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Reading Joycean Comedy and Faulknerian Tragedy: Exploring the Significance of Location, Literary Influence and the Possibilities of Heroism with Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Quentin Compson in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*

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Colin Cummings

HONORS THESIS

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*For the good geniuses
who gave us the books.*

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PREFACE

I first encountered James Joyce and William Faulkner in an AP English course my senior year of high school, a course that was heavily concentrated on European and American modernism. We read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *As I Lay Dying*, and at that time I was first struck by the many similarities between Joyce's and Faulkner's prose styles. When I came to Colby, I read both of these books again: *As I Lay Dying* in Critical Theory my freshman year, and *Portrait* in Modern British Fiction my sophomore year. For whatever reason one begins to develop "favorite authors," Joyce and Faulkner became mine. I ended up taking an author course on William Faulkner my junior year, but had to take up *Ulysses* on the side, reading it three times to get a handle on it. The first pass at *Ulysses* was made as a *tour de force* the January of my sophomore year, the second reading was conducted with the help of Clive Hart's and David Hayman's *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays* that summer (one chapter and the corresponding essay at a time) and the third reading was made along with Weldon Thornton's *Allusions in Ulysses* the summer before my senior year (noting the allusions as I went). Both Joyce and Faulkner are trying at times, but for those who undertake their work with curiosity and care, the work is fulfilling and the writers are fascinating. Ellmann says of Joyce (but the same holds true for Faulkner):

We can move closer to him by climbing over the obstacles of our own pretensions, but as we do so he tasks our prowess again by his difficult language. He requires that we adapt ourselves in form as well as in content to his new point of view. His heroes are not easy liking,

his books are not easy reading. He does not wish to conquer us, but we have to conquer him. There are, in other words, no invitations, but the door is ajar. (4)

As Gloria Naylor writes of the door behind *Bailey's Cafe*, approaching the door to Joyce or Faulkner also "takes courage to turn the knob and heart to leave the steps." What comes in the following pages is my attempt to move beyond these doors "between the edge of the world and infinite possibility." In spite of the difficulty that comes in studying Joyce and Faulkner, I hope that anyone who finds themselves at their doors (by choice or chance) might turn the knob, leave the steps and turn the pages, even if it may seem like an "endless plunge" (76) at first sight.

C. C.

Waterville, Maine
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In regards to this project I am thankful for the insights of Professor Laurie Osborn, who kindly agreed to be my second reader, and Professor Doug Archibald, who generously took time out of his retirement to consult with me at various stages of the project. This project would not have been possible, however, without the extraordinary support of Professor Cedric Gael Bryant over the past four years. Professor Bryant's contagious love of literature and his critical intelligence have influenced my thinking and writing skills in ways that I do not think I can ever quite thank him enough for. It has been a distinct pleasure to study literature under his advisement.

Thank you to my mother for her love and generous support of my personal and intellectual endeavors throughout my life. I love you.

Finally, thanks to Alexis for her proofreading skills, patience, and her constant love and support. Thank you for putting up with me through the course of this project. At times I'm sure it wasn't easy, but I love you for that and more.

INTRODUCTION

In his preface to the Gabler edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Richard Ellmann writes that "Joyce's theme in *Ulysses* was simple," though he "invoked the most elaborate means to present it" (ix). Joyce's project, as it is thematized in *Ulysses*, is to show that casual acts of human kindness can enable the individual to live meaningfully in a world too often complicated by the problems of daily existence. In his writing, Joyce's project was always, as Ellmann contends, his attempt to demonstrate "how the human spirit might subsist while engaging in its affirmation" (JJ 101). For Joyce, this process begins by coming to the realization that the ordinary things in life are extraordinary if we consider the many mysteries one finds within oneself, in other people and in the outside world. Joyce's project of affirming the human spirit is analogous to William Faulkner's. In his Nobel Prize Address, Faulkner called his writing career a "life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit," stressing it was his firm conviction that "man will not merely endure: he will prevail" by continually attempting to act amidst adverse circumstances. Yet in spite of this similarity between Joyce's and Faulkner's ultimate artistic visions, Joyce set out to achieve his project through the comic means of the aggrandizement of the mundane (which is exemplified in the various parodic styles of *Ulysses*), whereas Faulkner paradoxically set out to achieve his through the tragic means of man's struggle in the face of doom and destruction (which is exemplified by the abundance of human suffering and fatalism in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*).

This distinct similarity between Joyce's and Faulkner's philosophical concerns (the affirmation of life in spite of its myriad difficulties), and the striking disjuncture between their aesthetic approaches (comedy for Joyce and tragedy for Faulkner), is where my interest in this project began. I sought to explore the lives and works of both writers in order to get a sense of how two artists could attempt to convey a similar message through such different means. The first thing I explore is a number of similarities between Joyce's and Faulkner's personal worlds (particularly their intimate connections to location) and their sources of literary influence (of particular interest here is the possibility of Joyce's influence on Faulkner). Second are the ways in which Joyce came to comedy and Faulkner came to tragedy as the organizing principle of the worlds they went on to create. Finally, I explore the ways in which Joyce's and Faulkner's projects are carried out with the characters of Leopold Bloom and Quentin Compson, and the ways in which these characters embody a number of qualities of the classical hero in spite of the manifold difficulties that come with living in the modernist world.

LOCATION AND LITERARY INFLUENCE: JAMES JOYCE & WILLIAM FAULKNER

Location

“I want to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book.”

— James Joyce, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (1934)

“Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top....so I created a cosmos of my own.”

— William Faulkner, Interview with Jean Stein vanded Heuvel (1955)

A hallmark of great literature is often the intersection of location and imagination within a written world. When one thinks of other literary productions in which reality and fiction collide both memorably and meaningfully, Dostoevsky’s and Tolstoy’s Russia, Hardy’s Wessex, Joyce’s Dublin, and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County all come to mind. However, for James Joyce (1882-1941) and William Faulkner (1897-1962), the process of interpreting and reconstructing experience through language was complicated by the changes and challenges of the modern world. Both writers were born before the turn of the twentieth century, a global sociopolitical period in which many nations were concerned with overriding objectives of power and progress. In the pursuit of such objectives, shifts in demographics, such as race, gender and class, began to occur on an international scale, thereby bringing the individual into increasing ideational conflict with society and social constructions of reality. Before and after the First World War, Joyce and Faulkner found that the controlling and ostensibly “objective” authorial presence that presides over Dostoevsky’s

psychological fiction or Tolstoy's and Hardy's realism was beginning to show its insufficiency as a narrative mode that could represent the pressures of an increasingly violent reality on the continually devalued individual in society. Thus as Joyce and Faulkner began to negotiate the balance between what T. S. Eliot calls "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920), these sociopolitical pressures became evident not only in these writers' personal worlds, but also in the worlds they went on to create. Yet in approaching Joyce's and Faulkner's cultural backgrounds, it is initially hard to imagine that two more dissimilar individuals could go on to make such similar and significant contributions to modernist literature: Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), "widely recognized as the greatest novel of the twentieth century" (Rainey 211), and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), acclaimed as "America's greatest twentieth-century experiment in the art of the novel, one that compares favorably with James Joyce's highly celebrated *Ulysses*" (Williamson 4). Moreover, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) is also considered to be "one of the greatest American novels ever written" (Hamblin 1).

While Joyce grew up in the rapidly evolving urban environment of Dublin, Ireland, a landscape more typical of modernism in works such as Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), Faulkner grew up in Oxford, a rural town in Mississippi that was readily associated with the Agrarian tradition. Yet moving beyond these geographic and cultural specificities, it becomes increasingly apparent that both writers came of age in similar periods of unsettling social and political change. As Joyce witnessed and experienced the reverberating effects of English rule and Roman Catholicism in a

continually oppressed Ireland, Faulkner witnessed and experienced the fall of Agrarian culture after the Civil War in the American South. In this regard, Joyce's and Faulkner's historical differences are instructive, and their work ultimately proves to have more than an accidental relationship to one another.

Ireland's failure to secure its independence in Joyce's youth proved to be both an impediment and an inspiration all his life. What resulted were feelings towards Ireland that oscillated between a hatred¹ of an "ignorant and famine-stricken and treacherous country"² on the one hand, and a recognition of "the beauty and doom of the race of whom I am a child"³ on the other. Joyce left Ireland for the first time in January of 1903, leaving for Paris (where he would complete *Ulysses* and spend the majority of his life). In Paris, Joyce encountered a culture rich in literature, theater, painting and music. Art was everywhere for him to enjoy, but he was compelled to return to Ireland only four months later on account of his mother's health. After his mother died in August, Joyce did not linger in Dublin for very long, and left again in October, this time for Zurich. Although Joyce remained away from Ireland until 1909, his letters reflect that Dublin was continually present in his mind. While in Trieste in 1905 and Greece in 1906, Joyce often wrote his Aunt Josephine and his brother, Stanislaus, with various requests for magazines, books⁴ and maps⁵ pertaining to Dublin, comments and questions about current events,⁶ and the occasional admission

¹ J. Joyce's letter to Nora Joyce, October 27 1909.

² J. Joyce's letter to Stanislaus Joyce, January 12, 1911.

³ J. Joyce's letter to Nora Joyce, November 19, 1909.

⁴ J. Joyce's letter to Mrs. William Murray, December 4, 1905.

⁵ J. Joyce's letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 6, 1906.

⁶ J. Joyce's letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 13, 1906.

that “I wish someone was here to talk to me about Dublin.”⁷ Joyce returned to Ireland once again on July 29, 1909 with “mixed feelings about everything to do with Ireland except the necessity of his return to it” (JJ 285). He stayed just long enough to sign a contract for the publication of *Dubliners*, and wrote to his wife, Nora, expressing emphatically how “sick, sick, sick [he was] of Dublin,” and how much “[he longed] to be out of it.”⁸ Yet while Joyce sometimes described Dublin as “the city of failure, of rancour and of unhappiness,”⁹ throughout his life he consistently felt a need to “[present] Dublin to the world,”¹⁰ and even aspired to become “the great writer of the future in my country.”¹¹ When Joyce visited Dublin for the last time in 1912, once again regarding the yet unpublished *Dubliners*, he left with an idea of Ireland already in his head that would stay with him in various forms until the day he died. When Joyce was asked in later life if he would ever go back to Ireland, he would often reply, “Have I ever left it?” (JJ, qtd Joyce 302). As Richard Ellmann states, Joyce “could not exist without close ties [to Ireland], no matter in what part of Europe he resided; and if he came to terms with absence, it was by bringing Ireland with him” (302). Thus, when Joyce’s wife and children went back to Ireland in late 1922 Joyce refused to accompany them, choosing instead to continue what he often referred to as his “volunteer exile.”¹² Yet by this time Joyce had already given the Irish people “one good look at

⁷ J. Joyce’s letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 6, 1906.

⁸ J. Joyce’s letter to Nora Joyce, August 22, 1909.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ J. Joyce’s letter to Grant Richards, October 15, 1905.

¹¹ J. Joyce’s letter to Nora Joyce, September 5th, 1909.

¹² J. Joyce’s letter to Stanislaus Joyce, February 28, 1905.

themselves”¹³ in *Dubliners* (1914); “forged in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race” (224) with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916); and provided a “picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared it could be reconstructed out of [his] book” (Budgen, qtd Joyce 69) in *Ulysses*.

Like Joyce’s relationship to Ireland, William Faulkner’s relationship to the American South is defined by feelings of attraction and repulsion. As a boy, Faulkner fell in love with the rich landscape of the South, and studied the fauna and the wildlife with great interest and care. His relationship with the land was sustained throughout his life as a hunter and a farmer; however, Faulkner’s ideological relationship to the South was complicated by the socioeconomic conditions of southern society after the Civil War. In the wake of Reconstruction, the South, a culture once comprised of prosperous plantations, had been transformed into a troubled society that tenuously held itself together with an antiquated Agrarian ideology that enabled it to carry on in spite of the disastrous effects of abolition and the shame of defeat. As Michael Kreyling contends in *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998), this Agrarian ideology was that of a “self-formed social group” (7) predicated on a provincial notion of culture that had been “created by an arbitrary set of social formulations... intent on keeping itself in business” (6). Being provincial, then, as Faulkner came to realize, was “not so much to declare a fact but to perform a style” (5), and to “be a southerner was to live [this] style” (3). Thus, while being present in the South was important for Faulkner

¹³ J. Joyce’s letter to Grant Richards, June 23, 1906.

both personally and artistically, his periods of absence from the South were significant in much the same way that Joyce's absences from Dublin were. As Joyce remarked that "I have lived so long abroad I can feel at once the voice of Ireland in anything,"¹⁴ Karl contends that, "like Joyce with Dublin, [Faulkner] had to escape [the South] periodically so as to preserve it in his imagination" (216).

When Faulkner went to Europe in 1925,¹⁵ his journey into what Frederick Karl calls "the den of modernity" (247) proved to be a formative one for not only Faulkner's sense of himself as an American, but was essential in shaping his image of himself as a writer. However, what Faulkner encountered in Europe both complemented and challenged the young writer's worldview, further advancing the transition from a provincial to a more universal, modernist, view of the world. Soon after he arrived in Europe, Faulkner wrote home expressing his disdain for "American Tourists"¹⁶ in Switzerland, observing that they "eat and sleep and sit on the sides of mountains, watching the world pass, and that's all."¹⁷ In Paris, however, Faulkner encountered (as Joyce did) a world of creativity, discovering at every step of the way that art not only existed, but that it also affected the ways people went about their daily lives. In the 1920s, artists flocked to Paris from across the globe and collected in cafes, discussing art for hours at a time.¹⁸ Moreover, discussions pertaining to literature, theater, painting and music were not limited to these small circles of artists, but rather art was

¹⁴ J. Joyce's letter to Nora Joyce on November 19, 1909.

¹⁵ Faulkner went to Europe from August 2 to December 9, 1925.

¹⁶ W. Faulkner's letter to Maud Faulkner, August 13, 1925.

¹⁷ W. Faulkner's postcard to Maud Faulkner, August 13, 1925.

¹⁸ In one of his sessions at the University of Virginia on March 13, 1958, Faulkner recalled that Joyce "was the only literary man that [he remembered] seeing in Europe." Faulkner also recounted that, while he was in Paris in 1925, he "knew of Joyce," and "would go to some effort to go to the café that he inhabited to look at him" (Gwynn, qtd Faulkner 58).

imbedded in popular culture. As Faulkner continued his tour of Europe, he wrote home to his mother that England was “the loveliest, quietest country under the sun,” and that it was “[no] wonder Conrad could write such fine books here.”¹⁹ By observing and internalizing the cultural differences between the lively modernist artistic activity of Europe and the relative inactivity of art in America at the time (especially in literature), both overseas and at home, Faulkner not only returned to Oxford with “a certain confidence about the reality of art and artists,” but after entering “the den of modernity,” Faulkner was incapable of returning home solely as an American writer (Karl 251).

Joyce’s and Faulkner’s relationships with place are superficially dramatized in each writer’s fastidious attention to dress, and in this way their physical appearances become signifying systems that expose the significance of their conflicted personal and artistic ties to location. Describing one of his earliest encounters with Joyce in the National Library in 1902, Oliver St. John Gogarty (immortalized as the infamous “Stately plump Buck Mulligan” who emerges in the opening lines of *Ulysses*) recounts Joyce’s physical appearance at the age of 20:

With his back towards the centre of the room a small figure was seated in front of a large map. He was wielding a compass in his computations. He wore—which was rather remarkable—a white yachting cap. Frayed white rubber shoes matched the cap. His

¹⁹ W. Faulkner’s letter to Maud Faulkner, October 9, 1925.

trousers of a dark grey cloth were worn and ran into little torn tassels at the heels.²⁰

Additionally, Gogarty mentions “an ash plant which [Joyce] used as a walking stick,” moving “silently in his white rubber shoes with a loping stride.” Approaching Joyce’s physical appearance as a semiotic system, the disheveled yet dandy-like appearance that he seems to have carefully cultivated as a signifier conveys detached and erudite, if not supercilious and esoteric characteristics as its signified. Syntactically, the signification of Joyce’s physical appearance implies resistance to the lack of a “lively intellectual movement”²¹ that Joyce diagnosed as one of the contributing factors to the “hemiplegia and paralysis”²² that made Joyce feel like a “stranger”²³ in his own “ignorant”²⁴ country. In this light it is not surprising that Gogarty recounts that upon approaching Joyce on this particular occasion, Joyce responded “without preamble” to Gogarty’s salutation (“Hello, Joyce”) that, “From Ushant to Scilly is more than thirty five leagues.” This is a curious but nonetheless scholarly *non sequitur* to what turned out to be a very brief exchange between Joyce and one of the many adversarial persons in his life.

Faulkner’s physical appearance functions as another semiotic system: he seems to have felt the need to play “the role of the imposter” (Karl 17) among other Southerners in his early life, although, as Karl mentions, Faulkner kept his “imposturing to a minimum” (18). While Faulkner “[embroidered] his exploits in the Royal Air Force”

²⁰ “The Joyce I Knew” by Oliver St. John Gogarty, published in *The Saturday Review of Literature* on January 25, 1941.

²¹ J. Joyce’s letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 13 1906.

²² J. Joyce’s letter to Constance P. Curran, N.D. (?) 1904.

²³ J. Joyce’s letter to Nora Joyce, October 27, 1909.

²⁴ J. Joyce’s letter to Stanislaus Joyce, January 12, 1911.

(18) with a “flashy uniform” (17) as a signifier in order to convey the “weary, wounded warrior” (236) who “limped, carried a cane, [and] affected a British accent” (236), Faulkner also appears to have felt extreme pressures to conform to the “strict social codes” of a Southern Agrarian culture in which “[homogeneity] of impulse and behavior was the sole law” (56). Thus Faulkner began to cultivate a “studied indifference to appearance” (17) that became the signifier of the “unkempt, unwashed Faulkner” (262), whose beard made him look, as he told his mother in 1925, “sort of distinguished, like someone you’d care to know.”²⁵ As this bohemian character developed, it ultimately led to the signified of the private “Mississippi Farmer”²⁶ who “[liked his] town, [his] land, [his] people, [his] life, [and was] unhappy away from it even though [he had to] quit it [and go to Hollywood to write in order] to earn money to keep it going.”²⁷ Yet as Karl points out, while Faulkner was laboring to restore his plantation, Rowan Oak (another signifier that seems to epitomize Southern Agrarian society), he also “found his literary ideas pulling against the very ideal [Rowan Oak represented],” as “moving among his fellow Oxonians, he lived in an imaginative world which not only clashed with them, but held no place for them” (7).

As Joyce came to recognize the “beauty and doom of the race of whom I am a child,” Faulkner also had to come to terms with fact that “the very culture he [wished] to struggle against and separate himself from [was] part of him, flesh of his flesh” (Karl 69). Yet while Faulkner was able to negotiate this personal and aesthetic tension

²⁵ W. Faulkner’s letter to Maud Faulkner, September 6, 1925.

²⁶ W. Faulkner’s letter to Mark Van Doren, April 1, 1950.

²⁷ W. Faulkner’s letter to William F. Fielden, April 27, 1943.

within his “own little postage stamp of native soil” (Meriwether 255), which became Yoknapatawpha County, Joyce did not feel he could accomplish this task while contending “with every religious and social force in Ireland,”²⁸ the forces that contributed to the sense of “paralysis”²⁹ he felt in Dublin. Thus where Joyce felt the need to maintain a physical distance from Dublin in order to facilitate an aesthetic distance with which to treat Ireland as the subject of his art, Faulkner managed to maintain an aesthetic distance from the South while living among his subject matter, ultimately doing so without aligning himself with the predominant Agrarian values and their “enticing ideology for a provincial, organic society” (Karl 400). In addition to the cultural and geographic importance of location, literary influence also played a central role in both Joyce and Faulkner’s actual worlds and the ways in which they went on to create fictional worlds.

Literary Influence

“Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.”

— Thomas Stearns Eliot, “Philip Massinger”

In spite of the cultural differences between James Joyce (the dandy³⁰) and William Faulkner (the farmer³¹), André Bleikasten states in *The Ink of Melancholy* (1990) that at the outset of their literary careers, both writers “were *anxious* to reach a fuller

²⁸ J. Joyce’s letter to Nora Joyce, September 16, 1904.

²⁹ J. Joyce’s letter to Constance P. Curran, 1904.

³⁰ Ellmann recounts that while working at a bank in 1906, Joyce was unexpectedly promoted to the reception desk in the front of the bank, probably because of a formal tailcoat that Joyce often wore as everyday dress (234).

³¹ Blotner recounts that while teaching at the University of Virginia, Faulkner (who often wore a tattered sport coat and frequently felt the need to stress that he was a farmer and not a literary man) would join members of the English Faculty for coffee in between classes, only to formally rise from the table fifteen minutes later with the declaration, “I wish you gentlemen would excuse me, I must go home and let the cow out” (483).

understanding of the relation between life and art" (27, my italics). "Anxiety" in this context is a telling word, as despite what has commonly been discussed as Joyce's Irishness or Faulkner's Southernness, Bleikasten locates Faulkner's and Joyce's maturation as artists in the broader terms of both T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920) and Harold Bloom's "Anxiety of Influence" (1973) rather than the rationalistic terms in which they have often been discussed. As location was significant to the process of reshaping lived experience through language, those writers who may have influenced Joyce's and Faulkner's artistic development are also significant for the ways in which both writers ultimately found it necessary to revise the literary techniques of the past.

Both Joyce and Faulkner appear to have immersed themselves in literature by reading broadly and consistently at very early ages. In time, both writers came to appreciate, and ultimately appropriate, stylistic and thematic elements from several authors. For instance, Joyce appropriated early experiments in stream-of-consciousness narration from the French writer Edouard Dujardin, the inspiration to challenge conventional morality from Henrik Ibsen and the transmission of real people into fictive characters from Dante Alighieri. Faulkner appropriated an interest in the literary application of human psychology from Fyodor Dostoevsky, the inspiration to reduce all human experience to literature from Thomas Woolfe and stream-of-consciousness narration from James Joyce's experiments with the technique in *Ulysses*. Joyce's and Faulkner's aesthetic interest in the "historical sense" of literature displays each writer's respective desire to write "not merely with his own

generation in his bones, but with the whole of the literature of Europe... and within it the whole of the literature of his own country" (Eliot, *Essays* 499). However, as Harold Bloom notes, the process of self-appropriation brings on "immense anxieties of indebtedness" that define the writer's conflicted relationship with their "strong precursors" (5). Throughout their lives, both Joyce and Faulkner commented openly regarding their relation to past writers, but were often more reserved when it came to their contemporaries.

In his biographical study, *James Joyce*, Richard Ellmann contends that Joyce "read so widely that it is hard to say definitely of any important creative work published in the late nineteenth century that Joyce had not read" (78). Moreover, Ellmann also contends that "the whole idiom of twentieth-century fiction was established in Joyce's mind by 1906" when Joyce said, in relation to Thomas Hardy's *Life's Little Ironies* (1894), that, "what is wrong with these English writers is that they always keep beating around the bush" (Ellmann, *JJ* 242). Over a decade before Joyce wrote *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917), and sixteen years before writing *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce was already seeking a more direct and immediate means with which to represent reality faithfully in fiction. Yet while Joyce once remarked in a letter to his brother, Stanislaus, that, "Without boasting I think I have little to nothing to learn from English novelists,"³² he simultaneously displayed a marked interest in the work of his contemporaries. Ellmann relates that whenever Joyce "read a review in an English newspaper that suggested that a writer was doing the same sort of thing he

³²J. Joyce's letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 6, 1906.

was, he ordered the book" (243). Thus, while Joyce seems to have resisted the "guilt of indebtedness" (Bloom 117) by openly rejecting the possible influence of English literature, his simultaneous attention to its progress in relation to his own writing suggests a more complex relationship to other artists, especially since strong writers make literary history by "misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (Bloom 5).

Joyce's conflicted relationship to his contemporaries is probably best illustrated in his long relationship with William Butler Yeats. As a young man, Joyce's primary interests were poetry and drama, and at that time he saw Yeats as "the principal living Irish writer" (*JJ* 68-69). For instance, Ellmann contends that the title of Joyce's first collection of poetry, *Moods*, "suggests the influence of W. B. Yeats, whose early volumes insisted that moods were metaphysical realities to be transfixed by the artist"³³ (51). However, as Joyce matured and his interests shifted from poetry and drama to fiction,³⁴ the two writers began to go in very different artistic and political directions, though they maintained a mutual sense of admiration throughout their lives.³⁵ Between 1906 and 1907, Joyce referred to Yeats as one of the "blacklegs of literature"³⁶ and a "tiresome idiot... quite out of touch with the Irish people."³⁷ While Joyce's distrust of Yeats was not always this extreme (and Joyce very rarely commented on Yeats in his letters or conversations with friends as he got older), it

³³ *Moods* has not survived.

³⁴ In regards to Joyce's artistic transition, the *Critical Companion to James Joyce* puts forward the following: "Some critics have speculated that Yeats' success as a poet influenced Joyce's decision to concentrate his energies on fiction" (374).

³⁵ When Yeats died on January 28, 1939, Joyce sent a wreath to his grave in southern France (*Letters*, III. 438n.1).

³⁶ J. Joyce's letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 6, 1906.

³⁷ J. Joyce's letter to Stanislaus Joyce, February 11, 1907.

stemmed, in part, from Yeats' involvement in the Irish Literary Revival, which Yeats pioneered with a number of other Irish artists. Joyce distanced himself from Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival throughout his life,³⁸ feeling their nationalistic preference for Irish art posed too many creative limitations, and was too often used by Irish artists for the purpose of self-promotion. In *Ulysses*, Yeats and his work are frequently alluded to in moments of praise³⁹ and parody,⁴⁰ strongly suggesting both the possibility of Yeats' sustained influence on Joyce⁴¹ as well as Joyce's continued ambivalence towards Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival.

In turning to Faulkner's career, one notes a similarly conflicted relationship to contemporary writers. In an interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel, Faulkner lists Dickens, Conrad, Cervantes, Flaubert, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, and Melville as the books "[he] knew and loved when [he] was a young man and to which

³⁸ In a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, dated July 12, 1923, Joyce wrote: "Yeats wrote me a pressing invitation to stay with him in Dublin, where, he says, there are many who share his admiration of me and a new literary generation anxious to meet me. I thanked him amicably and declined." Joyce declined a similar request in a letter to Yeats dated July 12, 1924. Yeats then invited Joyce to join the Academy of Irish Letters in a letter dated September 2, 1932. Joyce replied in a letter dated October 5, 1932 thanking Yeats again, but added that he saw "no reason why [his] name should have arisen at all in connection with such an academy" and declined.

³⁹ The poem "Who Goes with Fergus" from *The Countess's Cathleen* is one of the Yeats works most often alluded to in *Ulysses*, occurring in "Telemachus" (9), "Proteus" (49), "Scylla and Charybdis" (218), "Circe" (581, 608-09) and "Eumaeus" (656). Other poems include "The Adoration of the Magi," "The Rose of Battle" and "The Song of Wandering Aengus"

⁴⁰ In the "Scylla and Charybdis," Buck Mulligan says to Stephen, "Longworth is awfully sick... after what you wrote about that old hake Gregory... She gets you a job on the paper and then you go and slate her drivel to Jaysus. Couldn't you do the Yeats touch? ...The most beautiful book that has come out of our country in my time." (Joyce, *Ulysses* 216). In *Allusions in Ulysses*, Weldon Thornton lists the second part of this passage as an allusion to Yeats' "Preface" to Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, which Yeats opens with the statement: "I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time" (Thornton 218). In light of this allusion, the "Yeats touch" may be a sardonic reference to the common practice of Irish artists promoting other members of the Irish Literary Revival, which Yeats' preface to Gregory's book demonstrates.

⁴¹ Also in *Allusions in Ulysses*, Thornton contends that "Yeats' stories 'The Table of Law' and 'The Adoration of the Magi' ...reveal some striking parallels with the opening sections of *Ulysses*, both in characters' situations and in the authors and works alluded to" (47). In the *Critical Companion to James Joyce* it is noted that Joyce "had about a dozen books by Yeats in his Trieste and Paris libraries" (375). Moreover, in a letter to his son, Giorgio, dated June 25, 1935, Joyce relates that he was at a party where he was asked to "recite something beautiful," adding: "For a couple of hours there followed a succession of poems by Yeats. Everybody congratulated me on my extraordinary memory, my clear diction and charming voice. Someone added: What a pity [Yeats] is such a fool!"

[he returned] as you do old friends" (Meriwether 251), and the authors whose work Faulkner frequently acclaimed and even identified as "[his] own masters" (112). However, Faulkner rarely commented on his contemporaries (with very rare exceptions), and almost conspicuously absent from this list is James Joyce. The question of Joyce's influence on Faulkner is complicated by the Anxiety of Influence, which Bloom alternately calls "a disease of self-consciousness" (29), in that Joyce's work, especially *Ulysses* (1922), exhibits similar structural arrangements, thematic concerns and modes of stylistic experimentation to Faulkner's work, especially in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929).⁴² Structurally, the events that occur in *Ulysses* and the Quentin section of *The Sound and the Fury* both take place in the course of a single day: *Ulysses* being set in Dublin on June 16th, 1904, and the Quentin section being set in Cambridge, MA on June 2nd, 1910. Thematically, both novels explore social conflicts (including race, gender and class) of their specific regions (Dublin for Joyce and the South for Faulkner) and in doing so interrogate issues relating to time, history, family and how the individual might meaningfully inhabit a world that presents an increasingly hostile reality. Stylistically, both novels make use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, a narrative mode that attempts to mirror and reveal the fluid process of the mind as it voluntarily and involuntarily modulates between external description and interior monologue, between present tense experience and memories

⁴² See *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia* (1999), edited by Robert W. Hamblin and Charles A. Peek: "It is demonstrably clear that Faulkner was a close and careful reader of *Ulysses*, that his relationship with Joyce's novel was sustained through his formative years as a novelist, and that it was deepened and renewed, very likely by means of fresh readings, as he composed his first novels between 1925 and 1931: [from *Soldiers' Pay* to *The Sound and the Fury*]. Faulkner is linked to Joyce by complex patterns of influence and emulation, borrowing and 'theft'; imitation and resistance, rereading and rewriting" (207).

of the past and between the individual's own interior voice and the voices of others, all of which reside within the consciousness of a single self. This experimental narrative strategy attempts to capture the complexity of the mind in action, with all of the attendant associations, amplifications and elisions of detail and other changes of mind that take place simultaneously with each passing idea and sensory impression. In order to accomplish this, Joyce and Faulkner had to abandon the traditional objective narrative structures of the Victorian era. Both writers experimented radically with not only narrative technique, but also abandoned regular capitalization, punctuation and grammatical constructions. Moreover, Joyce and Faulkner often used language as the poet does: in addition to the poetic repetition of words and phrases throughout a novel, the spaces caused by the use of unconventional syntax and the absence of punctuation function like line breaks, as units of thought that make space for multiple readings and interpretations.

Joyce's use of stream-of consciousness narration, which Faulkner seems to have incorporated in *The Sound and the Fury*, appears often in *Ulysses* when the interior content of a character's mind is revealed.⁴³ Take for instance a moment in the "Lotus Eaters" episode, in which the protagonist, Leopold Bloom, has just left his home at 7 Eccles Street to begin his journey through Dublin:

Where was that chap I saw in that picture somewhere? Ah, in the
dead sea, floating on his back, reading a book with a parasol open.

⁴³ *Time Magazine* (January 29, 1934) called *Ulysses* a "stream-of-consciousness Bible," noting that while it "may well seem an esoteric work of art" (citing "its elliptical shorthand" and "its apparently confused and formless method"), the novel is ultimately "a work of genius and a modern classic." *Time* added that James Joyce is "an experimentalist with language," "farther out on a limb than any other writer in English."

Couldn't sink if you tried: so thick with salt. Because the weight of the water, no, the weight of the body in the water is equal to the weight of the. Or is it the volume is equal to the weight? It's a law of something like that. Vance in High school cracking his fingerjoints, teaching. The college curriculum. Cracking curriculum. What is weight really when you say weight? Thirtytwo feet per second, per second. Law of falling bodies: per second, per second. They all fall to the ground. The earth. It's the force of gravity of the earth is the weight. (72)

Here, in an early passage of a novel that becomes increasingly complex, the narrative is already more fragmented than that of Hardy, Thackeray or any other Victorian novelist. There is no use of the third-person point of view (there is no authorial intrusion), nor is there a traditional use of the first-person point of view (while "I" appears, the character is not narrating). Instead, as Bloom makes his way through busy Dublin City Centre, we are in his mind, and the narrative consists of unmediated thoughts. This passage begins with recollection of a photograph of a man floating in the Dead Sea that Bloom once saw, which he then associates with sinking. As he tries to remember the mathematical equation of buoyancy, his thoughts return once again to the past, this time to High school. He then plays with the alliterative qualities of two words from his previous thought ("Cracking curriculum") and his mind goes to another equation that recurs within Bloom's mind throughout *Ulysses* (the law of falling bodies).

Approaching a passage from the Quentin section of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, a number of similarities are evident:

Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time. It twinkled and glinted, like breathing, the float slow like breathing too, and the debris half submerged, healing out to the sea and the caverns and the grottoes of the sea. The displacement of water is equal to the something of something. Reducto absurdum [*sic*] of all human experience, and two six-pound flat-irons weigh more than one tailor's goose. What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. *He smell hit. He smell hit.*

(90)

Quentin has just left his Harvard dormitory, stopped on the Anderson Memorial Bridge, and is looking at the Weld boathouse (Quentin will return here later in the day to drown himself⁴⁴). This passage begins with a recollection of a Negro superstition, which he associates with the image of his own shadow and another image of the ocean. He then tries to remember (as Bloom does) the mathematical equation for buoyancy, but his mind goes to a recurring phrase (Reducto absurdum [*sic*] of all experience) and ends in another recollection with the italicized portion. Like the excerpt from *Ulysses*, this passage does not use conventional narrative forms, and the content of the narrative is limited to the unmediated thoughts of Quentin's mind. Stylistically, it also mirrors Joyce's use of stream-of-consciousness by mediating

⁴⁴ A small brass plaque on the Anderson Memorial Bridge actually commemorates Quentin's death. It reads "Quentin Compson / Drowned in the odour / of honeysuckle / 1891-1910."

between past recollections and present thoughts, in addition to the use of repeated phrases.

Several of the initial reviews of *The Sound and the Fury* immediately picked up on “Joycean” aspects of Faulkner’s fiction, although the import of this term varied. Clifton P. Fadiman wrote in his review entitled “Hardly Worth While” on January 15, 1930 that “the Joycean method of discontinuity has been entirely successful only when applied to materials of Joycean proportions.” The *New York Times Book Review* of October 19, 1930 was even more critical of Faulkner for writing in “fluid Joycean terms” at all, a pejorative reference to Faulkner following Joyce’s abandonment of traditional grammar for the sake of stream-of-consciousness narration.⁴⁵ Yet in one of the very first reviews of *The Sound and the Fury* that appeared in the “Books” section of *The New York Herald Tribune* on October 13, 1929, Lyle Saxon states that he believes *The Sound and the Fury* to be “a novel of the first rank,” and concludes that if other critics call Faulkner mad “then James Joyce is equally so.”

While reviewers were ready to discuss the Joycean aspects of Faulkner’s work, Faulkner seems to have been anxious to do quite the opposite. In an interview with Faulkner in 1932, Henry Nash Smith writes:

...when [Faulkner] had settled himself I tried to find out something about his sources. Almost every critic who has commented on *The Sound and the Fury* has thought that Mr. Faulkner must have derived

⁴⁵ In his essay “Wherefore This Southern Fiction?” (1939), Benjamin T. Spencer made a similar observation of Faulkner’s non-traditional prose, complaining of an “overelaborate sentence structure” that he argued was the result of Faulkner’s attempt to make “each sentence, as it were, a microcosm,” a project Spencer thought was “sometimes interesting,” but also “annoying,” “distracting” and “all too frequently downright bad” (Bassett 245).

his methods from Joyce. But no. "I have never read *Ulysses*," he said, reaching over to his table to hand me a 1924 edition of the book.⁴⁶ "Until recently I had never seen a copy." ... I took it that a friend had lent the book to him during his recent visit to New York. (Meriwether 30)

While the young Faulkner goes on to admit to Smith that he "had heard of Joyce, of course," and that it was possible that he "was influenced by what [he] heard" (31), Faulkner seems to have felt the need to dissemble when it came to acknowledging any direct influence from Joyce, perhaps in an attempt to mitigate critical speculation as to the possible extent of Joyce's influence. Yet in an interview titled "Mrs. Faulkner Interviewed by M. J. Smith," Estelle Faulkner recalls:

When we were married in 1928, [William] began what he termed my education. He gave me James Joyce's *Ulysses* to read. I didn't understand it. He told me to read it again. I did and understood what Mr. Joyce was writing about... Then I tried to read *Sanctuary* in manuscript form. I couldn't get the meaning [the first time]. But the second time, with *Ulysses* in the background, it wasn't difficult. (Meriwether 26)

Faulkner's use of *Ulysses* for "educational" purposes suggests that he considered it to be an instructive tool of some sort, and also seems to connote a sense of respect for the magnitude of Joyce's work. Neither of these possibilities is surprising, however, given

⁴⁶ Also in *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia* (1999) it is noted that Faulkner "did in fact own a copy of *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., fourth printing, January 1924) that bears his signature" (209).

that Faulkner later said that “James Joyce was one of the greatest men of my time” (Gwynn, qtd Faulkner 280), and advised that one “should approach Joyce’s *Ulysses* as the illiterate Baptist preacher approaches the Old Testament: with faith” (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 250).

Two decades later in Japan, during 1955, Faulkner was asked to comment on his opinions as to “more recently made work,” including Joyce, and as to whether he was “quite indifferent to European culture” (Meriwether 112). Speaking of Joyce in his response, Faulkner states that “Joyce was touched by the divine [afflatus],” and while “Joyce was, well, in a way, a contemporary of [his],” Faulkner goes on to explain that when he read Joyce it was “possible that [his] career as a writer was already fixed,” and thus there “was no chance for it to be influenced other than in the tricks of the trade” (112). Later on, during the same visit to Japan, Faulkner acknowledged that he had in fact “read *Ulysses* in the middle 20s,” although he asserted again that he had been “scribbling for several years” before he read *Ulysses* (197). While Faulkner began to write before reading *Ulysses*, it is possible that he “stole” something from Joyce. Faulkner said in the interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel that the writer is “completely amoral in that he will rob, borrow, beg or steal from anybody and everybody to get the work done” (Lion 239). This statement echoes T. S. Eliot’s statement in his essay “Philip Massinger” (1920) that “Immature [writers] imitate; mature [writers] steal; bad [writers] deface what they take, and good [writers] make it into something better, or at least something different” (*Essays* 182). Thus, William Faulkner is, as Karl contends, one of the first American modernist writers who can be

“discussed along with James Joyce,” one of the writers that he “idolized, imitated, and filtered through memory and practice” (5).

SETTING THE STAGE: WHEN WORLD BECOMES WORD

“The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It had not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the Script

Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir”
— Wallace Stevens, “Of Modern Poetry” (1942)

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
— Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

Before rendering their impressions of experience into written worlds, James Joyce and William Faulkner had to develop the necessary linguistic techniques with which to begin their respective literary projects, and in doing so negotiated between (and ultimately settled into) the Aristotelian aesthetic modes of comedy (in Joyce’s case) and tragedy (in Faulkner’s). In *The Ink of Melancholy*, André Bleikasten states that for Joyce and Faulkner, “the quest for a workable aesthetic went along with a search for identity” (28-29). Given the early ages at which they began writing, each writer initiated this simultaneously personal and artistic quest very early on: Joyce writing his first poem, “Et Tu Healy,” at the age of 9, after Charles Stewart Parnell’s death in 1891, and Faulkner beginning to write poetry as early as 1911, at the age of 14. As they tried their hands at poetry, Joyce and Faulkner began to realize that the formal conventions of poetry did not provide either writer with a medium in which they could meaningfully mature as individuals or artists. Instead, the rhythmic and metrical structures that they inherited ultimately hindered their creative potentials,

and as structure turned to stricture, their language lapsed into artifice. For instance, Richard Ellmann writes that after Joyce had arranged to publish his first book, *Chamber Music*, upon returning the corrected page proofs in April of 1907 (the year in which *Chamber Music* was published), Joyce “became suddenly queasy about the poems” (270). Joyce told his brother that he had resolved to cancel the publication of the book because he thought the poems sounded “‘false’” (Ellmann, *JJ*, qtd Joyce 270), or as Ellmann says, Joyce “did not want to stand behind his own insincerity and fakery... the poems were for lovers, and [Joyce] was no lover”⁴⁷ (207). Similarly, Frederick Karl explains that before Faulkner turned to fiction, the only thing that kept him from writing completely “artificial love poetry” were obvious pastiches of T. S. Eliot’s poetry, further contending that Faulkner’s “quest for self-expression was bound to be frustrated in these areas, for the language [was] all wrong”⁴⁸ (169). Or, as Faulkner said, quite frankly, “I look at myself as a failed poet,” “I found my best medium to be fiction. My prose is really poetry” (Millgate, qtd Faulkner 119/56). Thus for both Faulkner and Joyce, conventional poetry ultimately proved to be an insufficient medium with which to explore “the power and the complexity of the momentary or evanescent experience” (Shiach 7), something that became a central

⁴⁷ Take for example one of the poems from *Chamber Music*: “Gentle lady, do not sing / Sad songs about the end of love...Sing about the long deep sleep / Of lovers that are dead, and how / In the grave all love shall sleep: / Love is a weary now.” In *Portrait*, Joyce may have mocked his own failure with poetry in the form of Stephen Dedalus’ trite villanelle, which is equally artificial as the poetry of *Chamber Music*: “Are you not weary of ardent ways / Lure of the Fallen seraphim? / Tell no more of enchanted days... Your eyes have set man’s heart ablaze / And you have had your will of him. / Are you not weary of ardent ways?” Moreover, in the “Sirens” episode of *Ulysses*, Bloom thinks: “Chamber music. Could make a kind of pun on that. It’s a kind of music” (282).

⁴⁸ Karl discusses Faulkner’s artificial attempts to recreate the effect of T. S. Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in his own poetry, which for Faulkner was ultimately a failed attempt to find a freshness of language comparable to Eliot’s. Take for example a line from Faulkner’s adaptation, “Love Song” from “Vision in Spring”: “And now, while evening lies embalmed upon the west / And a last faint pulse of life fades down the sky / We will go alone, my soul and I.”

aesthetic concern for both writers after they abandoned received poetic form and pursued prose. As Richard Ellmann notes that Joyce “applied himself to creating a subtle and elaborate art” (203), Frederick Karl says that it is in reading Faulkner that “one recognizes how devoted he is to small things, miniatures, and minimums” (59). This shared interest in subtleties and small things is best exemplified in their attempts to capture the myriad minute details of the individual’s interior experiences moment-to-moment, which is Joyce’s project with Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* and Faulkner’s project with Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. Thus, when comparing Joyce’s and Faulkner’s similar preoccupations with minutiae to D. H. Lawrence’s sense of the novel as “the highest complex of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered” (Shiach, qtd Lawrence 11), it is not surprising that after unfruitful passes at poetry, both Joyce and Faulkner found their medium, and themselves to some degree, in prose.

Switching from poetry to prose as a personal and artistic endeavor, Joyce and Faulkner sought to write meaningful fiction in the modern world that could capture the effects of continually accelerating cultural change on the individual. This project called for subjective narrative structures that the tried and tired objective techniques of nineteenth-century literature provided no sufficient models for. As the headnote that prefaces this section suggests, Wallace Stevens’ poem “Of Modern Poetry” is an instructive metaphor for the artistic situation both writers found themselves in: Joyce and Faulkner could no longer “[repeat] what / was in the script.” As was the case with poetic form, the received narrative forms of their strong nineteenth and early

twentieth-century predecessors also became impediments to the growth of their respective creative projects as they attempted to mediate between the literary past and their present ambitions (“Its past was a souvenir”). In order to truly “learn the speech of the place,” “face the men of the time” (Stevens) and artistically “set [their] lands in order” (Eliot), Joyce and Faulkner found it necessary to resist longstanding and developed artistic tradition. Both writers transgressed the “traditional” artistic standards of the Victorian novel, all of which seemed to linguistically reproduce similar social and moral messages through simultaneously realistic and romantic techniques in order to master feelings of loss and uncertainty that resulted in the early nineteenth century, a moment of intense transition caused by the quickening pace of the Industrial revolution. For both writers, nineteenth-century literature represented the prison-house of replication (to revise Frederic Jameson’s trope of the “prison-house of language”), and the only way to break free from the torpor of artistic and cultural repetition they each observed in the history of literature and their social worlds was through radical experimentation with the word, which Bleikasten calls a “never-complete quest for form and meaning” (46). Therefore, Joyce and Faulkner had to continually develop modes of stylistic innovation (most notably their abandonment of traditional syntax for more fluid prose, the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique and the reapplication of mythology to the modernist world) that would enable them to sufficiently address the aesthetic and social demands of the period within their imagined worlds, thereby beginning the process of changing the literary “theatre” of the twentieth-century to “something else” (Stevens). Both writers’ revised

conception of the novel became, as Virginia Woolf said in “Modern Fiction” (1919), a means with which to “attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist”⁴⁹ (150). The novel, then, became an artistic space for exploration through radical experimentation rather than for moral instruction; however, in spite of their similar modes of stylistic experimentation, and their application of myth as a means of constructing their worlds and the characters who live within them (including Leopold Bloom and Quentin Compson), for Joyce the organizing principle became comedy, while for Faulkner it became tragedy.

James Joyce

Early on in his career, James Joyce discovered what Richard Ellmann calls “his lifelong conviction that literature was the affirmation of the human spirit” and, in doing so, made it his life and literary goal to explore how “the human spirit⁵⁰ might subsist while engaging in its affirmation” (*JJ* 101). As Joyce made this discovery, he also realized that he was quarreling not only with a “petrified morality” that

⁴⁹ In this essay, Woolf also states that of those writers who attempt use radical experimentation to come closer to life, “Mr James Joyce is the most notable” (150).

⁵⁰ It is important to note that Joyce’s use of the words “spirit” and “soul” carry secular rather than religious meanings. Like Wallace Stevens (who wrote in his poem “Sunday Morning”: “What is divinity if it can come / Only in silent shadows and in dreams... divinity must live within [oneself]”), Joyce is artistically interested in inhabiting the present-tense material world. However, Joyce does not secularize religious words in a comic fashion in order to diminish their philosophical weight, rather he is attempting to change the realm in which they apply from the metaphysical to the material world. As Virginia Woolf writes in “Modern Fiction”: “Mr Joyce is spiritual” in that he “is concerned at all cost to reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see” (151). Joyce is invested in conveying the impalpability of everyday experience in his writing, and as Ellmann says: “in Joyce’s work the soul—a word which he never renounced—carries off the victory” (*JJ* 390). When Joyce wrote a play in 1900, entitled *A Brilliant Career*, the dedication page read: “To / My own Soul I / dedicate the first / true work of my life.”

dominated Irish culture, but also with bad art that he felt many Irish artists were condoning (101). Thus, in conjunction with the lingering and deleterious cultural effects of centuries of English rule and Roman Catholic influence that ultimately caused Joyce to voluntarily exile himself from Ireland, Joyce also felt a need to remain independent from Irish writers (including William Butler Yeats) and their commitment to the Irish Literary Revival, which countered many of Joyce's modernist aims. Exile, then, was an action of both personal and artistic significance for Joyce, as his essay, "The Day of the Rabblement" (1901) suggests:

No man... can be a lover of the good unless he abhors the multitude;
and the artist, though he may employ the crowd, is very careful to
isolate himself. (Joyce 69)

Leaving Ireland was relatively easy for Joyce, but the process of finding a means with which to carry out his own artistic aims was much more difficult. However, as the focus of Joyce's reading shifted from poetry and fiction to drama (from Dante and Tolstoy to Ibsen), he began the process of developing a means with which to represent "*life's stage*" (JJ, qtd Joyce 275) in his own art.

When Joyce was 18 it was his view that fiction "dealt with individual quirks in terms of temporary conventions, while drama dealt with changeless laws of human nature" (74). Even as a young man, Joyce's interest in drama was leading him towards a dramatic prose style predicated on a "counterpoint between myth and fact" (369). This is evident in his early essay "Drama and Life" (1900), where Joyce explains that while the relationship between drama and life is of the "most vital character" (CW 39),

and while “drama [can arise] spontaneously out of life” (43), in art, realistic fiction is superior to strict realism:

Shall we put life— real life —on the stage? No... for it will not draw... Life indeed nowadays is often a sad bore. Still I think out of the dreary sameness of existence, a measure of dramatic life may be drawn. Even the most commonplace... may play a part in a great drama... Life we must accept as we see it before our eye, men and women as we meet them in the real world, not as we apprehend them in the world of faery. The great human comedy in which we all share, gives limitless scope to the true artist... the heroic cycle... is not an Antwerp legend but a world drama. (44-45)

As Ellmann contends, this is “Joyce’s strongest early statement of method and intention” (75); and over the next 22 years, as Joyce continued to “fuse real people with mythical ones” (75), he was also looking for a way to fuse fiction and drama in order to form an artistic framework that would enable him to depict “the great human comedy in which we all share” and to reenact the “heroic cycle” as it applied amid the pressures of the twentieth century. In order to achieve this project, Joyce set out to make “the fictional history of his own life the call to arms of a new stage” (152), and while Joyce attempted this project in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he ultimately succeeded with the comic justification of the commonplace in *Ulysses*.

T. S. Eliot’s essay “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” (1923) analyzes not only Joyce’s artistic project of exploring the affirmation of the human spirit as it relates to reality

and myth, but also the ways in which Joyce achieves this project in *Ulysses*. In defending Joyce's epic novel against Richard Aldington's contention that *Ulysses* distorts reality,⁵¹ Eliot likens *Ulysses* to the last section of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms," which he calls "one of the greatest triumphs the human soul has ever achieved" (WL 129). In Eliot's view, the style (or anti-style) of *Ulysses* is not just an "amusing dodge, or scaffolding erected by the author for the purpose of disposing his realistic tale" (128), but instead he views it as the "most important expression which the present age has found" (128). Discussing the task of the creative writer in the age of modernism, Eliot contends that the creative artist is now "responsible for what [he] can do with material which [he] must simply accept" (129-30), and further contends that by way of what he calls Joyce's "mythic method," which he defines as the "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (130), *Ulysses* explores the "possibilities of its place and time" (129). Eliot's essay is significant in two ways: first for the ways in which his comments identify the significance of myth and place in Joyce's aesthetic project, and second for the ways in which Eliot defends *Ulysses* from being viewed as an "amusing dodge" by indirectly addressing the significance of comedy in Joyce's work, both as a structural and a thematic device.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce explores what Eliot refers to as "the possibilities of place and time" through the framework of the Ulysses myth, and in doing so imbues Dublin

⁵¹ Eliot was responding to Aldington's "The Influence of Mr. James Joyce," which was published in the *English Review*, April 1921. Eliot contends that Aldington found *Ulysses* to be "an invitation to chaos, and an expression of feelings which are perverse, partial, and a distortion of reality" (Eliot 128-29). Eliot uses the early and late criticism of Thackeray on Swift in order to mitigate Aldington's critique of *Ulysses* and defend the new "method employed" (128) in the novel, which Eliot calls "'in advance'" of the times (130).

(and Leopold Bloom) with mythical and almost archetypal significance for all humanity. Writing for Joyce was in part an exercise in which he could liberate himself from the tragic history of his country, and in this process he came to appreciate and amplify the minute pleasures of life in Ireland as he incessantly joined myth and reality in his writing. As Joyce's brother, Stanislaus, wrote after the book was published, in *Ulysses*:

Dublin is stretched out before the reader, the minute living incidents start out of the pages. Anyone who reads can hear the people talk and feel himself among them.⁵²

In this portion of his letter, Stanislaus gets at the heart of Joyce's project as it comes to fruition in *Ulysses*: the justification of the commonplace. Significantly, this is exactly what Joyce wrote twenty-four years earlier, in "Drama and Life," where he said that even "the most commonplace... may play a part in a great drama." Thus as Joyce spent his early adulthood writing and experimenting with the possibilities of words, his style became a hybrid of drama and fiction, and his project became an attempt to demonstrate that the ordinary is the extraordinary. Yet while Stanislaus identified the importance of the commonplace in *Ulysses*, he goes on to take issue with what he calls the "farcical" elements of his brother's book:

I have no humor for the episodes which are deliberately farcical: the Sirens, the Oxen of the Sun; and as the episodes grow longer and

⁵² S. Joyce's letter to James Joyce, August 7, 1924.

longer and you try to tell every damn thing you know about anybody that appears or anything that crops up my patience oozes out.

As Stanislaus takes issue with those episodes driven by parodic language, he seems to miss the many pleasures of Joyce's language (which are meant to mirror the pleasures of life), and fails to recognize the comic elements that underwrite what Eliot calls Joyce's mythic mode, and thereby the larger comic significance of *Ulysses*:

There is no serenity or happiness anywhere in the whole book. I suppose you will tell me ironically that this is my chance and my work; to set to and write up all the eucharistic moments of Dublin life. It is not my business. Yet in these same surroundings that you describe I have not rarely been penetrated by a keen sense of happiness. I cannot exploit these moments either in prose or verse, but the fact remains that they have been.

As Ellmann asserts, Joyce's favorite disposition was comedy (*JJ* 132), and throughout his life, Joyce maintained an "amicably ironic view of life" (385). Joyce was always "one of life's celebrants, in bad circumstances cracking good jokes, foisting upon ennui and miseries his comic vision"⁵³ (730). Joyce considered comedy to be a means with which to liberate the spirit in both life and art through "a eucharistic occasion, an occasion characterized by... joy" (379). Thus as comedy was congenial to

⁵³ Take for instance an anecdote from Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce*: "... acts of kindness were infrequent with Joyce, but they occurred throughout his life to surprise those who thought he was incapable of affection. He displayed his good will... comically one day when he and Eugene [Sheehy] were walking in Parnell Street. A beggar came up to them and asked, 'Could you spare us a copper?' Joyce was hard up, but asked, 'And why would you want a copper?' 'To tell the honest truth,' said the man, 'I was dyin' for a drink.' Joyce gave him his last penny and commented to Sheehy, 'If he'd said he wanted it for a cup of tea, I'd have hit him!'" (96)

his worldview, Joyce praised joy in *Ulysses* as the emotion in comedy that made it superior to tragedy in his mind. In *Ulysses as a Comic Novel* (1989), Zack Bowen echoes Richard Ellmann's suggestion that Joyce had a very "playful" mind (139), calling it "satiric" instead (35). In his book, Bowen argues that comedy stems from the aggrandizement of the mundane (14), in which case ordinary circumstances take on extraordinary import. Significantly, Joyce's artistic project of the justification of the commonplace proceeds from his view that the ordinary is the extraordinary (though Bowen does not note this). It is fitting, then, that Stanislaus recalls his brother saying

Don't you think there is a certain resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what I am trying to do? I mean that I am trying... to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own... for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift... Do you see that man who has just skipped out of the way of that tram? Consider, if he had been run over, how significant every act of his would at once become... It is my idea of the significance of trivial things that I want to give the two or three unfortunate wretches who may eventually read me.⁵⁴

While Joyce's project shares the fundamental comic concept of the aggrandizement of the mundane, the question then becomes: what is Joyce's comic

⁵⁴ Quoted from S. Joyce's *Diary* in Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce* (169).

vision? Whereas Stanislaus sees no “serenity or happiness” anywhere in *Ulysses*, Bowen writes that Joyce’s project in *Ulysses* moves

toward the older, more profound lesson of comedy: that life, as difficult as it is, has a fluid continuity that can provide a sense of pleasure as well as pain.... and that many of our difficulties are self-induced, and avoidable, if we only see their error. (34)

This “fluid continuity” of life, which Bowen alternately calls a “vital continuity” (9), can be located in *Ulysses* with Leopold Bloom’s recurring recognition of the “stream of life” (*Ulysses* 126). In comedy, repetition, and the “revivication” that results, are both associated with what Suzanne K. Kanger calls “The Comic Rhythm,” in which comedy reflects “a basic biological pattern of life, or life rhythm” (Bowen 2). Repetition is a fundamental element of Joyce’s fiction, and in Joyce’s mind comedy was a superior mode to tragedy in that it makes possible the feeling of joy, which Joyce defined as “the feeling which the possession of some good excites in us” (Joyce 144). For Joyce, who once sardonically remarked, “How I hate God and death” (*JJ*, qtd Joyce 184), life is the ultimate joy. Through the use of repetition and the stream-of-consciousness technique, Joyce’s prose attempts to mirror the vital process of the “stream of life,” and in doing so the language of *Ulysses* becomes a dramatic “struggle of words” in which the “common becomes profound and humor assumes serious import” (Bowen 130). Therefore, as *Ulysses* progresses, and the language becomes increasingly parodic, the book comes to represent what Bowen calls “a comic affirmation of the spirit of life” (1), which is analogous to Joyce’s artistic project of affirming the human spirit by

justifying what is often viewed as commonplace, and therefore mundane. Thus, by reenacting the affirmative processes of the great human comedy which we all share in conjunction with heroic cycle by way of the Ulysses myth, *Ulysses* “celebrates rather than suffers life” (xii) and the “joyful challenges [of] our existence” (2). In exploring the heroism of daily life, the comic hero in Joyce’s fiction becomes the individual who exemplifies the means with which to live meaningfully and authentically while facing the many challenges of everyday existence. Thus, the hero of Joyce’s human comedy is the “unimpressive” Leopold Bloom, “an urban man of no importance” (*JJ* 3), but a comic hero in the modernist world nonetheless.

William Faulkner

Reflecting on the role of art in an interview with Loïc Bouvard at Princeton University in 1952, which is believed to be one of William Faulkner’s most open and revealing interviews,⁵⁵ Faulkner said:

Art is not only mankind’s most supreme expression; it is also the salvation of mankind... The artist is the one who is able to communicate his message... I believe in man in spite of everything.

(Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 71-73)

Faulkner’s message, his belief in man in spite of everything (as it is put very simply above), was also put forward to the public two years earlier in his Nobel Prize Address (1950), where he said:

⁵⁵ The preface to this interview in *The Lion in the Garden* reads: “Near the end of the interview Bouvard says, ‘I felt that Faulkner had talked with me freely and candidly, and that he had opened to me the deepest recesses of his mind, and this made me very happy.’ M. Bouvard had good reason for his satisfaction. Perhaps for no other interviewer did Faulkner reveal himself, his reading, and his ideas with quite such clarity and precision” (68).

...man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. (*Essays* 120)

In spite of these and other straightforward and hopeful statements, it is initially hard to believe that Faulkner, a writer who, as Bouvard says, has “created such tormented, mad, monstrous human beings” (Meriwether 73), and whose early work was associated with what Frederick J. Hoffmann calls, in his “Introduction” to *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (1960), “The Cult of Cruelty” (26), could be interested in the perseverance of mankind. Yet for Faulkner, this artistic interest in the prevalence of mankind is paradoxically underwritten by his tragic worldview, a worldview informed by the complex relationships between himself and the world.

In a letter to Malcolm Cowley regarding the publication of what was to become *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), for which Cowley is often credited with “the heroic rescue of Faulkner from critical and publishing oblivion” (Hamblin 296), William Faulkner writes of the reciprocity between himself and his artistic project:

As regards any specific book, I’m trying primarily to tell a story, in the most effective way I can think of, the most moving, the most exhaustive... I am telling the same story over and over, which is myself and the world. Tom Wolfe was trying to say everything, get everything, the world... in which he was born and walked a little while and then lay down again, into one volume. I am trying to go a

step further... I'm trying to say it all in one sentence, between one Cap and one period. I'm still trying, to put it all, if possible, on one pinhead. I don't know how to do it. All I know to do is to keep on trying in a new way.⁵⁶

This passage from Faulkner's letter is telling of his artistic project on several counts. First, because it identifies not only his use of experimentation ("I am trying to go a step further"), but also his aesthetic investment, if only indirectly, in Ezra Pound's modernist imperative: "Make it new" ("All I know to do is to keep on trying in a new way"). Second, this passage brings to light Faulkner's interest in the problematic relationship between the individual ("myself") and the world, which he explores throughout his Yoknapatawpha novels. Faulkner, in retelling the story of himself and the world in the context of his characters with each consecutive novel, is continually writing "a very old story... the story of human beings in conflict with their nature, their character, their souls, with others or with their environment" (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 177). Thus, while the stylistic approach of his artistic project varies from novel to novel, Faulkner's writing is always concerned with "man in his human dilemma" (280), which he alternately calls in his Nobel Prize Address, "the problem of the human heart in conflict with itself" (*Essays* 119).

For Faulkner, retelling the story of man in his human dilemma is intimately connected to place, for as he says of the writer's artistic relationship to his environment:

⁵⁶ W. Faulkner's letter to Malcolm Cowley, Saturday [early Nov. 1944].

He's got to tell that story in the only terms he knows, the familiar terms, which would be colored, shaped, by his environment. He's not really writing about his environment, he's simply telling a story about human beings in the terms of environment." (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 177)

Faulkner's environment, which he referred to as his "own little postage stamp of native soil" in Lafayette County, was comprised of Oxford, Mississippi (where Faulkner spent much of his life), in addition to his birthplace, New Albany, and the land of his forefathers, Ripley. By experiencing these locations throughout his life, Faulkner found the geographic and sociological materials with which to transform Lafayette County into his apocryphal County, Yoknapatawpha:

I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about... and by sublimating the actual into apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other peoples, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too.... I like to think of the world I created as being a kind of keystone in the Universe. (255)

While Faulkner drew from his experience, he ruled out the autobiographical mode of writing (such as Thomas Wolfe's), and instead turned to the intersection between reality and myth, which he calls the actual and the apocryphal, in order to explore the relationship between the individual and the world in terms of a realistic form of

fiction. Thus, Faulkner treated myth and reality dynamically in order to comment on the actual through the apocryphal, thereby perceiving reality through the imagination.

As Faulkner began to draw on his experience for material he began to discover what Karl calls a “major tension between what the South [thought] of itself and the reality of life there” (217), a tension between socially constructed myth and reality. As Faulkner began to observe the cultural environment of the South from a more personally detached and artistically engaged perspective, Karl contends that Faulkner discovered that his “sense of community—the backbone of his Yoknapatawpha novels—was frayed, even tenuous, held together more by myth and tradition than by fact” (7). In this process of experiencing and observing his environment, Faulkner discovered a cultural schism between the old, provincial South and what he called in his 1933 “Introduction” to *The Sound and the Fury*, “a new South,” which “is not the south” (*Essays* 291). The old South (which Cowley calls the “Deep South”), a provincial, organic society that was strictly ordered by antiquated aristocratic tradition (myth) that clashed, often violently, with the new South (reality), became the geographic and sociological terms in which Faulkner attempted to “create on paper living people” through his imagination (128).

In his “Introduction” to the *Portable Faulkner*, Malcolm Cowley notes the important relationship between Faulkner and his environment, which he refers to as Faulkner’s “own situation” and the “decline of the South,” and praises Faulkner for his “labor of imagination” (Hoffmann 94). In Cowley’s mind, this work of the imagination was a “double labor”:

First to invent a Mississippi County that was like a mythical kingdom, but as complete and living in all its details; second, to make his story of Yoknapatawpha County stand as a parable or legend of all the Deep South.⁵⁷ (94)

In this passage, Cowley identifies the relationship between myth and reality that is central to Faulkner's artistic project, as well as his attempt to juxtapose his present moment with the legends of the past, a project that is, as Lynn Gartrell Levins notes in *Faulkner's Heroic Design* (1976), "the same literary technique which Eliot saw and appreciated in Joyce's *Ulysses* and which he termed the 'mythical method'—the manipulation of a 'continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity'"⁵⁸ (1). Levins contends that by placing the events that take place in Yoknapatawpha within "a framework of mythic and literary allusion," Faulkner imbues these events with universal archetypal significance (3), adds a "mythical dimension" to his imaginary region (4) and "elevates" the inhabitants to heroic proportions by identifying them with forces greater than themselves (3). Like Joyce's interest in the "heroic cycle," Faulkner is, as Levins says, "affirming the existence of some principle of historical

⁵⁷ While Cowley's introduction to *The Portable Faulkner* is one of the first significant pieces of criticism on Faulkner's work, his view that Faulkner's "mythical kingdom" applies only to the "Deep South" is ultimately reductive of its broader applications. Other critics, such as Lynn Gartrell Levins, have since discussed the more universal aspects of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, in part because of his use of mythology to retell the "very old story... of human beings in conflict with their nature, their character, their souls, with others or with their environment" (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 177).

⁵⁸ There are also other similarities between Joyce's and Faulkner's project in terms of Eliot's essay, "Ulysses, Order and Myth" that Levins does not develop in *Faulkner's Heroic Design*. By employing myth and reality in order to "illustrate man in his dilemma—facing his environment" (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 277), Faulkner's novels, as Eliot says, explore "the possibilities of [their] place and time" (129). Moreover, in addition to his use of the "mythical method," Faulkner was also aligned with Eliot's contention that the artist in the modernist world is "responsible for what [he] can do with material which [he] must simply accept" (129-30), for as Faulkner once said, in writing he used the "materials at hand" (Meriwether 277). Interestingly, Richard P. Adams, who discusses the mythic elements of Faulkner's work in *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*, thinks it highly probable that Faulkner read not only *Ulysses*, but also Eliot's essay when it appeared in *The Dial*, November 1923.

continuity which ties our era with a past that... [asserts] his belief that in the twentieth-century the heroic is still possible" (ix), and that man will prevail in the face of the myriad challenges of living in the modernist world. As Cowley notes in his "Introduction," one of these powerful forces that operates in both the South and Yoknapatawpha County is the ideological impulse to live "single-mindedly" by a "fixed" and "traditional code," which leads to "moral confusion and social decay" (Hoffmann 102-103). In his review of Cowley's *Portable Faulkner*, Robert Penn Warren brings further specificity to this idea of a "traditional morality" of a self-enclosed society ruled by "codes, concepts of virtue, [and] obligations" (Hoffman 133), which Warwick Wadlington discusses in *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy* (1987) in terms of a rigid "honor-shame code" (18).

In creating his imaginary world, Faulkner was repeating and revising the social conventions and conflicts he experienced and observed in the South, perhaps the most problematic of all being this dynamic cultural code of honor and shame. However, as Faulkner's personal relationship to the South seems to be defined by feelings of attraction and repulsion, Wadlington notes that while "Faulkner can define and criticize the limitations of the heroic honor-shame culture," this "should not belie that he also finds it a compelling means... for empowering persons to live and endure"⁵⁹ (54). While Faulkner recognized the limitations of the honor-shame code that ordered

⁵⁹ An important distinction must be made here between the type of endurance that enables man to prevail, which Faulkner discusses in his Nobel Prize Address, and the type of passive endurance Wadlington defines. Remaining passive in Faulkner's fiction is shameful, but enduring is not. Take for instance Faulkner's "Appendix" to *The Sound and the Fury*, in which the greatest tribute he could pay Dilsey and the other black people in the novel was that, "They endured" (Minter 215). Moreover, passivity is most often only a temporary state in Faulkner's fiction, as characters are voluntarily or involuntarily compelled to act.

the old South—the environment he experienced and observed—it also provided him with the terms to construct a “cultural theater” (54) in which to explore man in his human dilemma by telling stories that show “[symptoms] of a sociological background” (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 177). Thus, Faulknerian tragedy, as Wadlington defines it, “springs from the hazardous possibilities for heroic existence in [Faulkner’s] particular version of an honor-shame culture as well as from the critique of this cultural script” (8).

Faulkner’s version of an honor-shame culture, as it informs the cultural theater of his novels, stems from his view that, while man will prevail, human life is “basically a tragedy” (Meriwether 89) and that tragedy is “man wishing to be braver than he is, in combat with his heart or with his fellows or with his environment, and how he fails... the courage of his failure” (Gwynn, qtd Faulkner 51). “Man’s immortality,” then, is “that he is faced with a tragedy which he can’t beat and he still tries to do something with it” (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 89). This worldview places Faulkner’s characters problematically between only two possible modes of response: either “genuine action,” which brings honor, or “passive endurance,” which brings shame (Wadlington 17).

Faulkner’s subscription to this tragic worldview is probably best illustrated in an interview with Cynthia Grenier in 1955:

Q: You said just now, that you’re only concerned with telling a story.
Still, it is possible to read in philosophical content in your works.

There is a unity, a kind of purpose or theme binding your works together, don't you think?

FAULKNER (flatly): There isn't any theme in my work, or maybe if there is, you can call it a certain faith in man and his ability to always prevail and endure over circumstances and over his own destiny.

Q: But in many of your books, it seems as if the majority of your characters are trapped by fate.

FAULKNER: But (gesturing with pipe) there is always some one person who survives, who triumphs over his fate.

Q: Still, so many more go down than survive.

FAULKNER: That's all right, That they go down doesn't matter. It's *how* they go under.

Q: And what is the way to go under?

FAULKNER: It's to go under when trying to do more than you know to do. Its trying to defy defeat even if it's inevitable.... Man wants to be braver than he is... He shall prevail. (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 221).

Thus for Faulkner, a writer with "his eyes looking out on the world and finding it strange and wonderful and tragic" (67), and engaged in a "life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit" (*Essays* 119) by writing "about people, a story which he thought was tragic and true" (Gwynn 58), the tragic hero in Faulkner's fiction becomes the individual who attempts to defy an inevitable defeat, even if he is destroyed while

doing so. As Wadlington contends that *The Sound and the Fury* is a “logic of tragedy” (67), and Levins notes the “tragic design” (45) of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the question then becomes, what potential does Quentin Compson, the “protagonist” (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 146) of *The Sound and The Fury* and the “principal narrative consciousness” (Irwin 26) in *Absalom, Absalom!*, have as a tragic hero?

THE HERO IN THE MODERNIST WORLD: A QUESTION OF QUALITIES

“...the adventure that the hero is ready for is the one he gets. The adventure is symbolically a manifestation of his character. Even the landscape and the conditions of the environment match his readiness.”

— Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (1988)

The heroic possibilities of Leopold Bloom and Quentin Compson are inherent in those attributes and actions that conform to classical constructions of heroism and how the changes and challenges of the modernist world might complicate the qualifications for heroic potential. I have proposed thus far that the comic hero in James Joyce’s fiction is the individual who exemplifies the means with which to live meaningfully and authentically while facing the many challenges of everyday existence. Conversely, I have also proposed the tragic hero in William Faulkner’s fiction is the individual who attempts to defy an inevitable defeat, even if he is destroyed while doing so. In *The Power of Myth* (1988), Joseph Campbell, an American mythologist and Joyce critic, discusses the classical characteristics of the legendary hero, types of heroic deeds and the circumstances that bring the possibility for heroic action. A consideration of the heroic qualities Leopold Bloom and Quentin Compson possess begins by outlining Campbell’s qualities of the hero.

While Campbell acknowledges that the protagonist of a novel is often a hero (though hero is not necessarily synonymous with protagonist), he also stresses that in order for an individual to be heroic there are a number of character traits and circumstances that must be present. First, the hero must exhibit the knightly virtues of “loyalty” (by taking up an adventure), “temperance” (by attempting to overcome the

dark passions of the self) and “courage” (by engaging in his adventure with bravery) (153). Second, the hero must “[sacrifice] himself for something,” be it by “saving a people, or saving a person, or supporting an idea” (127). Third, the hero must be procreative, attempt to find or do something “beyond the normal range of achievement and experience” (123), thereby becoming

the founder of something... the founder of a new way of life. In order to find something new, one has to leave the old and go in quest of the seed idea, a germinal idea that will have the potentiality of bringing forth that new thing” (136).

This project of bringing forth a new discovery is a creative act. Because the creative spirit lies out beyond the boundaries of the ordinary, of the known, the hero, as Campbell contends, “can’t have creativity,” cannot accomplish the creative act, unless he leaves behind “the bounded, the fixed, all the rules” (156).

Because the hero must go beyond the ordinary, the hero’s act usually takes the form of one of two kinds of heroic deeds: the first is “the physical deed, in which the hero performs a courageous act,” and the second is “a spiritual deed, in which the hero learns to experience the supernormal range of human spiritual life and then comes back with the message” (123). As the aim of either form of heroic deeds is to recover something “that has been lost” or to discover “some life-giving elixir” (123), after the hero goes beyond the ordinary, the hero must return in the hopes of “making the values known and enacted in life” (135), thereby achieving a “truly heroic transformation of consciousness... either by the trials themselves or by illuminating

revelations" (126). Thus, the "typical hero act" involves a cycle—"departure, fulfillment, return"—and takes the form of an adventure or a series of adventures (135).

It is important to note that when an individual begins a heroic physical or spiritual deed, and thereby initiates his adventure (an external as well as internal one), the individual need not be aware that he is involved in a journey "[moving] out of the known" in order to be considered a hero, though he must come to self-awareness at some point (126). Campbell explains that this journey can be undertaken in two types of adventures: those that the hero undertakes "intentionally," a type of journey the hero responsibly chooses to undertake, and those into which the hero is "thrown," a type of adventure in which "the hero has no idea what he is doing but suddenly finds himself in a transformed realm" (129). In either form of adventure, the hero must face a series of external trials that "are designed to see that the intending hero" has "the courage, the knowledge [and] the capacity" (126) to "face trials and to bring a whole new body of possibilities to the field of interpreted experience" (41). Moreover, the hero's journey is also an internal attempt to "[overcome] the dark passions" of the self, thereby representing our ability to "control the irrational savage within us" (*xiv*). Thus, the hero's journey is often represented as a descent "into a dark void" that represents "the power of life locked in the unconscious" (146).

In such a "descent into the dark" the individual "leaves the realm of the familiar" (as the hero should) and "comes to a threshold" where a "monster of the abyss" (which represents the unconscious) comes to meet him (146). This is the ultimate trial,

and here the hero faces two possible outcomes. The first scenario is that when the hero encounters the power of the dark, he is able to “overcome and kill it” (146). This first type of journey “evokes [the] character,” the high rather than the low nature of the hero (131), which leads to a triumphant “life lived in self-discovery” (*xiv*). The second scenario is that the hero encounters the dark powers, but is “swallowed up,” cut into pieces, and descends “into the abyss” in fragments to be “later resurrected” (146). This second type of journey occurs if the hero, in attempting to master or control the dark side of the self, “insists on a certain program, and doesn’t listen to the demands of his own heart” (162). In this course of events, the hero runs the risk of a “schizophrenic crackup” (147). In either outcome, however, Campbell cautions that the adventure is “necessarily dangerous, having both negative and positive probabilities, all of them beyond control” (158). The hero of the “mechanistic” modern world is “running up against a hard world that is in no way responsive to his spiritual needs” (130), which Campbell likens to the “sociological stagnation of inauthentic lives” that one observes in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (131). In this kind of environment, the hero is either going to be able to use his journey for “the attainment of human purposes” or the journey is going to ultimately “flatten [him] out and deny [him his] humanity” (144). Thus, in the Campbellian construction of the hero’s journey, there is the possibility of “a hero who fails,” but Campbell says that this sort of hero is “usually represented as... someone pretending to more than he can achieve” (126).

While Campbell does not consider the hero in terms of the Aristotelian modes of comedy and tragedy, it is possible to read the two outcomes of the hero’s adventure

into the unknown within these terms. The first scenario, in which the hero emerges triumphantly from the dark, is that of the comic hero, as the journey results in the “ultimate satisfaction of its protagonist,” which Zack Bowen contends is the principal aim of the comic art (39). The second scenario, in which the hero is destroyed due to his insistence on a certain program, is the journey of the tragic hero, as the individual becomes “a victim of... his own tragic flaw,” which is what Lynn Gartrell Levins argues is the plight of the tragic hero (20). In either case, the hero is, as Campbell says, “the one who has given his physical life” – either in life or in death – “to some order of realization of... truth” (110); however, the hero “doesn’t show you the truth itself, he shows you the way to truth” (150). Campbell stresses that the individual “who thinks he has found the ultimate truth is wrong” (55). The characteristics, actions and circumstances of Leopold Bloom and Quentin Compson can now be compared with those of the comic and tragic hero as they are described above.

TAKING THE STAGE: LEOPOLD BLOOM

"...our world seems drained of spiritual value. People feel impotent. To me, that's the curse of modern society, the impotence, the ennui that people feel, the alienation of people from the world order around them. Maybe we need some hero who will give voice to our deeper longing."

— Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (1988)

At first blush, Leopold Bloom seems an unlikely candidate for heroic consideration. Meeting Bloom for the first time in "Calypso," the reader encounters a thirty-eight-year-old, lower-middle-class, outwardly ineloquent and ostensibly unimpressive man who works as an advertisements canvasser and is rumored to be a cuckold. Because Bloom is the son of Jewish immigrant, the reader also learns that many in Dublin consider him an outsider (a literal Wandering Jew), in spite of the fact that Bloom was baptized a Protestant and converted to Catholicism in order to marry his wife, Molly. Moreover, the reader witnesses a number of instances in which he is subject to rumor, ridicule and other forms of insensitive treatment. All of these circumstances seem to enshroud Bloom in a fog of loneliness and isolation instead of building a clear case for his heroism; however, upon closer examination it becomes evident that, as Richard Ellmann says, "the Homeric myth hovers behind Bloom in *Ulysses*, instantly altering the context of [the] book" and Bloom (*JJ* 2).

James Joyce once said that he envisioned Leopold Bloom as "a complete man... a good man" (Budgen 17). The classical model of the complete man is, of course, Odysseus: "Homer's man skilled in all the ways of contending" (Lentricchia 173-174). In Joyce's mind, the Odysseus myth is

the most beautiful, all embracing theme... greater, more human than that of *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote*, Dante, *Faust*... The most beautiful, human traits are contained in the *Odyssey*.... The motif of wandering... splendid... And the return, how profoundly human! Don't forget the trait of generosity... and many other beautiful touches. I am almost afraid to treat such a theme; it's overwhelming." (Ellmann, *JJ*, qtd Joyce 430).

In the context of the *Odysseus* myth, Joyce's desire for a protagonist who appears to be Jewish arose from "his affinity for the Jew as wandering" and isolated (383-84), which coincides with the motif of the wanderings of *Odysseus*. As an exile himself, Joyce felt that his own place in Europe was "as ambiguous" as that of the Jew (238), and accordingly it is no surprise that Bloom and Joyce share many characteristics, including an "amicably ironic view of life" (385). Moreover, as Ellmann contends in *Ulysses on the Liffey* (1973), "Joyce had no real interest in Judaism [and therefore he] gave Bloom none" (3). Thus as Ellmann shows, Joyce was attracted to "the concept of the likeable Jew," and ultimately decided to make Bloom "amiable and even noble in a humdrum sort of way;" however, to "save [Bloom] from sentimentality," Joyce also "made him somewhat absurd as a convert, a drifter, a cuckold" (*JJ* 384).

While there are a number of absurdities inherent in Bloom's identity (most notable of all being his religious ambiguity), it is important to note that these do not take him out of contention for heroic consideration. In *Ulysses as a Comic Novel*, Zack Bowen contends that while Bloom may be a "spiritual misfit" of sorts, "comedy has long

embraced... the person who simply does not fit into a traditional spiritual-theological system" (11). In spite of the paradoxical pieces of his character, Bloom, as "the central comic figure," proceeds with "moral certitude" (4) on his daylong Odyssey, blissfully ignorant of any absurdities that are apparent to the reader. To other Dubliners and even in his own mind, Bloom remains Leopold Bloom, who Ellmann calls a relatively unimpressive "urban man of no importance" (*JJ* 3); however, as the "events comedy portrays are those of everyday existence" (Bowen 20), Bloom's journey through his daily activities can take on mythical, Ulyssean significance.

Discussing the "incongruity between the title *Ulysses* and the man Bloom" in his early essay, "Ulyssean Qualities in Joyce's Leopold Bloom" (1953), W. B. Stanford contends that, given the right attitude, even an ordinary "lower middle-class citizen of a modern Megalopolis [could] become Ulyssean by doing and suffering Odyssean things" (125). Stanford further argues that Bloom's "environment naturally [inhibits] some of the traditional heroic traits" (130) of Odysseus; however, his argument is problematic on two counts. First, as Joseph Campbell states in *The Power of Myth*, there is no such thing as an "ordinary mortal" (163). In Campbell's mind, the "drudgery" of life has always held the potential of becoming "a life extinguishing affair" (131), as all individuals face the "possibility of rapture in the experience of life" (163). Thus there are no qualitative distinctions between Odysseus and Bloom as men. Second, given the ever-increasing complexity of human existence, as the experience of human life has changed dramatically over time, so too have the forms and intensity of the drudgery in life (both internally and externally). While Bloom does not demonstrate "sheer

courage” in “violent combat” in Joyce’s novel as the hero of the Trojan Horse does in Homeric myth (Stanford 130), living in the age of the iron horse (and approaching the advent of the automobile and the automatic rifle) Bloom is forced to contend with an increasingly accelerated frame of reference in his day-to-day existence. Whereas the trials of Mycenaean civilization tended to occur in exterior, physical forms, the trials of modern civilization tend to manifest in interior, psychological forms.⁶⁰ Amidst the changes and challenges of the modern world, living becomes a form of psychological warfare that calls for heroic perseverance, even in what might seem to be the most unheroic of circumstances. Bloom is Ulyssean in that his interior readiness to tackle primarily psychological trials mirrors Odysseus’ exterior readiness to tackle primarily physical trials. As Morton P. Levitt says in “A Hero for Our Time: Leopold Bloom and the Myth of Ulysses” (1972), it is that “the problems confronting Bloom are strangely like those which Odysseus must deal with” that creates a “sense of continuity between Mycenaean civilization and our own” (136). What is striking about *Ulysses*, then, is the possibility that the internal struggles Leopold Bloom must psychologically contend with on a day-to-day basis might require a form of heroism comparable to that which enabled Odysseus to survive the grueling physical trials of his nine-year journey.

The question then becomes, what are “traditional heroic traits” (Stanford 130), and how do they compare to Bloom’s character traits? In his essay “Mr. Bloom and

⁶⁰ As Rita Barnard writes in her essay, “Modern American Fiction,” life in the modernist world was “ultimately a cognitive [project]” (Barnard 39). Thus in Joyce’s adaptation of Homeric myth, Bloom’s battle against the Citizen in the “Cyclops” episode and against Bella Cohen in the “Circe” episode are psychological trials, whereas Odysseus’ encounters with Polyphemus and Circe in the *Odyssey* were physical trials. As Ellmann contends, “Joyce makes his modern Ulysses a man who is not a fighter, but whose mind is unsubduable. The victories of Bloom are mental... he has been made less athletic, but he retains the primary qualities of prudence, intelligence, sensitivity and good will” (JJ 371).

Mr. Joyce: a note on 'Heroism' in 'Ulysses'" (1963), Robert E. Kuehn states that one of the primary complications of considering Leopold Bloom as a hero stems from "the immense problem of defining the quality of heroism in *Ulysses*" (211). Yet, instead of identifying or constructing a model of heroism, Kuehn proposes that Bloom lives in "a world in which traditional heroism is no longer possible," and thus he suggests "Bloom becomes, by the curious logic of reduction and substitution... the hero by default, that is, the only possible hero, the hero of the commonplace" (211). This analysis, however, is problematic when considered in terms of Joyce's comic project: the justification of the commonplace through the aggrandizement of the mundane. In *Ulysses*, Joyce attempted to depict the great human comedy in which we all share and reenact the heroic cycle as it applied to the twentieth century. Because the ordinary is in fact the extraordinary in Joyce's fiction, Bloom is not a hero by reduction and substitution, but rather "Joyce wished Bloom to be heroic... [and] the task was to exhibit heroism of a new kind" (30). Bloom is both mock-hero and hero: he is "undistinguished by any acts" and simultaneously "distinguished... by the absence of act" (30). While Bloom is not outwardly eloquent, Joyce endowed him with inward eloquence and an active imagination. Even in his moments of diminution, when things go wrong, Bloom's virtues remain evident. As Ellmann asserts, "Joyce does not exalt [Bloom], but he makes him special" (*JJ* 372). Bloom is a "humble vessel elected to bear unimpeached the best qualities of the mind" (3); he represents a "new notion of greatness" (5). Thus while Bloom is meant to embody a new form of heroism, this is not to suggest that the traditional qualities of the hero no longer apply.

Approaching Bloom in terms of Joseph Campbell's construction of the hero, Leopold Bloom exhibits the virtues of loyalty, temperance and courage that are essential of any classical hero. In his essay, "Bloom as a Modern Epic Hero" (1977), John Henry Raleigh argues that Bloom exhibits an "array of virtues and prized qualities," among them being his loyalty to a "belief in the universal brotherhood of man," the prudential virtue of "temperance" and the cardinal chivalric attribute of "courage" (596). As Bloom embarks on his Odyssean adventure through Dublin, these virtues become apparent in the trials he faces and the responses they produce within him, particularly in the "Cyclops" and the "Circe" episodes. These trials are of an internal rather than an external nature, ultimately making Bloom's adventure spiritual instead of physical in terms of Campbell's classifications. In spite of his recurring thoughts regarding metempsychosis, Bloom never realizes that he is a mythic reincarnation of Odysseus; however, here too Bloom is in accord with the classical construction of the hero. Campbell contends the individual need not be aware that he has undertaken a heroic adventure, though for the individual to become a hero he must come to a moment of self-awareness in the course of his adventure (which occurs for Bloom upon his return home in the "Ithaca" episode). As Bloom unknowingly sets out on his adventure, he is compelled to transform from a passive adult to an active participant in his own life through a series of trials (thereby regaining his self-confidence), and also performs several selfless acts along the way. Moreover, Bloom not only fulfills a series of trials that bring self-discovery and service, he also returns, bringing forth a new discovery that ultimately has meaning for all mankind.

Bloom begins June 16th, 1904 like any other day. "The Wanderings of Ulysses" (as the middle section of *Ulysses* is designated) begins with the now famous "Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" as Bloom prepares breakfast for Molly to eat in bed in "Calypso" (*Ulysses* 54-55). Not all is well between husband and wife in the Bloom household, and the reader begins to get a sense that instead of attempting to hold Bloom captive (as Calypso should), Molly is attempting to persuade him to leave so she can conduct her assignation with Bloom's rival, Blazes Boylan. Bloom leaves briefly to fetch his own breakfast, comes back to conduct his morning routine and then unknowingly embarks upon his Ulyssean journey. In the "Calypso" episode, the reader gets acquainted with both Bloom's domestic life, and as the novel continues through Bloom's activities in "Lotus Eaters" (where he conducts his daily errands), "Hades" (where he attends the funeral of the late Paddy Dignam), "Aeolus" (where he goes to the office of the Freemason's Journal and attempts to arrange an ad for a client), "Laestrygonians" (where Bloom has lunch at Davy Byrne's pub), "Wandering Rocks" (where he continues his daily activities) and "Sirens" (where Bloom has an early dinner), the reader gets acquainted with the social aspects of Bloom's life. In this process the reader also gains an intimate familiarity with Bloom's interior life: his quiet certitude, lively imagination and playful sense of humor, as well as his insecurities, sexual fantasies and his continual attempts to suppress his private concerns (not least of which are his recurring thoughts of Molly's impending infidelity with Boylan, though he makes every attempt to avoid them). Throughout these early episodes, Bloom exhibits a reserved quality that enables him

to passively avoid his problems; however, in “Hades” Bloom makes a discovery that plays a critical role throughout the remainder of his adventure.

In the “Hades” episode, Bloom goes to Glasnevin Cemetery to pay his respects to recently deceased Paddy Dignam, which mirrors Ulysses’ descent into the land of the dead. Bloom’s thoughts throughout the episode dwell on not only Dignam’s death, but also the death of his father, Rudolph (who committed suicide), as well as the death of his only son, Rudy (who passed away prematurely). While Bloom recognizes there are “Funerals all over the world everywhere every minute. Shoveling them under by the cartload double quick. Thousands every hour” (101), as Bloom begins to regard the cemetery as a “treacherous place” (105), his thoughts begin to change. Bloom’s thoughts ultimately shift from death to life, and conclude in affirmation at the end of the chapter:

Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you.
Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me
this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life. (115)

For Campbell, “the adventure of the hero” is “the adventure of being alive” (163). Thus, part of the hero’s journey is “the conquest of the fear of death in the recovery of life’s joys” (152). Here, Bloom has begun this very important aspect of his adventure, an adventure that will bring the means with which to affirm the spirit of “warm fullblooded life.” Like Ulysses leaving “Hades,” Bloom still has trials to face, including the ultimate challenge: Circe, who, as Hades warns Ulysses, has the power to unman him. Bloom must now begin the process of regaining his self-confidence, fulfilling his

spiritual journey by discovering a germinal idea and returning so that his discovery can be “known and enacted in life” (135), thereby achieving a “truly heroic transformation of consciousness” (126). However, it is not until the “Cyclops” episode that Bloom is confronted with a meaningful trial that compels him to move from passivity to activity, thereby enabling him to become confident and combative in the journey of life.

Later in the day Bloom makes his way to Barney Kiernan’s pub to meet Martin Cunningham and discuss the late Dignam’s insurance policy. Bloom has come to the pub to serve, and he hopes to meet with Dignam’s widow afterwards to see if he can help resolve some of her financial complications. The pub is located on Little Britain street, and inside an intoxicated and xenophobic Irish Nationalist named the “Citizen” resides. In one of the narrative interpolations that take place in this episode, the Citizen is comically described as a monstrous figure reminiscent of the one-eyed giant, Polyphemus, that Odysseus encounters in Sicily:

The figure seated on a large boulder at the foot of a round tower was that of a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed redhaired freely freckled shaggy bearded widemouthed largenosed longheaded deepvoiced barekneed brawnyhanded hairylegged ruddyfaced sinewyarmed hero. From shoulder to shoulder he measured several ells and his rocklike mountainous knees were covered, as was likewise the rest of his body wherever visible, with a strong growth of tawny prickly hair in hue and toughness similar to

the mountain gorse (*Ulex Europaeus*). The widewinged nostrils, from which bristles of the same tawny hue projected, were of such capriciousness that within their cavernous obscurity the field lark might have easily have lodged her nest. The eyes in which a tear and a smile strove ever for the mastery were of the dimensions of a goodsized cauliflower. A powerful current of warm breath issued at regular intervals from the profound cavity of his mouth while in rhythmic resonance the loud strong hale reverberations of his formidable heart thundered rumblingly causing the ground, the summit of the lofty tower and still loftier walls of the cave to vibrate and tremble" (*Ulysses* 296).

Bowen contends that "excess is the key to comedy," and thus Joyce's parody in these interpolations infuse the "Cyclops" episode with "a genuine comic energy which is only hinted at in earlier episodes" (57). In Joyce's *Ulysses* Schema, the technique of the "Cyclops" episode is gigantism, and the exaggerated description of the Citizen comic. However, on a more serious level the exaggeration of the Citizen also draws particular attention to the "profound cavity" of his monstrous mouth. Literally, the Citizen is a "widemouth" into which drinks go in and a "deepvoice" comes out. Arriving at Kiernan's, Bloom comes to the entrance of a dark cavern of drunkenness and prejudice, full of unknown sights and sounds, the most prominent of which is the Citizen. Moreover, as David Hayman contends, "darkness prevails in the pub on all levels. It is a dark place, anger and violence

darken the air, prejudice darkens the minds of men, drink befuddles their brain" (258). This is a form of what Campbell calls the "descent into the dark" (though the ultimate example in Bloom's adventure takes place in the "Circe" episode), and the Citizen is a form of "the monster of the abyss" which Bloom must "overcome" or risk being swallowed up. In order to avoid being swallowed up in the abyss of the Citizen's mouth, Bloom must defend himself in verbal combat against the Citizen.

Amidst the talk of the deleterious effects of foreigners in the first few pages of "Cyclops," it is clear that Barney Kiernan's is a friend-or-foe environment, and outsiders are not welcome. When Bloom appears at the pub, he awaits Cunningham's arrival outside; but before he even enters the pub, Bloom catches the Citizen's attention. Spotting Bloom the Citizen asks, "What's that bloody freemason doing... prowling up and down outside?" (*Ulysses* 300). While Bloom is not a freemason (though he does work at the Freemasons Journal, which may explain the association), he has already been identified as an outsider, a foreigner, and thus a foe in the Citizen's mind. When Bloom finally enters, conflict is inevitable. Whereas Odysseus had to trick the Cyclops into getting drunk, the Citizen needs no assistance, as he is described "waiting for what the sky would drop in the way of drink" (295). Thus, as drinks are passed around in a liberal fashion, and while Bloom abstains, the Citizen becomes increasingly intoxicated and argumentative, and his animosity towards Bloom begins to accumulate. In the course of waiting for Cunningham, Bloom becomes engaged in a series of conversations with the Citizen

that continually tend towards politics (the art of the chapter); however, Bloom repeatedly manages to disengage just before the point of conflict.

Following a series of subjects in which Bloom backs down from arguing his point, the conversation then turns to the problem of British interference with Irish trade. As an embattled Irish Nationalist, the belligerent but articulate Citizen proposes violence as the best approach: putting “force against force” (330). Then, feeling courageously compelled to argue against the Citizen for the first time, Bloom replies:

--But it's no use, says [Bloom]. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows it's the very opposite of that that is really life.

-- What? Says Alf.

-- Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. (333)

Preaching love in a hateful environment, Bloom's internal affirmation of “warm fullblooded life” in “Hades” has now been transformed into an articulated belief in the universal brotherhood of mankind (an idea that has heroic possibilities). Bloom is beginning to prove that he is “O'Bloom, the son of Roy... Impervious to fear” (297), as he was described earlier in the episode; however, he still has a series of trials to fulfill before he can enact this discovery in his own life and begin his return home.

Bloom leaves the pub briefly to look for Cunningham at the nearby courthouse in the hopes of leaving the pub to complete his act of service for Dignam's widow (another part of Bloom's developing identity that has heroic potential); but in his

absence, the Citizen begins to mock Bloom for preaching universal love, calling him “a new apostle to the gentiles” (333), questioning his manhood and attacking his Jewish heritage:

--Do you call that a man? says the citizen...

--A wolf in sheep's clothing, says the citizen. That's what he is...

Ahasuerus I call him. Cursed by God. (338)

After searching for Cunningham outside, Bloom returns to the pub again, but is unaware that a rumor has been spread in his absence that he went to collect on a bet and is now expected to buy drinks with a portion of the winnings.⁶¹

When Bloom does not offer to buy drinks, thereby depriving the Citizen of a drink, the Citizen becomes enraged and begins to brazenly mock Bloom for being Jewish. Countering the Citizen's anti-Semitism, Bloom then engages the Citizen again in argument, this time defending his Jewish heritage:

And says [Bloom]:

--Mendelssohn was a jew and Karl Marx and Mercadante and Spinoza. And the Saviour was a jew and his father was a jew. Your God...

⁶¹ Earlier in the “Lotus Eaters” episode, Bantam Lyons asked Bloom if he could borrow his newspaper to “see about that French horse that's running today” (85). Lyons was talking about the Gold Cup race, which actually took place in Ascot, England on June 16, 1904. Bloom, totally ignorant of horse racing, replied, “You can keep it... I was just going to *throw it away*” (85, my italics). When Bloom leaves the pub to look for Cunningham in the “Cyclops” episode, T. Lenehan (who first appears in “Aeolus”) tells the other patrons in Barney Kiernan's that “Bloom had a few bob on *Throwaway* and he's gone to gather in the shekels... I met Bantam Lyons going to back that horse only I put him off it and he told me Bloom gave him the tip. Bet you what you likes he has a hundred shillings to five on. He's the only man in Dublin has it. A dark horse.” (335). Later in “Eumaus” Bloom reads a newspaper account of the race, but still does not realize his connection to the events. A horse named *Throwaway* actually won the 1904 Gold Cup race on 20-to-1 odds, and it appears Joyce, who was delighted by word play and the comic potential of verbal slips, could not resist incorporating such an anecdote in *Ulysses*.

--Whose God? Says the citizen.

--Well, his uncle was a jew, says he. Your God was a jew. Christ was a jew like me. (342)

In Barney Kiernan's, the Citizen's verbal attacks on Bloom are the most vicious in the novel, but here Bloom courageously combats the Citizen's verbal brutality for the second time. However, as the Citizen's anti-Semitic attacks fail to break Bloom's courage in verbal combat, the Citizen then threatens Bloom with physical force:

--By Jesus, says he, I'll brain that bloody jewman for using the holy name. By Jesus, I'll crucify him so I will. Give us that biscuit box here. (342)

The Citizen hurls the empty biscuit tin at Bloom, which recalls Polyphemus throwing the boulder at Odysseus. While the event is described in another interpolation as a "catastrophe... terrific and instantaneous in its effect" (344), the Citizen misses Bloom, and as Bloom escapes he is described as

Bloom Elijah, amid the clouds of the angels [ascending] to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees... like a shot off a shovel. (345)

As Ellmann suggests, the apotheosis of this interpolation is a comic one, but it "at once exalts Bloom and recalls him to purely human proportions" (*Liffey* 116). Moreover, Bowen states that the last phrase also "reinforces the incongruity which is the basis of comedy" (58). This is Bloom's first encounter with physical danger in his Odyssean journey through Dublin, and in a comic fashion he manages to escape unscathed.

Bloom entered the dark lair of the Citizen and ascends into brightness; however, Bloom's trial in "Cyclops" is not physical but rather spiritual. When the Citizen is described "[waddling] to the door, puffing and blowing" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 342-343) it becomes clear that he does not pose a real physical threat to Bloom. Rather, what Bloom had to contend with was the abyss of his mouth. Bloom courageously met the verbal brutality of the Citizen, reaffirmed his own manhood in a battle of argument and presented an idea that affirms the human spirit. In Bloom's adventure, this idea is what Campbell calls a "germinal idea" that has "the potentiality of bringing forth a new idea" (136). Yet while Bloom emerges with a new sense of confidence from "Cyclops," there are still trials to face in order to truly fulfill his journey and restore his sense of self-confidence. Bloom must now fulfill his transition from passivity to activity, return and bring forth his new discovery to become a hero.

After battling the bilious and belittling words of the Citizen, Bloom successfully completes his act of service with Dignam's widow. Then, in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, Bloom encounters Stephen Dedalus and a few of his friends at the Holles Street Maternity Hospital. Stephen (who Bloom has already crossed paths with in his journey) and his friends are drunk, and the drinks have presumably been purchased with Stephen's money. Once again, Bloom abstains from drinking, but seeing Stephen has "overmuch drunken" (*Ulysses* 389), Bloom begins to take a protective, even paternal interest in Stephen as his thoughts turn to paternity:

Now he is himself paternal and these about him might be his sons.

Who can say? The wise father knows his own child... No son of thy

loins is by thee. There is none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph. (413-414)

Throughout the day, Bloom has been haunted by the death of his own son, and in terms of the Odyssean parallels, Stephen is a Telemachus figure to Bloom. Thus, the "traveler Leopold" (386) becomes the "vigilant wanderer" (418), and when Stephen and his friends leave the hospital highly intoxicated, Bloom, collecting Stephen's things, is not far behind. Then, when Stephen and his friend, Lynch, decide to go to a brothel in Nighttown, Bloom follows the two drunks out of concern, thereby initiating another act of service and, simultaneously, another trial.

In the "Circe" episode, Joyce recreates Odysseus' encounter with the witch by that name who has the power to turn men into beasts. The art of the episode is magic and the technique is hallucination. By the time Bloom reaches the Mabbot street entrance of Nighttown, it is nearing midnight. When Bloom encountered the Citizen in "Cyclops" it was not even sundown. In Campbellian terms, crossing the threshold into Nighttown is to become the "descent into the dark" *par excellence*: the ultimate trial in Bloom's journey to becoming a hero. As the exterior and the interior collide, and reality and hallucinations become indistinguishable from one another, Bloom has truly moved "out of the known, conventional safety" of his life, and into unfamiliar, dangerous surroundings, as Campbell contends the hero must (126). Bloom's adventure becomes a battle against "the power of life locked in the unconscious" (146), and in this process he must overcome his own "dark passions" (*xiv*), which culminates in Bloom's hallucination in Bella Cohen's brothel. Thus, the "Circe" episode is a literal

return of the repressed, and Bloom's internal guilt over past transgressions, sexual fantasies and inadequacies take the form of visual, apparently external obstacles with which Bloom must contend.

Having lost sight of Stephen at the entrance to Nighttown, Bloom makes his way through the dark streets, meeting a series of hallucinations as he searches for him. After encountering his dead mother and father (representing his guilt over not following his Jewish heritage), his wife (representing his shame over her afternoon affair with Boylan) and a series of women (representing the range of his sexual escapades, fantasies and the ensuing guilt), Bloom hallucinates being put on trial for sexual misconduct. Yet Bloom defends himself against these trials, and continues to pursue Stephen:

BLOOM

Wildgoose chase this. Disorderly houses. Lord knows where they are gone. Drunks cover distance double quick... What am I following him for? Still, he's the best of the lot. If I hadn't heard about Mrs Beaufoy Purefoy I wouldn't have gone and wouldn't have met. Kismet. He'll lose the cash. (*Ulysses* 452)

After witnessing the amount of money Stephen spent on drinks for himself and others in "Oxen of the Sun," Bloom is concerned about what might happen to Stephen's money at a brothel in his drunken state. Seeking out Stephen in order to see to his personal and financial safety, Bloom finally reaches 81 Lower Tyrone Street, the location of Bella Cohen's brothel.

In terms of the Odyssean parallels, Bella Cohen's brothel is the palace of Circe. Inside Bloom finds Stephen, but in the process must face his longest hallucination, which will prove to be the most difficult trial in his heroic adventure. Before entering the brothel, one of the whores takes Bloom's "hard black shrivelled potato," which represents Odysseus' moly. In the *Odyssey*, Hermes gives Odysseus this potent herb as a form of protection from Circe's spells, and accordingly Bloom refers to his potato as a "talisman" (476). However, without his potato, Bloom enters the brothel, eats a chocolate (wondering if it might be an "Aphrodisiac?") and is confronted by "*Bella Cohen, a massive whoremistress*" (526-527). As Bowen states, "Circe" is "undeniably a funny episode." Yet while Bloom's trials "are comically objectified during the chapter" (63), there is simultaneously a serious mood to the episode. Bella Cohen is monstrous, showing both human traits (with a "*black horn fan like Minnie Hauck in Carmen*") as well as animalistic ones (as her large foot is described as a "hoof"). Moreover, she is also both feminine (with a "*threequarter ivory gown*") and masculine (with a "*sprouting mustache*"). Bella Cohen is Circe, and in Campbellian terms she is the "monster of the abyss," which represents the power of the unconscious (146).

At the moment of Bella's entrance, the fan she uses to cool herself speaks to Bloom, declaring a "Petticoat government" in which the "missus is master" (*Ulysses* 527). In this moment, Bloom realizes that "[he] should not have parted with [his] talisman" (529), and without it he is overcome by the "power of the dark" (Campbell 146), which Bella represents. Bloom must now, as Campbell says, "suffer all the trials and revelations of a terrible night-sea journey, while learning how to come to terms with

this power of the dark and emerge, at last, to a new way of life" (146). Facing Cohen without his talisman, Bloom undergoes a series of physical metamorphoses in the course of his hallucination. Bloom's ongoing psychological struggle to move from passivity to activity becomes an external, corporeal conflict. As Bella becomes Bello, taking on a "*baritone voice*" (*Ulysses* 530) and "*fat moustache rings round his shaven mouth*" (531), Bloom is transformed from a masculine role (phallic, active) to a feminine one (castrated, passive). Moreover, as the female Bloom contends with her dark passions, she also "*sinks on all fours, grunting, snuffing, rooting*" like a pig (531). Bloom is then compelled to "*shed [her] male garments*" and is dressed in whore's clothes (535). After being unmanned and transformed into a beast, the "SINS OF THE PAST" then rise against Bloom and testify in a "*medley of voices*" to more shameful sexual acts and fantasies (537). Bloom bows before Cohen as "Master! Mistress! Mantamer!" (538), and is subject to acts of sexual brutality, auctioned off to the highest bidder for sexual favors and then branded with a "B" for Bello. (539-540).

In the course of her hallucination thus far, Bloom has been psychologically castrated, reduced to an animal, confessed to her sins, and undergone punishment for these misdeeds. Bello describes Bloom as "an impotent little thing" and then tells her Boylan is with Molly in Eccles Street:

BELLO

... there's a man of brawn in possession there.... He is something like a fullgrown outdoor man. Well for you, you muff, if you had that weapon with knobs and lumps and warts all over it. He shot

his bolt, I can tell you... he's no eunuch... its kicking and coughing
up and down in her guts already! (541)

Forced to acknowledge Molly's infidelity, Bloom begins the process of reasserting his masculinity, saying: "Let me go. I will return. I will prove..." (543). He then cries out, "My will power! Memory! I have sinned! I have suff..." (544), and a Nymph appears. Bloom's sexuality is then traced back to his boyhood, a button snaps on his pants (calling him back to reality) and the spell of Bello Cohen is broken (544-553). As Bloom breaks through the hallucination, his sexuality is restored and the figure of Bella Cohen stands before him. Once again a man, Bloom then confronts Bella Cohen in comic fashion:

BLOOM

*(Composed, regards her) Passée. Mutton dressed as lamb. Long
in the tooth and superfluous hairs. A raw onion the last thing
at night would benefit your complexion. And take some double
chin drill. Your eyes are as vapid as the glass eyes of your
stuffed fox. They have the dimensions of your other features,
that's all. I'm not a triple screw propeller. (554)*

After being confronted by Bella Cohen, the agent of his psychosexual purgation, Bloom has acknowledged Molly's infidelity, assuaged his sexual guilt and has courageously resurrected himself from the dark depths the terrible night-sea journey⁶²

⁶² While Campbell uses this phrase to mythically describe the individual's perpetual battle with the monstrous unconscious throughout an entire lifetime (which is a repetition of Jung's conception of the terrible night-sea journey as the ego consciousness' journey by ship, perpetually struggling against a sea monster in order to prevent

that was his hallucination in the brothel. Having confronted the latent powers of his unconscious and undergone catharsis, Bloom has mastered his dark passions and regained his masculinity, thereby completing his transition from passivity to activity. Accordingly, Bloom regains his potato and begins to take on an active paternal role. He intercedes in Stephen's financial affairs after Stephen breaks a lamp and Bella attempts to extort more from him. Then Bloom courageously attempts to intercede on Stephen's behalf when he discovers the young man embroiled in an argument with two British soldiers. After one of the soldiers strikes Stephen unconscious, Bloom remains unafraid, prevents any further acts of violence, and "stands on guard" until Stephen regains consciousness (another act of service) (609). Thus, by the end of "Circe," Bloom has proved his courage and is ready to begin his return home with a revitalized sense of self-confidence that will enable him to begin and bring forth a new way of life.

In the "Ithaca" episode, Bloom finally returns to 7 Eccles Street, bringing Stephen along with him (who now represents his surrogate son). Although Stephen declines Bloom's offer to stay in the second bedroom (which would complete the Ulyssean reunion of father and son), this is Bloom's heroic return. In the course of his adventure, Bloom has displayed courage as he combated the verbal brutality of the Citizen in Barney Kiernan's pub and the psychosexual brutality of Bella Cohen in Nighttown (where he also went beyond the normal range of experience and regained temperance by mastering his dark passions). Moreover, Bloom has been loyal, not only by

being crushed to death in the deadly grip of the unconscious), I have revised this term to apply to Bloom's eighteen-hour Ulyssean journey through Dublin, though the same mythic significance applies.

returning to Molly in spite of his knowledge of her infidelity, but also in his commitment to a spiritual idea he discovered during his journey: his belief in the universal brotherhood of mankind, a belief that affirms the spirit of “warm fullblooded life.” Thus, Bloom is now described with “the light of inspiration shining in his countenance and bearing in his arms the secret of the race... Light to the gentiles”(676). This Biblical allusion to Paul (who was the apostle to the Gentiles) not only makes Bloom’s return ironically apostolic, but also refers back to the last time this phrase appeared in *Ulysses*, which is where Bloom discovered “the secret of the race.” In the “Cyclops” episode, the Citizen mocked Bloom for preaching universal love, calling him a “new apostle to the gentiles” (333); however, this is the heroic message Bloom has brought with him in his return: the secret of the race is Bloom’s life-affirming belief that love is really life. Bloom has returned with what Campbell calls a “life-giving elixir” (123) in the hopes of making this value “known and enacted in life” (39). Moreover, Bloom has also enacted this discovery in casual acts of kindness to Paddy Dignam’s widow and Stephen Dedalus, and returns home feeling “satisfied” having “sustained no positive loss” and having “brought positive gain to others” in the course of his adventure (*Ulysses* 676).

After departing unknowingly on his journey, discovering a germinal idea, and enacting it in several selfless acts of service, Bloom has returned with his message in order to achieve what Campbell calls a “truly heroic transformation of consciousness” (126). Bloom’s journey has been a “human quest” (139), and in spite of his

acknowledgment of the “irreparability of the past,” the “imprevidibility⁶³ of the future” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 696) and the “futility of triumph” (734), as Bloom falls asleep and the novel begins to come to a close, Bloom’s thoughts in “Ithaca” end with a full stop, “•” (737). As A. Walton Litz contends, this mark signifies not only the “conclusion of Bloom’s day” (which has been his adventure), but also his “retreat into the womb of time, from which he shall emerge the next day with all the fresh potentialities of Everyman” (404). As the resolution of Bloom’s adventure is both “an end and a beginning” (404), *Ulysses* comes to a comic closure, for Zack Bowen contends that the “basic absurdity of *Ulysses* lies in its representation of Bloom’s life from the time he gets up on June sixteenth to the time he goes to bed on the early morning of the seventeenth as a completed action” (29). Moreover, as the “proper effect of comedy is some sort of pleasure” for both the protagonist and the reader (43), *Ulysses* is ultimately comic because in the course of Bloom’s adventure

we laugh at the hero’s plight... [and] we are assured... that our own problems are universal... If Bloom can be a hero, inviting comparisons with Ulysses, then so can we all. If Bloom’s life is not so horrible... it assures us that we, who are as good as he, might experience something of the same [satisfaction]... Comedies do not bring the ultimate solutions to life; they depict the vitality in the ongoing struggle. (7).

⁶³ “Imprevidibility” was coined by Joyce, and means uncontrollable possibility.

Because he remains “combative in a struggle that will never be resolved and for which no ultimate victory is possible” (4), Bloom comes to exemplify the means with which to live meaningfully and authentically while facing the many challenges of everyday existence. Though he has remained unaware of it until now, Bloom’s physical life has been given to “some order of realization of... truth” (110). While it is not a universal truth (as Campbell contends it must not be), Bloom’s commitment to “warm fullblooded life” and his belief in the universal brotherhood of mankind is a system of values that gives meaning to life. Thus as “the traveler Leopold” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 386) becomes “our hero” (658) in the course of *Ulysses*, the laughter Bloom evokes is cathartic and the discovery he makes can be life-affirming for anyone who is willing to embody it in their own life. Joseph Campbell says that “we all have to find what best fosters the *flowering* of our humanity in this contemporary life” (148, my italics) and that the “the hero is the one who comes to participate in life” (66), to “say yes to this miracle of life” (67). In this context it is no surprise that the name of Joyce’s comic hero should be Leopold Bloom and the last word of his epic novel of life affirmation should be a definitive “Yes.”

TAKING THE STAGE: QUENTIN COMPSON

"To be or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?" (my italics)
— William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1623)

"Shall I, after teas and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
....
No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be"
— Thomas Stearns Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917)

Approaching the question of Quentin Compson's viability as a tragic hero, there has been significant critical disagreement concerning his heroism (or lack thereof). While some critics contend that Quentin has some measure of heroic potential,⁶⁴ or that he views himself as a heroic figure,⁶⁵ others argue,⁶⁶ as André Bleikasten does, that there "is of course nothing heroic about Quentin" (103). The question of Quentin's heroism is intimately bound up with his complicated relationship to his sister, Caddy Compson (which, for many critics, including Bleikasten, is limited to psychosexual significance⁶⁷), and the ways in which this conflict plays into his ultimate suicide in the "June Second, 1910" section of *The Sound and the Fury*. This relationship must first be

⁶⁴ James M. Mellard contends that Quentin is "a thinking rather than an acting hero" (68) in his essay "*The Sound and the Fury: Quentin Compson and Faulkner's 'Tragedy of Passion'*" (1970).

⁶⁵ In *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (1964), Olga Vickery argues that Quentin "sees himself as the hero of the [Compson] drama" (40), a reading similar to that of Gary Storhoff, who asserts, in his essay "Faulkner's Family Crucible: Quentin's Dilemma" (1998), that "the fool and the tragic hero is Quentin's familiar pattern in his family" (475).

⁶⁶ Like Bleikasten, Mark Spilika argues, in his essay "Quentin's universal Grief" (1970), that Quentin is a "perverse anti-hero" (455).

⁶⁷ Bleikasten also approaches Quentin's suicide from a "genealogical perspective" (83) in *The Ink of Melancholy* (83-87); however, in addition to not addressing the question of Quentin's heroism in this reading, Bleikasten also divorces his genealogical discussion of Quentin's suicide from his psychological discussion of Caddy's significance to Quentin's suicide, something I contend can (and must) be synergized.

explored in order to establish why Quentin commits suicide and in what terms his suicide can be viewed as a courageous, heroic act.

On a psychosexual level, Quentin's relationship to his sister is complicated by his conflation of familial love (*Storge*) and sexual love (*Eros*), which makes Caddy both an object of attraction and repulsion in Quentin's mind. In his psychosexual reading of Caddy's influence on Quentin's suicide, Bleikasten argues that Quentin's love for his sister is so "jealous, exclusive [and] excessive," it becomes an incestuous desire "that nothing can ever truly satisfy, a desire incommensurate with any real object, gliding from substitute to substitute down to the very last—death" (71). Bleikasten asserts that, in relation to this incestuous desire, Quentin's memory of "Caddy's muddy drawers [becomes] an emblem of her defilement, [which] Quentin considers to be an indelible stain on her honor: her fall from sexual innocence" (53). This emblematic memory Bleikasten refers to recalls Caddy climbing a pear tree to look in the window at her grandmother's funeral when the Compson children were very young (*S&F* 151-52). This scene is an Edenic image signifying a loss of innocence that resurfaces in Benjy's section:

We stopped under the tree by the parlor window...

"That's where Damuddy is." Caddy said...

She went to the tree. "Push me up, Versh."

"Your paw told you to stay out that tree." Versh said.

"That was a long time ago." Caddy said. "I expect he's forgotten about it..."

“All right.” Versh said... He went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. (38-39).

This “unbearable memory” that haunts Quentin is “to be washed away by the waters of the Charles River” (Beikasten 78) when he commits suicide, an act Bleikasten constructs as a “final surrender” (88). In light of what he calls “Quentin’s double narcissistic obsession with *incest* and with *suicide*” (72), Bleikasten contends that Caddy is, in Quentin’s mind, the “haunting figure in which death and desire meet and merge” (70). His suicide, then, is “a reentry into the waters of death/birth,” thereby reverting to an earlier state in which the ego is “unburdened and exalted rather than destroyed” (103). Thus, in Bleikasten’s psychosexual reading, “Quentin’s story can be read as an ironic version of the familiar journey of the romantic ego: from descent into a private hell to glorious resurrection” (103); and his suicide, then, is “a lover’s date” without any heroic possibility (79). However, while Caddy can be read as a psychosexual representation of both attraction and repulsion through the image of her muddy drawers as Bleikasten argues, Caddie’s significance to Quentin’s suicide is multivalent, for as Frederick Karl suggests, “the muddy drawers represent many things” (335).

Writing of Caddy, “a beautiful and tragic little girl” (Faulkner, *Essays* 300), in his 1946 “Introduction” to *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner said that

in *The Sound and the Fury* I had already put perhaps the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much: Caddy climbing the

pear tree to look in the window at her grandmother's funeral while Quentin and Jason and Benjy and the negroes looked up at the muddy seat of her drawers. (*Essays* 299)

In regards to the significant relationship between Faulkner's artistic concerns and this image, Karl argues that Caddy's muddy drawers typify Faulkner's conflicted relationship to the South—both his appreciation of its idealized past (which attracted him) as well as his recognition of its corrupted state in the modern world (which repulsed him). Moreover, Karl relates this love-hate relationship with the South to Quentin Compson in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, thereby suggesting another dimension to his relationship to his sister as well as his suicide:

the muddy drawers reveal a good deal about the author and the South. While they remain part of the love-longing of Quentin... the drawers also bring together the dilemmas and conflicts [*The Sound and the Fury*] takes on. In this respect, the tensions of the novel are not "resolved" until Quentin's final words at the end of *Absalom*, that brief hymn to love and hate for the South. Those muddy drawers... are a polluted vision of an Edenic existence, a dispossessed Garden... They reflect an existence Faulkner could not resolve in his own thinking, encompassing not only the sully of an Edenic fantasy, but the clash between indolent stability and corrosive, active modernism. Yet Faulkner also perceived that while the new and innovative may be

corruptive, the old is stagnant, indolent, passive, a historical backwater. (335)

In light of Cleanth Brooks' contention that "every artist puts something of himself into every one of his characters" (72), this reciprocity between Faulkner and his fiction provides a wider sociological significance to Caddy's muddy drawers. This additional social context complicates Bleikasten's psychosexual reading of this image, thereby opening up the possibility that Quentin's conflicted attitude towards the South might explain his preoccupation with Caddy's virginity in terms of what Warwick Wadlington calls, in *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy*, the traditional Southern "honor-shame code" (18). Moreover, this social context also reopens the possibility for Quentin's heroism that Bleikasten closes down in his psychosexual reading.

As the muddy drawers are an image of the "sullyng of an Edenic fantasy," they represent not only the corruption of Caddy's innocence in terms of Quentin's self-enclosed incest fantasy (which her lost virginity signifies on a psychosexual level), but also the ways in which the corruption of Caddy's innocence affects the honor of the Compson family in terms of Quentin's self-enclosed honor-shame morality (which her lost virginity signifies on a sociological level). In *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge* (1975), John T. Irwin states that

For Faulkner, doubling and incest are both images of the self-enclosed—the inability of the ego to break out of the circle of the self and of the individual to break out of the ring of the family—and as

such, both appear in his novels as symbols of the state of the South after the Civil War, symbols of a region turned in upon itself. (59)

As Irwin suggests that incest more broadly symbolizes the state of the South after the Civil War in Faulkner's fiction, Quentin's relation to Caddy has sociological as well as psychosexual significance. Ideologically, Quentin has aligned himself with a chivalric old Southern honor code that dictates concepts of virtue (including virginity), and Quentin deeply desires for himself and his family to live in terms of this code. Yet for Quentin, growing up amidst the moral confusion and social decay that the Civil War brought on the South (which represents the sullyng of an Edenic fantasy from a Southern standpoint⁶⁸), his ideology is a remnant of an antiquated social order that no longer applies in the modern world (which Quentin ultimately fails to realize). Because Quentin subscribes to an ideology that dictates a woman is supposed to be chaste, Caddy is expected to conform to this aspect of the old Southern honor code; however, as the old South is corrupted by the irredeemable loss of the Civil War, Caddy is corrupted by the irredeemable loss of her virginity. Quentin's internalized view of Caddy as chaste symbolically represents the old South, and thus Quentin desires both the promiscuous Caddy and the dilapidated state of the South (as they actually exist in reality) to be restored to Edenic, virginal states in which they were free from corruption (states of purity that are both socially constructed fictions of the Edenic fantasy of the old South). Moreover, if Quentin can conceive of a way in which

⁶⁸ The idea that the Civil War was solely responsible for the corruption of the "old South" was a dominant Southern point of view, and thus Southerners often referred to the Civil War as the "War of Northern Aggression." The reality is that the South was already corrupted by the sin of slavery. The Edenic fantasy of the "old South" was a socially constructed fiction, but it is one that Quentin seems to subscribe to.

Caddy (and thereby her virginity) can be restored to an earlier state in his mind, this will simultaneously restore his antiquated notion of his family's honor, something Quentin is deadly serious about (which his suicide confirms). Thus in contradistinction to Bleikasten, the muddy drawers represent not only Quentin's longing for the restoration of Caddy's sexual purity on a psychosexual level (which would restore his conception of Compson honor), but also his longing to reestablish the lost moral precepts of the antebellum South, including honor and chivalry, on a sociological level (which his incest fantasy symbolically represents). For Quentin, both Caddy and the South in their corrupted forms are objects of attraction and repulsion, objects of love and hate.

Approaching Quentin in terms of Joseph Campbell's construction of the hero, in addition to other ideas about heroism (including Quentin's own), I will argue that Quentin's suicide at the end of his section in *The Sound and the Fury* has heroic possibility given the additional cultural context of Quentin's life that is garnered in *Absalom, Absalom!*. I read Quentin's suicide as what Campbell calls a "physical deed, in which the hero performs a courageous act" (39) as he attempts to recover something "that has been lost" (123). In this context, Quentin's westward journey on June 2nd, 1910, which ends with his intentional plunge into the Charles River, is his attempt to reclaim the Edenic purity of both his sister and the South (which Caddy represents), repudiate his hereditary fate (which *Absalom, Absalom!* shows) and assert his own free will. Moreover, Campbell also contends that the hero, in attempting to do something "beyond the normal range of... experience" (123), should commit a creative act,

thereby leaving behind “the bounded, the fixed, all the rules” (39). In *The Play of Faulkner’s Language* (1982), William T. Matthews says that Quentin’s suicide is “clearly a creative (though surely desperate) gesture” because Quentin envisions his suicide as “the achievement of his life,” his *magnum opus* (85); however, as John Irwin argues, the distinction must be made between “those who kill themselves out of despair... and those who kill themselves as a last attempt to assert their mastery over their own fate” (97).

In order to address the broader significance of Quentin’s suicide, as well as the ways in which his suicide can be viewed as an act of heroism, reading *Absalom, Absalom!* as a prequel to *The Sound and the Fury* complicates the common reading that Quentin’s suicide is simply motivated by his inability to enact his incestuous desires. Although *The Sound and the Fury* was published in October 1929 and *Absalom, Absalom!* was published seven years later in October 1936, many of the events that take place in *Absalom, Absalom!* are narrated by Quentin in the South during the summer of 1909 and at Harvard in early 1910, only a matter of months before he commits suicide on June 2nd, 1910 in *The Sound and the Fury*. *Absalom, Absalom!* tells the story of Colonel Sutpen, “a man who wanted a son through pride, got too many of them and then they destroyed him;”⁶⁹ however, Faulkner chose Quentin to be the protagonist of the novel, as he told his publisher, Harrison Smith, in a letter before the novel was published:

Quentin Compson, of the Sound & Fury, tells it, or ties it together; he is the protagonist... I use him because it is just before he is to commit

⁶⁹ W. Faulkner’s letter to Harrison Smith, August 1934.

suicide... I use his bitterness which he has projected on the South in the form of hatred of it and its people to get more out of the story itself than a historical novel would be.⁷⁰

In his speculative reading of Faulkner's fiction, *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge*, John Irwin notes that "Faulkner did not need to make Quentin Compson a narrator of *Absalom*, nor did he need to involve the Compson family in the story of the Sutpens." Additionally, Irwin also proposes that, in light of reoccurring characters and temporal continuities, Faulkner's novels can be read as "parts of a single continuing story" (27). Reading *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* as a continuous story provides a sense of Quentin's personal history, which is defined by his complex relationship to his Southern heritage.

As the "principal narrative consciousness" of *Absalom, Absalom!* (Irwin 26), Quentin is told and retells the story of Colonel Sutpen, "the very dark forces of fate which [Sutpen] had evoked and dared" and the "current of retribution and fatality" that resulted (Faulkner, *A,A!* 133/216). Sutpen's is a story of doom brought on by his fatal sin of pride. And, as Lynn Gartrell Levins argues in *Faulkner's Heroic Design*, Quentin's agonizing cry as the novel ends ("I don't hate [the South]... I don't hate it... *I don't hate it... I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*") is a "realization of the enormous consequences of Sutpen's fatal sin, a sin which Quentin extends to not just the doomed progenitor of Sutpen's Hundred but all the South" (46). In Quentin's mind, the fatalistic story of Sutpen's destruction is an archetype for Southern experience. As a

⁷⁰ W. Faulkner's letter to Harrison Smith, February 1934.

“kind of Jungian ‘collective consciousness’” (Levins 22-23), any Southerner, then, has already absorbed the story “*without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it*” (Faulkner, *Absalom* 172). Being the descendent of a line of “defeated grandfathers” (289), Quentin considers himself “not a being, an entity, [but] a commonwealth,” his very body “an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names” (7). Thus Quentin is not only a physical but also a “mental descendant” of a fatalistic ideology which dictates that the only thing a Southerner can expect (since the loss of the Civil War) is repeated doom and destruction, a view held by Quentin’s father. As Jason Compson, Sr. tells his son in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Southerners are “doomed to live” (105) in “dead time” (71), victims of the “horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs” (71). Living in the shadow of his father’s “faith in human mischance and folly” (242) and hearing the fatalistic Southern story of unending doom and destruction, “Quentin, the Southerner ” (277), thinks:

Am I going to have to hear it all again... 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 so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do” (222)

Feeling trapped by the repetition of his heritage and fearful of the possibility that he might become “bankrupt with the incompetence of age” like his father (260), Quentin wonders if it might be better if no Southerner had “*ever drawn the breath of life on this earth. Better that all who remain of us be blasted from the face of this earth*” (233). In *Absalom,*

Absalom! Quentin is already problematically poised between the two poles of Hamlet's question: "To be or not to be" (*Hamlet* 3.1.64). Given the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that Quentin feels he faces, perhaps it might be better to "take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing end them" (3.1.66-68); better to "[irrevocably repudiate] the old heredity and training" of the South's collective fate (*Absalom* 277). Perhaps for Quentin, "an academic Hamlet" (142), suicide might be a manifestation of his "own free will" (263).

Quentin's section in *The Sound and the Fury* is, as Irwin states, "a prolonged struggle between fate and his exertions of will" (61). In terms of Joseph Campbell's construction of the hero, Quentin's extended trial takes the form of an internal conflict between his father's nihilistic philosophy (repetition of fate) and his own voice (exertion of free will) as he makes his way on his adventure through the streets of Cambridge. As Irwin asserts, "Mr. Compson is Quentin's most subtle enemy in *The Sound and the Fury*, and there is present in Quentin's section of the book, a thinly veiled hatred of his father" (75). Moreover, as "Quentin's father, with his failure and defeatism, his blend of cynicism and nihilism, has [told his son] that his actions are meaningless" (75) because they are made in "dead time," Quentin conceives of his fatalistic heritage as a "problem *in* time and a problem *of* time" (63). Thus, by equating time and fate, time becomes aligned with Mr. Compson as an adversarial force Quentin must contest.

When Quentin wakes on “June Second, 1910” with the recognition that he is “in time again, hearing the watch” (*Sound* 76), this awareness of his Grandfather’s watch is immediately connected to the words of his father:

When Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it is rather excruciating-ly [*sic*] apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum [*sic*] of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s. 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 of your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. (76)

Mr. Compson’s nihilistic worldview is an ideological influence that recurs within Quentin’s consciousness throughout his section in *The Sound and the Fury*. In regards to this influence, Bleikasten argues that Quentin is

heir to the southern tradition, to its aristocratic code of honor and its puritanical ethic. When this pattern of values is passed on, it has already lost its authority... Quentin clings to it with desperate obstinacy because it is the only available recourse against absurdity... (84)

While Quentin and his father both have some conception of a traditional southern honor-shame code, the ways in which they each interpret this code and put it into

practice are defined by the ideological system(s) that inform their individual worldviews.

Whether or not Quentin *actually* subscribes to his father's "pattern of values" can be explored in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's construction of the dominating authoritative discourse. In "The Topic of the Speaking Person," Bakhtin contends that, for the individual consciousness, the authoritative word is "a special (as it were, hieratic) language" that "strives to determine the very basis of [the individual's] ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of [his] behavior" (532). Therefore, as the authoritative discourse "demands [the individual] acknowledge it" (532), Bakhtin suggests that the authoritative discourse is, "so to speak, the word of the father" (532). Thus, Mr. Compson's words (his linguistic repetition of the fatalistic Southern story of unending doom and destruction) become a dominant ideology that Quentin must contest in order to act in the world.

After thinking that it is "between seven and eight o'clock" when he wakes up (*Sound* 76), Quentin goes to his dresser, turns his Grandfather's watch face-down and goes back to bed. Yet seeing the shadow of the sash on the curtain when he lies down again, Quentin remembers that he has "learned to tell [time] almost to the minute" based on the position of the shadow (77). In an attempt to avoid having to acknowledge time (which he has been attempting to do since he woke up and will continue to do throughout his section), Quentin then turns his back to the window; however, after only a few moments he can "hear the watch again" (78). Quentin then gets up and proceeds to break his Grandfather's watch:

I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. (*Sound* 80)

As his Grandfather's watch carries both temporal and familial associations, Quentin's attempt to destroy it suggests that he harbors deeply rooted hostilities towards both time and his heritage. While Quentin has internalized Mr. Compson's nihilistic philosophy (an authoritative discourse of Southern fatalism), this attempt to destroy his Grandfather's watch signifies that Quentin does not "cling to" his father's "system of values" with "desperate obstinacy" as Bleikasten contends, but both repeats and revises his father's values. Quentin is trying to reject the "'transmission of tradition'" from his father (Irwin, qtd Jones 66), which his attempt to destroy the watch suggests; but at the same time Quentin is inundated with his Father's voice, an authoritative discourse that "demands [he] acknowledge it" (Bakhtin 532). However, while Quentin and his father both think in terms of a bivalent honor-shame logic, and both consider "time [to be their] misfortune" (104), it is in their actions that the ideological differences between Quentin and his father become evident. Unlike his father, who chooses to live in a perpetual state of pessimism and passivity, Quentin is determined to conquer time, thereby liberating himself from the "reducto absurdum [*sic*] of human experience." This attempt to destroy his Grandfather's watch signifies that Quentin is seeking a "recourse against absurdity" other than his father's ideology (Bleikasten 84); however, as Mr. Compson's words influence Quentin's thoughts and

actions, they have not “lost [their] authority” as Bleikasten suggests (85). Moreover, this attempt to destroy the watch (and thereby resist his father’s influence) also signifies that Quentin has reified time – he literally believes that “Time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels,” and that it is “only when the clock stops [that] time comes to life” (80). Considering time as a literal thing rather than an abstract concept, Quentin believes that he can master time with physical action. Thus in Quentin’s mind, suicide, as a physical act, stands as a means with which to forever free himself from time and thereby from the Southern fate of folly and despair which Mr. Compson’s ideology affirms. However, while Quentin succeeds in reducing his Grandfather’s watch to a blank dial, “The watch [ticks] on” (80), thereby revealing Quentin’s paradoxical, even delusional, relationship to time. Quentin is obsessed with time, and although he tries to avoid it, there are few pages in Quentin’s section in which he is not aware of a ticking clock or time passing. Be it the sound of his Grandfather’s mangled watch in his pocket, the chimes of a clock tower or the length of his shadow, time is always on Quentin’s mind.

During his last conversation with his son, Mr. Compson tells Quentin that man “must just stay awake and see evil done for a while” (176). In response, Quentin posits suicide as a means of transcending time, the “*reducto absurdum* [*sic*] of all human experience” (76), stating “it doesn’t have to be even that long for a man of courage” (76). In this moment, the ideological differences between Quentin and his father are apparent. As Mr. Compson believes victory is impossible due to his subscription to the fatalistic antebellum ideology that all a Southerner can expect is repeated doom and

destruction (“no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought”), Quentin’s father chooses passivity as his response to the temporal certainty of defeat. Thus, from Mr. Compson’s standpoint, all a man must do, or can do, is “stay awake and see evil done for a while.” Quentin has rejected his father’s ideological standpoint and is seeking a mode of response that will enable him to counteract this apparently hereditary repetition of fate (“it doesn’t have to be even that long for a man of courage”). For Quentin, “Again [is a] Sadder [word] than was. Again [is the] Saddest [word] of all” (95). This fundamental ideological difference between Mr. Compson’s resignation to fate (passivity) and Quentin’s drive to exert his own free-will (activity) is evident when Quentin demands that his father act against one of Caddy’s seducers, Dalton Ames, whose behavior Quentin thinks “just missed gentility” (92). Quentin is so preoccupied with his chivalric concept of honor that he tells his father, “*I committed incest... it was me and not Dalton Ames*” (79), which in his mind would be more honorable than the reality of the situation. This behavior displays both a patriarchal concern with defending Caddy’s purity (which would restore his conception of Compson honor) as well as Quentin’s longing to reestablish the lost moral precepts of the antebellum South (which his incest fantasy symbolically represents); however, as John Irwin suggests, Mr. Compson answers in essence:

“Do you realize how many times this has happened before and how many times it will happen again? You are seeking a once-and-for-all solution to this problem, but there are no once-and-for all solutions. One has no force, no authority to act in this matter because one has no

originality. The very repetitive nature of time precludes the existence of originality within its cycles. You cannot be the father because I am not the father – only Time is the father.” (Irwin 110-11)

While Mr. Compson still views the world in terms of honor and shame as his son does, Quentin’s father refuses to act because he believes honor can no longer be actualized when “One has no force, no authority to act” (110-11). Thus as Mr. Compson wills the “eternal recurrence of the same” (95), he has elected for what Irwin calls a “passivity actively initiated” (95). Quentin, on the other hand, feels himself in “the grip of a fate that periodically repeats itself without his willing it,” and thus his condition is a “passivity involuntarily imposed” (95). Unlike Mr. Compson, Quentin is actively looking for ways to conquer passivity, thereby overcoming the fatalistic ideology of his father. Quentin searches for a “once-and-for-all solution.” He is seeking a solution that will not only enable him to assert his mastery over fate, but one that will simultaneously restore his sister’s virginity in his mind (thereby restoring her innocence as well as his family’s honor). Quentin desires to find “a virgin space” (111) in which originality is possible, a place in which he can hold “*the best of the old South which is dead* (Absalom 104).

In Quentin’s last conversation with his father, Mr. Compson tells his son that, by proposing suicide as a means of transcending time, he is blind to the “general truth” of the “sequence of natural events” which “shadows every mans [*sic*] brow” (177). Because Mr. Compson subscribes to the ideology of Southern fatalism, which dictates that a man has no authority to act against time, Quentin’s father believes that a man

has no other recourse than to passively endure the repetitive nature of time, which in his mind brings inevitable doom and destruction. Moreover, Quentin's father further contends that Quentin's conception of suicide is the contemplation of "an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and [he will] not even be dead" (177). However, as Mr. Compson also believes that "every man is the arbiter of his own virtues," Quentin's father tells his son that "whether or not you consider [suicide] courageous is of more importance than the act itself than any act" (176). As Quentin believes that a "man of courage" need not "just stay awake and see evil done for a while," need not remain in an impotent state of inactivity like his father has chosen, Quentin considers casting himself off a bridge into the Charles River with two flat-irons in his pockets to be an act of courage. In Quentin's mind this act will enable him to resist the fatalistic ideology of his father and reclaim the Edenic purity of both his sister and the South (which Caddy represents) through the means of his own agency. In contradistinction to his father's fatalism, then, Quentin believes that

It's not when you realize that nothing can help you—religion, pride, anything—it's when you realize that you don't need any aid. (80)

Moreover, as Mr. Compson notes, Quentin does not consider his suicide to be the end of his life. Instead Quentin conceives of himself as conscious beyond the grave, witnessing the Second Coming, as though he has already resurrected himself through suicide:

And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand. Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flat-iron would come rising up.
(80)

Thus Quentin envisions the moment of his suicide as "*The bridge arching into silence darkness sleep the water peaceful swift not goodbye*" (172).

If Quentin's construction of his suicide as an act of courage is "of more importance than the act itself" (*Sound* 176), the heroic possibility of Quentin's suicide is problematic but not impossible. As Quentin commits suicide in defiance of his father and his father's attempts to teach him the narrative that all a Southerner can expect is the repetition of a hereditary fate of folly and despair,⁷¹ I read Quentin's plunge into the darkness of the Charles River as a manifestation of what Campbell calls the descent into the dark, his movement out of "the realm of the familiar" (146). Psychologically, the ideological influence of Mr. Compson can be read metaphorically as a monstrous presence for the ways in which "Father said" repeatedly intrudes upon Quentin's conscious thoughts, in which case he is forced to contend with it because the authoritative discourse "demands [the individual] acknowledge it" (Bakhtin 532). In order to conquer Mr. Compson's ideological presence and its dictum that "no battle is ever won [or] even fought" (*Sound* 76), in order to silence the Southern story of the

⁷¹ I use "teach" here intentionally, as Mr. Compson does not involuntarily pass on his ideology to his son, but rather he actively preaches it: "Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away" (*Sound* 175).

"very dark forces of fate" that a Southerner is heir to (*Absalom* 133), Quentin goes "voluntarily to the crucifixion" (Campbell 138), "[asserting his] mastery over [his] own fate" (Irwin 97). Quentin aspires to "a spiritual sphere which transcends all the pains of earth," which in his mind are caused by the repetitive nature of time (Campbell 138). Thus Quentin "[crucifies his] temporal and earthly [body], [lets himself] be torn" apart in order to rise through "dismemberment" (138). In Quentin's mind, suicide is a way for him to liberate himself from the fate of his family. As Karl states, Quentin's suicide represents his repudiation of "an entire line of declining, name-repeating Compsons" (34); however, Quentin has not "sought out his own doom" as Karl contends (332), but rather Quentin constructs his suicide as a courageous release from that doom. By becoming "the agent of [his] own crucifixion" in his own mind, Quentin has "[repudiated] home and blood in order to champion his defiance" (*Absalom* 114, 271).

It must first be stressed that Joseph Campbell would never consider a suicide as a proper act of heroism as it is not a life-affirming act; however, if Quentin is to be read as a heroic figure, even if only in his own mind, two additional questions remain. First, as Campbell asserts, the hero must "[sacrifice] himself for something" (127), there must be a measure of service in Quentin's construction of suicide as a courageous act for it to be considered heroic. If being a Southerner is a "hereditary evil" (*Absalom* 148), a product of being "born and bred in the deep South" (4) with blood that is "tainted and corrupt" (263), Quentin's suicide frees his unborn. As Irwin suggests, the solution Quentin seeks must be one that frees him alike from "time," "generation" and "fate,"

but Quentin also realizes that “he must die childless, he must free himself from time without having passed on the self-perpetuating affront of sonship” (122). Thus, in terms of Quentin’s construction of courage (though certainly not Campbell’s), suicide can be read as Quentin’s attempt to free “himself as well as his descendants from time and death by freeing them from generations” (130). Second, as Campbell contends the hero must also bring about a “transformation of consciousness” (126), Quentin’s suicide must be committed with the intent of making a set of values “known and enacted in life” (135). In his suicide, and even in his behavior beforehand, Quentin is seeking, in part, to reestablish the lost chivalric code of the antebellum South. As Levins argues:

By espousing the chivalric code as a pattern of behavior, Quentin hopes to inspire his family to more honorable rules of conduct, and if he fails he will at least have invested the disintegration of the Compson family—an alcoholic father, a neurotic mother, a promiscuous sister, an idiot brother—with the heroic dimensions associated with this ideal. (128-129)

By resisting his father’s ideology, in both life and death, Quentin attempts to initiate a “truly heroic transformation of consciousness” within his family. In his last conversation with his father, Quentin says that his suicide will make it “better for me [and] for all of us” (*Sound* 178); however, if his suicide does not end with such a transformation, as Campbell acknowledges, there is the possibility of “a hero who fails” (41). While Joseph Campbell would not accept suicide as a failed heroic act, and

while Quentin's suicide can not and does not stop the disintegration of the Compsons, in Quentin's mind his suicide stands a courageous attempt to free himself from fate and assert his agency.

Like the classical tragic hero, Quentin "operates against a backdrop of fate" as he seeks out a way to assert his agency (Levins 18). In the course of "June Second, 1910," Quentin never despairs, and as he moves closer to his suicide Quentin becomes "more confident of the efficacy of [his] own action" (49). Quentin will not settle for "living in a helpless state... where one is passive in the grip of time... in a state where the will's sense of mastery and activity is an illusion," like T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock (Irwin 96). Whereas Prufrock asks "Do I dare disturb the universe," Quentin, like the classical tragic hero, "dares to defy Circumstance" (Levins 20). Quentin has the strength, the courage, which Prufrock does not: the strength to "force the moment to the its crisis." Quentin, like the classical tragic hero, is doomed to fail, a victim to his own tragic flaw and an error of judgment. As Levins states, Quentin's tragic flaw is that ultimately his "abstract chivalric code becomes more important to him than the reality of daily living; the chivalric pattern comes to mean more than the living individuals whose conduct that ideal should inspire" (Levins 129). Moreover, Quentin's error of judgment is his conviction that his suicide will enable him to escape his fate through an "apotheosis" in which he "will not even be dead" (*Sound* 177). In Campbell's construction, the hero who fails does so because he "insists on a certain program" (262), and in the process runs the risk of a "schizophrenic crackup" (147). The program Quentin insists on is the chivalric old Southern honor code, and it is not surprising,

then, that critics such as André Bleikasten state that “Quentin’s divided self is close to schizophrenia” (110). In the chivalric code, Quentin thinks he has found a truth that will inspire his family to more honorable rules of conduct (thereby mitigating some of the corruption Quentin associates with their fate); however, as Campbell stresses, the individual “who thinks he has found [an] ultimate truth is wrong” (55). Yet one must consider Faulkner’s belief that man’s immortality is “that he is faced with a tragedy which he can’t beat and he still tries to do something with it” (Meriwether, qtd Faulkner 89). Whether or not a man’s “every breath is,” as Mr. Compson says, “a fresh cast of dice already loaded against him,” Quentin “risks everything on a single blind turn of a card” (*Sound* 177). Quentin is a tragic hero because he attempts to defy an inevitable defeat, even if he destroys himself while doing so—he attempts the “fierce manipulation of the cards or dice” (*Absalom* 129). For Quentin, suicide is “nobler in the mind” than suffering the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” Thus by refusing to accept the “calamity of so long life” as his father does, Quentin “[takes] arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing [ends] them” (*Hamlet* 3.1.67-68).

CONCLUSION

While James Joyce and William Faulkner lived and wrote a quarter of the world away from one another and constructed their fictional worlds in terms of their distinct cultural backgrounds, the internal struggles Leopold Bloom and Quentin Compson undergo are strikingly similar. As Bloom, a middle-aged man of Jewish descent, makes his way around Dublin, and Quentin, a young man of Southern descent, makes his way around Cambridge, both characters seem isolated from their physical surroundings, dwelling on recurrent subjects of psychological distress. As the reader becomes acquainted with the complex interior lives of both characters—Bloom's struggle with his self-confidence (which is a product of his insecurities and difficulties in acknowledging his private concerns, including his wife's impending infidelity) and Quentin's struggle with his free will (which is a product of his conflicted relationship with his sister / the South)—the interior trials that Bloom and Quentin must contend with reflect the effects of the challenges of the modern world on the continually devalued individual, which Joyce and Faulkner witnessed around the turn of the twentieth century. Living in the midst of widespread acceleration, mechanization and commodification since the Industrial Revolution, the individual has come into ever increasing conflict with society and social constructions of reality. Bloom and Quentin typify this struggle, experiencing alienation and fragmentation as they attempt to assert their agency and find some sense of personal authenticity amidst so much social decay. For both characters this project is an internal negotiation between power and powerlessness, between action and passivity.

In spite of the similar internal trials Bloom and Quentin face, the ways in which they ultimately attempt their respective transitions from passivity to activity are markedly different. In *Ulysses*, Bloom encounters exterior situations, such as the Citizen in "Cyclops" and Bella Cohen in "Circe," that enable him to transform from a passive adult to an active participant in his own life. In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's internal struggle to come to terms with the reality of his sister's lost innocence, which represents the loss of the old South, and his attempt to free himself from the ideological influence of his father's nihilistic philosophy, which dictates that after the irredeemable loss of the Civil War all a Southerner can expect is a collective fate of repeated doom and destruction. In the face of these trials, Quentin chooses suicide, which he constructs in his mind as a means with which to reclaim the Edenic purity of both his sister and the South (which his sister represents), resist his father's influence (thereby repudiating his hereditary fate) and assert his own free will. These modes of response place Bloom and Quentin on opposite ends of the Aristotelian aesthetic modes of comedy (which is the organizing principle of Joyce's artistic project) and tragedy (which is the organizing principle of Faulkner's artistic project). Yet while Joyce and Faulkner wrote in terms of these different organizational principles, the ultimate aim of both of their artistic projects is the affirmation of the human spirit.

I have argued that Bloom is a comic hero because his life-affirming belief that love is really life exemplifies the means with which to live meaningfully and authentically while facing the many challenges of everyday existence. Moreover, I have also argued

that Quentin is a tragic hero because through his suicide he attempts to defy an inevitable defeat, even though he is destroyed in his attempt to do so. In accordance with Joseph Campbell's construction of the hero, both Bloom and Quentin undertake heroic adventures. In the course of his Odyssean journey through Dublin in *Ulysses*, Bloom makes a spiritual discovery, courageously defends himself against the Citizen and Bella Cohen in two trials, completes a number of acts of service and ultimately returns to make his spiritual discovery known and enacted in life, thereby completing what Campbell calls "a truly heroic transformation of consciousness" (126). In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's trial takes the form of his resistance to, and his ultimate rejection of the ideological influence of his father, and his adventure culminates in his suicidal repudiation of his hereditary fate, which Quentin considers to be an act of courage. Comparing the circumstances and actions of these two characters with Joyce's and Faulkner's similar artistic projects, the ways in which Bloom affirms the spirit of life as a comic hero is straightforward in that his journey is a human quest and his spiritual discovery that love is really life is a product of Bloom's belief in the universal brotherhood of mankind. However, the ways in which Quentin affirms the spirit of life as a tragic hero are more complicated.

As Zack Bowen proposes, the protagonists in both comedy and tragedy both "try to do their best in an often hostile world" (118-19); however, pleasure and the "ultimate satisfaction of [the] protagonist" are the end results of comedy (39), whereas "tragedy always brings pain," typically resulting in the ultimate destruction of the protagonist (130). Yet in spite of the fatalism and suffering that are attendant to the

tragic mode, as Lynn Gartrell Levins asserts, "Even tragedy... is an affirmation of faith in life" (47). While Quentin takes his own life, this action ironically affirms life in that it demonstrates that the death of one individual is not the end. Implicit in Quentin's action is the hopeful message of modernism that in the face of doom and destruction life goes on; or, as Faulkner says in his Nobel Prize Address, "[man] will prevail." As the laughter Bloom elicits from the reader of *Ulysses* is cathartic, so too is Quentin's action, as the reader pities Quentin for taking his own life and is terrified that the life of such an exceptional protagonist could come to such an unfortunate end, thereby purging those emotions for the reader. It is often the case that the tragic hero is a "superior protagonist" (Bowen 20), whereas the comic hero is "part of life as it exists rather than being the reshapers or the changers that tragic heroes are" (12). Rather, comic heroes like Bloom are part of the "vital continuity" of life, part of "life as it exists" (12).

Ultimately, Joseph Campbell's construction of the hero implicitly favors the comic hero, heroes like Leopold Bloom who embody the "power and energy of life" (144) and engage in the "affirmation of all things" (67). As tragic heroes like Quentin Compson demonstrate, Campbell acknowledges that "[affirmation] is difficult" (66); however, he maintains that "the hero's sphere of action is not the transcendent," which Quentin aspires to, but rather "here, now, in the field of time" (66). As a comic hero, on the other hand, Bloom comes to a "deeper awareness of the very act of living itself" (xvii) at the end of *Ulysses*, in spite of all of the difficulties he faces. As Campbell also maintains, "[suffering] is life;" and even in the midst of suffering life can become

“harmonious, centered [and] affirmative” (160) if the individual is “looking for a way of experiencing the world that will open [him] to the transcendence that informs it” (53). What Bloom recognizes and Quentin does not, and Joyce, Faulkner and Campbell believe we must all recognize, is “ the ‘radiance of all things’” (Campbell, qtd Joyce 162). Like Bloom, we must comprehend that “heaven and hell are within us”⁷² (39), and that the “function of life” is the “experience of eternity right here and now” (67).

⁷² Significantly, a similar phrase occurs in Faulkner’s first novel, *Soldiers’ Pay* (1926). At the end of the novel, one of the characters says, “We make our own heaven or hell in this world. Who knows; perhaps when we die we may not be required to go anywhere nor do anything at all. That would be heaven” (313).

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APPENDIX (POEMS)

“Of Modern Poetry” (1942) by Wallace Stevens

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
It has to face the men of the time and to meet
The women of the time. It has to think about war
And it has to find what will suffice. It has
To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage,
And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
Of which, an invisible audience listens,
Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
In an emotion as of two people, as of two
Emotions becoming one. The actor is
A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
Beyond which it has no will to rise.

It must
Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions
And for a hundred visions and revisions
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
[They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"]
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all;
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

.

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say, "That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor —
And this, and so much more? —
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

.

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous —
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.