoux, and Flaubert’s own twinning of white and black maternity in *L’Éducation sentimentale*. ‘La négresse’, the black woman who cares for Madame Arnoux’s child, appears rarely and yet pointedly bookends the novel. ‘Une négresse, coiffée d’un foulard, se présenta, en tenant par la main une petite fille’ is one of the novel’s most arresting early images, and when Frédéric indulges in a nostalgic summary of their romance as he says goodbye to Madame Arnoux forever, ‘la négresse’ features pointedly as the last lost memory, and is the only one given a possessive pronoun: ‘Il lui rappela le petit jardin d’Auteuil, des soirs au théâtre, une rencontre sur le boulevard, d’anciens domestiques, sa négresse. Elle s’étonnait de sa mémoire’.⁵⁵⁸ Even

⁵⁵⁵ Philip Weinstein, “‘If I Could Say Mother’: Construing the Unsayable About Faulknerian Maternity”, in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. by David Minter, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 430-42 (p. 438). Since the first Scottish Compson, Quentin MacLachan, Dickerson notes that ‘to be motherless either literally or figuratively’ is part of the family legacy (‘Magician’s Wand’, p. 325).

⁵⁵⁶ *SF*, p. 109. The novel also opens with the funeral of the family matriarch, ‘Damuddy’.

⁵⁵⁷ King, pp. 251-53.

⁵⁵⁸ *ES*, 8 and 512.

when she appears in her absence ('une négresse, qu'il croisa un jour dans les Tuileries tenant une petite fille par la main, lui rappela la négresse de Mme Arnoux'⁵⁵⁹), it is as a figure of displaced maternity, holding by the hand another woman's child.

The Compson children are looked after by Dilsey, one of Faulkner's few maternal figures who manages to survive and assume this role (for children who are not her own), and she is also one of his few African American characters who elides the usual tropes of his white gaze.⁵⁶⁰ This dichotomy between white and black motherhood falls in line with the formulas of the Southern family romance, in which 'the white woman was denied sexual and nurturing attributes, which were displaced onto the black woman'.⁵⁶¹ Behind these literary removals and racial displacements of motherhood were intolerable realities of the enforced miscarriages in Faulkner's South – particularly in Mississippi. The sterilization of black women occurred regularly in federally funded clinics (named 'maternity clinics') during the Reconstruction era and persisted until it reached the supreme court in the 1960s.⁵⁶² The political scientist Shatema Threadcraft describes the breadth of the eugenics movement in the South in *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (2016):

[S]terilizations had been performed routinely since Southern states opened 'maternity clinics' with the explicit aim of lowering the black birth rate in the 1930s [...]. Southern doctors also frequently rendered black women infertile during other procedures. So useless was the black uterus in both the doctors' and the wider community's opinion that this came to be known as a 'Mississippi appendectomy'.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ *ES*, 29.

⁵⁶⁰ Dilsey, who narrates the final chapter of the novel, was likely based on Caroline Barr, who looked after Faulkner and his brothers. See George E. Kent, 'The Black Woman in Faulkner's Works, With the Exclusion of Dilsey, Part II', *Phylon Quarterly*, 36 (1987) and Faulkner's 'Funeral Sermon for Mammy Caroline Barr, February 4, 1940', in Meriwether (ed.), *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, pp. 117-18.

⁵⁶¹ King, p. 254.

⁵⁶² For more on eugenic sterilization laws and procedures in the South, see Edward Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁵⁶³ Threadcraft estimates that 75,000 sterilizations took place in all. See Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 2.

Thus, the South was engaged in a mass-abortion at a societal level, creating a population of mothers who might have been. The ghosts of these lost children, deemed illegitimate even before their conception, haunt Faulkner's work. It is not enough for Sutpen to have Bon killed, it must be as though he never existed '*else that design to which he had dedicated himself would die stillborn*'.⁵⁶⁴ Rather than the paternal recognition Bon seeks, Sutpen attempts to erase his birth: '*[H]e was absent, and he was; he returned, and he was not; three women put something into the earth and covered it, and he had never been*'.⁵⁶⁵

Toni Morrison took this lost black motherhood and made it central, crafting a literal haunting in *Beloved*, in which the dismemberment of the family, the enforced separation of child from mother systematized by slavery and ensuing events such as the 'Mississippi appendectomy', is enacted in a physical dismemberment when Sethe severs her own infant's head from its body in a desperate act to save her from slavery.⁵⁶⁶ The ghostly adult who returns to haunt Sethe brings to semi-life the daughter she might have had. The comparison helps us read Charles Bon as an equally ghostly figure, a child from the past who has invaded the present, ushered in by the haunted sibling (like *Beloved* is by Denver) and demanding recognition. 'It's so hard for me to believe in [time]', Sethe says, 'Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. [...] Some things you forget. Other things you never do'.⁵⁶⁷ In a novel of physical dismemberments, Morrison's use of 'rememory' or 'remembering' becomes the obverse of dis(re)membering, as characters engage in the re-membering of fragmented narratives.

⁵⁶⁴ AA, 184.

⁵⁶⁵ AA, 153.

⁵⁶⁶ Morrison wrote that her novel was inspired by an 1850 protest-by-infanticide undertaken by Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery and felt the only way to provide the same escape to her children was through their death. Morrison explains in her foreword that she was obsessed by the questions of 'parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement' and that she would write a heroine who 'assume[s] the consequences of choosing infanticide'. See Morrison's preface to *Beloved* (p. ix).

⁵⁶⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, 43.

‘[E]st-ce qu’on oublie quelque chose, est-ce que rien se *passé*’, Flaubert asked, ‘est-ce qu’on peut *se détacher* de quoi que ce soit?’ [my emphasis].⁵⁶⁸ To detach or dismember from the past, for Faulkner’s (and Morrison’s) characters, is never possible – they are forced to re-member – and thus unable to mourn since ‘[m]ourning’, as Ladd notes, ‘has as its goal a degree of forgetting’.⁵⁶⁹

Morrison’s *Beloved* uses the fluvial to combine maternity with the journey from slavery to freedom, where release from the womb means enslavement at birth. The birth of Sethe’s daughter, Denver, takes place in a small boat on the Ohio River as her mother escapes from slavery, her body ‘flooding the boat when Denver was born’.⁵⁷⁰ Sethe’s water returns to her years later (‘the water she voided was endless’) when the ghostly embodiment of *Beloved* reappears in the form of an adult woman who ‘walked out of the water’.⁵⁷¹ A symbolic line between freedom and slavery, the Mississippi River both divides and joins the two factions of the United States – as Faulkner writes it: ‘that Continental Trough, that River [...] the geologic umbilical’.⁵⁷² Harriet Beecher Stowe used the dismemberment of the family in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), specifically the separation of mother and child, to incite her reader: a character aboard a ship watches a mother’s infant stolen from her to be sold into slavery. Later that night, the grieving mother throws herself from the ship and drowns herself in the Mississippi River – an exaggerated reversal of the initial rupture at birth (the break and release of water) in a return to Freud’s ‘oceanic feeling’.⁵⁷³ Stowe

⁵⁶⁸ Letter to Louise Colet (C, II, 57 [20 March 1852]).

⁵⁶⁹ Ladd, *Resisting History*, p. 89

⁵⁷⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 61.

⁵⁷¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 60.

⁵⁷² *AA*, 258.

⁵⁷³ Freud sees this ‘primordial feeling’ as ‘a relic of infancy, a time when we were indeed one with the world, a residue of the mother-infant bond’. See Sarah Ackerman, ‘Exploring Freud’s Resistance to the Oceanic Feeling’, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 65.1 (2017), 9-31 (p. 20). He likens this feeling to ‘an infant at the breast [who] does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world’. See Sigmund Freud, ‘Civilization and its Discontents (1930)’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XXI, 64-145 (pp. 66-67).

takes the opportunity to write directly to her reader: ‘I beseech you, pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American slave-trade!’.⁵⁷⁴ George Sand’s *Indiana* (1832) also brings together the fluvial, maternity, and race with the Shakespearian image of Noun, who drowns herself after announcing her pregnancy to the uninterested Raymond. Given her Christian penchant following 1848, it is unsurprising that Sand was in strong disagreement with Flaubert about ‘l’art pour l’art’ and wrote emphatically of Stowe’s sentimentalist novel (published the same year as the formation of the Second Empire) that it was ‘essentiellement domestique et familial’ and Stowe was the writer ‘la plus maternelle qui fût jamais’.⁵⁷⁵

A final example of the meeting of the fluvial and the maternal is from Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, which orbits around the death of a mother, Addie Bundren, the title’s dying ‘I’.⁵⁷⁶ The novel opens with Addie dying in her bed to the sound of her eldest son, Cash, building her coffin (perhaps an ode to Charles Bovary who, ‘pendant deux heures, eut à subir le supplice du marteau qui résonnait sur les planches’).⁵⁷⁷ As Rodolphe once understood, Addie learns with the birth of her first son ‘that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at [...] I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn’t care whether there was a word for it or not’.⁵⁷⁸ ‘Motherhood’, therefore,

⁵⁷⁴ See Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 452.

⁵⁷⁵ See George Sand, ‘Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852)’, in *Autour de la table* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1876), pp. 319-27 (p. 325). Flaubert, in turn, complained to Louise Colet of Stowe’s heavy-handed sentimentalism: ‘Les réflexions de l’auteur m’ont irrité tout le temps. Est-ce qu’on a besoin de faire des réflexions sur l’esclavage? Montrez-le, voilà tout’. (*C*, II, 204 [letter to Louise Colet, 9 December 1852]). Flaubert’s reaction to Stowe’s sentimentalism is a pertinent example of how the question of ‘art for art’s sake’ and the imagery of the family overlap. See Doris Y. Kadish, ‘Gendered Readings of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: The Example of Sand and Flaubert’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 26.3/4 (1998), 308-20.

⁵⁷⁶ As Nancy Blake points out, ‘it is impossible not to misread “burden”’. See Nancy Blake, ‘The Word as Truth or Delirium: Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*’, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’histoire*, 63 (1985), 554-63 (p. 554).

⁵⁷⁷ *MB*, 456.

⁵⁷⁸ William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 172. Addie gives a pared down version of Rodolph’s lamentation: ‘puisque personne, jamais, ne peut donner l’exacte mesure de ses

denotes the absence of the experience, and Addie's daughter, Dewey Dell, is just as incapable of accepting the death of her mother as she is of linguistically expressing her own pregnancy: 'I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. [...] Its not that I wouldn't and will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon'.⁵⁷⁹ Whether it is the arrival of her own motherhood or the loss of her mother that is 'too soon' is left unclear, so that two maternal deaths occur simultaneously: that of Addie, who is dying, and that of Dewey Dell, who hopes to lose her looming maternity by means of abortion.⁵⁸⁰

As her children carry her coffin across the fictional Yoknapatawpha River to reach the burial ground, Addie's corpse is drowned in the overwhelming current; the scene is written as if her corpse drowns itself: 'in the water she fought to stay under the water'.⁵⁸¹ Freud's analysis of the 'oceanic feeling' as a return to the infant state, before understanding one's separation from all things (notably the mother), helps guide a reading of this repeated poetics of submersion as one of re-membering or rejoining the child with mother. Addie's post-mortem suicide in this later novel gives new meaning to Quentin's final plunge; having repeatedly lost maternal figures (his grandmother, the always already lost Mrs Compson, and Caddy) he resubmerges himself into the 'womb of time'.⁵⁸²

besoins, ni de ses conceptions, ni de ses douleurs, et que la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles' (*MB*, 265).

⁵⁷⁹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. 120.

⁵⁸⁰ Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* treats abortion and contraception as prominent themes, with explicit reference to 1940s contraception ('post-coital douching') and fluvial imagery: 'when the stove went out my douche bag was hanging behind it. It froze and when we lit the stove again I forgot it and it burst'. In preparation for the abortion that ultimately causes her to bleed to death, Charlotte 'boiled the water herself', and Harry euphemistically says of the procedure: 'you just have to let the air in'. See William Faulkner, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 172. For more on contraception and abortion in Faulkner, see B.W. Capo, 'Can This Woman Be Saved? Birth Control and Marriage in Modern American Literature', *Modern Language Studies*, 34.1/2 (2004), pp. 28-41.

⁵⁸¹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. 151.

⁵⁸² Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. 121. Flaubert and Faulkner exemplify much of Luce Irigaray's thesis in their simultaneous fear, repulsion and obsession with female fluidity. See Luce Irigaray, 'La "mécanique" des

Flaubert wrote of memory in fluvial terms: ‘L’océan des souvenirs me submerge. Je m’y noie.’⁵⁸³ Evoking this same suffocation in the fluids of memory, a commemorative plaque, mounted in tribute to Faulkner on a bridge in Cambridge, Massachusetts from which Quentin might have jumped with the irons attached to his feet, reads: ‘Quentin Compson, Drowned in the Odour of Honeysuckle, 1891-1910’⁵⁸⁴ – drowned in the memories of Caddy, who ‘*that damn honeysuckle*’ evokes, in his own ‘océan des souvenirs’. The mixed and contradictory imagery of water and iron in Quentin’s final moments is redolent of the ‘seemingly contradictory’ atmosphere of iron and water which (as Tony Tanner has shown) engulfs Emma Bovary in hers: ‘a terminal compound image for all the fog and iron that, in different ways, Emma has been “inhaling” all her life, until they have become one as she becomes none’.⁵⁸⁵ Quentin ‘inhales’ the counterfactual incest which he cannot rid from his mind (‘[i]f we could just have done something so dreadful [...] *Poor Quentin youve never done that have you*’⁵⁸⁶), rendered as a cloying smell that hangs in his atmosphere. I shall now more fully discuss Quentin’s fixation on his sister, and the intertextual play this incest facilitates.

VII: Coitus Interruptus: Killing Dalton Ames

*‘That’s what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events.’*⁵⁸⁷

fluides’, *Arc*, 58 (1974), 49-55. For a discussion of fluidity and the feminine in Flaubert, see Claire-Lise Tondeur, ‘Gustave Flaubert: Le Désir, la fluidité et la dissolution’, *Neophilologus*, 73.4 (1989), 512-21.

⁵⁸³ Letter to Maxime Du Camp (*C*, v, 610 [16 April 1879]).

⁵⁸⁴ The plaque was in fact lost and replaced due to construction in 1983. The original inscription (‘Quentin Compson III, June 2, 1910, Drowned in the Fading of Honeysuckle’), became ‘Quentin Compson, Drowned in the Odour of Honeysuckle, 1891-1910’. See Lewis P. Simpson, ‘Why did Quentin Compson go to Harvard’, in *Mind and the American Civil War: A Meditation on Lost Causes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 96-105, (p. 103).

⁵⁸⁵ Tanner, p. 320.

⁵⁸⁶ *SF*, 94. On the importance of smell in Flaubert’s *Correspondence*, see Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 207.

⁵⁸⁷ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. 121. The phrase references Othello: ‘there are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered’. See William Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn,

Faulkner's 'way of representing time', Philip Weinstein writes, is 'deranged'.⁵⁸⁸ Disparate moments become 'pressed together while remaining apart - not fused but confused'.⁵⁸⁹ This is the essential aesthetic of Quentin's chapter in *The Sound and the Fury*, which opens and closes in Cambridge, Massachusetts on the last day of his life in 1910, yet is perpetually haunted by and confused with memories from his upbringing in Mississippi. Conversations from the past interrupt the narrative flow of events in the present indicated by shifts in typeface, the sentences flickering in and out of italics. The chapter is typographically eclectic: it moves between lengthy unpunctuated sentences of prose and verse-like lists of dialogue. Punctuation to signal a transition into dialogue or indicate a new speaker gradually fades away so that events and conversations join into a singular narrative stream. Interactions between Quentin and his father or sister appear in italics in contradistinction to 'present' moments with Shreve in Cambridge. Memories from the past assert themselves into the continuity of Quentin's day in 1910 so that they eventually insist upon a narrative logic in which past, present, and future events interact and inform one another. As a result, the narrative sequence, as Philip Weinstein puts it, 'eclipses time's cleanly forward motion from A to B to C (perhaps the deepest assumption our sanity requires and that conventional narrative blessedly respects)'.⁵⁹⁰ This forward-moving sequence upon which readers habitually rely is also a genealogical one, in which filial associations move in one direction: the parent must precede and produce the offspring.

ed. by Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), pp. 2109-92 (I. 3. 358).

⁵⁸⁸ Philip M. Weinstein, *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 58. As I shall discuss in Chapter Three, critics (such as Elissa Marder and Ross Chambers) also write of Emma Bovary in terms of temporal disorders.

⁵⁸⁹ Weinstein, *Becoming Faulkner*, p. 58.

⁵⁹⁰ Weinstein, *Becoming Faulkner*, p. 58.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, not only is time's progression deranged, but so is the order of how families, generations, and societies come into existence.

Quentin's chapter, titled by the date of the day he drowns himself in the Charles River (June Second, 1910'), opens with him 'hearing the watch'.⁵⁹¹ The watch, given to him by his father, is the symbolic anchor of the text, a reminder of the time and of the previous generations of Compsons that torment him:

[The watch] was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire [...] I give it 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.⁵⁹²

This heirloom from his grandfather - both the watch and time itself - is broken, and in its absence time fills the atmospherics of this chapter: 'The place was full of ticking, like crickets in September grass, and I could hear a big clock on the wall' and 'I could hear my watch ticking away in my pocket and after a while I had all the other sounds shut away, leaving only the watch in my pocket'.⁵⁹³ This broken watch, symbolizing the rupture of continuous temporal sequencing, sets the scene for Quentin's most elaborate and grammatically unhinged fantasy: to *un-birth* Dalton Ames. The scene is convoluted and unnerving to our conceptions of both narrative and filial progression. Having promised to kill the potential father of his sister's child so that he and Caddy might run away with the money intended for his degree at Harvard ('tomorrow Ill kill him I swear I will father neednt know until afterward and then you and I nobody need ever know we can take my school money'), Quentin fails to act when he faces Dalton.⁵⁹⁴ The encounter is written in a dialogue sequence spread thinly down the page, yet without punctuation, as though in verse:

⁵⁹¹ *SF*, 48.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*

⁵⁹³ *SF*, 53.

⁵⁹⁴ *SF*, 95.

Ill kill you
listen buddy what's your name
Quentin
My mouth said it I didnt say it at all
listen no good taking it so hard its not your fault kid it would have been some other fellow
did you ever have a sister did you.⁵⁹⁵

The only individual on whom Quentin will ever successfully inflict violence is himself. He realizes that he has neither managed to strike Dalton nor force him to leave town: 'after a while I knew that he hadnt hit me that he had lied about that for her sake too and that I had just passed out like a girl but even that didnt matter'.⁵⁹⁶ Dalton embodies what Quentin cannot be: his sister's lover, the father of his sister's child, and a man of action who 'has been in the army' as Caddy tells him, and 'had killed men'.⁵⁹⁷ Unable to act in reality, Quentin kills him within the counterfactual zone of the text: he reaches back through time before the moment of Dalton's conception to unconceive and unwrite him from existence.

Quentin grammatically dismembers the new family Caddy is about to form with Dalton: to kill his sister's lover, Quentin uses the past conditional ('I could have been his mother') to create a lost counterfactual universe in which Dalton was never born. Quentin thus engages in an imaginative act of double abortion: he *unconceives*, or even *misconceives*, both Dalton, and with him, Caddy's unborn child: 'Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. If I could have been his mother lying with open body lifted laughing, holding his father with my hand refraining, seeing, watching him die before he lived. *One minute she was standing in the door*'.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁵ *SF*, 101.

⁵⁹⁶ *SF*, 103.

⁵⁹⁷ *SF*, 148. Faulkner lamented that he 'missed out' on fighting in World War I by about a month, and had desperately tried to participate, even putting on a faux British accent to try and join the British Armed Forces 'masquerading as the scion of an aristocratic British family' and returning to Oxford in uniform with stories from a war in Europe he never saw (Weinstein, *Becoming Faulkner*, p. 8).

⁵⁹⁸ *SF*, 51.

‘[W]atching him die before he lived’ is what the reader experiences with the past conditional verb tense: the possibility of Quentin being Dalton’s mother is an action we know to be impossible before it can come into existence; loss occurs in the very enunciation of the action. In unconceiving Dalton Ames, Quentin has relieved himself of the possibility (and ensuing failure) of trying to kill him. In this convoluted instance of linguistic sterilization (‘with my hand refraining’), Quentin’s present inaction becomes transposed into action in a temporal space between fantasy and memory: ‘making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words’.⁵⁹⁹ To will this alternative world into ‘incontrovertible fact’, Quentin falsely confesses to his father – ‘*I have committed incest I said Father it was I*’ – in the hopes that ‘if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away’.⁶⁰⁰ The uncapitalized pronoun indicates the disintegration of the ‘I’, Quentin’s selfhood, as the chapter leads him towards suicide. The capitalization of ‘Father’ and use of ‘*committed*’ invoke Quentin’s betrayal of the laws of both state and church, and this renunciation of these systems, the sin itself, allows for his escape: ‘*then well have to go away amid the pointing and the horror*’.⁶⁰¹ ‘Watching him die before he lived’ is the experience of reading this novel, and arguably Faulkner’s oeuvre more widely: *Absalom, Absalom!* opens with Quentin himself resurrected from the ‘bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand’ of the river where we know he is heading.⁶⁰² In a novel of ghosts who refuse to die, what Quentin’s ‘I’ craves is finitude:

⁵⁹⁹ *SF*, 72.

⁶⁰⁰ *SF*, 112.

⁶⁰¹ *SF*, 94.

⁶⁰² *SF*, 51. *Absalom, Absalom!*’s reader’s experience functions similarly as Quentin has already committed suicide (in *The Sound and the Fury*) by the start of the novel. As Sartre notes, Quentin’s ‘coming suicide which casts its shadow over Quentin’s last day is not a human possibility; not for a second does Quentin envisage the possibility of *not* killing himself’ (‘Time in the Work of Faulkner’, p. 269).

Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful [...] *I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames* And when he put Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. [...] He would be there and she would and I would. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. If we could have just done something so dreadful and Father said That's sad too people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today.⁶⁰³

All notions of textual hierarchies are removed, and it is not just time itself that disintegrates (like the broken watch), but also grammar, punctuation, and topographical indicators which allow the reader to distinguish between dialogue, verse, and prose – between fantasy and reality, fact and counterfact.

The sin of incest occurs alongside grammatical and novelistic sins: a convention of the novel according to Said is that the 'integrity of the text is maintained by a series of genealogical connections: author-text, beginning-middle-end, text-meaning, reader-interpretation [...] Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, of hierarchy'.⁶⁰⁴ Quentin subverts his own patrilineal order and invents a realm in which the son becomes parent and in so doing allows us to see how the text's beginning might also be its end. As firstborn, he argues that his birth made Jason Compson a father, and he can thus claim creative agency: '*I will am my fathers Progenitive I invented him created I him*'.⁶⁰⁵ The juxtaposition of future ('will'), present ('am') and past ('invented'/'created') rearranges temporal and procreational logic to force this fantasy into possibility.⁶⁰⁶

Beginnings and ends thus become, as Quentin puts it, a matter of 'invention' and 'creation' – an aesthetic choice rather than an inherent order. This indulgence momentarily frees Quentin both from the filial link that prevents him from marrying his

⁶⁰³ *SF*, 51.

⁶⁰⁴ Said, p. 162.

⁶⁰⁵ *SF*, 78.

⁶⁰⁶ The same distorted sequencing (a feature, of course, of the forward yet backward-facing movement of the past conditional tense and time more generally in Faulkner) exists for Sutpen, who perceives the creation and acknowledgement of a black son, Charles Bon, as the negation of his identity as a land-owning Southern aristocrat.

sister and from the shackles of his inherited history.⁶⁰⁷ If Quentin can imagine himself out of existence, thus uncreating his father, then in this counterfactual zone, he is free to marry his sister. Quentin wishes that there might be a world with ‘nobody there but her and me’, where he might protect Caddy’s virginity and negate the lineage of failure that haunts him.⁶⁰⁸ As Faulkner put it in an interview: ‘The action as portrayed by Quentin was transmitted to him through his father. There was a basic failure before that. The grandfather had been a failed brigadier twice in the Civil War. It was the – the basic failure Quentin inherited through his father, or beyond his father’.⁶⁰⁹ The burden of both familial and national failures, Quentin’s ‘basic failure’ to act, or ‘impuissance’, lies at the heart of his temporal ruptures.

“Thank God”, Quentin thinks in *Absalom, Absalom!*, on behalf of Henry Sutpen: ‘not for the incest of course but because at last they were going to do something, at last he could be something even though that something was the irrevocable repudiation of the old heredity and training and the acceptance of eternal damnation’.⁶¹⁰ It is through incest (both sexual and textual) that Quentin (and Henry) is finally able to free himself from the ‘debilitating awareness of ancestral father’ – that is, both Quentin’s and the novel’s.⁶¹¹

Faulkner’s dismemberment of these genealogies is a violent commentary on the conventional sequencing of history. To rearrange the successional direction of the family narrative is to unseat the bedrock hierarchies of the Southern nation and plantation ideology. In this final section, by reading one text into another – incest via intertext – I

⁶⁰⁷ Faulkner later wrote in the Compson family genealogy that Quentin: ‘loved not his sister’s body but some concept of Compson honor’ (*SF*, 9).

⁶⁰⁸ Shreve jokes to Quentin: ‘There now. Just look at what your grandpa did to that poor old [negro]’ (*SF*, 52).

⁶⁰⁹ William Faulkner, from ‘Class Conferences at the University of Virginia’, in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. by David Minter, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. 234-37 (p. 235).

⁶¹⁰ *AA*, 249.

⁶¹¹ Warwick Wadlington, ‘The Sound and the Fury: A Logic of Tragedy’, *American Literature*, 53.3 (1981), 409-23 (p. 417).

shall demonstrate how Quentin finds his freedom by reading (or writing, or telling) his story of incest into that of Henry-Judith-Charles.

VIII: Incest as Intertext

*'[T]he dim upper hallway where an echo spoke which was not mine but rather that of the lost irrevocable might-have-been which haunts all houses.'*⁶¹²
- William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Faulkner's texts are incestuous; they borrow from, refer to, and rewrite scenes from their sibling works. By reading incest as a site for intertext, I shall demonstrate how, for Faulkner, dead ends of lineage become literary opportunities. To make this final point, I reprise (as Quentin compulsively does) the image of Caddy standing in the door. Or rather, it is never explicitly said to be Caddy: *'One minute she was standing in the door.'*⁶¹³ The semantic plurality of the image provides a doorway between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. '[D]oor' interrupts the continuity of Quentin's thoughts and becomes a threshold to another 'door': 'I will sleep fast when I door Door door' - the capitalized 'Door' has ceased to refer to a portal, and is now invested with meaning the reader understands to be linked to incestuous desire.⁶¹⁴ The 'she' standing in a 'door' stretches across novels; in both cases the door frames the incest storylines, and by leaving 'she' unspecified renders the door's hinges supple enough to swing between two sisters: Judith and Caddy. The 'door' becomes pregnant with possibility and invites the incest plotline from *The Sound and the Fury* to puncture the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!*.

⁶¹² *AA*, 137.

⁶¹³ *SF*, 51.

⁶¹⁴ *SF*, 110.

As Rosa tells Quentin of Judith and Henry Sutpen's potential act of incest in *Absalom, Absalom!* ('[t]he town knew that between Henry and Judith there had been a relationship closer than the traditional loyalty of brother and sister even; a curious relationship'⁶¹⁵), a disjointed phrase in italics interrupts her narrative sequence: '*Quentin could not pass that*'. To phrase it differently, it is Quentin, not Rosa, who tells us of the potential incestuous undertones of Judith and Henry's relationship, by superimposing his own memory of his desire for Caddy on Rosa's (re)telling of the moment after the murder of Charles Bon. Quentin cannot get past the corridor of Rosa's past, because he is still locked within that of his own memory:

But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass – that door [...] The door crashed in and the brother stood there, [...] the pistol still hanging against his flank: the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity, speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps, as if [...] striking one another in turn neither making any attempt to guard against the blows.

Now you cant marry him.

Why cant I marry him?

Because he's dead.

Dead?

Yes. I killed him.

He (Quentin) couldn't pass that. He was not even listening to her; he said, 'Ma'am? What's that? What did you say?'⁶¹⁶

The punctuation and typeface signal that the dialogue between Henry and Judith – in contradistinction to the punctuated speech by Rosa – exists somewhere between memory and imagination. The 'door' in which Caddy stood reappears – we come to understand that it is figuratively the same door – and the pacing of the pseudo-dialogue echoes the sexual and textual back and forth between Quentin and his sister, in which prose shifts into verse, resurrecting topographically and thematically a similar 'staccato' exchange in

The Sound and the Fury:

Caddy do you remember how [...] your drawers were muddy
dont cry
Im not crying Caddy

⁶¹⁵ AA, 79.

⁶¹⁶ AA, 172.

push it are you going to
 do you want me to
 yes push it
 touch your hand to it
 dont cry poor Quentin
 but I couldn't stop she held my head against her damp hard breast I could hear her
 heart going firm and slow now [...] waves of honeysuckle coming up the air [...]

Faulkner's denies its own use of dialogue – instead, the exchange is written in brief,

unhelpful statements, with elements omitted (like punctuation) to aid our understanding

(for example, the crying is only indicated by its absence, the knife emerges only in its

loss). Like Quentin clamouring for his knife, the reader is forced to 'hunt all around for'

the incest that is not quite there.⁶¹⁸ Like with Quentin and Caddy, the act of incest

between Judith and Henry, between Judith and Bon, and between Bon and Henry, exists

as counterfactual desire, Quentin asking (with the ubiquitous 'just') '[i]f we could have just

done something so dreadful' or Bon thinking '*I want to go to bed with who might be my*

sister'.⁶¹⁹

Rosa's vague insinuation of Sutpen family incest grows as the novel continues – or more

importantly, it develops in Quentin and Shreve's imagination. The sources of their story

become increasingly dubious and confused, and it is Shreve – the outsider, who has

moved from passive listener to active narrator – who takes hold of Bon's motivations with

the constant incision of words of doubt: 'And who to say if it wasn't maybe the possibility

of incest, because who (without a sister: I dont know about the others) has been in love

[...] the: *was-not:is:was*'.⁶²⁰ '*Is*' becomes subsumed by '*was*', eaten by colons. As Sartre

⁶¹⁷ *SF*, 96.

⁶¹⁸ *SF*, 97.

⁶¹⁹ *AA*, 326.

⁶²⁰ *AA*, 323-24. Shreve's '*was-not:is:was*' echoes Quentin's commitment to suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*: 'A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peaceffullest words. Peaceffullest words. *Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum*' (*SF*, 110 [I was not. I am. I was. I am not]).

observes, in Faulkner the present 'is full of gaps, and, through those gaps, things of the past [...] come to invade it'.⁶²¹ The less Shreve and Quentin know from Rosa or General Compson, the more gaps allow for such invasions.

As they go through the story of incest – between Judith and Bon as much as between Bon and Henry, the boundaries of time disappear further, so that they become '[f]our of them there, in that room in New Orleans in 1860, just as in a sense there were four of them here in this tomblike room in Massachusetts in 1910'.⁶²² This muddling of narrative voices, unable to stay separate, echoes Quentin's inability – and later Bon and Henry's – to stay separate from their kin. In Henry's desire for something so 'unbearably similar' as his own sibling is the sense of cross-generational repeated doom as Quentin faces a story 'unbearably similar' to his own. Within both novels, and *between* both novels, narrative streams and bloodstreams become indistinguishable:

Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew he had never begun, since it did not matter (and possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking. So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark [...] four of them and then just two – Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry.⁶²³

Just as some critics have read the homoerotic potential of Frédéric and Deslauriers's relationship (especially in the narrative duet of the final scene), so others have discussed the 'erotic overtones of [Shreve and Quentin's] interactions'.⁶²⁴ They orally compose this part of story, filling in the gaps, taking from it what they need to satisfy through narration their own unspoken desires: "And now", Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love" in a 'happy marriage of speaking and hearing [...] and sifting and discarding the false and

⁶²¹ Sartre, 'Time in the Work of Faulkner', p. 267.

⁶²² *AA*, 336.

⁶²³ *AA*, 334.

⁶²⁴ See Erin Pearson, who makes a case for a closet analogy give the series of enclosed spaces of the narrative, especially this 'tomblike' room from which Quentin and Shreve narrate in Erin Pearson, 'Faulkner's Cryptic Closet: Forbidden Desire, Disavowal, and the "Dark House" at the Heart of *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, 64 (2011), 341-67 (p. 344).

conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived – in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false'.⁶²⁵ Both men at Harvard 'discussed (rather, existed in)' the two men at the University of Mississippi, and Shreve, as Pearson notes, both heightens 'the elements with homoerotic resonance' and 'fuses erotics with patrilineal identity':

[Henry] said, blurted – no, not blurted: it would be fumbling, *groping*; and he (the cosmopolite ten years the youth's senior almost, lounging in one of the *silk robes* the like of which the youth had never seen before and believed that *women wore*) watching the youth blush fiery red [...] while he fumbled, *groped*, blurted with abrupt complete irrelevance: 'If I had a brother, I wouldn't want him to be younger than me' [...] and he: 'No son of a landed father wants an older brother' and the youth: 'Yes. I do', looking straight at the other [...] the *sybarite*, standing (the youth) now, *erect* [...] his face scarlet but his head high [...]: 'Yes. And I would want him to be just like you' and he: 'Is that so? The whiskey's your side. Drink or *pass*' [my emphasis].⁶²⁶

To 'pass' is the word that carries with it all of Quentin's temporal struggles, as we have already seen: 'he too could not *pass*', 'couldn't *pass* that' [my emphasis]. Rosa tells Quentin that after Bon's murder they behaved '*as though that afternoon had never been* [...] *not once did we mention Charles Bon*' – but his presence is felt in the repetition of '*pass*' – what Henry could not *pass* was Bon's racial *passing*, just as it is impossible in this novel to leave anything in the past – or *passed*.⁶²⁷

[Quentin] had not been listening, since he had something which he still was unable to pass: that door [...] the sister facing him across the wedding dress which she was not to use, not even to finish, the two of them slashing at one another with twelve or fourteen words and most of these the same words repeated two or three times.⁶²⁸

The 'door', 'sister', and 'slashing' of words 'repeated two or three times' sounds like a description of both *Absalom, Absalom!* And *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner's novels

⁶²⁵ AA, 253. This erotic form of narration occurs between Denver and her ghost-sister in *Beloved* as they piece together their mother's lost stories. Here, the narrative line is matrilinear, passed down between generations of women: 'the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her – and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved' (Morrison, *Beloved*, 92).

⁶²⁶ AA, 253.

⁶²⁷ AA, 158. For a discussion of how the 'passing myth', once a fixation of twentieth-century American literature has lost its hold on twenty-first century writers, see Juda Bennett, 'Toni Morrison and the Burden of the Passing Narrative', *African American Review*, 35.2 (2001), 205-17.

⁶²⁸ AA, 174.

are so in dialogue with one another, that it is tempting to read them in the way Nicholas White suggests we read Emile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871-1893). White sees the incest plotline as a 'redirection by incest' towards:

[A] particular model of reading which cuts across the essentially linear unfolding of the series through historical time and biological process. [...] [T]he figure of incest acts as a structuring principle which links branches of the tree and novels which might otherwise remain disparate. Such a transgressive 'zigzagging' effect takes us, literally and laterally, across the terrain of the family, from novel to novel.⁶²⁹

Conclusion: Disinherited Reading

*'[N]o man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his and her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him, and the long sentence is an attempt to get his past and possibly his future into the instant.'*⁶³⁰

- William Faulkner, *Faulkner in the University*

Writers inherit literary traditions from their predecessors - this is Harold Bloom's easily swallowed assertion in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973).⁶³¹ Bloom conceives of artistic evolution in Oedipal terms: the author is caught between the drive to imitate the poetic father, and the desire to break free of this debt. In this Freudian negotiation, inheritors are engaged in 'misreadings' of their predecessors. Through devices such as the use of the past conditional tense, where alternative realities can exist and linger in a temporal zone of impossibility, Flaubert and Faulkner stage intentional *mis*readings (and *mis*conceptions). These allow, as Tilby writes, 'multiple interpretations to exist in embryo'.⁶³² Here Tilby is writing about Flaubert, but could just as easily be describing

⁶²⁹ Nicholas White, p. 107

⁶³⁰ William Faulkner, commenting on why he uses 'long sentences', in *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-1958*, ed. by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 84.

⁶³¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: The Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁶³² Michael Tilby, 'Flaubert's Place in Literary History', in Unwin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, pp. 14-33 (p. 27).

Faulkner. The simultaneity of these disparate possible readings undermines the reader's instinct to rely on a sole 'real' reading and so destabilizes dominant literary modes of writing historical events.

This chapter has shown how Flaubert and Faulkner use the family metaphor to comment upon literary (re)production, and the dismemberment of the family is significant because it mirrors the dismemberment of the literary filial hierarchy that took place over the course of nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶³³ Caserio argues that the subversion of the family plot in the modern novel replaced 'genealogical forms of narration - strictly dependent and interdependent lines of continuity' with 'mutuality and adjacency of parts', which disrupted 'linear and hierarchically causal narrative sequence'.⁶³⁴ Without a 'narrative form of parenthood', these parts become 'figuratively celibate, even sterile'.⁶³⁵ This sterility belongs to the wider anti-progress position - or rather, progress through anti-progress: 'There is creativity [...] even in sterility, whether it be biological or narrational; life and significance even where there is no parenthood'.⁶³⁶ Flaubert's *style indirect libre* functions in this way, with its disjointed, as Jonathan Culler calls them, 'rapid shifts of perspective that prevent one from determining who speaks or from where' so that the reader is unable to decipher 'the salient features of the scene, their relation to one another, and their importance'.⁶³⁷ This rupture of syntactical 'relations' refutes the hierarchies of narrative - that one event is necessarily more 'real' or 'true' than another - allowing for the counterfactual events to become central.⁶³⁸ While my first chapter showed

⁶³³ Nathaniel Wing is right to note that the literary 'disruption of hierarchical relations (prose/poetry, narrator/protagonist, masculine/feminine, etc.)' in French literature between 1848 and 1871 'are related also to instabilities in the wider social order, in the symbolic representations of power' (p. 114).

⁶³⁴ Caserio, p. 235.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Caserio, p. 236.

⁶³⁷ Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 109.

⁶³⁸ Nicholas White, p. 100.

how Flaubert's and Faulkner's omission, exaggeration and distortion of history counterintuitively gives it a forceful omnipresence, this second chapter has shown how these authors used the dead ends of lineage (miscarriage, incest, abortion, sterility) to depict histories that failed to deliver on their promises. In so doing, Flaubert and Faulkner invented sentences that reject dependency on the conventional sequencing of narrative. My next and final chapter harnesses these arguments to then venture more fully into an examination of Flaubert's and Faulkner's treatment of mourning (both textual and corporeal) in *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August*. Studying their depictions of the violent and gruesome contortions of a body in mourning, I argue, elucidates the role of mourning in their writing process.

3.

BLACK BLOOD; BLACK BILE:

Melancholic Bodies in 'Madame Bovary' and 'Light in August'

*J'ai eu, tout jeune, un pressentiment complet de la vie. C'était comme une odeur de cuisine nauséabonde qui s'échappe par un soupirail. On n'a pas besoin d'en avoir mangé pour savoir qu'elle est à faire vomir.*⁶³⁹

- Gustave Flaubert, letter to Maxime Du Camp (1846)

*'There are some things which happen to us which the intelligence and the sense refuse just as the stomach sometimes refuses what the palate has accepted but which digestion cannot compass.'*⁶⁴⁰

- William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Introduction: *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August*

⁶³⁹ Letter to Maxime Du Camp (C, I, 261 [7 April 1846]).

⁶⁴⁰ AA, 151.

The central comparison of this chapter takes its cue from the twin secretions of black liquid at the end of *Madame Bovary* (1856) and *Light in August* (1932):

Il fallut soulever un peu la tête, et alors un *flot de liquides noirs* sortit, comme un vomissement, de sa bouche [my emphasis].⁶⁴¹

Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, or fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the *pent black blood* seemed to rush like a released breath [my emphasis].⁶⁴²

Emma Bovary dies after a grotesque and prolonged session of retching. As her corpse is prepared for the funeral, it posthumously discharges an elusive black liquid as its final spew. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas is pursued through Faulkner's fictional town of Jefferson, Mississippi until he is finally caught, killed, and castrated by a mob of white men. Like Emma, it is in the moments after Joe's death that his body expels a black liquid as its final act. Flaubert and Faulkner have kept the biological cause and visual descriptions of these purged black fluids vague, which I take as an invitation to link these posthumous liquids not only to one another, but to humoral black bile (*melaina-kole*).⁶⁴³ Despite its lack of scientific grounding, 'black bile is meaningful', David Eng notes, precisely because 'it acquires a particular significance from its vast range of potential meanings'.⁶⁴⁴ This metaphorical substance provides a discursive space within which to read significance that links melancholia with the physiological, the historical, and the writerly.

In the Galenic system of bodily humours, the melancholic disorder is caused by an excess of black bile, a waste product that contaminates the blood stream, darkens the complexion (I shall revisit the racial significance of this point), and must be purged from

⁶⁴¹ *MB*, 456-57.

⁶⁴² *LLA*, 185.

⁶⁴³ I have followed Jonathan Flatley's spelling of *melaina-kole* in Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁶⁴⁴ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (eds), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 8.

the body.⁶⁴⁵ ‘Melancholia is black bile’, Charles Taylor explains, ‘[t]hat’s what it means. Today we might think of the relationship expressed in this term as a psycho-physical causal one. An excess of the substance, black bile, in our system tends to bring on melancholy’.⁶⁴⁶ However, in the traditional theory of humours, ‘black bile doesn’t just cause melancholy; melancholy somehow resides in it. The substance embodies this significance’.⁶⁴⁷ Taylor’s clarification reframes Emma’s and Joe’s excretions as final confessions to, and releases of, their melancholia.⁶⁴⁸ This chapter uses these final secretions to launch a discussion of Flaubert and Faulkner’s use of the corporeal to write oblique representations of historical mourning. I unpack these two images of black liquids to then move through the rich interchange between parallel depictions of mourning through tortured and sexualized relationships with food. This chapter compares Flaubert’s and Faulkner’s use of melancholic bodies to write about historical mourning and the ecstasy (both creative climax and corporeal escape) that creative work provides, in which mourning becomes an aesthetic end unto itself.

I: The Genius of Melancholy

*L’encre est mon élément naturel. Beau liquide, du reste, que ce liquide sombre!
et dangereux! Comme on s’y noie! comme il attire!*⁶⁴⁹
- Gustave Flaubert, letter to Louise Colet, 1853

⁶⁴⁵ Flaubert and Faulkner would have been acquainted with the Galenic system, which left its traces in nineteenth-century medicine. Rather than being wholly rejected, the Galenic system was continuously reinterpreted so that ‘the temperaments, which provided a medically useful classification of man, and a somatic theory of human behavior were preserved into the nineteenth century’. See Owsei Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 181.

⁶⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 188.

⁶⁴⁷ Taylor, p. 189.

⁶⁴⁸ Gail Paster notes that, for the early moderns, ‘emotions flood the body not metaphorically but literally, as the humors course through the bloodstream carrying cholera, melancholy, blood, and phlegm to the parts’ (p. 15). Something similar occurs here, where the black bile seems to contain, not just represent, her melancholia.

⁶⁴⁹ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 395 [14 August 1853]).

[A]rt, which has no place in Southern life, is almost the sum total of the Southern
artist. It is his breath, blood, flesh, all'.⁶⁵⁰
- William Faulkner, 'Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, 1933'

Faulkner said that *Madame Bovary* was a novel done 'perfectly'.⁶⁵¹ In paying particular attention to the depictions of the body in Faulkner, one sees the extent to which Flaubert's example loomed in his mind as he wrote. It therefore both is and is not surprising the extent to which Emma Bovary and Joe Christmas are comparable protagonists in analogous settings. Both Flaubert and Faulkner, masters of conveying provincial regionalism, brought the corporeal to life by depicting the struggle of the alienated person against its environment. 'Melancholy persons', Julia Kristeva writes, 'with their despondent, secret insides, are potential exiles'.⁶⁵² By excavating their 'secret insides', Flaubert and Faulkner write the stories of two exiles who are suffocated (and ultimately killed) by social norms and unmourned histories.

In the wake of an incursive modernity, the people of rural Normandy and Faulkner's fictional Jefferson, Mississippi cling to their religious rituals and provincial norms.⁶⁵³ In these socially restrictive climates, Joe's racial ambiguity and unknown origins cast him as a threatening 'stranger', and Emma is alienated by her inability to conform to the marital and maternal expectations of the 'mœurs de province'. The friction between the individual body and its environment is played out across a tension between private and public spaces in these communities. In *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August*, history is even more deeply hidden than in the novels examined in earlier chapters. Instead of the

⁶⁵⁰ Faulkner, 'Introduction to *the Sound and the Fury*, 1933', p. 291.

⁶⁵¹ Meriwether and Millgate (eds), *Lion in the Garden*, pp. 55-56 and 72.

⁶⁵² Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 64.

⁶⁵³ Though separated by nearly a century, the delayed modernization of the rural South in the 1930s meant that many of the implied tensions between the rural customs of Flaubert's nineteenth-century Normandy and the looming advent of modernity are more concurrent with the societal moment depicted in *Light in August* than one might expect.

Civil War battlefields, cityscapes of New Orleans, barricades of Paris and university campuses that stage *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *L'Éducation sentimentale*, intimate domestic spaces – kitchens, bedrooms – host the pivotal of these novels. For example, Emma finds her poison in the pantry of Homais's kitchen, and Percy Grimm castrates Joe behind Hightower's kitchen table. Emma's very house is a domestic prison – even the stillness of the furniture aggravates her sense of entrapment: 'les meubles à leur place semblaient devenus plus immobiles et se perdre dans l'ombre comme dans un océan ténébreux'.⁶⁵⁴ The dark waters of this image foreshadow the dark liquids at her death.

Enlisting these black liquids as lynchpin for this chapter's comparison makes even more sense when we remember that Emma's 'liquides noir' left a lasting impression on Faulkner, who reprised the Flaubertian image in *Sanctuary* (1931), published the year before *Light in August*: 'He smells black, Benbow thought; he smells like that black stuff that ran out of Bovary's mouth and down upon her bridal veil when they raised her head'.⁶⁵⁵ The reference is fleeting yet provides insight into how Faulkner read Flaubert. First, Faulkner emphasizes that it is not Emma who expulses the liquid, but the liquid itself that 'ran out' of her already dead body. Providing yet another indication of the prevalence of *Madame Bovary* on Faulkner's mind while writing, he uses Flaubert's attribution of agency to the liquid for Joe's 'black blood'. It is not the body that ejects the substance, but the 'black blood' that 'rushes out' of its own volition. It is a minute yet impactful choice: the reader is left with a haunting understanding of the liquid's power and significance.

⁶⁵⁴ *MB*, 160.

⁶⁵⁵ William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York: Random House, 2013), p. 4.

Faulkner's (re)reading also imagines a specification absent from the original Flaubertian scene: he gives a smell to Emma's black bile. Heightening the sensory stakes of these 'liquides noirs', Faulkner has this smell denote race. The foundational logic of nineteenth-century racial taxonomies and definitions links the history of melancholia to that of race, because the logic that upholds the racialization of blood in the nineteenth century finds its roots in classical humoral theory. David Eng explains:

Humoral theory joined with the new Enlightenment sciences to produce a less elastic, more fixed understanding of character as complexion - an understanding that fleshed out the period's other name for character: 'race'. While nineteenth-century scientific movements would interiorize character-as-complexion by locating 'race' in bone structure and blood, adding yet another layer to the palimpsest of modern racial thought, the 1771 definition of *complexion* foregrounds humoral theory's persistent ability to materialize the social conditions and constraints of racial difference.⁶⁵⁶

Recurrent references to complexion are found throughout medieval humoral writings, such as 'the melancholic is *pexime complexionatus* (worst complected)', or again: 'the physiological syndrome of *abundantia melancholiae* (abundance of melancholy humor) includes darkening of the skin, blood, and urine'.⁶⁵⁷ In her discussion of the racialization of mourning, Dana Luciano notes: 'Insofar as melancholia has itself been understood to emerge from a certain type of embodiment - one that is insistently if subtly racialized through its association with "black bile" and "dark-complected persons" - its clinical history gestures consistently toward not only the differentiation but also the pathologization of race'.⁶⁵⁸ In Faulkner's South, the blood metaphor was used to 'sustain and legitimate the concept of "race", and, within that conceptual scheme, blood is understood as constitutive of race'.⁶⁵⁹ Thereby, when Joe's 'black blood' is released from his 'pale' body, it can be read as a revelation not only of his melancholia, but his black

⁶⁵⁶ Eng and Kazanjian, p. 9.

⁶⁵⁷ Agamben, p. 11.

⁶⁵⁸ Dana Luciano, 'Passing Shadows: Melancholic Nationality and Black Critical Publicity in Pauline E. Hopkins's *Of One Blood*', in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 148-87 (pp. 157-58).

⁶⁵⁹ Jay Watson, 'Writing Blood: The Art of the Literal in *Light in August*', in *Faulkner and the Natural World*, pp. 66-97 (p. 77).

race. Amy Louise Wood notes that the spectacularization that ‘bolstered prolynching thought’ followed the logic ‘that to see an event was to understand its truth’.⁶⁶⁰ William Marston’s work exemplifies how blood began to be seen as a way of identifying truth in the first half of the twentieth century. His 1917 paper, ‘Systolic blood pressure symptoms of deception’, argued that blood pressure could be used to detect truth from lies.⁶⁶¹ For the people of Jefferson in *Light in August*, to see Joe’s ‘black blood’ was to understand, at long last, the ‘truth’ of his race.

Similarly, Emma’s black liquids confess the truth of her inner suffering, and Faulkner’s rewriting of the scene exaggerates this point. The final added detail I want to highlight in the passage from *Sanctuary* is Faulkner’s inclusion of the ‘bridal veil’, which is never mentioned explicitly in the Flaubertian version. In Flaubert, the image of black liquid upon white fabric is implied but left unsaid. As the black liquids run down from the open mouth of Emma’s corpse, Félicité and Mme Lefrançois cry out ‘Ah! Mon Dieu! La robe, prenez garde’, in a desperate attempt to save the last symbolic remnant of her failed marriage.⁶⁶² The reader knows that ‘la robe’ is a wedding dress because of Charles’s earlier specification (‘je veux qu’on l’enterre dans sa robe de nocces’⁶⁶³), but Flaubert never confirms whether or not the dress was successfully saved from these excretions. The fact that in Faulkner’s version the black ‘stuff’ ran ‘down upon’ her wedding dress is

⁶⁶⁰ Wood, p. 4.

⁶⁶¹ W. M. Marston, ‘Systolic Blood Pressure Symptoms of Deception,’ *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 2.2 (1917), pp. 117-63.

⁶⁶² *MB*, 457.

⁶⁶³ *MB*, 452. Charles becomes uncharacteristically decisive in this moment, refusing to give an explanation for this final wish other than: ‘je le veux. Faites-le’ (*MB*, 452). The image evokes Flaubert’s description of sister’s corpse, also dressed in her wedding gown, and like Charles, Flaubert kept a piece of her hair: ‘On lui a mis sa robe de noce [...]. J’ai à moi [...] une mèche de cheveux, la table et le pupitre sur lequel elle écrivait. Voilà tout, voilà tout ce qui reste de ceux qu’on a aimés!’ (*C*, I, 258 [letter to Maxime Du Camp, 25 March 1846]). Flaubert managed to encrypt what was left of her (note the *pupitre*) in his novel. According to Jacques Seebacher, Flaubert timed the day of Emma’s poisoning to coincide with the date of Caroline’s death. See Jacques Seebacher, ‘Chiffres, dates, écritures, inscriptions dans *Madame Bovary*,’ in *La Production du sens chez Flaubert, [Colloque de Cérisy]*, ed. by Claudine Gothot-Mersch and Jeanne Bem (Paris: Union Générale d’Éditions, 1975), pp. 286-96.

significant, because it denotes her last rebellion.⁶⁶⁴ In having her ‘liquides noirs’ spew onto her ‘bridal veil’, the ‘black stuff’, like the deceptions of her adultery, visually tarnishes her conjugal oath. Thus, Emma’s release of black liquid upon white cloth might be read as her post-mortem confession to Charles of her infidelity, but it is also, more importantly, a confession of her *melaina-kole*. By rewriting this scene with a more pronounced image of black liquid staining white bridal garb, Faulkner creates a visual cue of black upon white, ink upon page.⁶⁶⁵

These black liquids function as bodily confessions – black ink signing the white paper of her ‘robe de nocces’ and committing a racial identity to Joe’s ‘pale body’, writing upon the ‘level dead parchment color’ of his ‘flesh’.⁶⁶⁶ Joe is the colour of the page on which Faulkner writes, and thus left open to being written upon, in a novel (starting with its title) coloured by its lexicon of ‘light’ and dark. The contrast of ‘black blood’ and Joe’s ‘pale’ body seals the association – the black ink has finally arrived to write his final confession upon ‘that still, grave, inescapable, parchmentcolored face’.⁶⁶⁷ After their deaths, these abandoned bodies continue to speak without them, confessing into certainty that which they could not say, or know: in Emma’s case, it is the haziness of her sadness, in Joe’s, the uncertainty of his racial past. For Emma and Joe, bodily functions and the fluids of mourning become the ‘pent up’ toxic by-products of lives not lived and loss left un-mourned.

⁶⁶⁴ Bleikasten observes that the black ink against her white dress is ‘a symbolic reduplication of the book within the book,’ that is, not only Flaubert’s influence on Faulkner, and the fetishizing of writerly failure, but equally, of the ‘black stuff, fallen on a white page [...] terror and nausea exorcised in the very act of writing’ (Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy*, p. 252).

⁶⁶⁵ Poe, once again, provides revealing precedent: ‘there was blood upon her white robes’ (*House of Usber*, p. 108.)

⁶⁶⁶ Faulkner never describes the colour of Joe’s skin in explicitly racialized terms: ‘His face was gaunt, the flesh a level dead parchment color. Not the skin: the flesh itself’ (*LIA*, 17).

⁶⁶⁷ *LIA*, 123.

II: Mourning Interrupted

In *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August*, the post-Cartesian separation of body and mind is undone, and historical climates penetrate the bodies of these characters, affecting their blood streams, appetites, and excretions.⁶⁶⁸ This merging of outer and inner suffering is what allows Emma's and Joe's melancholia to embody France's and the American South's struggle to establish new identities as they could no longer hold onto the old. Historical mourning is manifested in the functions and fluids of the body.⁶⁶⁹ Stripped of their former claims to a sense of origin, these societies struggled to piece together new ones. Robin Mitchell argues that in the first half of the nineteenth century, 'ideas about Frenchness shifted from monarchy to republic to empire', and 'French social, cultural, and political upheavals in this transitional era hindered the crystallization of a single, concrete national identity'.⁶⁷⁰ The myopic town in which *Light in August* is set is infiltrated by the pressures of Northern industrialization beyond the perimeters of Yoknapatawpha County.⁶⁷¹ The industrial revolution seizing the agrarian society of the South is best exemplified by the timber mill where Joe works: '[I]n seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away'.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁸ See John Cottingham, 'Cartesian Dualism: Theology, Metaphysics, and Science', in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). On the modern tendencies to think of mental and physical as exclusive categories, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 189, and Gail Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁶⁶⁹ On the 'continuous reciprocal causation' in early modern thought between mind, body and atmosphere, see Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 163.

⁶⁷⁰ Robin Mitchell, *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020), pp. 10-13.

⁶⁷¹ King notes that this negotiation between old and new played itself out in Southern literature with the 'New South Creed', a popular form of post-Reconstruction fiction which sought to 'combine the best of the Old South with the spirit of modern industrial capitalism' (King, p. 252).

⁶⁷² *LLA*, 5. On the environmental waste and destruction that occurred during 'the cut-and-get-out phase of the timber industry in the Deep South: a half-century of intensive exploitation and wastefulness' that

Joe is described as a walking embodiment of this ecological violence when his grandfather says he is ‘a walking *pollution* in God’s own face’ [my emphasis].⁶⁷³

Even less conspicuously than in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, history hovers in the air of Emma’s Norman world.⁶⁷⁴ The same *brouillard* and *vapeur* of political indecision and corruption that surround Frédéric here infiltrate Emma’s membrane and become bound with her private sadness – what Tanner calls, ‘the fog in Emma Bovary’s head’.⁶⁷⁵ When she overhears Charles and Homais discuss her lover Léon’s departure to Paris, the cloud of her sadness pollutes the air of the entire region:

Le lendemain fut, pour Emma, une journée funèbre. Tout lui parut enveloppé par une *atmosphère noire* qui flottait confusément sur l’extérieur des choses; et le chagrin s’engouffrait dans son âme avec des hurlements doux, comme fait le vent d’hiver dans les châteaux abandonnés [my emphasis].⁶⁷⁶

As Homais and Charles worry about what might befall the provincial Léon should he move to Paris, a rare allusion to political upheaval is folded into a comment about the pollution of the city’s water: “‘j’ai peur pour lui [...] À cause du changement de régime [...] et de la perturbation qui en résulte dans l’économie générale. Et puis, l’eau de Paris, voyez-vous!’”⁶⁷⁷

Emma’s melancholia is defined by its inexpressibility, repeatedly fused and confused with the microclimate of her surroundings: ‘comment dire un insaisissable malaise, qui change d’aspect comme les nuées, qui tourbillonne comme le vent? Les mots lui manquaient

reached its peak when *Light in August* was published, see Lawrence Buell, ‘Faulkner and the Claims of the Natural World’, in *Faulkner and the Natural World*, pp. 1-18 (p. 2).

⁶⁷³ *LIA*, 54.

⁶⁷⁴ Teresa Brennan suggests that ‘the transmission of affect, whether it be grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin’ and ‘responsible for bodily changes’. See Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 1.

⁶⁷⁵ Tanner, p. 233.

⁶⁷⁶ *MB*, 172.

⁶⁷⁷ *MB*, 169.

donc’.⁶⁷⁸ The reader is thus caught trying to fasten Emma’s melancholia to a concrete cause. Ross Chambers writes: ‘Emma est en proie, en effet, à la mélancolie: on en reconnaît les symptômes classiques – dispersion du moi, torpeur et incapacité à agir, sentiment de coupure dans la continuité temporelle’.⁶⁷⁹ In *Crack Wars*, Avital Ronell reads Emma as an addict – an abuser of powders (sugar and poison), food, and of course, romantic literature.⁶⁸⁰ Her addiction to fiction is a hunger for the impossible alternative lives she might have had – an addiction to the counterfactual:

Avant qu’elle se mariât, elle avait cru avoir de l’amour; mais le bonheur qui aurait dû résulter de cet amour n’étant pas venu, il fallait qu’elle se fût trompée, songeait-elle. Et Emma cherchait à savoir ce que l’on entendait au juste dans la vie par les mots *félicité*, de *passion* et *d’ivresse*, qui lui avaient parus si beaux dans les livres.⁶⁸¹

With cruel irony, *félicité* appears in Emma’s marriage only in the form of the name of her maid, who witnesses her mistress’s immobilizing bouts of sadness: ‘[Emma] restait brisée, haletante, inerte, sanglotant à voix basse et avec des larmes qui coulaient’. She confides to Félicité: ‘c’est après le mariage que ça m’est venu’, the vagueness of ‘ça’ reveals the trouble of identifying what exactly it is that Emma mourns.

Elissa Marder diagnoses Emma with the titular term of her article, ‘temporal bulimia’, in which she ‘vacillates between failed attempts to preserve time, bitter attempts to consume it, and falls into despairing acts of abjecting it’.⁶⁸² Emma’s temporal disorder might be understood as a historical disorder, because it is not just that Emma slips between the life

⁶⁷⁸ *MB*, 57.

⁶⁷⁹ Ross Chambers, *Mélancolie et opposition: les débuts du modernisme en France* (Paris: José Corti, 1987), p. 202. See also Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1921).

⁶⁸⁰ Emma’s overuse of sugar and her overuse of substances generally (notably money), lends itself to Ronell’s argument that Emma exemplifies the nineteenth-century correlation between *ennui*, melancholia, and substance addiction (fine white powers of yet another nature). ‘*Madame Bovary*’, Ronell writes, ‘I daresay is about bad drugs’ – amongst these are the alternative realities of fiction (Ronell, p. 61). Ronell notes the importance of ‘an ontology of boredom’ with which to contextualise Emma: ‘We are reminded that for Baudelaire and Gautier, Flaubert’s contemporaries and acquaintances, this experience of nothing is at times laced with drugs’ (pp. 119-20).

⁶⁸¹ *MB*, 47.

⁶⁸² Elissa Marder, ‘Trauma, Addiction, and Temporal Bulimia in “Madame Bovary”’, *Diacritics*, 27.1 (1997), 49-64 (p. 61).

she leads and a counterfactual one she craves, but she is also, even more than Frédéric, entirely divorced from a sense of history: 'She is unable to understand her own history as she is incapable of understanding the history of France'.⁶⁸³ History is explicitly absent from *Madame Bovary's* pages: 1848 is a nonevent that nonetheless inflects the novel's melancholic atmosphere. Referring to earlier drafts of the novel, Green catches Flaubert in the act of intentional omission:

Emma's death is set in the last years of the July Monarchy, the novel first appeared in 1856, and so that temporal gap between the events of the novel and the 'maintenant' of the narrator is implicitly filled by the revolution of 1848 and its immediate aftermath. The conspicuous absence of explicit references to those events – an absence underlined by the fact that the significant dates of 'mardi 22 février 1848' and 'jeudi 4 décembre 1851' which appear in the early drafts have been omitted from the final version – subtly emphasizes their importance.⁶⁸⁴

At the root of Emma's inability neither to perceive nor to experience the passage of time (a Faulknerian malady if ever there was one) is the death of her mother, and more importantly, her subsequent inability to mourn this loss.⁶⁸⁵ This 'coupure dans la continuité temporelle' of her own life is mimicked by the novel's depiction of 'a history fragmented and debased'.⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, the very structure of the novel treats this death, like the events of 1848 and 1851, as a non-event, a mere sidenote to her personal history. Written almost as paraphrase in a sort of recapitulative flashback, the death of Emma's mother is folded into a sequence that covers her departure from the convent, return to the farm, and ensuing marriage to Charles in the span of a few paragraphs.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸³ Green, 'Time and History', p. 289. Robin Mitchell explains the extent to which France's loss of colonial influence shaped the tone of the century in which Flaubert wrote his text: 'standard terms used to describe French constitutional history since 1799 such as the *Empire* and the *Second Empire* elide the true imperial history and legacy of defeat.' See Mitchell, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸⁴ Anne Green, 'Time and History in *Madame Bovary*', *French Studies*, 49.3 (1995), 283-91 (p. 289).

⁶⁸⁵ Quentin's chapter in *The Sound and the Fury* moves between moments in time and thus both he and the structure of the chapter are victims to this 'coupure dans la continuité temporelle'. Quentin's grandfather's watch, which stops working, is a more literal incarnation of Chambers' 'coupure temporelle'.

⁶⁸⁶ Green, 'Time and History', p. 287.

⁶⁸⁷ Marder notes that 'this dead mother appears as the first unmistakable annunciation of the activities of involuntary forgetting, mechanical repetition, and failed mourning'. See Marder, 'Temporal Bulimia', p. 56.

Despite the romantic appeal of its rituals, Emma is incapable of committing to her maternal mourning:

Quand sa mère mourut, elle pleura beaucoup les premiers jours. Elle se fit faire un tableau funèbre avec les cheveux de la défunte, et, dans une lettre qu'elle envoyait aux Bertaux, toute pleine de réflexions tristes sur la vie, elle demandait qu'on l'ensevelît plus tard dans le même tombeau. [...] Emma fut intérieurement satisfaite de se sentir arrivée du premier coup à ce rare idéal des existences pâles, où ne parviennent jamais les cœurs médiocres.⁶⁸⁸

Her mourning is compared to the 'Lamartinien' romantic literature Flaubert so despised:

'elle se laissa donc glisser dans les méandres lamartiniens, écouta les harpes sur les lacs, tous les chants de cygnes mourants, toutes les chutes de feuilles, les vierges pures qui montent au ciel, et la voix de l'Éternel discourant dans les vallons'.⁶⁸⁹ Initially enraptured by the romance of her suffering, maternal mourning, like her adultery, leads to further *ennui*: 'Elle s'en ennuya, n'en voulut point convenir, continua par habitude, ensuite par vanité, et fut enfin surprise de se sentir apaisée, et sans plus de tristesse au cœur que de rides sur son front'.⁶⁹⁰

Emma's slippage from mourning into *ennui*, as Ronell reminds us, is symptomatic of a transition into melancholia: 'As symptom, boredom is co-originary with melancholia'.⁶⁹¹ Or as Marder writes it, 'nineteenth-century boredom, like melancholia, is mourning's dysfunctional evil twin'.⁶⁹² The sentence that immediately follows this passage describes Emma's rejection of the only other potential figures of maternal authority in her life: 'Les bonnes religieuses, qui avaient si bien présumé de sa vocation, s'aperçurent avec de grands étonnements que Mademoiselle Rouault semblait échapper à leur soin'.⁶⁹³ The

⁶⁸⁸ *MB*, 53.

⁶⁸⁹ Flaubert often mocked Lamartine, such as when he wrote to Louise Colet: 'C'est à lui que nous devons tous les embêtements bleuâtres du lyrisme poitrinaire, et lui que nous devons remercier de l'Empire: homme qui va aux médiocres et qui les aime' (*C*, II, 299 [letter to Louise Colet, 6 April 1853]).

⁶⁹⁰ *MB*, 54.

⁶⁹¹ Ronell, pp. 119-20.

⁶⁹² Marder, 'Temporal Bulimia', p. 57.

⁶⁹³ *MB*, 54.

style indirect libre, now referring to Emma as the nuns would have called her ('Mademoiselle Rouault'), takes an abrupt turn away from Emma's grief, just as her rejection of their healing reflects a rejection of the desire to recover from this loss through successful mourning.⁶⁹⁴ With foreboding language, Flaubert's next sentence writes: 'elle fit comme les chevaux que l'on tire par la bride: elle s'arrêta court et le mors lui sortit des dents'.⁶⁹⁵ The comparison allows him to play with the homonyms 'mors' and 'mort' which presage the vomiting of her grief when death (*la mort*), comes out of her teeth ('lui sortit des dents'). Arguably, the abjection of her *melaina-kole* is her final healing from the interrupted mourning of this early maternal loss. Kristeva argues that the 'loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation'.⁶⁹⁶ If acceptance of this separation is interrupted, and the mother's death refused or denied, then: 'the depressive or melancholic putting to death of the self is what follows, instead of matricide'.⁶⁹⁷

This analysis of *Madame Bovary* helps to read Joe's inability to engage with his own maternal grief - yet in Faulkner's world, any anxiety of origin is necessarily racialized. Having been abandoned at the orphanage by his maternal grandfather, the only reference to another maternal figure is his early memory of a girl at his orphanage who is mentioned only fleetingly, remembered more for her disappearance than her appearance: 'One day there was missing from among them a girl of twelve named Alice.

⁶⁹⁴ This co-extensiveness pervades nineteenth-century literature, as captured and explored in *Piotr Sniedziewski, The Melancholic Gaze* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018). This longing for the lost Other is crystallized by Flaubert's depictions and usage of the Orient, as shown in Ali Behdad, *Belated Travellers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁶⁹⁵ *MB*, 54.

⁶⁹⁶ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.* On the potential homophobia of Kristeva's gendered analysis of the matricidal impulse, see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 111.

He had liked her, enough to let her mother him a little'.⁶⁹⁸ The absence of Joe's biological mother (who we later learn died in childbirth) deprives him of the racial certainty needed to survive in Faulkner's South. While Emma is held captive in her domestic prison, Joe Christmas is imprisoned within the racial ambiguity of his 'parchment'-hued skin, which removes just as it invites every possibility in his racially-determined environment. The white men who kill Joe sought to avenge Joanna's murder not for the sake of the victim, but because the ambiguity of his racial origins threatened the certainty of their own.

The rapid industrialization in Southern towns such as Jefferson, Amy Louise Wood argues in her work on lynching, 'brought social changes that destabilized established norms, particularly racial norms'.⁶⁹⁹ 'In this new environment', Wood explains,

one's social status was less known and less fixed, and traditional forms of authority – the patriarchal household, the church, the planter elite – were called into question. Moreover, interactions in industrial workplaces and exchanges in the commercial marketplace could potentially place white and blacks on equal footing.⁷⁰⁰

With Joe Christmas, Faulkner writes a character who embodies all of these anxieties: he arrives to Jefferson as a stranger without origin, he moves freely between jobs which had previously been reserved exclusively for whites, and he begins a sexual relationship with the shunned Joanna Burden, the last living descendant of a white abolitionist family. Joe is allegedly hunted and killed for Joanna's murder, though his true crime for the people of Jefferson is his racial ambiguity:

He went into a white barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him. [...] [W]alking back and forth with people *passing* him a dozen times and not knowing it [...] He never did anything. He never acted like either a negro or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. [...] It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a [negro] too.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁸ *LLA*, 136.

⁶⁹⁹ Wood, p. 5

⁷⁰⁰ Wood, pp. 4-5. See also Schultz, Mark Roman, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

⁷⁰¹ *LLA*, 141.

Joe's choices and actions are all conditioned by the possibilities of what he does not know, rather than any reality he lives.⁷⁰² '[O]ne of [my parents] was part [negro]', Joe confesses to Bobbie – the first woman with whom he has a sexual relationship. When she asks '[h]ow do you know that?', he can only answer 'I don't know it'.⁷⁰³

Faulkner does not allow Joe to be an authority on his own racial identity, instead placing the onus of the question upon the reader. Applying Derrida's *Pharmakon* to Faulkner's use of multivalent descriptors, Pearson notes how words in his texts 'force the experience of undecidability upon the reader: any attempted translation of Faulkner's meaning would necessarily carry the phantom trace of the other potential translation'.⁷⁰⁴ The word 'parchment' has this effect upon the reader, who becomes complicit in the act of trying to determine what race the word denotes, a question that is in and of itself a construct of a society the novel condemns. '[S]tanding perhaps as Faulkner's greatest example of the constructedness of racial categories and their relationship to individual identity', writes Theresa Towner, 'is Joe Christmas, who murders and is murdered because of the American color line, yet who never knows where he stands in relation to it'.⁷⁰⁵

The narrative voice of the novel does not quite know where it sits in relation to Joe: like the famous 'nous' of *Madame Bovary's* first chapter, which implicates its reader as part of the town, Faulkner writes the chase and murder of Joe Christmas from the speculative

⁷⁰² While this chapter focuses exclusively on Joe Christmas and his relationship with Joanna Burden, the same might be said for the structure of the novel, which moves between several parallel and occasionally interlacing storylines that function as mirroring counterfactual versions of one another (i.e. pregnant Lena Grove searching for the father of her child or Reverend Hightower haunted by the ghosts of his parents).

⁷⁰³ *LLA*, 104.

⁷⁰⁴ Pearson, p. 358.

⁷⁰⁵ Theresa M. Towner, 'Unsurprised Flesh: Color, Race, and Identity in Faulkner's Fiction', in *Faulkner and the Natural World*, ed. by Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 45-65 (p. 59).

perspective of town hearsay.⁷⁰⁶ Tony Tanner reads Charles's humiliating act of 'carrying one's own desk' as 'the ultimate secular inversion of Christ carrying his own cross. What we are watching is the painful insertion of "le nouveau" into "nous"; or, to put it another way, the incorporation or absorption of "le nouveau" by the "nous"'.⁷⁰⁷ For Joe Christmas, a similar 'absorption' into society via crucifixion occurs: upon his death and 'confession' of black blood, he is finally absorbed when Faulkner writes that upon Joe's death, he entered 'into their memories forever and ever'.⁷⁰⁸

Spectators congregate in the intimacy of Emma's bedroom and Hightower's kitchen to witness the violent end to these bodies – Flaubert even has Homais describe Emma's death as spectacle: 'jamais le pharmacien n'avait cru qu'il pût y avoir de si épouvantable *spectacle*' [my emphasis].⁷⁰⁹ In the South, Amy Louise Wood explains, the 'ability to witness the death of the condemned was viewed as a community's prerogative', and Homais suggests a similar sense of entitlement to the viewing of Emma's demise when he quips about her leaking corpse: 'J'en ai vu d'autres à l'Hôtel-Dieu [...] Nous faisons du punch dans l'amphithéâtre aux dissections!'.⁷¹⁰ Amy Louise Wood explains that the ritualism of 'lynching spectacles emerged from and coincided with older forms of ritual

⁷⁰⁶ The entire town becomes a nondescript anonymous mass: 'Through the long afternoon they clotted about the square and before the jail – the clerks, the idle, the countrymen in overalls' (*LIA*, 141). The mass is further dehumanized as it transitions from 'they' to 'it': 'It went here and there about the town, dying and burning again like a wind or a fire until in the lengthening shadows the country people began to depart in wagons and dusty cars and the townspeople began to move supperwards' (*LIA*, 141).

⁷⁰⁷ Tanner, p. 237. See *Adultery in the Novel* for a discussion of the full breadth of Flaubert's use of *nous* in this famous opening scene, and the weight of its technical achievement.

⁷⁰⁸ When Byron hears Joe's name, he thinks: 'he had never thought how a man's name, which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is, can be somehow an augur of what he will do [...] It was as though there was something in the sound of it that was trying to tell them what to expect; that he carried with him his own inescapable warning' (*LIA*, 16). In his 1913 article 'The Crisis', Du Bois writes: 'Jesus Christ was a labourer and black men are laborers', and the novel's first observations of Joe Christmas are that he 'worked with silent and unflagging savageness' (*LIA*, 19). Du Bois continues: '(Christ) was despised of his fellow men and we are despised; He was persecuted and crucified, and we are mobbed and lynched'. See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Church and the Negro", in *Du Bois on Religion*, ed. by Phil Zuckerman (New York, 2000), pp. 99-100.

⁷⁰⁹ *MB*, 437.

⁷¹⁰ *MB*, 457, and Wood, pp. 4-5.

and spectatorship, such as public executions, that would have been familiar to white southerners'.⁷¹¹ In the lynching model Amy Louise Wood describes, victims were dragged from a private space (usually their home or place of work), into a public, historically loaded, execution space – one of the more horrifying examples taking place in a literal theatre.⁷¹² The presence of these spectators – witnesses from the communities which alienated them – violates the privacy of Emma's and Joe's grief and transforms their deathbeds into the confession stands of their final testimonies.

III: Digestion and Indigestion

*'Descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets.'*⁷¹³

– Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'

Joe's and Emma's final buccal abjections with which we began this chapter are given new significance when we parse through all that has entered their stomachs along the way. For these melancholic characters, food appears in extremes; whether coveted, gorged, rejected, or vomited, neither Emma nor Joe can ever simply eat. Food and the ceremonies of eating become both a sexual and morbid realm. In these texts, the work of mourning and that of digestion are placed on a continuum, a web in which bodily

⁷¹¹ She argues that it is likely not coincidental that 'the practice of lynching across the South at the turn of the 20th century coincided with the decline of legal public executions'. See Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 4.

⁷¹² Wood explains that this industrialization, which brought in working men from outside otherwise insular rural towns might account for the increase in lynchings which took place during this period: 'especially the most spectacular lynchings, occurred in these rapidly growing towns and cities'. Wood explains: 'Northern capital was flooding into the South to bolster rising industries like cotton mills, steel and iron, coal mining, lumber, and turpentine. Many African Americans, poor whites, and white yeoman farmers moved out of rural areas and into growing towns and cities to work in these industries' (Wood, p. 6).

⁷¹³ Foucault, p. 82.

functions and secretions become inseparable from psychological states, and creative output.

Mealtimes heighten Joe's and Emma's sense of separation and isolation from the societies in which they live. With notable intentionality, Flaubert and Faulkner stage their deaths at dinnertime ('on entendait le cliquetis des fourchettes sur les assiettes dans la salle à manger'; 'the townspeople began to move supperwards'⁷¹⁴). Joe runs to Reverend Hightower's kitchen 'to seek refuge', and Percy Grimm 'ran straight to the *kitchen* and into *the doorway, already firing*' to find him 'with that unfailing certitude' [my emphasis]. A century earlier, Emma runs with similar conviction towards the source of her death in Homais's kitchen, 'jusqu'au *seuil de la cuisine, où brûlait une chandelle* posée sur le fourneau' [my emphasis].⁷¹⁵

Flaubert makes Emma's stomach the principal site of her melancholia, with its patterns of gorging and vomiting, consumptions, and secretions synchronized with the ups and downs of her emotional desires and plummets. Drawn out of her home in a trancelike state by the sounds of the church bells, Emma goes to the priest in the hopes that religious structure might give definition to her melancholia: 'ce fut sans en avoir conscience qu'elle s'achemina vers l'église, disposée à n'importe quelle dévotion, pourvu qu'elle absorbât son âme et que l'existence entière y disparût'.⁷¹⁶ Half-listening to Emma's stumbling attempts to define her malady without cause, l'abbé Bournisien distractedly offers: 'C'est la digestion, sans doute? Il faut rentrer chez vous, madame Bovary, boire un peu de thé; ça vous fortifiera, ou bien un verre d'eau fraîche avec de la cassonade'.⁷¹⁷

While it is tempting to read the digestive focus of the priest's advice ('c'est la digestion,

⁷¹⁴ *MB*, 433 and *LIA*, 141.

⁷¹⁵ *MB*, 433.

⁷¹⁶ *MB*, 154.

⁷¹⁷ *MB*, 158.

sans doute?⁷¹⁸) as trifling and obtuse, the abbé Bournisien's confusion of Emma's melancholia for indigestion might instead be understood as a perceptive conflation.

The priest's conflation of Emma's digestive troubles and her grief finds logic when we consider the Abraham and Torok rereading of Freud's distinction between 'successful' and 'failed' mourning (melancholia). According to Abraham and Torok, in 'successful' mourning, the lost love object is *introjected* – they write that it is 'digested' and 'metabolized' by the mourning body. This is set in contrast to 'failed' mourning, where the lost object is *incorporated* (note the latin root *incorporo*; to embody), in which the mourner is unable to digest or 'swallow' the loss.⁷¹⁹ The refusal to mourn is channelled into the act of eating (both real and imaginary) the lost love object:

[I]n order not to 'swallow' a loss, we fantasise swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing. [...] When, in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love object we miss, this means that we refuse to mourn and we shun the consequences of mourning [...]. The fantasy of incorporation reveals a gap within the psyche: it points to something missing just where introjection should have occurred.⁷²⁰

I want to focus on two scenes in which this reading is elucidating: Emma's scoffing of the arsenic powder and Joe's childhood gorging of the dietician's toothpaste in the orphanage become desperate attempts to eat their lost mothers.⁷²¹

IV: Toothpaste

Emma Bovary and Joe Christmas are unable to digest their grief in part because they fail to even know what it is that they mourn.⁷²² Joe's motherlessness precedes his

⁷¹⁸ *MB*, 158.

⁷¹⁹ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, 'Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation', in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 125-38.

⁷²⁰ Abraham and Torok, p. 127.

⁷²¹ Saturn's cannibalism and consumption of his children is a useful reference point.

⁷²² Elissa Marder and Philip Weinstein also argue that Emma and Joe (respectively) struggle to mourn their absent mothers. See Philip Weinstein, *What Else But Love?: The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and*

consciousness and that of the novel. Just before Joe is found and killed, the reader learns that Joe's mother died during his delivery.⁷²³ His white maternal grandfather, Doc Hines, unsure of the racial origins of Joe's father, leaves the infant at an orphanage on Christmas day. I want to focus on a primal scene of abjection from Joe's childhood at the orphanage which creates a nexus of Joe's 'racially fated life' (as Laura Doyle puts it) with food, sex, and maternal grief.⁷²⁴

At the age of five, Joe develops a fixation for a sweet toothpaste kept in the office of 'the dietician' - a woman at the orphanage who, in her role of feeding the children, Joe sees as a 'mechanical adjunct to eating, food, the diningroom, the ceremony of eating'.⁷²⁵ Like a fine wine, she is described as 'young, a little fullbodied', and her flesh becomes for Joe impossible to disassociate from the texture and taste of the toothpaste he covets: 'smooth, pink-and-white, making his mind think of the diningroom, making his mouth think of something sweet and sticky to eat, and also pinkcolored and surreptitious'.⁷²⁶ During one of his furtive journeys to her office as he watches 'the pink worm coil smooth and cool and slow onto his parchmentcolored finger', he is interrupted by the sound of footsteps.⁷²⁷ Unwilling to relinquish the comforts of this sweet pink paste, he continues to eat as he hides behind a curtain in her office: 'he squatted, among delicate shoes and suspended

Morrison (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 156-83; Elissa Marder, "Trauma, Addiction, and Temporal Bulimia in *Madame Bovary*", *Diacritics*, 27.1 (1997), 49-64.

⁷²³ The novel emphasizes the importance of Joe's absent mother by structurally giving import to mothers: in a parallel plotline, Lena Grove is an expecting mother with an absent father. The novel opens with her arrival in Jefferson, and the delivery of her child coincides with Joe's death at the end of the novel.

⁷²⁴ Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 341. For a discussion of food in Faulkner, see Paul J. Rosenzweig, 'Faulkner's Motif of Food in "Light in August"', *American Imago*, 37.1 (1980), 93-112.

⁷²⁵ *LLA*, 51.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

soft womangarments. Crouching, he heard the dietitian and her companion enter the room'.⁷²⁸

Faulkner juxtaposes Joe's forbidden treat with the dietitian's illicit sexual encounter with her 'companion' on the other side of a curtain. '[S]quatted amongst the soft womansmelling garments and the shoes' in her room, immersed in his own consumption of 'the cool invisible worm as it coiled onto his finger and smeared sharp, automatonlike and sweet, into his mouth', he continues to eat the toothpaste despite 'the animal warning him that more would make him sick'.⁷²⁹ As the dietitian reaches a sexual climax beyond the curtain, Joe begins to have an out-of-body experience: '[he] seemed to be turned in upon himself, watching himself sweating, watching himself smear another worm of paste into his mouth which his stomach did not want. Sure enough, it refused to go down'.⁷³⁰ Gorging himself on food that reminds him of female flesh, to the sounds of sexual climax and tucked away in 'the rife, pinkwomansmelling obscurity behind the curtain' Joe feels 'the paste which he had already swallowed [lift] inside him, trying to get back out, into the air where it was cool. It was no longer sweet'. Accepting the abjection to come, Joe remains 'squatted, pinkfoamed, listening to his insides, waiting with astonished fatalism for what was about to happen to him. He said to himself with complete and passive surrender: 'Well, here I am'.⁷³¹ After eating the arsenic, Emma Bovary similarly watches herself as though from the outside: 'Elle s'épiait curieusement, pour discerner si elle ne souffrait pas'.⁷³² Like Joe post-toothpaste, after eating the arsenic Emma 'fut prise d'une

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ *LLA*, 52.

⁷³⁰ *LLA*, 52.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

⁷³² *MB*, 435.

nausé si soudaine’ and in a similar moment of passive recognition and acceptance thinks: ‘Ah! Voilà que ça commence! Murmura-t-elle’.⁷³³

Recalling Abraham and Torok and the edible description of the dietician’s female flesh (‘smooth, pink-and-white’; ‘something sweet and sticky to eat’), we can read this desperate desire to ingest this pulpy paste as Joe’s desire to ingest the missed love object – his absent mother. As Agamben explains, Freud sees ‘the oral or cannibal phase in the evolution of the libido’ in which ‘the ego aspires to incorporate its object by devouring it’ as a symptom of melancholia.⁷³⁴ Kristeva later notes that ‘Melancholy cannibalism [...] accounts for this passion for holding within the mouth [...] the intolerable other that I crave to destroy so as to better possess it alive. Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested ... than lost’.⁷³⁵

His foetal position in the ‘pinkwomansmelling obscurity’ of his hiding place bolsters this claim. It is also a moment of birth. Joe’s self-admission of existence by vomit (‘here I am’) alerts Joe to his own selfhood, and the dietician to the vomiting child behind the curtain: ‘you little rat! Spying on me! You little [negro] bastard!’.⁷³⁶ These words are the first racial identification Joe receives, and the first reference to his having any lineage beyond the walls of the orphanage. The dietician ascribes not only a racial identity to Joe, but also confirms his lack of parental legitimacy (‘bastard’), emphasizing the stakes of the absent mother in, as Joel Williamson writes, an ‘era of widespread anxiety about miscegenation’.⁷³⁷ Joe’s vomit is a confession – both to the sin he believes he has

⁷³³ *MB*, 435-36.

⁷³⁴ Agamben, p. 21.

⁷³⁵ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 12.

⁷³⁶ *LLA*, 52.

⁷³⁷ Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), p. 103.

committed (that of stealing the toothpaste), and for the first time in his conscious life, a confession to potential blackness.

Joe's racial self-conception is conceived in this moment of sexual intercourse between the dietician and the doctor, with parallel ejaculations of semen and toothpaste occurring in unison on either side of a curtain, creating a continuum of sex, race, and food that culminates in Joe's castration behind an overturned kitchen table – the weapon of choice is pointedly a 'bloody butcher knife'.⁷³⁸ Along the way, Joe cannot escape a tortured relationship between female flesh and food. He is eventually adopted from the orphanage by the religious and physically punitive Mr McEachern. When his wife, Mrs McEachern, attempts to take on a maternal role, Joe is unable to accept:

she was trying to take off his shoes, until he realized what she wanted. He put her hands away and removed the shoes himself. [...] She put him to bed. For two years almost he had been dressing and undressing himself, unnoticed and unassisted save by occasional Alices. [...] This had never happened to him before.⁷³⁹

While Joe concedes to his adoptive father's chores, Bible studies, and physical punishments because 'the punishment which, deserved or not, just or unjust, was impersonal, both the man and the boy accepting it as a natural and inescapable fact', he cannot accept Mrs McEachern mothering: 'it was not the hard work which he hated, nor the punishment and injustice. [...] It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated'.⁷⁴⁰

When Mrs McEachern's attempts to console Joe following her husband's beatings, Joe thinks: 'she, getting in the way, must give it an odor, an attenuation, an aftertaste'.⁷⁴¹ This

⁷³⁸ *LLA*, 464. Saturn, associated with melancholia, was 'the cannibal and castrated god' (Agamben, p. 13).

⁷³⁹ *LLA*, 166-67.

⁷⁴⁰ *LLA*, 167.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*

attribution of sensory elements to maternal care is part of the larger web woven between maternity and food in *Light in August*. Joe rebuffs Mrs McEachern's maternity by rejecting her provision of food: 'While she watched him he rose from the bed and took the tray and carried it to the corner and turned it upside down, dumping the dishes and food and all onto the floor'.⁷⁴² When writing this scene, I suspect Faulkner had Emma in mind, who throws over the dinner table, 'avec toutes les assiettes [...] de la sauce, de la viande, les couteaux, la salière' when she learns of Rodolphe's departure.⁷⁴³ Joe understands Mrs McEachern's desire to feed him as an attempt to force him into mourning: 'She was trying to make me cry. Then she thinks that they would have had me'.⁷⁴⁴ To mourn would be to acknowledge the maternal loss he is determined to deny.

Kristeva argues that the acceptance of the loss of the mother for the male in a heterosexist culture allows the lost object to be 'recovered as erotic object'.⁷⁴⁵ However, Joe is unable to mourn the absent mother and thereby unable to fulfil Kristeva's notion of erotic substitution without triggering the complex triecta between food, womb-like spaces, and vomit established in the dietician's office.⁷⁴⁶ In his relationship with Joanna Burden, mealtimes are the point of entry. Before each meeting, Joanna ritualistically lays out a pre-coital meal for Joe on the kitchen table before he comes up to her room. Living in an abandoned slave cabin on her property, Joe always enters her house – having been summoned by letter – by the kitchen window: 'he seemed to flow into the dark kitchen: a

⁷⁴² *LLA*, 65.

⁷⁴³ *MB*, 287.

⁷⁴⁴ *LLA*, 70.

⁷⁴⁵ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 28.

⁷⁴⁶ For more on Kristeva and mourning the lost mother, see Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 336-373.

shadow returning without a sound and without locomotion to the allmother of obscurity and darkness'.⁷⁴⁷

As a young adult, he begins a sexual relationship with Bobbie, a 'waitress' who works at a diner that serves as a front for a brothel.⁷⁴⁸ Inexperienced, Joe thinks to himself that 'there is something about [the diner] beside food, eating'.⁷⁴⁹ He indicates his affection for her by offering a box of candy (recalling the sweetness of the toothpaste), and when Bobbie tells Joe she will not have sex with him because she is 'sick' with menstruation, Joe flees to vomit in a womb-like clearing in the woods:

He reached the woods and entered, among the hard trunks, the branchshadowed quiet, hardfeeling, hardsmelling, invisible. In the notseeing and the hardknowing as though in a cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns [...] And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul. He touched a tree, leaning his propped arms against it, seeing the ranked and moonlit urns. He vomited.⁷⁵⁰

The scene merges fallic ('hard trunks') with prepartum ('the notseeing', 'cave', 'urns') imagery, and presages the dark liquids that end his life ('something liquid, deathcolored, and foul'). It is difficult not to think of Emma Bovary with this evocation of the feminine classical imagery of the urn, here cracked and leaking 'something liquid, deathcolored, and foul' - like the creative masterpiece that is Emma at the end of what Faulkner deemed a 'perfectly' concocted novel. We can press yet further with this association: Faulkner repeatedly used *chora* to describe his creative process. Discussing his process, Faulkner claimed that a writer is 'a creature driven by demons' whose 'only responsibility is to his art' and 'if a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the "Ode on a

⁷⁴⁷ *LLA*, 230. 'Seemed' insinuates a third, unsure, observing party. Joe enters through Joanna's window, which reminds him of escaping through the kitchen window of the McEachern house - again, with an insertion of doubt: 'perhaps the thought of that other window which he had used to use' [my emphasis] (*Ibid.*).

⁷⁴⁸ The narrative reinforces the connection between sex and food by referring to her as 'the waitress', and Joe brings her candy: 'he bought a stale and flyspecked box of candy [...]. He gave it to the waitress' (*LLA*, 79).

⁷⁴⁹ *LLA*, 73.

⁷⁵⁰ *LLA*, 78.

Grecian Urn” is worth any number of old ladies’.⁷⁵¹ Referencing the beloved vase of *Quo Vadis*, Faulkner again associates these receptacles not only with absent women, but also with creative perfection.⁷⁵² Describing the creative ecstasy he experienced while writing *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner wrote: ‘I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can make myself a vase like that which the old Roman kept at his bedside and wore the rim slowly away with kissing it. 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’.⁷⁵³ John T. Irwin notes that for Faulkner, ‘a writer’s relation to his material and to the work of art is always a loss, a separation, a cutting off, a self-castration that transforms the masculine artist into the feminine-masculine vase of the work’.⁷⁵⁴ Critics have read the blackness of Joe’s blood which emanates from his ‘loins’ after his castration as an allusion to menstrual blood.⁷⁵⁵ Joe’s death is then a final joining with the feminine – perhaps with the lost mother who died in childbirth before the novel began, or even with his literary mother, Emma Bovary.⁷⁵⁶ Flaubert was perhaps more correct than he intended when he wrote to Louise Colet that ‘[l]a littérature contemporaine est noyée dans les règles de femme’.⁷⁵⁷ Menstruation, the purging of unused reproductive materials, resonates with Irwin’s assertion that it is by a ‘separation that the artist’s self and his other self, the work, mutually constitute one another – loss is the very condition of their existence’.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵¹ Faulkner, ‘Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* (1933)’, p. 292.

⁷⁵² See Margaret J. Yonce, ‘Faulkner’s Use of “Quo Vadis”’, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 40 (1987), 393-400.

⁷⁵³ Faulkner, ‘Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* (1933)’, p. 292.

⁷⁵⁴ John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 171.

⁷⁵⁵ For example, see R. Urgo, ‘Menstrual Blood and “[Negro]” Blood: Joe Christmas and the Ideology of Sex and Race’, *Mississippi Quarterly*, 42 (1989), p. 401.

⁷⁵⁶ We see Faulkner also play with the nineteenth-century doctrine of the separate spheres, which imagines that there is a public male sphere and private, domestic realm which is decidedly feminine. Joe chooses to run to the kitchen (feminine) for the stage of his murder.

⁷⁵⁷ Letter to Louise Colet (C, II, 508 [15 January 1854]). Flaubert wrote in one of his earlier letters to Louise: ‘Le mouchoir est dedans, je vois ton sang. – Je voudrais qu’il en fût tout rouge’ (C, I, 273 [letter to Louise Colet, 4-5 August 1846]). For more on Flaubert’s (often erotic) letters to Louise Colet about menstruation, see Beizer, pp. 81-82.

⁷⁵⁸ Irwin, *Doubling*, p. 171.

V: Le bocal bleu

Emma chooses death by eating: ‘elle saisit le bocal bleu, en arracha le bouchon, y fourra sa main, et, la retirant pleine d’une poudre blanche, elle se mit à manger à même’.⁷⁵⁹ To fully understand the significance of Emma’s final meal, one must give due attention to how Flaubert intricately associates the imagery and role of not just food, but the ceremonies of mealtimes, kitchens, cutlery, tableware, and the fraught acts of eating and digesting in the development of her melancholia.

Madame Bovary is a novel about revulsion, one that tracks Emma Bovary’s growing disgust at her spouse from dinner table to deathbed. The wedding of their doomed marriage had centred around ‘un grand dîner’ at which villagers ‘resta seize heures à table’, despite being served ‘les bas morceaux des viandes’, and during her early attempts to her adhere to the exigencies of a town doctor’s wife, Emma commits to the pomp of mealtime ceremonies:⁷⁶⁰

Quand ils avaient, le dimanche, quelque voisin à dîner, elle trouvait moyen d’offrir un plat coquet, s’entendait à poser sur des feuilles de vigne les pyramides de reines-claudes, servait renversés les pots de confitures dans une assiette, et même elle parlait d’acheter des rince-bouche pour le dessert. Il rejaillissait de tout cela beaucoup de considération sur Bovary.⁷⁶¹

Ever since Erich Auerbach’s painstaking dissection of Emma’s own dissection of Charles’s eating habits, it has been impossible to overlook the importance of mealtimes in Flaubert’s creation of the abyss between Emma and her husband.⁷⁶² It is little surprise that

⁷⁵⁹ *MB*, 434.

⁷⁶⁰ *MB*, 13 and 40.

⁷⁶¹ *MB*, 40 and 58.

⁷⁶² See Erich Auerbach, ‘In the Hôtel de la Mole’, in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 454-92 (pp. 482-91).

Emma should reach for the arsenic at dinnertime since ‘c’était à l’heure du repas’ that her distaste for Charles would reach its height:

Il demandait à manger, et, comme la bonne était couchée, c’était Emma qui le servait. Il retirait sa redingote pour dîner plus à son aise [...] satisfait de lui-même, il mangeait le reste du miroton, épluchait son fromage, croquait une pomme, vidait sa carafe, puis s’allait mettre au lit, se couchait sur le dos et ronflait.⁷⁶³

By using the *imparfait*, the verbs themselves tell the reader of the suffocating repetition of this scene in Emma’s quotidien life. Their contrasted behaviour at mealtimes paints the discrepancy between Charles’s marital repletion and Emma’s starvation: ‘elle grignotait quelques noisettes, ou bien, appuyée du coude, s’amusait, avec la pointe de son couteau, à faire des raies sur la toile cirée’.⁷⁶⁴ Eventually, she rejects food altogether (‘elle but du vinaigre pour se faire maigrir, contracta une petite toux sèche et perdit complètement l’appétit’⁷⁶⁵) and hoping to demolish the ceremonies of her marriage after Rodolphe leaves for Rouen, she flings all the apparatus of ‘l’heure du repas’ across the house, the disassembled dinner table reflecting the disorder of Emma’s inner world: ‘La table, avec toutes les assiettes, était renversée; de la sauce, de la viande, les couteaux, la salière et l’huilier jonchaient l’appartement’.⁷⁶⁶ Abandoned by Rodolphe, she lies in her bed, as though waiting to be fed: ‘étendue, la bouche ouverte’.⁷⁶⁷ Later, when on her death bed, Charles sees ‘la face cadavéreuse d’Emma, étendue sur le dos, *la bouche ouverte*’, just as when Charles dies he is found, once again, at dinner time: ‘À sept heures, la petite Berthe, qui ne l’avait pas vu de toute l’après-midi, vint le chercher pour dîner. Il avait [...] *la bouche ouverte*’ [my emphasis].⁷⁶⁸ After her death, Emma’s mouth is described as a void: ‘[l]e coin de sa bouche, qui se tenait ouverte, faisait comme un trou noir au bas de

⁷⁶³ *MB*, 59.

⁷⁶⁴ *MB*, 91.

⁷⁶⁵ *MB*, 93.

⁷⁶⁶ *MB*, 287.

⁷⁶⁷ *MB*, 288. In Bakhtin’s conception of grotesque bodies, the open mouth is where ‘the world enters the body or emerges from it’, where ‘the body itself goes out to meet the world’. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 26.

⁷⁶⁸ *MB*, 281.

son visage'.⁷⁶⁹ Food is the organising device of Emma's melancholia, and the dinner table is the prison of the most excruciating scenes of her marriage: 'Mais c'était surtout aux heures des repas qu'elle n'en pouvait plus [...] avec le poêle qui fumait, la porte qui criait, les murs qui suintaient, les pavés humides; toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette'.⁷⁷⁰

Also served upon a plate is a brief yet pointed reference to the 'amertume de l'existence' for the wives of French history. Green highlights this consequential detail:

When Emma and her father are served a meal at the inn, it comes on plates depicting scenes from the life of Louise de La Vallière, mistress of Louis XIV, but the writing round the plate-rims offering reductive explanations of the pictures has been partly obliterated by the constant scraping of cutlery.⁷⁷¹

Green reads 'the emblematic value of these scratched dinner-plates as an image of the reduction and virtual obliteration of history' in the novel.⁷⁷² The grating soundtrack of cutlery against plates, an action which overtime has worn away Louise de La Vallière's history from these plates at the inn, is also the sound that slowly wears Emma away from her own life.

In her last desperate yet determined action of the novel, Emma is shown to the reader through Justin's eyes: 'Elle lui apparut extraordinairement belle, et majestueuse comme un fantôme; sans comprendre ce qu'elle voulait, il pressentait quelque chose de terrible'.⁷⁷³ Neither Justin, nor the reader, nor Emma, precisely understands 'ce qu'elle voulait'. Alarming yet beautiful through Justin's gaze, Emma modifies her voice in this moment, exaggerating her own femininity: 'Mais elle reprit vivement, à voix basse, d'une

⁷⁶⁹ *MB*, 454. Emphasis is also placed on Joe's mouth after his death: 'he lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth' (*LIA*, 464).

⁷⁷⁰ *MB*, 91.

⁷⁷¹ Green, 'Time and History', p. 287.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*

voix douce, dissolvante: “Je la veux! Donne-la-moi!”⁷⁷⁴ Emma has become, what Kristeva calls, ‘the feminine as image of death’: ‘the unrepresentable nature of death was linked with that other unrepresentable – original abode but also last resting place [...] which, for mythical thought, is constituted by the female body’.⁷⁷⁵ Thus, when we read ‘Je *la* veux! Donne-*la*-moi!’ [my emphasis], the imprecision of Emma’s demand for ‘la’ opens it to denote the feminine more widely: *La poudre?* *La mort?* *La mère* – she is asking for one and all of these things. Her demand to eat ‘la’ indicates a failure to mourn in a misguided and desperate attempt to hold onto that which is already lost through ingestion. Or even, as critics have suggested, ‘manger à même’ is manger *elle-même*.⁷⁷⁶ The ensuing vomit demonstrates she is unable to contain ‘la’ (mother/death/herself/powder) within her system. After this final meal, she can only abject, purge – her mouth moving in a grotesque phantom attempt to chew: ‘Elle roulait sa tête avec un geste doux, plein d’angoisse, et tout en ouvrant continuellement les mâchoires, comme si elle eût porté sur sa langue quelque chose de très lourd. À huit heures, les vomissements reparurent’.⁷⁷⁷

Like Faulkner’s Roman vase, ‘le bocal bleu’ is a receptacle that contains art as feminine death – it is loaded with the weighty technicality and artistry of a Flaubertian object. First, there is the colour of the ‘bocal’. Flaubert wrote that colour in a text should function like food: ‘La couleur, comme les aliments, doit être digérée et mêlée au sang des pensées’.⁷⁷⁸

The colour blue diligently follows Emma from when she first appears to Charles in the

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 27.

⁷⁷⁶ *MB*, 433. Compiling observations by Tony Tanner, Jean-Pierre Richard, and Avital Ronell, Marder writes: ‘Emma feeds herself with herself in a final attempt to provide herself with a body capable of containing and retaining her experience. It is not clear whether to read this ultimate auto-cannibalistic act as Emma’s attempt to feed her death with her life or as an attempt to feed her life with her death’ (Marder, *Temporal Bulimia*, p. 61).

⁷⁷⁷ *MB*, 436. Throughout the novel, Flaubert enjoys indicating the time of day, leading the reader to wonder who exactly is keeping such close track of the time – certainly not Emma, who is busy vomiting.

⁷⁷⁸ Letter to Louis Colet (*C*, II, 372 [2 July 1853]).

form of a letter sealed in blue wax requesting his medical services ('cette lettre, cachetée d'un petit cachet de cire bleue'⁷⁷⁹), to the air on the night of her death: 'des tourbillons de vapeur bleuâtre se confondaient au bord de la croisée avec le brouillard qui entrainait'.⁷⁸⁰ Just as Louise Colet first appeared to Flaubert in Paris wearing a blue gown, Emma is wearing a blue dress when she is first described to her reader: 'une jeune femme, en robe de mérinos bleu garnie de trois volants, vint sur le seuil de la maison pour recevoir M Bovary, qu'elle fit entrer dans la cuisine, où flambait un grand feu'.⁷⁸¹ A rereading of the novel recasts this moment as a foreshadowing of her death, set in an almost identical frame: 'elle s'avança jusqu'au seuil de la cuisine, où brûlait une chandelle posée sur le fourneau' where 'elle alla droit vers la troisième tablette, tant son souvenir la guidait bien, saisit le bocal bleu'.⁷⁸² After she has eaten the arsenic, her body seems to sweat out the blue bottle that contained the poison: 'des gouttes suintaient sur sa figure bleuâtre'.⁷⁸³ Emma has always been blue, and this 'bocal' has, through colour association, always been destined for her – her body becomes the new blue receptacle for the deathly white powder.⁷⁸⁴

Then, there is the poisonous white powder itself, which ominously resembles the sugar peppered across the novel's imagery. Sugar becomes a signifier of Emma's taste for lavish excess. Charles's mother observes that in Emma's home 'le bois, le sucre et la chandelle *filaient comme dans une grande maison*' [Flaubert's emphasis].⁷⁸⁵ Indeed, at the

⁷⁷⁹ *MB*, 15.

⁷⁸⁰ *MB*, 458.

⁷⁸¹ *MB*, 18. Flaubert's penchant for blue might possibly relate to the blue uniform he wore as a schoolboy. See Green, *Flaubert*, pp. 19 and 52.

⁷⁸² *MB*, 433-434.

⁷⁸³ *MB*, 437.

⁷⁸⁴ Nabokov has noted the recurrence of the colour blue: during Emma's ecstatic horse ride with Rodolphe wearing a blue veil, the blue jar of the arsenic, and 'the blue haze that hung about the countryside at her funeral'. See Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1980), p. 162.

⁷⁸⁵ *MB*, 59.

Viscount's *'grande maison'*, Emma notes the allure of the sugar's distinct whiteness: '[l]e sucre en poudre même lui parut plus blanc et plus fin qu'ailleurs'.⁷⁸⁶ The nonchalance of 'même' in 'le sucre en poudre même' positions the fine white powder as an afterthought, only for it to be revealed later that white powders will be the life-defining detail of the novel.⁷⁸⁷ Referencing the politically-charged discovery that sugar could be derived from French-grown beetroot rather than cane from colonial territories, Flaubert playfully wrote that '[a]utrefois on croyait que la canne à sucre seule donnait le sucre. On en tire à peu près de tout maintenant; il en est de même de la poésie'.⁷⁸⁸ This quip on the authentic derivations of sugar and poetry points to Flaubert's morbid play on the danger of the false friendships of white powders – and words. Emma first learns of the poison's location in the blue bottle in Homais's kitchen pantry when she witnesses the pharmacist's wife berate Justin (Emma's reluctant accomplice) for a nearly fatal confusion during which Mme Homais presents a counterfactual outcome, which later becomes Emma's reality:

tu as vu une bouteille, en verre bleu, cachetée avec de la cire jaune, qui contient une poudre blanche, sur laquelle même j'avais écrit: *Dangereux!* et sais-tu ce qu'il y avait dedans? De l'arsenic! et tu vas toucher à cela! prendre une bassine qui est à côté! – À côté! s'écria madame Homais en joignant les mains. De l'arsenic? Tu pouvais nous empoisonner tous!⁷⁸⁹

The scene emphasizes the economy of confusion that takes place in this novel – from the source of Emma's malaise to the discomfiting visual similarity between sugar and arsenic, between pleasure and poison. After Emma's death, Homais uses this confusion to conceal from the town of Yonville the intentionality of Emma's self-poisoning. Create yet another alternative reality, Homais rewrites the tale: 'les Yonvillais eurent tous entendu son histoire d'arsenic qu'elle avait pris pour du sucre, en faisant une crème à la vanille'.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁶ *MB*, 69. Bernard notes that powdered sugar was a rarity in the nineteenth century (p. 47).

⁷⁸⁷ *MB*, 434.

⁷⁸⁸ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 284 [27 March 1853]). For more on the economic and political stakes of sugar in France, see Jonna M. Yarrington, 'Sucre Indigène and Sucre Colonial: Reconsidering the Splitting of the French National Sugar Market, 1800-1860', *Economic Anthropology*, 5 (2018), 20-31.

⁷⁸⁹ *MB*, 342.

⁷⁹⁰ *MB*, 451. Michel Barnard points out that 'l'intervention de Homais n'est d'ailleurs pas innocente. Il ne cherche pas seulement à couvrir d'un voile le suicide d'Emma, il voudrait aussi faire oublier que l'arsenic

I want to pause at this ‘crème à la vanille’ to draw attention to the visual importance of the white hues and foamy, creamy textures of the alimentary imagery. Flaubert gives these elements syntactical agency: the cider can flaunt its own foam (‘le cidre doux en bouteilles poussait sa mousse épaisse autour des bouchons’⁷⁹¹) and the cream can float of its own accord (‘de grands plats de crème jaune, qui flottaient d’eux-mêmes au moindre choc de la table’⁷⁹²). In the scene of opulence and ecstasy at the ball, cream foams (*cidre, champagne, crème*) become dominant imagery, the frothy ‘mousse épaisse’, the ‘crème jaune’ denote Emma’s euphoric experiences as she glimpses the life that could have been at the vicomte’s ball. Kristeva reminds us, that white foams are the Aristotelian counterpoint to black bile: ‘froth (*aphros*)’:⁷⁹³

[Froth is] the euphoric counterpoint to black bile. Such a white mixture of air (*pneuma*) and liquid brings out froth in the sea, wine, as well as in the sperm of man. Aristotle combines scientific statement with mythical allusions as he links melancholia to spermatic froth and eroti, with explicit references to Dionysus and Aphrodite.⁷⁹⁴

Indeed, Aphrodite seems to be overlooking the revelries at the Vaubyessard ball, ‘une statue de femme drapée jusqu’au menton regardait immobile la salle pleine de monde’, while the Dionysian opulence gives everything a mythical sheen.⁷⁹⁵ Joe’s ‘pinkfoamed’ toothpaste smeared across his mouth as he experiences an orgasm by proxy also belongs to this joining of food and Aristotle’s ‘spermatic froth’. The contradistinction between black bile and froth is a reminder of the interrelatedness of melancholia and euphoria.

venait de chez lui’. See Michel Barnard, ‘*Madame Bovary* ou le danger des sucreries’, *Romantisme*, 103 (1999), 41-51 (p. 42). Vanilla was another luxury food with colonial origins in the nineteenth century.

⁷⁹¹ *MB*, 38.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*

⁷⁹³ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 7.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁵ *MB*, 68.

This plays itself out as Emma ‘descendit la côte en courant’ towards the arsenic ‘[d]ans un transport d’héroïsme’.⁷⁹⁶ As Emma makes her way to Homais’s kitchen, Justin observes that ‘la *pâleur* de son visage [...] tranchait en *blanc* sur le *fond noir* de la nuit’ [my emphasis].⁷⁹⁷ In this moment she appears to Justin as already dead: ‘Elle lui apparut extraordinairement belle, et majestueuse comme un fantôme’ (the verb *apparaître* redolent of the famous *apparition* of Madame Arnoux).⁷⁹⁸ Death and euphoria are brought into tension: as her ghostly form runs towards death, she is in some ways more alive (‘presque joyeuse’), with more volition, than ever before: ‘elle reprit vivement [...] “Je la veux!”’.⁷⁹⁹

In medieval humoral cosmology, the ‘physiological syndrome of *abundantia melancholiae* (abundance of melancholy humor) includes [...] burning in the gut [...] hysteria [...] epilepsy [...] and suicidal mania’.⁸⁰⁰ The list fits all too neatly with the burn in Emma’s arsenic-filled gut, her hysteria (we think of Baudelaire’s comment on the novel: ‘voilà le poète hystérique!’), and of course, Flaubert’s own suspected epilepsy.⁸⁰¹ In his correspondence, Flaubert describes his own epileptic fit with imagery he later reprises for Emma’s final moments before her manic dash towards the arsenic. He wrote to Hippolyte Taine in 1866: ‘Il vous semble que tout ce qu’on a dans la tête éclate à la fois comme les mille pièces d’un feu d’artifice’.⁸⁰² This imagery reappears during the spinning at the end of Emma’s life, when overwhelmed by debt and heartbreak ‘il lui sembla tout à coup que des globules couleur de feu éclataient dans l’air comme des balles fulminantes

⁷⁹⁶ *MB*, 432.

⁷⁹⁷ *MB*, 433.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰ Agamben, p. 11.

⁸⁰¹ Charles Baudelaire, ‘*Madame Bovary* par Gustave Flaubert’, in *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 477-82 (p. 481).

⁸⁰² Letter to Hippolyte Taine (*C*, III, 572 [1 December 1866]).

en s'aplatissant, et tournaient, tournaient, pour aller se fondre sur la neige'.⁸⁰³ Flaubert creates a discomfiting parallel between Emma's frenzied panic and her euphoric waltz at the ball, where her perceptions seem to short-circuit in a sensory overload: 'ils tournaient: tout tournait autour d'eux, les lampes, les meubles, les lambris, et le parquet comme un disque sur un pivot'.⁸⁰⁴ In Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), they identify 'habitual day-dreaming' as a cause of hysteria – the repetition and quotidian nature allowing it to slip into pathology. Emma is never able to shake herself out of the spinning from the ball – they launch a series of daydreams for an alternative existence from which she arguable never returns. However, Laura Marcus observes that 'hysteria and feminism' were 'two sides of the same coin – two forms of nineteenth-century protest against women's lack of freedom and self-determination'.⁸⁰⁵ In other words, Emma's day-dreaming in fantasy worlds – 'Ce fut donc une occupation pour Emma que le souvenir de ce bal' – which causes her hysteria, also enables her corporeal escape.⁸⁰⁶

Conclusion: The Ecstasy of Mourning

*'Les appétits de la chair, les convoitises d'argent et les mélancolies de la passion, tout se confondit dans une même souffrance; – et au lieu d'en détourner sa pensée, elle l'y attachait davantage, s'excitant à la douleur et en cherchant partout les occasions.'*⁸⁰⁷
 – Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

⁸⁰³ Tanner evocatively latches on to the cyclical imagery of Emma's perpetual turning and ties it to the anti-progression of Emma's life, which ends in death: 'she is forever "turning", seeking continual change, but the more she turns the more she finds she is more deeply immersed in sameness. When we read that "Emma had rediscovered in adultery all the banality of marriage" [...] We know that she is near to realizing the fatal futility of all her "turnings"' (p. 258).

⁸⁰⁴ *MB*, 432.

⁸⁰⁵ Marcus, p. 111.

⁸⁰⁶ *MB*, 79. There are significant parallels between this scene and the visit to the theatre discussed in Chapter One.

⁸⁰⁷ *MB*, 312.

Emma and Joe gain freedom through death – their final acts of abjection, disembodiment, and escape from the urges and confinements of the corporeal. Both find agency in their death: Emma defies Justin’s pleas exclaiming ‘je la veux!’ as she grabs the poison, and while Joe is technically murdered by Percy Grimm and his mob of white men, the omniscient narrative voice of the townspeople observes that ‘[i]t was as though he had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide’.⁸⁰⁸ Like an exorcism, as Joe dies, his ‘face, body, all seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself’ before ‘the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath’.⁸⁰⁹ In similar fashion, during Emma’s prolonged act of dying, something within tries to escape as her body experiences ‘l’effrayante accélération de ses côtes secouées par un souffle furieux, comme si l’âme eût fait des bonds pour se détacher’.⁸¹⁰ After he is killed, Joe finally achieves separation from the external menaces of race, alimentary torment, and sexual needs, when he separates from his body. Liberated from the corporeal, he is absorbed into the ‘nous’ (to borrow from Tanner’s reading of *Bovary*) as the men who have just killed him watch as he enters the atmosphere of the town:

upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it [...] it will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast [...] itself alone triumphant. Again from the town, deadened a little by the walls, the scream of the siren mounted toward its unbelievable crescendo, passing out of the realm of hearing.⁸¹¹

In a similar image, after her death, Charles watches Emma: ‘il lui semblait que, s’épandant au-dehors d’elle-même, elle se perdait confusément dans l’entourage des choses, dans le silence dans la nuit, dans le vent qui passait, dans les senteurs humides

⁸⁰⁸ *LLA*, 179. As we have discussed in previous chapters, ‘passively’ is always a loaded term in Faulkner, and the crux of the problem for Joe: his murder of Joanna Burden is the excuse for his lynching, but his true ‘crime’ for the people of Jefferson is his racial indeterminacy and ability to ‘pass’ – for ‘pretending to be a white man’ (*LLA*, 141).

⁸⁰⁹ See also Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁸¹⁰ *MB*, 448.

⁸¹¹ *LLA*, 465.

qui montaient'.⁸¹² Emma and Joe transform into sonic and atmospheric entities – decidedly incorporeal, a final separation from the maternal bodies that made and left them.

Joe Christmas's black blood seemed 'to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring'.⁸¹³ Just before Emma Bovary eats the arsenic, she sees 'des globules couleur de feu éclataient dans l'air comme des balles fulminantes'. Flaubert had his first epileptic fit while a student in Paris in 1844, and this experience was both traumatizing and enabling: it armed him with an excuse to abandon his law studies and dedicate himself entirely to writing.⁸¹⁴ In this sense his epilepsy, his 'feu d'artifice', was indeed his ecstasy, a creative release – or release into creativity that permitted Flaubert as writer to finally climax.⁸¹⁵

These out-of-body experiences – or moments of ecstasy (or *ex-stasis*) – come from extreme grief: for Emma this occurs just before she eats the arsenic, and for Joe, after his murder. In the early modern period, genial melancholy understood the 'spark of genius to be generated by a moderately inflamed melancholy humor'.⁸¹⁶ A melancholic disposition was a feature of those predisposed to acts of genius, and writing and creative

⁸¹² *MB*, 459.

⁸¹³ *LLA*, 187. On race and early modern conceptions of epilepsy, we might consider Othello's epileptic fit. See *Othello*, IV. 1. 42. See also Michael Trimble, 'Representations of Epilepsy on the Stage: From the Greeks to the 20th Century', *Epilepsy & Behavior*, 57.B (2016), 238-42.

⁸¹⁴ Flaubert described the experience as 'une maladie de la mémoire' and – like Joe's blood – as a *release*: 'un relâchement de ce qu'elle recèle. On sent les images s'échapper de vous comme des flots de sang' (*C*, III, 572 [letter to Hippolyte Taine, 1 December 1866]).

⁸¹⁵ Georges Perec noted in an interview that the 'essence of Flaubert is that tension between almost epileptic lyricism and rigorous discipline'. See Marcel Bénabou, 'Georges Perec Owns Up: An Interview', *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 29.1 (2009), 25.

⁸¹⁶ Noel L. Brann, *The Debate Over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 3. For an account of the intellectual history and classical sources of melancholy, see Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy and Art* (London: Nelson, 1962), pp. 3-112.

work were a cure for melancholy.⁸¹⁷ If writing is a healing mechanism with which to purge the bloodstream of *melaina-kole*, then ‘black bile’ becomes ink – a writer’s secretion, the black liquid that flows during a writerly act of mourning. Flaubert’s description of ‘liquides noirs’ (rather than specifying vomit, bile, or blood) capitalizes on the term’s equivocal connotations and associations. His elusive ‘liquides noirs’ acknowledge the breadth of black bile’s literary legacy and widen the substance’s symbolic potential.⁸¹⁸ As Beizer points out:

Given Flaubert’s image of his thought as a fluid that drips from his pen, we hardly need wait for the dying Emma Bovary to suffer from the bitter taste of ink or for a black liquid to stream from her corpse’s mouth in order to understand ink as yet another figure in the very fluid symbolic economy of the body.⁸¹⁹

Emma’s final black liquids evoke the other black fluids which preoccupied Flaubert’s mind: ‘L’encre est mon élément naturel. Beau liquide, du reste, que ce liquide sombre! et dangereux! Comme on s’y noie! comme il attire!’.⁸²⁰ Thus, mourning by writing releases the melancholia from the body, and with it exudes a visualized form of suffering through the act of creative work.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁷ Jonathan Flatley also argues that ‘whether melancholia has been seen to stem from physiological imbalances (too much black bile or *melaina-kole*), astrological misfortune (born under the sign of Saturn) [...] or unmourned losses, also persistent has been a sense that there may be a valuable aspect of this condition’. See Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁸¹⁸ Green notes that in Flaubert’s letters ‘the creative process is often described in terms of liquid: he visualizes his writing as emerging in a trickle or a torrent’. See Anne Green, ‘Flaubert: Remembering, Forgetting, Creating’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 39.1 (2010), 119-30 (p. 125). Also, in Faulkner’s first sentence Rosa’s voice – the voice of narration and her outpour of memories – is compared to a stream (AA, 3).

⁸¹⁹ Beizer, p. 102.

⁸²⁰ Letter to Louise Colet (C, II, 395 [14 August 1853]).

⁸²¹ For a discussion of Galen – the father of anatomy – and rhetoric, see Heinrich von Staden, ‘Anatomy as Rhetoric: Galen on Dissection and Persuasion’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 50.1 (1995), 47-66.

CONCLUSION

*'We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors [...] but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.'*⁸²²

- T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'

*'[A writer] robs and steals from everything he ever wrote or read [...] As every writer does, I took whatever I needed wherever I could find it, without any compunction and with no sense of violating any ethics.'*⁸²³

- William Faulkner, *Class Conferences at the University of Virginia*

⁸²² Eliot, p. 956 [1919].

⁸²³ *Faulkner in the University*, p. 115.

This thesis has argued that the prioritization and elevation of the counterfactual mode in the work of Gustave Flaubert and William Faulkner is symptomatic of the histories of defeat which they portray and in which they lived. I have demonstrated that failure, both historical and narrative, incites and necessitates the imagining of alternatives, and that the process of mourning the impossibility of these alternatives is an aesthetic end unto itself. Chapter One demonstrated how the absence of the overtly historical counterintuitively happens through tactical exaggerations and theatrical framing devices which, in turn, heighten the reader's sensibilities to the unsaid. In this mode of (not) writing history, Flaubert depicts the failure to engage with the real by moving his characters through a theatrical and defamiliarized hyperreality, whereas Faulkner draws our attention to the unreliability of historiographies by exaggerating and spectacularizing the processes of narration and the inherent confabulation and speculation involved in the transference of history. In both cases, architectural framing devices stage the action, separating private from public, fantasy from the real, and placing the reader as one of many 'spectators' engaged in watching and listening to (hi)stories. The elusive author at work is shown to reside in the atmospheres - the *Stimmung* - of these texts.

In Chapter Two, I read 'failure' through the lens of the family metaphor, and isolated instances in history and in the novels and lives of both authors where family lineage is disrupted, and/or corrupted. The fecundity of this metaphor allowed me to link the imagery and subject matter of their novels not only to each other, but also to the literary disruptions these authors have brought to the literary form. Ultimately, the counterfactual (children, mothers, and bloodlines) overtakes the factual in both the narrative and meta-narratives of these texts.

Chapter Three left the more overtly historical settings of *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Absalom, Absalom!* to turn to the private somatic manifestations of mourning in *Madame Bovary* and *Light in August*. Showing what happens to a body left to writhe in the counterfactual, these novels depict the degeneration of protagonists unable to mourn the real losses in their lives. This chapter also identifies a fundamental contrast of mourning the counterfactual: the creative ecstasy (both escape and pleasure) found in the act of grieving what could have been.

The overarching argument which has taken shape over these three chapters is that the oeuvres of Gustave Flaubert and William Faulkner are not only symptomatic of cultures of defeat but also orchestrate a reading process that replicates the experience of living those histories. Throughout, I have demonstrated that facts are dismissed as a valuable tool to tell these histories. Instead, confabulation – whether it be Frédéric's imagined interaction with Madame Arnoux, or Quentin and Shreve's (re)creation of Charles's and Henry's meeting – supersedes the recognizable figures and scenes of the Revolution of 1848 or the battles of the American Civil War. All of this is delivered through prose which, though radically different in the case of each author, is attuned to the sonority and topographic effects of its language. Faulkner's sensitivity to the Southern oral tradition ('we need to talk, to tell, since oratory is our heritage') is well-suited to Flaubert's own attention to assonance.⁸²⁴ All of this culminates to create a distinctive textual mood – both *Stimmung* and grammatical mood – that is informed by Flaubert's and Faulkner's historical contexts.

⁸²⁴ Faulkner, 'Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*, 1933', p. 292.

This thesis has argued that comparing Flaubert and Faulkner sheds new light on how history functions in their novels: a counterfactual realm takes hold, dethroning traditional models of writing history into fiction. A dominant melancholic mood overwhelms their prose as they depict historical moments that are about defeat and inaction, and thus unwritable and unmournable. Understanding that both authors wrote in milieus which saw a heightened production of counterfactual history narratives provides illuminating context to their narratives of stagnation and failure. France and the antebellum South were unable to release their imagined lost objects: a Revolution of 1848 which wanted the cataclysm of 1789, and a Confederate victory which would have affirmed the romantic fantasies of the Southern plantation myth. At the textual level, the repetitive and circular nature of the prose, structured around phonetic and topographical reverberations, mirrors the ruminating condition of counterfactual thinking. Multiple novels exist in each of the novels studied in this thesis: the one that is written, and those that remain unwritten. Flaubert and Faulkner have called out the inevitable counterfactualism of fiction, and resurrected words of uncertainty ('maybe', 'sans doute', 'et si', and 'doubtless') as the engines of fictional and historical writing.

Over the course of these three chapters, I have shown that comparative projects between authors that transgress boundaries of place, time, and language permit the identification of thematic undercurrents that cut across the specifics of historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts, allowing us to use metrics beyond genre and period to address the breadth of their influence. The non-linear format of these novels provides an example of how to conduct studies such as these, which benefit from thematic (as opposed to chronological) structuring to emphasize the cross-fertilization that takes place between works of fiction. Divisions between novels, authors, and literary movements are shown to be more porous

than expected. Counterintuitively, this does not reduce the differences between texts and authors, but rather widens the reach of what qualifies as ‘influence’ or interconnectedness. Texts become vessels that carry historical mourning, not only as a result of the content of their plot or the place in which they were written, but also in answer to the formal legacies of their literary predecessors, which they perpetuate in between their lines.

I: The Counterfactual Project

Comparative criticism can initially feel forced. However, this sense of fraudulence comes from the challenges of formulating the argument, rather than from the experience of reading. I did not encounter these authors chronologically, and when I did begin to read Flaubert, I found shadows of Faulkner’s prose between the lines of his predecessor’s text. Creating my own set of counterfactuals, I imagined Quentin Compson standing beside Frédéric on the bridge, laughing at this Parisian’s fanciful image of drowning himself in the Seine, compared to his own tragic and final death at the bottom of the Charles River, dragged down by the reliable and irreversible weight of irons tied to his feet. Similarly, Faulkner took some of Flaubert’s claims and brought them to unimaginable extremes. If the two writers had dined together, Faulkner might have laughed at *Bouvard et Pécuchet’s* dabble in nihilism. Just as I imagined Quentin provoking Frédéric, I often picture Faulkner challenging Flaubert: ‘Gustave, you want to write a book about nothing?’, he might have taunted: ‘allow me to introduce you to Vardaman, whose mother is a fish’. Or even: ‘I take your past conditional, Gustave, and raise you a chapter of pure confabulation’ or ‘I take your muddling of dates, and raise you complete and utter historical chaos, a novel that cannot even be understood without a genealogy printed

at the back'. Yet in taking Flaubert's initiatives and stretching them further, he found himself writing something closer to the literature which *Madame Bovary* forever changed: a fictional universe far more like Balzac's realism, featuring the incest and romanticism of Chateaubriand and dynasties of biblical proportions. If he had been given Faulkner's manuscript to edit, Flaubert would likely have drawn thick lines through crass grammatical misdemeanours and unforgivable conjugational breaches. Yet, like Sartre, Malraux, Borges, Morrison, and readers across the globe, I imagine Flaubert would also have found comfort in Faulkner's angered depiction of the violence of provincialism. That something of the heat, dust, and pollution of Faulkner's air would have moved Flaubert's own sensitivity to his environments. I suspect that despite himself, Flaubert would have learned from Faulkner just as the latter claimed to have taken 'whatever I needed wherever I could find it' from the early masters of modern fiction.⁸²⁵ Faulkner's novels are about literary hauntings - his novels haunt one another - and Flaubert, the 'writer's writer', haunts all of modern fiction; as Nabokov said: 'without Flaubert there would have been no Marcel Proust in France, no James Joyce in Ireland', and indeed no Faulkner in the American South.⁸²⁶ Equally, this thesis could not read Flaubert as it does without Faulkner's guidance.

Since beginning this thesis in 2014, several significant political and cultural shifts have altered how this project might now be received in 2022. A significant number of Confederate monuments in the American South (with accelerated momentum during the Black Lives Matter movement in June of 2020) have been dismantled, resurrecting with renewed urgency old conversations around memory and unsayable American histories. These relics of failed mourning have been confronted head-on in mainstream political

⁸²⁵ *Faulkner in the University*, p. 115.

⁸²⁶ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, p. 157.

discourse, with Faulkner repeatedly cited as a cornerstone figure for thinking through the burdens of memory.⁸²⁷ The conversation around how to approach Faulkner has also recently been reopened, most notably in Gorra's *The Saddest Words* (2020), which launched a series of articles on the trouble of Faulkner's racism for a modern white readership.⁸²⁸ The question raised by Faust's review of Gorra's book ('What to do about William Faulkner?') is one posed by and for a predominantly white critical engagement with Faulkner (in the United States). While the conversation has pivoted from more complacent sentiments (such as those expressed in a 2012 New York Times piece entitled: 'How William Faulkner Tackled Race - and Freed the South from Itself'⁸²⁹) to a more reticent approach (for example, that adopted by *The New Yorker's* 'William Faulkner's Demons' [2020]), a more pressing question might be to ask why there are so few African-American scholars of Faulkner's literature, and what this means for the future of Faulkner scholarship? Though much is not recent, the non-white Faulkner scholarship which does exist points to the directions Faulkner scholarship should take, such as a more sceptical engagement with white Faulkner criticism, as John T. Matthews notes that Thadious Davis does in *Faulkner's "Negro"* (1983) ('Davis' approach repeatedly chastens "white" criticism for its condescension, sentimentality, or odious stereotyping of black characters'⁸³⁰) and as Davis later argues, Faulkner's narratives should be read with and in

⁸²⁷ For example, see Drew Gilpin Faust, 'What to do About William Faulkner', *The Atlantic*, 326.2 (2020), 80-82.

⁸²⁸ Gorra's recent book has received mixed reviews for his reckoning with Faulkner's politics and ethics, especially in his final chapter (pp. 335-56). Current Faulkner criticism - as Drew Faust's (positive) 2020 review of Gorra's book indicates - is largely a reopening of the question that gives her article its title.

⁸²⁹ John Jeremiah Sullivan, 'How William Faulkner Tackled Race - and Freed the South From Itself', *The New York Times Magazine*, 28 June 2012. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/magazine/how-william-faulkner-tackled-race-and-freed-the-south-from-itself.html> > [accessed 25 November 2020].

⁸³⁰ See John T. Matthews, 'Review', *American Literature*, 56.1 (1984), 122-27 (p. 126) and Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983). For other examples of African-American Faulkner scholarship, see also Houston A. Baker Jr., *I Don't Hate the South: Reflections on Faulkner, Family, and the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Erskine Peters, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being* (Darby, PA: Norwood Editions, 1983); George E. Kent, 'The Black Women in Faulkner's Works, with the Exclusion of Dilsey, Part II', *Phylon Quarterly*, 36 (1987); and from amongst Faulkner's contemporaries, Sterling Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937);

light of those by 'blacks and black women who "tell" their stories differently and use different materials for legibility'.⁸³¹

Of that which does exist, it is one of Faulkner's most renowned readers and critics, Toni Morrison, who appears most frequently in this project. The inclusion of her work is yet another aspect which has shifted in its tone since the start of this thesis, when Morrison was a living author and critic: by the time of its completion, she had entered and redefined the influential cohort of deceased authors to which both Flaubert and Faulkner belong.⁸³² In French literary studies, the increase of university funding for postcolonial studies and francophone literature far beyond France's immediate border since the start of this project has widened the span of Flaubert's influence, and brought into relief the limitations of past scholarship. However, as this thesis has hoped to demonstrate, and further research could insist upon, this is largely due to missed opportunities to read Flaubert in unexpected places, and in conjunction with unexpected authors.⁸³³

The origins of this thesis and the framework for the counterfactual emerged not from studies of either Flaubert or Faulkner, but during a course on the Haitian Revolution. The historiographical debates concerning Haiti are a significant example of a mode of (not) writing the history of revolution/civil war more generally, and Haitian historiography provides a heuristic model via which we should read literary texts about the not-writing of

and Ralph Ellison, 'Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity', in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. by John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 1995), p. 86.

⁸³¹ Thadious Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 276.

⁸³² On Morrison and Faulkner, see John N. Duvall, 'Toni Morrison and the Anxiety of Faulknerian Influence' in *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned*, ed. by Carol A. Kolmerton, Stephen M. Ross and others (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), pp. 3-16; and Morrison's own dissertation on Faulkner and Virginia Woolf: 'Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated' (unpublished M.A. thesis, Cornell University, 1955).

⁸³³ There are many exceptions, for instance the work of Jennifer Yee, Lisa Lowe, and Margaret Mitchell.

history. Inspired by the work of Rolph Trouillot, it occurred to me as I read *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Absalom, Absalom!* that the oblique presence of history in these novels resonates with the 'unthinkable' and 'unwritable' nature of the Haitian Revolution. Though I have since reframed the overarching focus of this project away from the specificity of Haiti and towards a wider discussion of unwritable histories, Haiti is nonetheless present in between the lines of the current iteration of this thesis – just as it exists between the lines of these texts. The absent presence of Haiti and its revolution, a former colony of both France and the United States, is an unspoken undertow which charges the literary imaginations of both nations.⁸³⁴

II: Mourning the Alternative Novel

*'Maudit soit le jour où j'ai eu la fatale idée de mettre mon nom sur un livre! [...] Je demande à ce qu'on m'oublie, à ce qu'on me foute la paix, à ce qu'on ne parle jamais de moi!
Ma personne me devient odieuse!'*⁸³⁵
– Gustave Flaubert, letter to his niece, Caroline (1879)

*'I will protest to the last. It is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history [...]. I wish I had had enough sense to see ahead thirty years ago and, like some of the Elizabethans, not sign them. It is my aim, and every effort bent, that the sum and history of my life, which in the same sentence is my obit and epitaph too, shall be them both: He made the books and he died.'*⁸³⁶
– William Faulkner, letter to Malcolm Cowley (1949)

The alternative novels these authors might have written haunt those that we read today.

The specificity of Flaubert's ideals of a counterfactual prose he might have written animates the novels he does write: 'Oh mon dieu! si j'écrivais le style dont j'ai l'idée, quel écrivain je serais!'.⁸³⁷ He convinces his reader of the stakes of counterfactuals, while

⁸³⁴ On Haiti in the American literary imagination, see Michael J. Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

⁸³⁵ Letter to his niece, Caroline (*C*, v, 554 [22 February 1879]).

⁸³⁶ Faulkner to Malcolm Cowley, 11 February 1949, quoted in Ladd, *Resisting History*, p. 105.

⁸³⁷ Letter to Louise Colet (*C*, II, 30 [16 January 1852]).

simultaneously undermining their plausibility in the text itself, where counterfactuals are so indulged and fleshed with detail that to lose them becomes a moment of real loss despite their unreality:

Frédéric se meublait un palais à la moresque, pour vivre couché sur des divans de cachemire, au murmure d'un jet d'eau, servi par des pages nègres; – et ces choses rêvées devenaient à la fin tellement précises, qu'elles le désolaient comme s'il les avait perdues.⁸³⁸

The narrative buys into the reality of Frédéric's desires while simultaneously accepting their impossibility. Ultimately, counterfactuals overtake the factual in both the narrative and the literary meta-narrative constructed by the author. Repeated gestures towards the Balzacian character Frédéric fails to become and allusions to Walter Scott remind us of the more realist novel Flaubert might have written.⁸³⁹ The ghosts of lost possibilities also haunt Faulkner's work. On the experience of writing *The Sound and the Fury*, he said:

I was deliberately choosing among possibilities and probabilities of behaviour and weighing and measuring each choice by the scale of the Jameses and Conrads and Balzacs. I knew that I had read too much, that I had reached that stage which all young writers must pass through.⁸⁴⁰

These 'possibilities and probabilities of behaviour', the counterfactual, alternative lives his characters and novels might lead, are where his literary predecessors lie – and where we might most acutely find Flaubert. Just as Frédéric's alternative life as a Balzacian hero is explicitly mounted before us as a rejected possibility, so are the works of James, Conrad, and Flaubert present in Faulkner as explicit literary counterfactuals to the novel he ultimately writes. In a sense, these literary forefathers, in the act of writing, become counterfactual authorial identities – what Harold Bloom calls 'other selves': 'the poet is

⁸³⁸ *ES*, 67. Jennifer Yee argues that materialistic and fetishistic references to exotic objects show how 'Frédéric Moreau remains in thrall to the Romantic ideal of the exotic as transcendence, but this allegiance is repeatedly satirized, specifically through the linkage of the exotic with capitalism and colonialism' (*The Colonial Comedy*, p. 37).

⁸³⁹ Deslauriers advises Frédéric at the beginning of the novel: 'Mais je te dis là des choses classiques, il me semble? Rappelle-toi Rastignac dans *la Comédie humaine!* Tu réussiras, j'en suis sûr!' (*ES*, 22). For a discussion of Flaubert's reversal of Balzacian tropes, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), esp. pp. 171-215.

⁸⁴⁰ William Faulkner, 'An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*, 1946', in *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), pp. 296-300 (p. 298).

condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of *other selves*' [Bloom's emphasis].⁸⁴¹ These alternative novels within a novel draw our attention to the multivalent historical possibilities and interpretations at a given moment – both real and imagined.

This thesis has used the concept of mourning the counterfactual to frame the rich interchange between the work of Flaubert and Faulkner. Yet to mourn the counterfactual can also be seen as a way of describing the act of writing fiction in its simplest terms: it is the act of imagining an alternative reality, while acknowledging that it can never exist, and finding aesthetic purpose and meaning in that knowledge. The act of mourning becomes an end unto itself; the depiction of the counterfactual enables the 'ecstasy' (both creative climax and corporeal escape) of mourning. As Mr Compson tells Quentin, it is not the loss itself that torments him, but: *'you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you.'*⁸⁴² Flaubert and Faulkner are emblematic of this; they exploit the inevitable bereavement of the creative process as the *raison d'être* of their work. Unlike other works of fiction that prioritize the progression of a plot and the conventions of a readable novel, Flaubert and Faulkner allow the redundancy, boredom, delusion, masochism, disenchantment, and excreted liquids of melancholia to govern the bodies of both character and text. There is no attempt to depict the author as triumphant, just as no hero can survive their novel and no historical event reaches the satisfaction of certainty. Their novels confess to that which history must deeply deny: the untruths of inherited stories, the irrelevance of facts, the unreliability of language, and the simultaneity of past, present, and future events. The melancholic mood of Flaubert and Faulkner's work derives from

⁸⁴¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 25-26.

⁸⁴² *SF*, 112.

an authorial mourning that runs through each word, comma, and period for the counterfactual novels that might have been written, destroyed by the very act of ‘completing’ the ones that do exist.⁸⁴³ Like any written version of history, *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are haunted by their unwritable counterparts.

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⁸⁴³ According to Joseph Blotner, Faulkner’s most extreme drinking bouts tended to occur after the completion of a novel. This can be interpreted as a form of grieving, not only that the novel, in a sense, no longer belongs to him once finished, but also that the fantasy of the novel he might have written is forever lost to the reality of the published version. See Blotner, *Faulkner*, p. 719.

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