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Faulknerian Social Strata Meridians in Yoknapatawpha County: A Study in Literary Geography

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Faulknerian Social Strata Meridians in Yoknapatawpha County: A Study in Literary
Geography

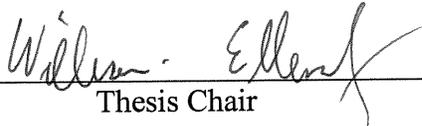
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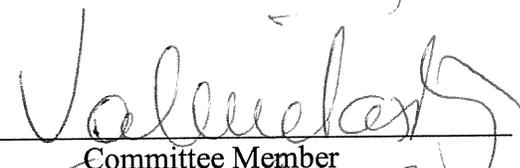
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William Faulkner may have claimed ownership of Yoknapatawpha County as a fictional destination whose inhabitants he had the exclusive right to mine for literary inspiration, but not even the sole proprietor and cartographer himself could have accounted for the transcendence of his literarily- and cartographically-delineated social strata beyond the boundaries of his 2400-mile mythical county. Superimposed over a real map of Lafayette County, Mississippi, his birthplace and the very root of his modernist and Southern gothic canon, Yoknapatawpha is no more fictional than racism and gender inequality in the South. Faulkner's maps themselves—of which there are two official copies, the first appearing in the back matter of the 1936 edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the second appearing in 1946's *The Portable Faulkner*—have evolved over time to reflect the alterations of the land itself as it undergoes the shift into modernity. With the second, reduced printing in *The Portable Faulkner*, the map loses its nuance and much of Faulkner's descriptions which lend meaning and depth to the maps, just as Yoknapatawpha and Jefferson do when their social strata begin to conglomerate. The maps, and the disparity between them, reveal a cartographical geography that plots the geospatial relationships between social classes in the post-Civil War South while upending the historical conceptions of these relationships.

Before delving into the complexities of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha maps and in order to understand how these modernist manifestos favor the approach of literary geography, it is necessary to explain what literary geography is and how this study is made possible by literary cartography. Literary cartography, which is the creation of the maps that can then be analyzed with an approach to literary geography, is at the intersection of geocriticism and the digital humanities. Robert Tally, Jr., who is widely

regarded by the academic community as the forefather of the study, provides insight into literary cartography:

Mapping establishes a meaningful framework for the subject, with points of reference for thinking about oneself and one's place in the broader social space. Likewise, narratives are frequently used to make sense of, or give form to, this world in significant ways. As such, literary works serve a cartographic function by creating a figurative or allegorical representation of a social space, broadly understood. This I refer to as literary cartography. ("On Literary Cartography: Narrative as a Spatially Symbolic Act")

Although this is a relatively new critical approach to literature, it has been gaining momentum among scholarly communities like Faulkner's. At the 2015 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha conference held fittingly in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner's birthplace and the spiritual base for Jefferson, editors Jay Watson and Anne J. Abadie sensed a converging of the traditional lenses through which Faulkner has been analyzed, feminism, modernism, and miscegenation, tentatively in the direction of literary cartography. Thus, the published collection was coined *Faulkner's Geographies*, and in it were highlighted the ways in which Faulkner's geographies shape the development of his characters. And yet, the title of this conference's publishing was misleading—those traditional lenses were the focus instead of the land itself, and the maps were hardly made mention of. They were neither utilized nor explored to their full extent. Under the critical lens of literary cartography are connections between Faulkner's social classes that can be read outside of the boundaries of the map as well as the boundaries of their historical conceptions to expand on a truly modernist dimension of Faulkner's own making that

extends beyond his 2400-square-mile county. That is my goal for this study of Faulkner's literary geography, or the study of his existing cartography. Essentially, if literary cartography is when "you read books, focussing on spatial aspects, [and] you design a map," then what happens when "you have a look at that map, and... discover things you didn't know before: New insights which are generated by that map" (Piatti 182) is the study of that map's literary geography. The underlying assumption of literary geography, that every character occupies a space, is very much supported by the evidence that Faulkner himself created his own maps for the purpose of charting his characters' place in his canon.

The subject of these maps, Yoknapatawpha County, is set up as a caste system reflective of the social classes of the time in which Faulkner was writing, namely the pre- and post-Civil War South, but there is an incongruity between the way its denizens interact with different social strata other than their own across his geography and the way that one might expect history to govern said interactions. Particularly, the mobility of three classes of citizens that history says have been disenfranchised—women, the black community, and the impoverished rural folk—proves that social and racial segregation exists in Yoknapatawpha, but not in the traditional, geographical way. Instead, segregation can be found metaphorically, as more of an ironic version of Faulkner's favoritism towards these disenfranchised classes at the cost of destroying the white men and women of Jefferson who cling to the very ideas that obliterate them. Thus, the field of literary cartography and geography has opened up a new realm of study for the classic characters who inhabit Yoknapatawpha, revealing them to occupy a deeper space in the canon of modernism. When viewed through the lens of literary geography, the placement

of Frenchman's Bend and Sutpen's Hundred with Jefferson in the middle take on a social meaning, and Faulkner carefully aligns the characters that come out of each place on these social and geospatial maps. While it might be assumed that the lower the class distinction, the less well-traveled these people ought to be as a result, but a literarily geographical study of the map suggests just the opposite. The spatial distance of Frenchman's Bend, which affects the families that inhabit the surrounding area, does nothing to hinder the movements, both geographical and social, of said inhabitants. Faulkner scholar Joseph Urgo claims, "On its surface, on the map, Yoknapatawpha is an imaginary place, a county superimposed on that of Lafayette County, Mississippi" (642). These maps provide not only the corpus of Faulkner's county and his literary works, but also within the context of his space in the modernist canon. Many of Faulkner's protagonists either benefit or suffer from their relationship with modernity; the healthier that relationship is, the more isolated from modernity the characters are.

To provide context for what Faulkner's maps accomplish from a modernist perspective, it is crucial to understand the social strata in their own context within their own native geography—as separate from Jefferson—before depicting how they are altered by their experiences with Jefferson. The Frenchman's Bend area along the Yoknapatawpha river, located in the southeast corner of Faulkner's map, is a hotbed of illegal activities, a kind of cesspool of bootleggers, swindlers, murderers, and squatters who represent the dredges of the county. Take, for instance, Flem Snopes, son of Ab Snopes. Ab was a mercenary in the Civil War who took no side but his own for self-serving purposes. After the war, he settled in Frenchman's Bend as a squatter. This is also where Popeye kills Tommy in *Sanctuary*, and where in "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard"

Henry Armstid is lured by the false promise of hidden gold, giving the area an association with death and violence which Faulkner notes on the *Absalom* map: “Old Frenchman’s Place, which Flem Snopes unloaded on Henry Armstid and Suratt, and where Popeye killed Tommy” (3-4). Being separated from town by a river, Frenchman’s Bend is a place that one might assume would be isolated from the town. However, the most vulgar upstarts in the history of the county hail from this area, spreading outward and disseminating into the population of “civilized” Jefferson like a pestilence.

Flem Snopes, seen expressly in *The Hamlet*, is the representative of the social-climbing yet unchanging Snopes clan. Flem begins life as a barn-burning disciple of his crazed father Ab, travelling throughout the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha as a sharecropper, bound to his social stratum by poverty. The Snopeses infect the area of Frenchman’s Bend like a venereal disease; their pervasive Snopesism is no easier to get rid of than such a disease, gradually spreading upward to beleaguer Jefferson.

Flem uses the relationships he forged in Frenchman’s Bend to fuel his move to town, and—through swindling—he surges forward in the social strata, propelling himself out of the quarter of Beat Four. He scams Varner’s store and Suratt’s half of the restaurant and then becomes president of the bank during his bid for acceptance by the town. In “Centaur in Brass,” he erects a monument of himself made from brass that ends up in the town’s water tower, poisoning the town with his idolatry and obsession with the antiquated Civil War notion of having a monument in his name. He lives in town, right in the epicenter of the social strata, and yet he is more isolated than he ever was. This is perhaps because the town did not accept his method of rising to power, which can be construed as a message from Faulkner that it is virtually impossible to supplant one’s true

position within a highly-regimented social stratum like that of Jefferson. It certainly rings true of Snopes, who never changes his smarmy, phlegm-like personality. There is still another interpretation for his isolation—he does not accept himself and feels severed from his upbringing. He is unable to embrace himself because of his abhorrent inward self-reflection.

He cannot overcome this even when he builds a bungalow outside of town with its “tiny grassless and treeless side yard. It was a locality of such other hopeless little houses inhabited half by Negroes, and washed clay gullies and ditches filled with scrapped automobiles and tin cans, and the prospect was not pleasing” (“Centaur in Brass” 168). Once a native of Frenchman’s Bend but corrupted by the solicitations of wealth and prosperity in Jefferson, Snopes has been reduced back down to the social strata and area that he fought so fiercely to remove himself from; this grassless, hapless prospect is the result of what proximity to Jefferson does to lower-class white men like Snopes. While he remains one of the most well-traveled citizens of Yoknapatawpha, both in respect to his social position and his geographical location, he is also one of the most disliked isolates. This is perhaps because his inward desire to move forward in society was tempered by his need to sever his ties from his family in order to accomplish this goal. In doing so, he alienated himself from his past, and thus from himself. From that point onward, no social position he perceived an affinity for, nor any land he could acquire, could divert the glare of introspective hatred from the lens of his self-awareness. He remains unmoved, though “he travels about the county steadily and constantly” (“Centaur in Brass” 149), because he is still attached to the appeal of Jefferson—not realizing it to be a snare of fool’s gold—and fixated on “his monument: that shaft taller than anything

in sight and filled with transient and symbolical liquid that was not even fit to drink” (“Centaur in Brass” 168).

No family represents the dichotomy between social strata and geographical location in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha saga better than the Bundrens, who are not only spatially-isolated from town (and yet are integral to its functioning, as are the Snopes), but are also isolated from each other. The poorest people among Yoknapatawpha, such as the Bundrens, had the furthest to go to make sense of their lives, often settling outside of town as opposed to in town so as to carve up the land in the image of their own poverty. They travel throughout the county, including Jefferson, finding work and money wherever they can, but they are not a part of the town’s social structure; instead they belong to the white trash social class. On Faulkner’s maps, the Bundrens’ residence is located just a little to the south of Frenchman’s Bend, about as far away from Jefferson as the borders of Yoknapatawpha permit. There are five Bundren children, all of whom are isolated from each other not by space but rather by their perspectives and conflicts of heart, which creates one further separation between them and Jefferson. They each want something different from their journey to Jefferson, which is ostensibly for the sole purpose of burying their mother.

The Bundrens’ journey from their native Frenchman’s Bend to Jefferson is the defining instance of the vicissitude of the town and its poorly-reconciled fusion with modernity, which showcases the sentience of the map. Urgo speaks to the maps’ active participation in intervening in the lives of Faulkner’s characters for an ulterior motive:

Yoknapatawpha, I suggest, refers not to a place but to a defiance of place, a defiance which may erupt anywhere paradise is challenged. The map comes into

existence not simply by encountering life's cosmic significance, but by countering it with something else, by probing, sharing, or revealing the deeper existence led by people who are at once rooted and transcended. (643)

The physical, geographical disaster that wards away the Bundrens from returning Addie's body to Jefferson is an example of the map's sentience and the power that it has in the modernist interpretation of the lives of Faulkner's characters. Samson's bridge, which collapses and prevents the Bundrens from accessing the main road to Jefferson, appearing to them as "just a tangle of yellow and the levee not less wider than a knife-back kind of" (*AILD* 80), represents this. The hundred-yard gap between the Bundrens and their path into Jefferson is described as "that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice" (*AILD* 96); if the wasteland that Faulkner speaks of from the disembodied voice of Darl is modernity and all the ruinous calamity that it brings to Jefferson, then the broken bridge barring the progress of Addie's body back to town is that final precipice which Faulkner's topography itself is warning them not to breach. It is nature's beckoning to them not to violate the sanctity of their isolation in the country with their trip into town. From a cartographical standpoint, Faulkner is telling the Bundrens to stay in Frenchman's Bend, that only death and decay lie in Jefferson, the corrosive city. When asked if there is a villain in *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner responded, "It's the convention in which people have to live.... the convention which gave them no out except to carry [Addie] through fire and flood twenty miles in order to follow the dying wish, which by that time to her meant nothing" (Blotner and Gwynn 112).

The effects of this perverse convention that necessitates the journey to Jefferson manifest themselves in the lives of each of the five Bundren children, but they are especially detrimental to Darl and Dewey Dell, the clairvoyant pair. As Urgo suggests, “Darl Bundren, who will see another map overlaid on the landscape before him, as if taking in all of material reality” (642) becomes more clairvoyantly-enhanced and insane not only as Addie’s body rots but also as they near Jefferson. Dewey Dell too becomes more and more desperate to ease her situation, pregnancy, as she gets closer to town. When confronted with the town’s Dr. Peabody, who comes to ease her mother’s passing, Dewey Dell mourns that the influence of Jefferson, in the form of the man who could give her the abortion that she so desperately needs, has come so near and yet is unattainable; “He could do everything for me. And he dont know it... I dont see why he didn’t stay in town. We are country people, not as good as town people. I dont see why he didn’t. Then I can see the top of the barn. The cow stands at the foot of the path, lowing” (*AILD* 40). To be clear, there is a reason why Dewey Dell chooses Jefferson as the destination for her abortion, although it is “forty miles” (*AILD* 60) north of Samson’s bridge, which they would have crossed had it not collapsed; logically, it is the only place for her to receive the abortion, but thematically, it is because Jefferson embodies the sterility of modernity. To Faulkner, ‘white trash’ like the Bundrens are not only as good as town people, they are better because of their connection with nature, as exemplified by Dewey’s observance of the barn and the cow. Indeed, Dewey herself is a symbol of the fertility of her homestead, where she feels “like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth” (*AILD* 42), in stark contrast with the infertility of Jefferson. As she travels closer to Jefferson, she becomes less in-tune with nature and more in-tune with the corruption of

the city, the road to which she sees as “a black void rushing under me” (*AILD* 78).

Jefferson is the epitome of the modernism that Faulkner attempts to keep her from by surreptitiously sabotaging her with his geographical interferences like the collapse of the bridge and circumventing the aptly-named town of New Hope. By preventing her from contributing to the infertility of the town, the geographical disturbances that bar her from her abortion make it clear that Faulkner means to keep her separate from this modernist fate, thus keeping her fertile and contributing to a new generation that is far removed from Jefferson.

The black community in Faulkner provides another distinction between social strata and geography; obviously, when dealing with Faulkner’s writings, which are steeped in the history of the American South, it is impossible to avoid the theme of miscegenation, or the separation of races. This segregation provides the backbone of Faulkner’s writings, but his literary depictions of it make it seem less omnipresent than the account that history gives us. From Faulkner, we get a different impression: despite their social separation, black people in Faulkner can be found immersed in each stratum of Yoknapatawpha’s society, especially concentrated in Jefferson and the area flanking it. Referred to by Faulkner as “Negro Hollow,” the black community lives so close to Jefferson that a black woman carrying laundry could carry it so “without touch of hand between the kitchen door of the white house and the blackened washpot beside a cabin door in Negro Hollow” (“That Evening Sun” 289). The black community is inseparable from the white community of Jefferson, with many of the white inhabitants, like the Compsons and Miss Minnie Cooper, relying on the black community for daily tasks like cooking, doing laundry, and chauffeuring. After the reckoning of the Civil War, the

purging of families like the Compsons and Grierson, it is the black community who still provides the backbone of the town, they who endure; “even the Negro women who still take in white people’s washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles” (“That Evening Sun” 289). While they suffer from their lack of privilege, their treatment by Faulkner is less deplorable than their white counterparts, despite the proximity of both classes to town.

Black women in Faulkner have even more mobility, inversely proportional to their social rank. Though they are isolated by being a part of two minorities, they receive the most empathic treatment by Faulkner and have some of the healthiest relationships to the past and present, profiting from the integration brought in on the heels of modernity. Nancy in “That Evening Sun,” who is marked not by any geographical isolation, as her house is located in Negro Hollow, but rather by an ideological one, was an integral part in the lives of the Compsons. Despite their racial separation, the family maintained a relationship with Nancy for a long time that changed the lives of both Nancy, a black woman, and Quentin, a white middle-class boy who is so deeply affected by the circumstances of Nancy’s departure from his life that he returns fifteen years later to narrate her tale.

Nancy, along with other black women, does the laundry and cooks for white families at the time. She interacts with and has access to any number of white people in town, and her movement through the county is not restricted by her race because they want her services. For example, she is taken advantage of by Mr. Stovall, who supplies her cocaine addiction in exchange for sex and as a result impregnates her in her husband’s absence. Quentin changes his perception of her as he grows up, adjusting his

speech and memories to reflect this: he uses “Negro” (“That Evening Sun” 289) instead of the typical slurs that even his brother Jason uses to describe her, which is progressive for that time. This indicates Quentin’s love for Nancy and her importance to a social stratum that is not her own, forcing readers to consider her as an important character in a literarily-geographical analysis of Faulkner’s modernist agenda. Faulkner clearly intends for this association to exist because he also places her in a similar situation in *Requiem for a Nun* (Blotner and Gwynn 79). More importantly, Quentin paints his own father as a largely ineffective influence in comparison to black mother surrogates like Nancy and Dilsey, citing him as a failure who had the potential to help Nancy overcome at least part of her isolation (though he could do nothing for the case of her segregation) by allowing her to stay safely at his home but chose not to. Mr. Compson suffers thereafter for his treatment of Nancy, thus supporting the theory that Faulkner favors black women over white men although black women seem to undergo more strife than almost any other social class in Faulkner’s works. Faulkner is the most sympathetic towards them, putting all those who oppose them in an antithetical social reversal in which they ail from the advance of modernity, as does Mr. Compson with the patrilineal end of his family.

During a graduate course in American Fiction at the University of Virginia, Faulkner addresses the impotence of Quentin as passed down from his father in response to a student’s query regarding “the impression that Quentin is the way he is to a large extent because of his father’s lack of values, or the fact that he doesn’t seem to pass down to his son many values that will sustain him” (Blotner and Gwynn 2). Faulkner had this to say in response:

It was the—the basic failure Quentin inherited through his father, or beyond his father. It was a—something had happened somewhere between the first Compson and Quentin. The first Compson was a bold ruthless man who came into Mississippi as a free forester to grasp where and when he could and wanted to, and established what should have been a princely line, and that princely line decayed. (Blotner and Gwynn 3)

The sins of the line that began much like the marauding Snopes and Sutpens but which settled in town have finally caught up with the Compsons and have resulted in their impotence. Mr. Compson does not come from a moral high ground strong enough to abort the catching up of doom to his son, and Jefferson was no place to set down all stock and hope for his line in; therefore, it is in Jefferson after decades of attempting to live as high members of society, that their failure to make healthy connections to the new era of social integration puts an end to the Compsons.

Dilsey, too, is a paragon of the matronly black figure, who to Faulkner represents the contiguity of the black community to the people who were allegedly so separate from them. It is Dilsey, far more than his own mother and father, who supplies Quentin with his upbringing and the ideals that are associated with them. Furthermore, the Compson children spend more time in her house, a result of trying to escape the disintegration of their family at home. In reflection of this, Faulkner based her off his own mother figure, forcing the reader to “recall the traditional Mammy virtues Faulkner extolled in his own Mammy, who accepted poverty and overwork ‘without cavil or calculation or complain’ and thus ‘earned the gratitude and affection of the family she had conferred the fidelity and devotion upon’” (Jehlen 76-7). In contrast to the men of Jefferson, to whom he

devotes three-page-long sentences, all that Faulkner has to say about people like Dilsey is simply, “They endured” (*The Sound and the Fury* 22). His words regarding Dilsey are sparing because she has no weaknesses for him to exploit, unlike the Compsons and Sutpens of *Absalom, Absalom!* or the Sartorises of *The Unvanquished*, who are weak despite their immortality in statue form (see the Confederate monument standing erect in the middle of town). These families crumble when the Civil War yanks away the foundations of their lives which were built upon the backs of slaves like Dilsey’s ancestors. Here marks a deviation, as with Nancy, from how history separates the races. Faulkner’s deviation is characterized by his inability to detach himself from his life as it governs his characters. So, what history says is a clearly-demarcated, geographical line between black and white is quite literally blurred by his compassion towards and proximity to the people who inspired his characters in his life.

Jefferson itself, the county seat of Yoknapatawpha and its central town, is a ghost of antebellum chivalry in the aftermath of the Civil War and a microcosm of the modernist theory of stagnation. It has far and away the densest concentration of plots and notes on Faulkner’s maps; it contains John Sartoris’ statue and effigy which guards his railroad, the cemetery in which Addie Bundren is finally interred after the horrifying ordeal of *As I Lay Dying*, the jail where Lee Goodwin was lynched in *Sanctuary*, the residences of Miss Rosa Coldfield and Horace Benbow, and Benjy’s pasture which the Compsons sell to the golf club (*Absalom, Absalom!* 3-4). It is the expression of everything grandiose and tragic about the South and the root of its demise: slavery. At the very center of the town, and the map by extension, is the “Confederate monument which Benjy had to pass on his left side” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 3-4), described by Faulkner in

The Sound and the Fury as “gaz[ing] with empty eyes beneath his marble hand into wind and weather” (335). Primarily concentrated in the town are the middle and upper class white communities of Yoknapatawpha, and this is where we see the convergence of Faulkner’s modernist influences.

It is neither their transgressions nor their geographical location that haunts these citizens: the citizens of Jefferson are much more preoccupied with, if not pummeled by, time. It is not just in conjunction with the progress of time, in that it leaves monumental institutions like the statue and Emily Grierson and the Compsons who were long assumed to be the everlasting pillars of Jefferson’s foundation smothered under their own dust, but it is also in retrospect, stretching back to the first boat of slaves, that Faulkner sees the destruction of the town. Jefferson and its inhabitants were doomed long before the carpet-bagging types of Homer Barron of “A Rose for Emily” infiltrate the square with their sidewalks, long before the first sounds of motors begin to rattle the cupolas of Emily’s gothic haunt, carrying the likes of Temple Drake from *Sanctuary* out to her doom in Frenchman’s Bend. And even though the Sutpen and Snopes family do not start out life in Jefferson and live on the outskirts, they suffer from connections with the town all the same; enterprising is what ruined families like the Snopes and Suptens. In drinking the favor of Jefferson, they also swallow the poison. There is much movement in and out of Jefferson, and yet no one in Jefferson moves. This is because Faulkner, as a Southern modernist, overlays his maps of Yoknapatawpha, and therefore the lives of his characters, with tones of stagnation, impotence, the irreversibility of time, and the sins of the past. All these he maps out within his works, culminating in Jefferson—in the language of Faulkner’s maps, the “courthouse where Temple Drake testified” and condemned the

innocent Lee Goodwin to death by lynching is the same place as the “confederate monument which Benjy had to pass on his left side” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 3-4); thus, Faulkner conflates the two major sins of the South right in the middle of Jefferson.

Jeffersonian spinsters like Miss Emily and Miss Minnie Cooper, even Temple Drake and Caddy Compson, are also isolated. These women are as much a part of high society as they could be, integrated into the customs and society of Jefferson, and yet they are separated by time and a change in ideals from their peers. They represent modernist infertility and an intrusion of sexuality. They are the sins of the past come to call. Around them are concentrated symbols of time, the modernist’s key concern, rather than space—the dust that pervades Miss Emily’s home and the “invisible watch” that hung below her belt, out of sight and out of mind but “ticking at the end of the gold chain” nonetheless (“A Rose for Emily” 121). These women are immersed in the midst of the town and yet are philosophically and metaphorically isolated. In philosophy, they were not allowed the same rights as men and in most cases, they were only treated with respect if, as in the case of Miss Emily who was indeed a dying breed, homage was being paid to the chivalric notions upon which the South was built. They are symbols of this dead South, and as feminist Faulkner critic Minrose Gwin purports in her landmark analysis of femininity and Faulkner’s writings, *The Feminine and Faulkner*, “the symbolization of woman renders her immobile” (15). The Jefferson woman, like Emily Grierson or Miss Minnie Cooper, becomes “the last to realize that she was losing ground” (“Dry September” 174).

These women lived in the height of their society, in the middle of town, and were spatially separated from their peers by little more than walls and a stretch of yard.

According to Gwin, “If we think of the process of woman as the space of disruption in Faulkner’s texts, then we may begin to rethink the whole notion of ‘character’ and approach the female subject, the *woman character*, as the discursiveness of that space, as the rebellious unconsciousness of patriarchy” (16). Similarly, Lorie Watkins traces the movements of women in Yoknapatawpha in her contribution to *Faulkner’s Geographies*, titled “Woman in Motion: Escaping Yoknapatawpha.” She claims that women play eminent roles throughout his novels, but that the only time they are portrayed as being free is when they have escaped the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha, citing Faulkner’s central muse in *The Sound and the Fury*, Caddy Compson, as the paragon of the physical women’s movement out of Yoknapatawpha. It is against the background of this patriarchy Gwin discusses that Faulkner pits female characters like Caddy Compson and Temple Drake, thus highlighting the disparity between their social class and the emerging wanton sexuality of Jefferson.

Temple, for example, begins her parabolic trajectory away from her society after she leans too far outward into the clutch of Gowan Stevens who takes her to Frenchman’s Bend. Once at Frenchman’s Bend, she is as far out of her stratosphere as she has ever been, and it is here that her curve into moral depravity widens, expanding ever outward after her rape by Popeye. Along this curve belongs her time spent in Miss Reba’s brothel in Memphis, notably far-removed from the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha, and where she like Miss Emily obsesses over images of time; specifically the glass clocks that she is stuck in the room with that “appeared to hold all reluctant light, holding in its tranquil depths a quiet gesture of moribund time, one-armed like a veteran from the wars” (*Sanctuary* 283). This is because she has never been so far away from home and is among

one of the vilest characters in Faulkner's novels thereafter. Perhaps this represents the evil that Faulkner himself sees as burgeoning sexuality in the decline of the South—something that defines the modern woman. Faulkner treads a thin line between empathizing with these women and condemning them.

Minnie Cooper and Miss Emily, to whom are attached more images of chivalry than are Temple and Caddy, stand no such chance of escaping the constraints of Jefferson, having already been swept away by the loss of antebellum tradition. Both women, mainstays of Jefferson, have been displaced without realizing it. While “against that background Minnie's bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality.... when she passed and went on along the serried store fronts, in the doors of which the sitting and lounging men did not even follow her with their eyes any more” (“Dry September” 175), at the same time across town, “garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores” (“A Rose for Emily” 119). Similarly, down the street from both of these women, lives Narcissa Benbow. Narcissa, in *Sanctuary*, explains to Horace that ““I live here in this town. I'll have to stay here. But you're a man. It doesn't matter to you. You can go away”” (*Sanctuary* 306). Narcissa's vanity, her image, is tied to Jefferson because of these rigid social structures, and it is this vanity that prevents her from seeing the falsehood in her statement; Horace cannot leave, either, because as a citizen of Jefferson himself, he cannot escape his connection with the town and the horrors of systemic racism and classism that he has seen take place there.

The women of Jefferson are immovable, tied to the dead South of their breeding, as impotent as the men who also remain there.

The Compson family of Compson's Mile are closer to each other than to town, though they are very near Jefferson, and of all the white families of Jefferson they have the closest dependency on the neighboring black community. However, they are not spared from the ravages of time because their spatial proximity to the decay of Jefferson, which endows the family with a sense of gender roles that is too strong for their healthy advance into the future. It is, therefore, owing to the prescriptions of chivalry and traditional gender roles, as well as their past association with slavery, that binds the Compson men to Jefferson and allows time to geld them. The men are anchored to their household even after that household has become dissolute. Quentin especially flounders in the aftermath of his sister Caddy's loss of virginity at the age of sixteen. It, according to the customs of the time (during which he was being raised to be a gentleman, follow a set code, and maintain the honor of his family) should have been he to lose his virginity first, not Caddy. He was too young to defend his family's honor against Caddy's actions, yet too deeply entrenched in the consequences of her misdeed to overcome it, or to punish Caddy for escaping with the destiny that should have been his to control. According to Jehlen, "If he attaches undue symbolic value to his sister's virginity, it is less for the sake of cavalier values than out of a need for a point of moral reference amid the increasing anomie of his surroundings" (41). Echoing the previous statements of Gwin, it is not only the women but also the men who are rendered immobile by being too attached to the symbolism of the South.

Therefore, even after he grows up, becomes an adult, and attends Harvard at the cost of his family's land claim, he is still mired in Jefferson's past, which is the root of the uprooting of his legacy. Throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*, his struggle to reconcile becoming a ghost of the past is mirrored in the account of Miss Rosa Coldfield, who experienced a similar fate forty-three years prior. As she recounts her family's fall from grace during the fall of the South itself, the Civil War, he notes that he, like every young man in his generation, has become "a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease... looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet freed of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence" (*Absalom, Absalom!* 9). He comes to realize that he has become a ghost in his own time because Caddy upended the rigid gender roles, thereby disgracing the family, in much the same way that Miss Rosa Coldfield, another "stubborn back-looking ghost," is incapable of recovering her family legacy as well, though hers was built on a different but still altogether unstable social construct: systemic racism in the form of slavery. As Quentin's perception of his place in the new South unravels because he too preoccupied with the old one, he develops an obsession with escaping time, and his method for this is to escape town altogether at Harvard. Finally, he acquiesces to the immutability of his past in Jefferson and commits suicide. As he jumps from the bridge in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the water embraces him and—he thinks—suspends him in time by muting the sound of the ticking clocks forever. Yet he has further alienated his family from progress by ending its line, thereby contributing to Faulkner's modernist themes of stagnation and impotence.

His brother Jason is similarly castrated by Caddy's actions and her following flight from Jefferson. Even after Quentin's suicide because of this issue, Jason remains anchored, albeit in a different way than Quentin's twelve-pound blocks that bind him to Jefferson's past. He is degraded to chasing after the youngest Compson, Caddy's daughter Quentin who is not able to pass on the family name, and stealing money from her mother to invest in stocks. This of course leaves him with no money or children and with as bitter a taste in his mouth as his illness from gasoline exposure. Gas is the very lifeblood of modernity, but it sucks the life out of Jason because he does not belong in this modern world, propelled forward; he would rather be focusing on the past, in retrograde motion. With no last name to pass down to the next generation and with no healthy connections to the new generation, namely Caddy's daughter Quentin, Jason is rendered impotent and furious, which the book's title, *The Sound and the Fury*, purports.

Upper class white families in the outlying area, the Sutpens, Compsons, and Sartorises alike, suffer less by geographical proximity to Jefferson and more by affiliation with slavery. These outliers receive the "Jefferson treatment," with the male line ending in tragedy and not continuing into modernity. In the northwest corner of Faulkner's maps, Sutpen's Hundred is as tragic a failure of a family unit by association with slavery as any in Faulkner. Another scholar from the *Faulkner's Geographies* anthology, Scott Romine, claims that the theme of plantations is incessantly associated with decay and destruction throughout Faulkner's novels ("Designing Spaces: Sutpen, Snopes, and the Promise of the Plantation"). His reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* assumes that this is the connection that Faulkner was attempting to make when he wrote about the collapse of the Sutpen line and the failure of the Snopes clan to establish their roots in such a society. However,

despite their relative geospatial separation from town, Sutpen's Hundred and the Sartoris plantation alike were built upon the ideals of Jefferson and for the admiration of its townspeople. For example, Sutpen "came here...seeking some place to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. He sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that" (*Absalom, Absalom!* 11). Miss Rosa Coldfield's mourning her lost social grace in association with her geographical location is a confirmation of the Jefferson treatment:

Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it, even if it had not rather been our family, our father's progenitors, who had incurred the curse long years before and had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed.

(Absalom, Absalom! 16)

Not only are plantations and the downfall of the South intertwined on a metaphorical level, but the plantation itself is also a geographic factor that determines the social position of the characters, and their depravity as a result.

Perhaps most important to a modernist interpretation of Faulknerian social strata and geographical effects on them is the fact that each social stratum outside Jefferson represents an element untainted by modernism that the people of Jefferson cannot attain. A lack of sex, love, and regeneration pervades Jefferson, as does an isolation from nature, and yet these qualities are abundant outside of Jefferson, in areas as remote as the Bundren's homestead and as close as Negro Hollow. The black community, though living

concurrently with the white people in Jefferson and having such an enduring and meaningful impact on their lives, like Nancy and Dilsey's relationship with the Compson children, are not affected by the dust that smothers the others because they were not the catalysts of the South's destruction. What I mean by this is that they suffered from rather than caused the war, and this is how these characters are still able to live in and around Jefferson. They are obviously not guilty of perpetuating the sin of slavery, which cannot be said for their white counterparts, and this is why their families are functional and their love lasts. The Compson children spend more time in Negro Hollow with Dilsey than at their own home in the formative years of childhood, and as a result, there is more love shared between Dilsey and Nancy and Quentin and Caddy than is shared between anyone in Jefferson—Emily Grierson and Homer Barron, for instance. And while their geographic location, a facet of nature, governs the fate of those who live in Jefferson, they are unable to communicate or grasp a sense of meaning or purpose from it in the same way that Darl or Dewey Dell Bundren can. For all her regret about her fertility, Dewey Dell serves almost as a rural Demeter in her connection with the very topography of Yoknapatawpha, going back to her thought of herself as a wet seed.

Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner claimed, is simple: ““Y-o-k, n-a, p-a, t-a-w, p-h-a, YOK [Yock] -na-pa-TAW-pha”” (Blotner and Gwynn 74). His statement is innocuous enough, but it is characteristic of Faulkner's subversive if not altogether false rhetoric in regard to his own creation; Yoknapatawpha is anything but simple, and this deceptive simplicity between the act of marrying Faulkner's geography to his literary characters is precisely what makes Faulkner's writing so complex. Adding to this difficulty is the unreliableness of Faulkner himself in generating primary source material;

although this study uses his maps as foundational, it is important to note the many inaccuracies within them. Even the fact that there are more than one is enough, potentially, to discredit their authority. However, the dichotomy between the maps—the first drawn for the back matter of the 1937 edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the latter, which his publisher commissioned for *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946—increases the worth of attempting to interpret Faulkner's modernist intentions manifold. The former of the two maps, the one appearing in the back matter of *Absalom, Absalom!*, is far more revealing than its later counterpart, illustrating more of the nuanced geospatial and social relationships in comparison to the map that his publisher commissioned for *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946. Rather than anything that Faulkner specifically wrote for his maps, the differences between the two attest to the disparity between the original, richly-detailed South of Faulkner's imagination and the stunted aftermath of the Civil War and the advance of modernity.

Faulkner's original map represents a more organic structure of Yoknapatawpha, taking care to denote the goings-on and landmarks that could be expected to characterize a map of a county such as his. Certainly there is death and violence, nine counts of death and violence to be exact, ten if counting Temple Drake's perjury at the courthouse in *Sanctuary*, but by the same count there are almost twenty plots of homes, business, and events that appear as organic elements that could be on any map, untouched by violence (*Absalom, Absalom!* 3-4). Moreover, in this map there is movement, both social and geographical; with the aid of Faulkner's arrows, which are absent in the second map, one can decry geographical movement into and out of Jefferson—down the main road to Mottstown, the road taken by Anse Bundren and his children, and north to Memphis

Junction, the road taken by Temple and Popeye—as well as social movement. Varner’s store, Faulkner notes, is where Flem begins his social enterprising, but Flem’s steadfast progression towards town can also be seen just outside the town center, at Bayard Sartoris’ bank, which Flem will later become president of (*Absalom, Absalom!* 3-4).

Comparing *The Portable Faulkner* map with the first map illuminates what time has done to Yoknapatawpha, as themes of death and stagnation overtake the original social structure. Associated with Sutpen’s Hundred is Wash Jones’ murder of the plantation master, but absent is the church which Sutpen previously rode to for his wedding. In place of the chart of the Bundren’s movement to deliver Addie’s body to New Hope cemetery is instead the note that “Here was born the convict & grew a man & sinned & was transported for the rest of his life to pay for it” (*The Portable Faulkner*). The shape of Jefferson itself has been blotted out, seemingly impaled by a series of lines that point to more stagnation and death: “A Rose for Emily,” along with “An Odor of Verbena,” as well as the violence of “That Evening Sun” and “Death Drag” (*The Portable Faulkner*). The incrimination of the white man is more evident than ever in this map, as well as the intrusion of modernity and his displacement. Next to Compson’s Mile is an airport, and all that Faulkner has to offer on either map regarding the Native American Issetibbeha’s land, which he did not feel entitled to sell and yet did so anyway under the promise of bootlegged alcohol from the white man, is to note that it is “where by 1820 his people had learned to call it ‘The Plantation’ just like the white men did” (*The Portable Faulkner*). The relationship between the two maps, the notable additions and absences, mark the passing of time and the gradual replacement of a diverse Yoknapatawpha by one that is marked solely by deviance and tragedy. The differences

between them, more so than perhaps what is on them, indicate Faulkner's motivations in creating them and as well as the literature of the Yoknapatawpha saga.

The division between the actual (the map of Lafayette and the real influence that gave rise to much of Faulkner's substantive fiction) and apocryphal (Faulkner often referred to his county as apocryphal) is much the same as the division between the two maps, the reason being that Faulkner was never able or willing to separate himself from his works, or his maps, which were laid over real maps of the time and obviously were married to the real historical and social issues of the time in which he was writing. While it is certain that he viewed slavery as the ultimate destruction of the South, "slavery seems to Faulkner much more clearly evil than segregation because slavery generated a history of conflict with excluded lower-class whites" (Jehlen 10). Thus the entire social demographic of the county is organized based on involvement with or association with slavery, with Jefferson in the center serving as a kind of regression, geospatially opposite to the modernity that is fast encroaching.

These social strata can be read in his novels and seen on his maps as an interpretation of his modernism. "Where other American writers failed ultimately to grasp the tangibility of social context because, believing in the American myth of classlessness they could visualize society only as a universal and neutral setting, Faulkner treats society itself as his central character" (Jehlen 11); but more than that, Faulkner treats his geography as a central character around which his social caste system is arranged or displayed. His allegiance is to his geography, his status as a Southern Gothic writer, and the land that he loves so much that he dedicated entire maps to it is mapped out in such a way that outlines the culprits of its undoing. The advance of modernity, the

scars of the Civil War, run deep in Faulkner's mind, and the caste systems that caused and result from this cataclysm of the South display his views of why it was ruined in the first place. It was Faulkner's inability to separate himself from the real geography and social mores that inspired the bulk of his canon; the actual and the apocryphal, is nowhere more evident than it is in his treatment of the impoverished population, the black community, and women, and it is especially nuanced concerning black women figures such as Nancy and Dilsey, as reflected by Quentin's sympathy for them over his own father.

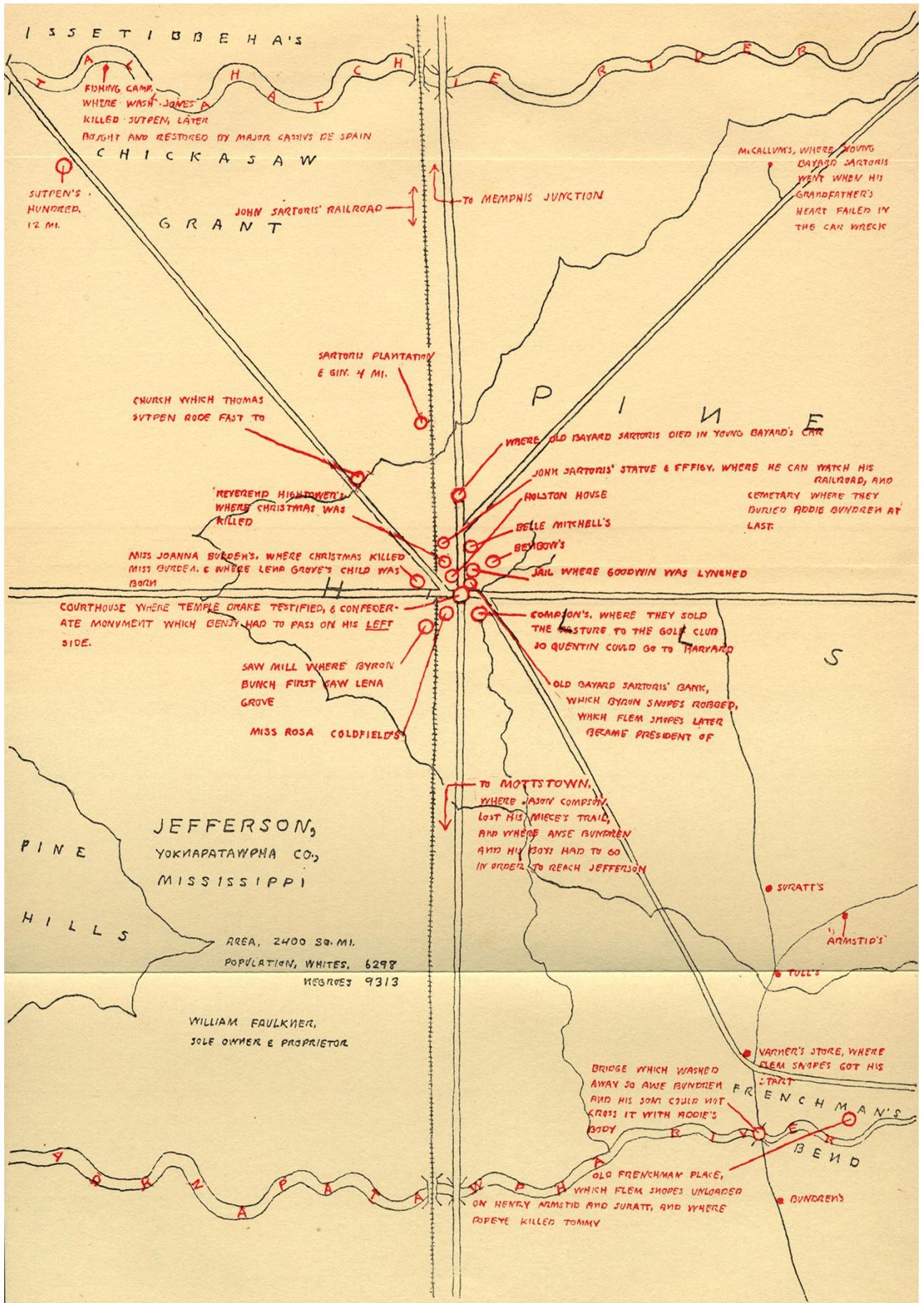
Jefferson is the epicenter of Faulkner's modernist dilemma because it is too rooted in the ways of the past, built on sins, as were Compson's Mile and the Sartoris plantation. Even the Sutpen plantation, though not in the town, is a modernist wasteland because it was built for the support of the town and with its resources. Ironically, with the exception of Sutpen's Hundred, as one journeys further south, or outward, one encounters less of a resistance to change, and therefore characters with a healthier bond to the future. The social classes that are uncorrupted by Jefferson remain as bastions against the rising tide of modern times, but they do themselves undergo an integration of sorts:

This incommensurability [of the rural] is not only about failing to adapt and/or preserve, but also about forcing the narrative of the twentieth century to recognize the incongruity of the social and cultural shifts that were underway at this time. Faulkner's writing insists that the reader note the social and ecological repercussions of these changes before losing sight of an ideological conflict that was worth remembering. (Moffitt 25)

By bringing to a boil the vestiges of the doomed South, Faulkner sets up the inhabitants of Jefferson for defeat and failure. Moffitt furthers this claim by saying that, “Paradoxically, as the city overrides what would be the future for the rural, it collaborates with the ghosts of the past by reinvigorating the unresolved excesses of slavery and racism” (Moffitt 34). These ghosts of the past—of time—are what haunt Jefferson. He also highlights how stagnant the social mores are and, as a result, why no one goes anywhere or changes perspective. Emily can no more leave her situation in Jefferson, escaping the wardenship of her father and Colonel Sartoris, than Miss Minnie Cooper can escape her bounds of spinsterhood, or Miss Rosa Coldfield could grow up to bring anything other than dishonor to her lineage. Jefferson is traversing backward through time even as modern times fast encroach upon the territory.

Faulkner, ever the prescient studier of the human condition that he was, mapped out within his mythical, apocryphal county a study of the interrelatedness of social strata during a time that is historically characterized by miscegenation, and he was able to do so not only because he was pulling from his own intimate experiences with such a landscape in the form of Lafayette County and Oxford, but also because he understood human nature—what propels people forward, and what holds them back. Yoknapatawpha is an interwoven demographic of social climbers, murderers, city folk and rural folk alike, complete with a mesh of rural homesteads, metropolitan areas, and everything and anything that can be imagined in between, all tied together under Faulkner’s modernist influence. His maps gave him the opportunity not to adjust what transpired in the South, but instead to adjust the fabric of the future. Like pulling threads, for one to rise, another must fall, and in Jefferson, specifically, a microcosm for the downfall of the south is

represented, with slavery at its root, but along with its destruction comes the potential for it to rise again—perhaps out of Negro Hollow or Frenchman’s Bend, maybe even carried in by John Sartoris’ railroad—this time with a more equal distribution of social classes.



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