"A Mystical Estate" Paternity and Inheritance in Absalom, Absalom!, The Sound and the Fury, and Ulysses

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“A Mystical Estate”

Paternity and Inheritance in
Absalom, Absalom!, The Sound and the Fury, and Ulysses

Lucy V. Cleland

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of the
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in English

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An Introduction

When comparing Ireland and the American South, one must first and foremost draw a distinction in time: Irish culture long predates southern culture. Ireland’s cyclical rebellions span centuries; the South rose to and fell from its independent height in almost a single generation. Further differences arise because of the southern institution of slavery, its violently enforced racial subjugation, and the white, landed gentry through whom power was maintained. Needless to say, Ireland’s experience was different. Racial boundaries that defined the American South do not readily correspond to the more nationalist, European ideas about race that defined Ireland’s long experience under British rule. Even geographically, Ireland is a distinct island with an independent history that is part of a whole, whereas the American South was not distinct but an original piece of what was construed as a whole. (I do not address here the extent to which a unified attitude actually prevailed in the South, and any historical comparison between the two regions would yield to vast differences that my thesis does not deal with.)

Despite these differences, similarities abound. Generally, although Ireland and the American South were pieces of larger pictures, regionally both were places that felt themselves to be conceptually apart, distinct. Both have experienced, indeed, hosted, rebellions that failed to do what they set out to do. Moreover, while their individual political histories stand apart, Ireland and the American South have close cultural ties. For example, in his article “‘A lengthening chain in the shape of memories’: The Irish and Southern Culture,” William Ferris explores the cultural intersection between the South and Ireland, reminding the reader, through the words of Patrick Colum, that “there were two Irish immigrations into America. There was an eighteenth century immigration, which showed itself in the southern cities, like Charleston. That was an
immigration with capital… The second immigration was of people who had nothing but their hands…. In short, “Ireland and the South have a lot in common” (Ferris, quoting Patrick Colum, 10). Irish settlers mixed with the English during the colonial period and, according to Ferris, settled most thickly in the cities on the southern Coast, namely, New Orleans, Savannah, and Charleston. Ferris also points out how historically close and intertwined are Irish and southern music.

Perhaps the most important and lasting similarity between the American South and Ireland is the strong reliance in both places on oral tradition. More southern writers have drawn this comparison outright than Irish, but the resemblance undeniably exists since culturally the southern oral tradition has roots in the Irish oral tradition. Ferris describes this correlation and its effect on southern and Irish writers: “Both groups experienced a ‘literary renaissance’ in the early part of the twentieth century, and both discovered a foundation for their literary work in the oral traditions of Ireland and the American South” (Ferris 21). He quotes an interview with Eudora Welty, where she notes what “great talkers” the Irish were, a statement that could easily be applied to the southern oral tradition as well. Welty describes “whole family stories unrolling” from her friends Elizabeth Bowen and Norah McGuinness, both Irish, but the description could have been of her southern friends as well or of a Faulkner novel.

Ireland and the American South’s mutual “foundation” in the oral tradition led me to wonder about Faulkner and Joyce and to look for historical and cultural similarities and differences given the strong oral traditions they inherited. I expected to find that in their work Faulkner and Joyce had wrestled with similar issues, considering both were modernists, both were eldest brothers in large families, and both lived in fertile, rural places that had strived for but failed to secure home rule against an industrialized opponent—places that continued, post-failure,
to think of themselves as separate from their victors. Both were sunk deeply not only into two regional oral traditions, but also in larger contexts of literary legacy and written traditions: Joyce in Ireland, but also in European tradition, and Faulkner in the South, but also in American tradition at large and the European tradition to a certain extent. From my investigation, three major intersections between Joyce and Faulkner emerged: the concept of voice, the weight of the father, and the regional inheritance at stake, both for the major characters and for the authors themselves. My work attempts to locate, at these intersections, patterns and ideas apparent in a few works of Joyce and Faulkner that reveal the mechanics of inhabiting a failed culture, what the ramifications of that was for masculinity, and what such an inheritance would mean at the individual level.

The texts I have chosen to analyze are Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Apart from the books’ content, my decision was based on a judgment of scale: I wanted to find texts in the Faulkner canon that could stand up to *Ulysses*’ girth. *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* do, tracing members of the Compson family through successive generations. And since *Absalom, Absalom!* is a prequel to *The Sound and the Fury*, the two can reasonably be taken together. To a great extent, I allowed my investigation to narrow to the masculine perspective in these works. I derived this focus first and foremost from the two male authors whose works I was engaging. The major characters in the works that I am closely studying—Quentin, Mr. Compson, Stephen, and Bloom—also are all men. Further, Faulkner and Joyce appear almost skittish to engage their female voices: Joyce saves Molly’s voice for the end of *Ulysses*, and Faulkner doesn’t singularly articulate any female voice until Miss Rosa in *Absalom, Absalom!* But my focus on the masculine in these works was substantiated by the cultural significance of the father-son relationship in the South and in
Ireland. The aspects and nuances of this relationship suited my analysis in a few different ways. The emphasis on male lineage apparent in both *Ulysses*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Sound and the Fury* spurred me to look at male lines and consider fatherhood and its impacts on selfhood. But the father-son relationship also makes an excellent conduit for the larger idea of a cultural inheritance, something John D. Sykes calls the “symbolic father representative of cultural power” in his essay, “What Faulkner (Might Have) Learned from Joyce” (Sykes 1). Nationalism and regionalism in both Faulkner and Joyce’s works is a *paternal* power.¹ The female characters are not immune to the effects of paternal power, but in these texts they often appear to escape, even if marginally, the full impact of the father. Analyzing these female characters in terms of inheritance uncovers a doubled inheritance conferred by femininity, making daughters problematic in almost every way for being like the father and still a woman. The effects of paternal power, both regional and personal, on the son are no less complex. Faulkner and Joyce devote attention to the relationship of sons to paternity, making the complexities significantly more available. Closer to the image of the original father and expected to fall into the patriarchal line, sons wrestle with the erasure of selfhood that female characters, saved by their gender, do not experience to the same degree. Regardless, the region becomes an extension of the father, and the father an extension of the region. This reinforces the patriarchal culture in the post-war South and Victorian Ireland, doubling the paternal weight for any son who has for a father not only his physical father, but also the lingering weight of the region as father, and as a region itself full of past father figures.

¹ In Irish culture and mythos there are numerous illusions to “Mother Ireland,” a destitute Mother/Crone figure who calls for her sons to redeem her and sacrifice themselves to restore her in some way. The figure of the suffering mother, however, is not a strong matriarchal image and has come under huge amounts of criticism for being an affirmation of the patriarchal system. Joyce himself vigorously rejected this figure. Often under colonial rule such figures appear (“Mother India” is a close parallel) perhaps because an outside force has replaced the figure of power, the symbolic father, leaving the mother to call on her sons to rise in masculine rebellion.
One of the primary reasons I have chosen to focus on Bloom and Quentin out of the array of characters Faulkner and Joyce create is the augmented relationship each has to paternity. Although Quentin appears in only one chapter out of the four offered in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner singles him out as the son most closely connected to and influenced by his father, Mr. Compson. Creating the nascent relationship between Mr. Compson and Quentin when he wrote *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929, Faulkner returns to it, elaborates on it, and articulates it much further in *Absalom, Absalom!* published in 1936. While he wrote the latter seven years later, he positioned it, in Compson-time, as a prequel and featured Quentin as the main character. Faulkner himself emphasizes Quentin by writing another book about him, devoid of Benjy, Jason, or Caddy. Expanding the voice Quentin remembers for him in *The Sound and the Fury*, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Mr. Compson is given his own voice, which then channels Quentin’s grandfather, General Compson, and through the General, the voice of Thomas Sutpen, a character who enacts and represents a microcosm of southern failure. This chain of voices links the relationship with the father with the relationship with the region and the cultural inheritance Quentin experiences. Thus, Faulkner positions him as both the most aware and most implicated son, fixed in a direct line of men leading back into the idea of the High South. Quentin’s struggle with this position makes him the best candidate for my investigation.

Fittingly, Quentin’s struggle with his inheritance also makes him the character most often compared to Joyce’s characters. Critics tend to position him as a more extreme version of Stephen Dedalus (Sundquist 15, Sykes 7). Sykes compares how both Stephen and Quentin can be positioned as young artists and argues that their art “grows directly out of conflict with the fathers [i.e., both actual and symbolic]” (Sykes 7). Stephen’s distaste for his father, Simon Dedalus, mirrors Quentin’s rebellious resistance of his father, Mr. Compson. Indeed, if my
investigation treated *Portrait of the Artist* instead of *Ulysses*, it would have a great deal more to say about a comparison between Quentin and Stephen and the forms of fatherhood they experience. Although Joyce doesn’t abandon Stephen in *Ulysses* by any means, he introduces a different character, Leopold Bloom. It is Bloom, the outsider, not Stephen, the cultural insider, who represents Odysseus in Joyce’s structure. And Bloom’s relationship with fatherhood in *Ulysses* trumps Stephen’s. Bloom’s is flatly more complex than Stephen’s more traditional resistance of father and culture, which in *Ulysses*, starts to look whiny and misanthropic compared to Bloom’s experience. Bloom’s father was Jewish, an immigrant with a different heritage and lineage. Rudolph Bloom killed himself, leaving Bloom fatherless and cutting Bloom off from the family past, albeit a past the son had already disavowed. Additionally, Bloom lost a son: the still born, Rudy, who should have carried on his grandfather’s name into another generation. Bloom’s failure as a paternal figure and his abandonment of his own father renders a far more complex situation for me to explore about fatherhood and lineage. Bloom’s peripheral existence also prevents him from being a full-fledged inheritor of Irish culture, and his resistance to orthodoxy and mixed-up feelings about his own father cut him off from a Jewish inheritance, denying Bloom both potential symbolic fathers. Joyce uses Bloom’s external relationship to other Irishmen to reveal more about inheritance than insiders like Stephen are able to show, see, or feel. By focusing my analysis on Bloom, I hope to find what else Joyce was saying about inheritance that he hadn’t said or couldn’t say within more insular representations of inheritance, such as Quentin and Stephen symbolize. But a different position is not necessarily a better one: Bloom has his own inherited fragments and faces different problems and traumas as an outsider without a son or father to turn to.
I am not the first to draw Joyce and Faulkner together. As Faulkner post-dated Joyce, he was often asked about the influence of Joyce’s work on his own novels. In such interviews, general consensus is that Faulkner played cagey. Critics and reporters alike continued to raise the issue. Hugh Kenner wrote an article for the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1978 conference entitled “Faulkner and Joyce.” Around the same time the James Joyce Quarterly included a short piece by Thomas Connolly entitled “Joyce and Faulkner,” published in 1979. Michael Zeitlin has done some extensive, specific work about Faulkner and Joyce that concentrates on the question of influence but through close reading at the textual level. John D. Sykes has made similar claims and comparisons. Often, Joyce and Faulkner are thrown together to create cultural significance such as Ferris’s using Faulkner’s discovery of Joyce’s work to strengthen Ferris’s argument about the connection that southerners feel to Ireland. On the other hand, regional parallels are often ignored altogether, and criticism sometimes focuses on “a predominating modernist confluence of styles, ideas, and artistic purposes” of which Joyce and Faulkner are prime examples, strengthened by the fact one might have drawn from the other.

According to Faulkner’s biographer Joseph Blotner, Faulkner once grew “talkative” on a car trip and admitted to some friends that “he had been having a good time with people who accused him of being influenced by James Joyce. Then he recited from memory for his companions one of his favorite poems, “Watching the Needleboats at San Sabba”—by James Joyce” (Blotner 287). This incident plainly shows that Faulkner knew Joyce’s work, which slim to none have disputed besides Faulkner himself. But, as Thomas Connolly put it in his “Joyce and Faulkner” piece for the James Joyce Quarterly, Faulkner’s “ambivalence about his relationship with James Joyce and about Joyce’s influence or lack of influence on his own works is….notorious” (Connolly 513). Blotner also describes Faulkner’s ambivalence, relating how
when reflecting thirty years later on his time spent in Paris, Faulkner would say, “‘I knew of Joyce, and I would go to some effort to go to the cafe that he inhabited to look at him. But that was the only literary man that I remember seeing in Europe in those days’” (Blotner 159). Despite Faulkner’s description of near-Joyce encounters, and occasional late-in-life verbal veneration, he continued to be “[notoriously]” cagey, perhaps only because of how often reviewers assumed Joyce had influenced Faulkner (Blotner notes at least 3 such instances 247, 253, 437).

While tracing the line of influence between the authors presents confounding and interesting results, rarely aided by either author, the juxtaposition of their major works, as Hugh Kenner points out, reveals connections beyond methodical appropriation. Kenner points out that the question of “reading,” i.e., how well Faulkner read *Ulysses*, might not even apply to the two modernist authors: “Reading in [Ulysses] is something else…Dipping into *Ulysses* may be one way to profit from it and [may] well have been a Faulkner practice…more veneration than study” (Kenner 22-23). Kenner makes two points that figure into my analysis. First, Faulkner and Joyce envision the same kind of *reader*, with a willingness and curiosity for correlation. Joyce, by virtue of coming first, can claim to have prepared or invented this reader in a way. But their use of such a reader is characteristic of their work and of modernism in how demanding they are of such a reader. Joyce and Faulkner take special pleasure, it appears, in inciting an obsessive quality of reading and of thinking about their works. They both use style, detail, and unusual temporal schematics to inculcate the reader with that obsession. The second point that Kenner makes is one that my thesis will rely on as proof of reasonable similarity. Kenner points out how *Ulysses* “turns out to contain the chronicle, extending over three generations, of an immigrant family in Ireland, making their way, marrying, giving birth, keeping to themselves” and thus is
“in its social…preoccupations…more like a Faulkner novel than anyone could have guessed until recently [1978]: anyone, that is, but possibly Faulkner.” According to Kenner, both “measure off phases of a nightmare … that which cannot be undone, and which cannot be forgotten” (Kenner 33). That nightmare, paternally pre-figured and passed through time, is at once the “family [story] unrolling” in the present and the individual experiencing the inheritance of the family and of the family in the region. Taken together, Joyce and Faulkner’s attitudes and ambivalence about the issue of inheritance fill their works with evidence about what is inherited and how and raise questions along the way about the power of paternity from both family and region. By turning back to their own regions, Faulkner and Joyce tell the loser’s tale, rife with cycles of futility, and portray a sense of action and momentum now lost to a past that will not end and that “cannot be forgotten.” As their characters rebel and cope, they reveal different things about the cultures they live in, the weight of such a regionally defined inheritance on their identity, and the effects of the past on the present.
PART I
Paternity and Continuity

Both Joyce and Faulkner were in touch with their oral traditions; both their bodies of work show how interested they each were in speech patterns, rhythms, and individual voices. Hugh Kenner postulates that one thing Faulkner might have absorbed from Joyce’s work is the “variety of textures,” and Kenner points to their similar successful creations of a “climate of mind, utterly individual” (Kenner 23,25). In this chapter, I will investigate the concept of ‘voice’ as it works to create a “climate of mind” for the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Ulysses*. But even if individual character comes through the texture of language for the reader, Kenner’s own term “climate of mind” locates individuality within a wider sphere of influence. The characters in *Ulysses* and *Absalom, Absalom!* self-consciously question the origin and significance of their voices in the “climate” of voices circulating in their regions and in their families. Strong paternal voices are especially problematic. How the voices of fathers infiltrate the individual mind offers a crucial starting point for understanding the power of paternity in both these novels. The complex connection between fathers and sons can be tracked starting with attention to voice. Ideas about being “eternally begotten of the Father” (Nicene Creed) are not far afield as Stephen Dedalus toys with a reversal of the Nicene Creed in “Proteus,” and Thomas Sutpen defines “all that is seen and unseen” in *Absalom, Absalom!*. This chapter will seek to measure what weight continuity of voice carries for individual identity in these texts.
Voices and Inherited Language in *Ulysses*

In “Hades,” Bloom dwells on the number of people buried who once “walked round Dublin” (113). The triggers he chooses for them that might help solidify the memory of a person are a little odd: “Eyes, walk, voice” (114). That last quality of voice seems to be especially promising as a trigger for memory as Bloom muses “Well, the voice, yes” and contemplates devices to capture a person’s voice, like the photograph “reminds you of the face.” The voice however, carries a little more power and longevity than the face, whose memories and associations expire (“after fifteen years, say”). But the voice may be clearer for longer, better promoting emotional recall and continuity. Voices posses a particular power in association with masculinity and with power. When speaking of fathers and sons, both Stephen and Bloom dwell on the idea of the son having the father’s voice, the son as a prolonging of the same substance, what Stephen dubs “consubstantial” after the theological assertion that the Father and the Son are of the same essence.

“Telemachus” first describes the importance and power of voices, both personal and national. The first episode begins to raise questions about fathers and inheritance that Stephen and Bloom will both explore in the early episodes of *Ulysses*. Even in its earliest pages, “Telemachus” bursts with references to voice, mainly directed at Buck Mulligan’s voice. The keeper of one supremely “wellfed voice,” Buck takes on any tone he chooses, a malleability that contrasts starkly with Stephen’s relatively flat and quiet voice (5). Mulligan’s vocal fullness pervades “Telemachus,” his raunchy, exclamatory voice firing off without fail. Both Mulligan and Haines have a fullness of voice that fills the space of the tower and overwhelms Stephen. When Stephen fumes over Mulligan’s comments about his mother, before he can use his voice to defend himself, “a voice within the tower [calls] loudly” for Mulligan, causing him to head
downstairs with a word to Stephen to “give up the moody broody” before “his head [vanishes downstairs] but the drone of his descending voice [booms] out of the stair head” (9). That “booming” “drone” that Mulligan possess in his “wellfed” voice points to an absence in Stephen of anything similar.

Mulligan’s “drone,” as he descends, quotes a fragment of WB Yeats’ “Who Goes With Fergus?” causing Stephen to remember singing the same poem, in his own voice, though he does not even use the word: “I sang it alone in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love’s bitter mystery” (9). Stephen’s own voice, when not squashed by his pity for his mother, sings “alone,” sustaining chords “long” and “dark.” At the very end of that segment of the memory, he slips into her voice, addressing him, “For those words, Stephen: love’s bitter mystery,” emphasizing a piece of the song that meant something to her, though for Stephen this remains mysterious. The fact that he remembers his mother’s voice rather than a father’s in this tenuous beginning contributes simultaneously to his position as Telemachus and to the possibility that his voice is lacking in a father’s voice somehow, whether by choice or by circumstance (yet unknown). But Stephen’s voice possesses an inherently different quality—a fragility that can’t compete with the voices of Mulligan and Haines, causing him to almost rely on their voices. It is Mulligan’s voice that snaps him from his reverie of the “ghoul…mother”: “Buck Mulligan’s voice sang from within the tower. It came nearer up the staircase, calling again. Stephen, still trembling at his soul’s cry, heard warm running sunlight and in the air behind him friendly words” (10). Such positive and powerful connotations surround Buck’s voice for Stephen, always accompanied by a powerful verb, this time “sang,” and malleable as mentioned earlier. Within the span of a couple of paragraphs,
Buck Mulligan might imitate “an old woman’s wheedling voice,” “[ask] in a fine puzzled voice,” “[lunge]” to “very earnestly,” and speak “in a finical sweet voice, showing his white teeth and blinking his eyes pleasantly,” only to “[suddenly overcloud] all his features” and “[growl] in a hoarsened rasping voice as he [hews]...vigorously at a loaf” (12-13). By contrast, Stephen gets “depressed by his own voice” (8).

Stephen’s envy for Mulligan’s “wellfed voice” shows through during their interaction with the Milk Lady: “Stephen listened in scornful silence. She bows her old head to a voice that speaks to her loudly...me she slights. To the voice that will shrive and oil for the grave all there is of her but her woman’s unclean loins... And to the loud voice that now bids her be silent with wondering unsteady eyes” (14). The old woman literally “bows,” Stephen perceives, to a “voice that speaks to her loudly,” ignoring or not even hearing Stephen’s own voice. Wrapped in between long descriptions of respected or loud voices, Stephen squeezes himself in as “me she slights” – withholding any power from himself, he is merely acted upon, “[slighted]” and noticeably voiceless: he doesn’t even say “my voice she slights” even though he uses the actual word “voice” in every other description in the short passage of thought.

The Milk Woman also prompts a short exchange about inherited voices in the form of languages: Although she is a native, she doesn’t recognize Irish spoken, mistaking it for French. Mulligan interjects sardonically that “[Haines is] English...and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland. –Sure we ought to, the old woman said, and I’m ashamed I don’t speak the language myself. I’m told it’s a grand language by them that knows. –Grand is no name for it, said Buck Mulligan. Wonderful entirely. Fill us out some more tea, Kinch.” (14). There’s a flat indictment of Ireland’s political and cultural situation in the fact the old, native Irish woman doesn’t recognize Irish upon hearing it spoken by an Englishman, notorious colonizers and repressors of
Irish culture, but does recognize it as a “grand language” out of her “[shame]” of not speaking it herself. Because she addresses her respect to the Englishman, the object of the Milk Lady’s tone of respect is muddled up; potentially the respect is directed at the Irish language but it could also be colonial courtesy made to the Englishman. The irony is further heightened in this interaction if one considers the crone Milk Woman a potential parody of the “Mother Ireland” character Joyce disliked so much. Her use of “I’m told” further removes her from actually paying respect to either Englishman or Irish language directly, and the compliment “grand language” is detached and impersonal, implying it doesn’t fit her common Irish identity.

This small interchange is charged with tensions of inherited voices: the British now speaking Irish, the traditional Irish person not recognizing her own language, and instead speaking in English. The problem of inherited voices extends to the national level, raising complex questions about what it means to belong to a nation and to feel cultural ownership for a certain region. The weight of history upon individual reality, or lack there of, in the Milk Lady exchange is best signified by language. Already the past has been creeping in through Stephen’s brief memory of his mother’s voice, and voices have proven themselves terribly important foreshadowing Bloom’s idea, to come later in “Hades,” that voice best conducts memories, and thus identity. Looking at the relationship between Stephen and Mulligan’s voices in “Telemachus,” there is no doubt that the quality of voice directly connects to quality of masculinity, the way Buck Mulligan fills the tower with his “booming song” while Stephen’s “listless” (18) speaking barely connotes a true “voice” at all. The interaction with the Milk Lady furthers this connection, moving from voice to nationalism, without leaving masculinity behind as three young men use their different voices on a woman and are treated differently in turn.
Stephen’s inability to fully use his voice around his mother (even to sing to her on her deathbed) further strengthens the tie forming between the male voice and male identity.

Enter the Father into the equation, heretofore withheld: “Buck Mulligan…bending in loose laughter, said to Stephen’s ear: ---O, shade of Kinch the elder! Japhet in search of a father!” (18). Mulligan mocks Stephen’s theory of Hamlet at a personal level, filling his “ear” with a quip about Stephen’s own search for a father and desire to escape the “shade of Kinch the elder.” Mulligan also gets in a dig about Stephen’s silence: “The sacred pint alone can unbind the tongue of Dedalus” (18) he says, referring to Stephen’s reluctance to voice his Hamlet theory, but perhaps more generally to his vocal dryness, both in quality and in flow. Haines, slightly oblivious to their teasing, responds with an allusion to a Hamlet theory, which Stephen’s fully embellished theory later emulates: “—I read a theological interpretation of it somewhere, [Haines] said bemused. The Father and the Son idea. The Son striving to be atoned with the Father” (18). Considering the line’s position at the near end of “Telemachus” and the third party character voicing it, a “theological interpretation” of “Father and…Son [ideas]” foreshadows thoughts and experiences Bloom and Stephen will continue to have about Fathers and Sons throughout the book. Haine’s comment carries weight in conjunction with Stephen’s musings over Hamlet in “Scylla and Charybdis” alone, not to mention all the “[ideas]” about Fathers and Sons being put forth in the book. By putting forth the concept of “striving” between sons and fathers so early, Joyce marks the road ahead, just as the emphasis on voices in “Telemachus” and their qualities and strengths, prepares for more voices and ideas about them to come.

“Telemachus” ends with a stranger voice as Stephen deserts the swimmers: “A voice, sweettoned and sustained, called to him from the sea. Turning the curve he waved his hand. It called to him again. A sleek brown head, a seal’s far out on the water, round” (23). That
“sweettoned and sustained…seal’s” voice calls to Stephen from the water at the close of the chapter, and even it has full qualities, in its “sustained” sweet voice and its “round” “sleek…head.” The seal’s song follows on the heels of Stephen’s feelings of displacement, “I will not sleep here tonight. Home also I cannot go” (23), which taken together would imply that he does not want to be with Mulligan and Haines anymore, nor does he want to return home to his father’s house. One last word concludes the chapter after the seal’s fullness: “Usurper,” Stephen thinks shortly. The sheer brevity and the word’s connotations from both the Odyssey and Hamlet suggest bitterness, for the Claudius-like ‘suitors’ perhaps represented by Haines, Mulligan, maybe even the “sweettoned…seal.” The allusion to fathers inherent in the idea of a “Usurper” mixes with the reliance on untrustworthy masculine voices (recall Mulligan’s changeably “wellfed” one, or Haine’s Irish in an English mouth) and Stephen’s exilic note that “home [he] also cannot go,” to suggest the possibility that Stephen looks for a “Usurper” to overturn the “shade of Kinch the elder” and provide an alternative male voice he can model.

Stephen picks up on theology around fathers and sons and on the importance of voice in “Proteus.” Shortly into the chapter, he muses on his own making: “Woombed in sin darkness I was too, made not begotten. By them, the man with my voice and my eyes and a ghost woman with ashes on her breath” (38). Stephen inverses the Nicene Creed to differentiate himself and his messiness from Christ, the traditional ‘begotten not made’ becoming “made not begotten.” What follows in the Nicene Creed is ‘being of one substance with the father / in whom all things were made,’ but in Stephen’s version continues “the man with my voice and my eyes and a ghost woman with ashes on her breath,” linking himself with his father’s voice and eyes. Stephen overpowers “the man” refusing to say “father” until a little later, and repossessing “[the man’s]” eyes and voices as his own, “my voice” he says, as if it had been stolen. The ghost woman
doesn’t give him anything but again the image of his mother threatens his voice with the “ashes on her breath” and the possibility that a link to her substance now means a link to death. A few lines later, Stephen ponders, “Is that then the divine substance wherein Father and Son are consubstantial? Where is poor dear Arius to try conclusions?” The “divine substance” here might be the “coupler’s will” between his parents, or the “lex eterna” of God’s foreknowing, but either way, the notable word is “consubstantial”—meaning of the same substance or essence. Stephen asking for Arius to “try conclusions” refers to the heretic Arius’s assertion of transubstantiality, which would re-order the Trinity, bringing the Father over the Son, and the Son over the Holy Spirit.

Stephen reinforces the negativity associated with that re-ordering of transubstantiality that would put the father over the son by admitting that he and “the man” have the same voice and eyes, and then later by his memory of his father’s voice as he decides whether or not to go to his Aunts. “My consubstantial father’s voice” he begins, opting for the theology in which he and his father are at least equal rather than being ordered below him. But then his memory of his father’s voice overtakes his own inner voice: “Did you see anything of your artist brother Stephen lately? No? Sure he’s not down in Strasburg terrace with his aunt Sally? Couldn’t he fly a bit higher than that, eh? And and and and tell us Stephen, how is uncle Si? O weeping God the things I married into” (38). In a moment of true “consubstantial… voice” Stephen’s father’s voice mingles with his own inner voice, displaying the difference between them but also betraying how well Stephen knows his father’s voice, how much power it still has as it derails his own inner voice, and how scathed he feels by it. He self-mocks by remembering in his own inner voice being mocked by his father’s spoken voice. Boundaries blur here for Stephen between father and son, spoken and thought, showing off the “consubstantial” nature of their voices.
Beyond being overtaken by his father’s voice, Stephen also parodies its power to criticize him. During “Proteus” Stephen disassociates himself from his voice enough to address himself, either through his fathers or his cousins, criticizing himself with his own internal voice: “You were going to do wonders, what? Missionary to Europe after fiery Columbanus…Pretending to speak broken English as you dragged your valise, porter threepence, across the slimy pier at New Haven. Comment?” (42). Stephen calls himself out for pretending to have a different voice, specifically a French voice after his time there, fooling when in England by acting broken English and speaking in French. The reality is of course, he knows English perfectly well, and has a telegram in his pocket, worded in English, that says “—mother dying come home father” (42). The telegram in English of his father’s voice weighs doubly on Stephen’s pretense to have another voice, as it is relayed in his actual language and serves as a physical manifestation of his father’s voice. Despite its repulsing brevity, Stephen is utterly compelled and undercut by the telegram from his father; he follows the order to “come home” and makes his way back to Ireland.

Paragraphs away, while Stephen is thinking about patrimony, Irish independence and “yoke fellows” under the strain of common national cause, he links that national patrimony and imagined postprandial conversation between father and son (Stephen is thinking of Kevin Egan and his son, Patrice) to a more personal comment: “You’re your father’s son. I know the voice” (43). This statement, reminding the reader of the connections already made between paternity and voice, goes farther to suggest not only consubstantiality but also a recognizable voice passed between fathers and sons. The comment additionally refers to Nestor’s comment in the Odyssey where he notes how, according to Gifford and Seidman, “surprisingly similar Telemachus’ and Odysseus’s voices are” (G&S 55). Imbedded in a string of thoughts about Irish nationalism, the
comment about patrimony further strengthens the connection between inheritance, fathers, and voices that was touched upon in “Telemachus.” Although the tone and the placement suggests that Stephen resists being identified by his father’s voice, and critical of being “[yoked] to a father, or a nation (43).

Stephen’s passing comment about identifying the father with the son through voices foreshadows a less classical, more biblical reference Bloom draws in connection to his father and to the voices of fathers and sons. From the beginning of “Calypso” which abuts the end of “Proteus” Joyce keeps bringing up voices. Bloom’s external voice is dwarfed from the beginning by his internal, and he’s a little self conscious of his spoken voice, established on the second page of “Calypso” when he calls to Molly through the house. Joyce adds in between the dialogue: “And when he had heard his voice say it he added: --You don’t want anything for breakfast?” (56). In “Lotus Eaters” Bloom thinks of his own father in relation to voice, remembering “how he used to talk about Kate Bateman” in Leah and “the scene he was always talking about where the old blind Abraham recognizes the voice and puts his fingers on his face” (76). Bloom remembers not just what his father talked of but also his father talking, his voice speaking about the recognition of voices especially ones shared by fathers and sons:

--- Nathan’s voice! His son’s voice! I hear the voice of Nathan who left his father to die of grief and misery in my arms, who left the house of his father and left the God of his father.

   Every word is so deep, Leopold.

   Poor Papa! Poor man! I am glad I didn’t go into the room to look at his face” (76).

The dichotomy here between face and voice echoes Bloom’s later valuation of the gramophone over the photograph, for although Abraham touches Nathan’s face to find his Jewish father’s visage, it is his voice that he recognizes first and his voice that Joyce chooses to leave in this mangled quotation incriminating Nathan for leaving his father’s house. The significance of voice dominance is further supported by Bloom’s memory of this quote in his father’s voice (he quotes
his father quoting), introduced as dialogue by the dash and even commented on in the father’s voice addressing Bloom “Every word is so deep, Leopold.” But the melodramatic quality of the language remembered undercuts this assertion of depth; Mr. Bloom further paraphrases and translates the original language from German, further reducing the words’ “depth.” Bloom’s very mixed-up understanding of the play already undercut this “depth,” a play he has seen in English, translated from the original German, but played by an Italian actress. Bloom can’t get a good grip on the displacement of the language (he even boggles the name of the theater) and after all the translation and confusion, the idea that every word is “deep” confuses the reader even more. Bloom’s sigh of “Poor Papa!” following his father’s assertion of depth changes our understanding of the claim by changing the tone with his own genuine sadness contained within a short, shallow statement. A tension arises between his father’s assertion of “depth” and the obvious lack of it, both in Bloom’s own language and the language of the play.

As the language borders on the cliché (“Poor Papa!”) Bloom veers away from articulating his strongest feelings. His strongest emotions overwhelm Bloom’s linguistic resources and push against a melodramatic limit on rote words. Bloom’s sentences get choppier and choppier in the face of emotion; he encounters a problem of translation, a lack of words to properly translate his feelings with “depth.” He says, “Poor Papa! Poor man! I’m glad I didn’t go into the room to look at his face. That day! O dear! O dear! Ffoo! Well, perhaps it was the best for him” (76). The string of two word exclamations already shows Bloom’s reluctance to reach for language for his feelings about his father’s suicide, exclamations that culminate in “Ffoo,” a vocal placeholder for emotions that don’t have words, or perhaps good enough words, to go with them. After “Ffoo” Bloom falls into a cliché, almost saying “well, perhaps it was the best…” only tacking on “for him” in a moment where the language reaches for something more personal, but still falls short.
The irony rests that the “[deepest]” word is not a word at all—but Ffoo, a sound, cropping up in a moment of clipped thoughts so characteristic of Bloom’s interior voice.

Bloom remembers his father’s voice again in “Aeolus,” in a passage entitled (in the newsprint style) “AND IT WAS THE FEAST OF PASSOVER.” The memory of Passover is triggered for Bloom by seeing the typesetter reading backwards: “Must require some practice that. mangiD. kcirtaP. Poor papa with his hagadah book, reading backwards with his finger to me,” (122). Hebrew is read from right to left, conventionally backwards, the notes elaborate that the Hebrew word haggadah means “‘a telling’ after the injunction ‘and thou shalt tell thy son on that day’; that is, …on the first day of the Feast of Passover” (G&S 132). The first ritual of Passover occurs between a father and a son, in a vocal retelling of the exodus from Egypt in order to, according to the note, “[bring the past] ‘into present immediacy’” (G&S 132) using the voice of father to bring the past to the son. Bloom’s memory of his father’s voice reading the “hagadah book” backwards ends with the quiet location of “to me,” shyly receiving of all his father’s energy and strain of backwards reading. The differing grammatical structures of “reading backwards with his finger” and “with his finger to me” offer dual motions of the father: first implying he uses his finger to follow along in the Hebrew (a flesh substitute for the traditional pointer), but also implying a pointing at the son, specifying Bloom as the recipient of this reading and of his own voice.

From this admission of his own location in relation to his father, Bloom quickly recalls in succession: “Pessach. Next year in Jerusalem. Dear, O dear!” (122). Pessach is Yiddish for Passover, and “Next year in Jerusalem” is the last line of the ceremony from the first night of Passover, and both indicate Bloom remembering his father’s voice in the original Hebrew and remembering the important phrases from the ceremony. But Bloom distances himself from his
father’s voice, particularly the Hebrew voice, relegating the words to internal memories—
decidedly unable to speak them to his own son, Rudy, who was stillborn. He gets a bit confused
about Hebrew and a quips about the history: “all that business about that brought us out of the
land of Egypt and into the house of bondage alleluia. Shema Israel Adonai Elohenu. No, that’s
the other” (122). There is something incredibly sad about the fact that all these thoughts are
internal for Bloom. He has no son to pass these fragments on to, no reason to vocalize his
theories and values, no language to pass on. Bloom remains quiet, keeping the voice and the
language of his father in his head and dismissing “all that business” in a way he might not have if
Rudy lived.

We get a glimpse of Bloom’s potential jealousy and longing for a son, for some reason to
vocalize, as he observes Mr. Dedalus in “Hades.” Bloom’s preoccupation with fathers and voices
is clear in his language. After hearing Dedalus “[snarl]” and “[cry above the clatter]” about
Stephen, Bloom comments that Dedalus is a “noisy selfwilled man. Full of his son” (87).
However the annoyed judgment is just as much a curse as it is an expression of envy, that “noisy”
“fullness” is something that Bloom ever seeks (for instance, in “Hades” Joyce sets up a verbal
comparison between “warm beds: warm fullblooded life,” to the “magotty bed” at Bloom’s
father’s suicide). Bloom’s tone quickly changes, turning from angry envy to a sad admission:
“[Dedalus] is right. Something to hand on. If little Rudy had lived. See him grow up. Hear his
feeling it would be. From me. Just a chance…My son inside her. I could have helped him on in
life. I could. Make him independent. Learn German too.” (89) The structure of these statements
about Rudy echoes the short, choppy exclamations Bloom made about his father’s suicide in
“Lotus Eaters,” suggesting another funneling of strong emotion into tighter language. Bloom’s
admission of regret and envy exposes the very basic desire in him to have had a son so he could have “something to hand on” (89).

He obviously gleans from Milly’s letter and increasing age what little use he was to her is waning. But she was her mother from the start: “Molly. Milly. Same thing watered down. Her tomboy oaths…She’s a dear girl. Soon to be a woman…Yes, yes: a woman too. Life. Life” (89). Bloom’s equation of Molly and Milly gets completed at the end of the thought with the echoing of “Life,” underscoring the echo of one life in the other and closely relating to the “consubstantial” ideas Stephen put forth in “Proteus.” For Bloom, the strength of the relation between mother and daughter still takes place in the language: of their names, of broken oaths, and remembered phrases from Milly’s letter.

If such can be said for relation of the mother and the daughter, for Bloom even more potential may lie between the father and the son, all the stranger and stronger for being almost realized. Bloom again focuses in on the “voice” and the likeness, how if Rudy (his still born son) had lived he would have “[heard] his voice in the house” and seen himself in his son’s eyes. Bloom can barely conceptualize what it would be like to encounter a man that was “from [him],” a son to be full of and be noisy about. Instead, he has Rudy to be quiet about and his own father’s voice to keep inside his head, shamed and grieved. His shorn language, especially around Rudy and his own father (“From me. Just a chance,” “Ffoo”), conveys movingly equal amounts of sorrow, self-pity, and curiosity, both for his father and for himself as his father.

Each of those roles however, is wrapped up in this concept of voice, of self-preservation in another, of continuing on through a son instead of being emptied out by life. The concepts are still wrapped up in language from the remembered dialogue from the conception (“Give us a touch, Poldy”), to the choppy contemplations on if Rudy had lived, clipped and drenched in
emotion. The connection Bloom makes between “helping him on in life” and teaching him the language German is even more significant as it is the language of Bloom’s father, Rudy’s would-have-been grandfather. Bloom’s desire to establish a linguistic, vocal continuity between the generations of men is telling especially in conjunction with his desire to “hear his voice in the house,” and his sounding out of the connection between Molly and Milly that could have been between grandfather, father and son, a desire for the “same thing watered down” (87).

There are problems inherent in being “the same thing watered down,” however, and the earlier notions Stephen was thinking about identify a reluctance to maintain that similarity, a search for a male “Usurper” to the father. Stephen’s longing for a distinct voice in relation to other men, like Buck Mulligan, is compounded in relation to his father. Their similarity fuels Stephen’s desire to differentiate himself from the “man with [his] voice and [his] eyes and a ghost woman with ashes on her breath” (38) and yet the “consubstantial” nature of being “made” from Mr. Dedalus plagues Stephen and weakens his voice. His mistrust of his father is more generally a mistrust of the substance he came from and thus who and what he is—a cyclic churning of identity frustrated by the similarities as Stephen attempts to understand and fight the identity-crushing weight of paternity.

While Stephen desires to throw off that mode of similarity, Bloom longs for a son to be similar to him, offering a counter weight for the Hamlet-like distress and complicating the ideas raised about purpose and masculine self-hood. Bloom’s highly emotional desire for not just any son, but Rudy specifically, isn’t even expressed vocally despite being tagged with ideas about language, passing on a voice, and a continuity of the father in the son. Bloom’s internal voice additionally tinkers with those memories of his own father, mixing things up, remembering his father’s voice and things his father told him. The shame he feels over his father’s suicide keeps
him from expressing them out loud, reaching instead a kind of emotional block as the language of the interior wrestles with cliché and the reasons to externalize those stories fracture without a son to tell them to, without a son to point to. Bloom’s identity is partly defined by this loneliness, his difference exacerbated by his fractured connection with his father and his unrealized connection to his son. He is terribly aware of his own voice’s singularity (recall how he “heard his [own voice]” in “Calypso”): he does not feel similar to anyone. For Bloom the possibility that someone could come “from him” is tantalizing and devastating: “Just a chance,” he reiterates, as he imagines how a son, how Rudy, could have established a link with the past, with German, the language of his father, and rejuvenated Bloom’s identity as a man who could be “full” of “something to hand on.”
Voice and Blood Lineage in *Absalom, Absalom*!

Tales and theories of the Sutpen family’s closeness plague and constitute *Absalom, Absalom!* in equal measure. From the perspectives of the outside characters Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, and Miss Rosa, Sutpen’s children appear “curiously alike,” both in relation to each other and in relation to Sutpen himself. Questions about the influence of paternity abound, as the outside characters weigh the implications of “common blood” against those of common circumstances, an assessment complicated by the presence of black blood and the involvement of one or two of Sutpen’s illegitimate children. However, one feature of Sutpen’s progeny’s “unbearable similarities,” receives more attention than others: a connection in communication, both spoken and unspoken, that composes a strange “rapport” (79) between them. That rapport blurs the boundaries between the Sutpens as individuals and sparks much of speculation and many imagined encounters in the minds of the Compson storytellers. The structure of the narrative allows for a doubling of this blurring between individual voices by creating an audible connection between 3 generations of Compson men as they piece together the Sutpen story. As the voices of Grandfather Compson, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve the Canadian run together, parallel with the theories about the Sutpen bloodline, revealing implications of paternity and theorizing about the nature of the father’s voice.

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1 Quentin’s college roommate, Shreve. Quentin implicates Shreve by telling him the story (really the story of the story). Faulkner offers cross-continent reasoning for how this worked later on using the Mississippi river (208)—evidence I will deal with later on in this section.
2 In *The Sound and the Fury*, published prior, Faulkner writes two memory passages from Quentin’s perspective that describe exchanges between Quentin and Caddy. Their voices are similarly indistinguishable in those passages. They often repeat each other and alternate their voices, one
Each of the characters involved in the retelling of the Sutpen story has their own ideas about something that I have called a “rapport” between Sutpen and his children, a term I appropriate from Mr. Compson’s description (which occurs early in the book) of the Sutpen children’s relationship. Here, “rapport” invokes not harmony but an intense closeness of understanding. Mr. Compson isolates this “rapport” between Sutpen’s progeny from their shared blood, emphasizing the circumstances rather than bloodlines have shaped the “rapport.” Following his model, I use the concept of “blood” (71) as a placeholder for the idea of a bloodline that would carry certain traits between generations; the idea of a determining, genetic inheritance exacerbated by circumstance but distinguishable from it and not dependent on it. As the novel progresses, however, this distinction between a circumstantial “rapport” and a blood-tie does not remain fixed. Mr. Compson, Miss Rosa, and Quentin will all struggle to determine the source of the Sutpen “rapport” and the implications of shared blood and shared circumstance.

I have mentioned already that Mr. Compson rejects the idea of a blood-based “rapport” between Henry and Judith. He instead pinpoints their circumstances as having created “that telepathy with which as children they seemed at times to anticipate one another’s actions” (79). But he holds “that telepathy” separate from the “conventional delusion of that between twins” allying “that telepathy” with the circumstance-created “rapport” instead: “two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen’s Hundred; the solitude, the shadow of that father” (79).

Mr. Compson’s assertion about Henry and Judith openly disavows a blood-determined rapport, but the impetus to dismiss blood in favor of circumstance seems more interested in a break with those conventions about siblinghood than those about blood relation. Mr. Compson even uses the phrase “conventional delusion.” The murky meaning of such a phrase may try to
dismiss any “delusions” we may have about normative close sibling or twin relationships, and take our minds further, beyond the pale, where Mr. Compson’s version of Sutpen lore lies. Mr. Compson winds towards his understanding of “two people” who have been totally defined by an outside force, by Sutpen, the father and the force of father’s will, and would have been so defined regardless of blood relation. For Mr. Compson the determining factor in the close “rapport” between Henry and Judith is their “[marooning]” on Sutpen’s hundred, in the “solitude…of that father” (79). The image of the father’s shadow strikes an ominous chord and the image extends the circumstances beyond the place the father created and to the father himself. Sutpen’s body, his form and figure, create a certain situation, which in its dark, shadowed, “solitude,” molds Henry and Judith’s relationship into one more ferocious and connected than if they had been born twins.

The idea of their situation, indeed their paternal situation, carrying the more importance than their blood tie is underscored in the last sentence by Mr. Compson’s pointed use of “that” in conjunction with “father” when articulating the shadowy “solitude” in which Henry and Judith have lived. His specific use of “that” alienates Sutpen as a father, distancing him by saying “that” over “this,” forsaking possession of him on behalf of Judith and Henry by not using “their,” and also specifying him in a tone that is almost accusatory. Their father is not ‘a father,’ or ‘the father,’ or ‘their father,’ or ‘this father,’ but “that father” (emphasis mine). The language singles Sutpen out and asks the reader to mentally refer to everything known about him as a father. The accusatory “that” expands Sutpen into something large enough to be pointed to and too large to be possessed. The description that follows supports this adversarial largeness, as Mr. Compson remarks how the town merely “assumed armistice” with Sutpen, failing to “[accept and assimilate]” him.
Mr. Compson’s understanding of Henry and Judith’s “rapport” recasts their whole existence within the context of their father, instead of the context of their parents or shared lineage in both sides of their family. For Mr. Compson, Sutpen’s paternal power is an iron mold into which any genetic substance might have been poured and come out the same shape. Thomas Sutpen’s power is reiterated from the beginning of the novel, even when no one knew him, “…the stranger’s name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in a steady strophe and antistrophe: Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen.” (24, Narrator). Judith is the primary champion of Sutpen’s monstrous will and demonic rising, but Mr. Compson is certainly not immune to the puzzling power, which is consistently attributed to Sutpen. Sutpen is given immense power throughout all accounts of his character; even in his most sympathetic descriptions he is a man with a “design...in mind,” (204).

Another of Mr. Compson’s formulas about the Sutpen children follows this same pattern—the development of a metaphor for an intense “rapport” between Henry and Judith, formed by the nature of their circumstances. As Mr. Compson tries to describe how Miss Rosa might have seen Henry and Judith, he reiterates:

…between Henry and Judith there had been a relationship closer than the traditional loyalty of brother and sister even; a curious relationship: something of that fierce impersonal rivalry between two cadets in a crack regiment who eat from the same dish and sleep under the same blanket and chance the same destruction and who would risk death for one another not for the other’s sake but for the sake of the unbroken front of the regiment itself (62).

The repetition of “same,” the absence of affection for the “other” “fierce impersonal [rival],” and the immense loyalty to the regiment itself all suggest that Henry and Judith were hewn from the same situation, and thus bound even “closer than the traditional…brother and sister.” Not lovingly for each other, which might have maintained some traditional distance of siblinghood, but bound together by circumstance into an “unbroken front” against “the same destruction.” By
locating them on a lower rung as “cadets,” Mr. Compson also suggests there was someone higher than them, above them, enforcing this sameness and demanding the “unbroken front of the regiment itself.” All the terminology of his metaphor suggests a larger power structure at play. But Mr. Compson refuses to specify the “shadow” of Sutpen in this earlier passage, skirting the issue perhaps, but also appearing more interested in the relationship between Henry and Judith. The “curious relationship,” here again attributed to circumstance, holds endless fascination for Mr. Compson in the equality and the enmity it creates between the two siblings. Henry and Judith, despite being in the “same regiment” engage in internal “rivalry” yet still hold the “unbroken front” above all else, even life. Mr. Compson strives to unpack Henry and Judith’s intensity, using different formulas to discover what created their intense similarity. While Mr. Compson will shortly identify the paternal figure as casting the “shadow” in which his metaphorical cadets camp, in this passage his fascination with their circumstances demonstrates that he perceives the relationship between Henry and Judith as instinctual and rare—and in need of explication.

Mr. Compson reiterates the same-ness ascribed to Henry and Judith in relation to Judith and Sutpen, deepening his Sutpen lore by further trying to express their uncommonly close communication. He says:

they didn’t need to talk. they were too much alike. They were as two people become now and then, who seem to know one another so well or are so much alike that the power, the need, to communicate by speech atrophies from disuse and, comprehending without need of the medium of ear or intellect, they no longer understand one another’s actual words. (96)

As Mr. Compson tries to articulate his notion of a non-verbal link based on the likeness of the father in the daughter (who, as we already know, has her father’s eyes) he strains his own language trying to explain their peculiar lack-there-of. He moves between extremes: equating
“power” and “need,” “comprehending” and “no longer understanding.” Sliding between these poles, Mr. Compson tries to locate, with his own voice, the non-verbal, non-intellectual rapport between Sutpen and Judith— which he attributes to their “alikeness.”

Miss Rosa, Henry and Judith’s Aunt on their mother’s side, also observes the same “disuse” of the ordinarily spoken language among Sutpens and also speculates about its origins. As she observes an exchange between Sutpen and Judith, she says, “*they spoke four sentences, four sentences of simple direct words behind beneath above which I felt that same rapport of communal blood which I had sensed that day Clytie held me from the stairs*” (128). Like Mr. Compson, she slides between poles trying to tune into that exchange with the string of prepositions, “behind beneath above.” Rosa tries to feel out where it was in relation to those “simple direct words” that she felt “that same rapport of communal blood” already known to her from a previous confrontation, hence her use of “that,” which recalls “that father,” and “same” indicating she has experienced the “rapport” before. The specific strand of “communal blood” Rosa has in mind here is the Sutpen blood, a rapport that excludes her. Even though she and Judith are related by blood, the dominant, Sutpen blood overpowers that weaker blood connection:

*I had for company one woman whom, for all she was blood kin to me, I did not understand... and another who was so foreign to me and to all that I was that we might have been not only of different races (which we were), not only of different sexes (which we were not), but of different species, speaking no language which the other understood* (123-124).

Miss Rosa departs from Mr. Compson’s ideas about the Sutpen family by identifying the Sutpen blood, the “communal blood,” as the primary source of the “rapport” among his descendants. Her “blood kin” entanglement with Judith and Henry complicates her insistence on the power of Sutpen’s blood as Miss Rosa, weighing two bloodlines, finds one to be dominant. Her own
bloodline, generated by her notoriously weak father, is no match for Sutpen’s. The Sutpen blood overpowers and critically influences her ability to “understand” Judith and Clytie. Even when she is “drafted by circumstance” during the war to Sutpen’s Hundred with the other two women, a concept of contingency that recalls Mr. Compson’s metaphors of the cadet regiment and desert islands that forged Judith and Henry, the women are divided in a time when they should have everything in common. For Miss Rosa, the presence of Sutpen’s blood even in her own “blood kin” blocks what should be a natural ability to “understand” each other. In Clytie, half Sutpen and half black, it altogether extinguishes it, separating them into “different species” and reducing the shared language between them into “no language.”

Miss Rosa continues to complicate her own notion of Sutpen blood with ideas about circumstance and with ideas about Sutpen’s force, especially as a father, both of which echo the power Mr. Compson imputes to Sutpen. She describes Judith as “created by circumstance” but then questions herself and revises: “(circumstance? A hundred years of careful nurturing, perhaps not by blood, not even Coldfield blood, but certainly by the tradition in which Thomas Sutpen’s ruthless will had carved a niche)” (125). Of Clytie, also Sutpen’s daughter by blood, Miss Rosa contemplates how she was “wild: half untamed black, half Sutpen blood: and if ‘untamed’ be synonymous with wild, then Sutpen is the silent unsleeping viciousness of the tamer’s lash” (126). Sutpen blood harbors a “silent unsleeping viciousness” resonates with Mr. Compson’s notions of the cadets in a “crack regiment,” “marooned” in the “shadow of that father,” faced with “[chancing] the same destruction.” That the “viciousness” in the blood should be “silent,” however, is even more interesting and recollects Mr. Compson and Miss Rosa’s ideas about the sub-lingual nature of Sutpen communications—a “silent” rapport that can subsist on being “too much alike” without “the power, the need, to communicate by speech” (96).
Miss Rosa is convinced that something in this power derives from the “communal blood” that she experienced for the first and last time during her confrontation with Clytie on the stairs, following Henry’s murder of Charles Bon. When she first confronts Clytie’s face she notes that it was a “cold implacable mindless…replica of [Sutpen’s] own” with his same “clairvoyant will” (110). In the moment that Clytie blocks Miss Rosa from the stairs, Rosa feels they are “two abstract contradictions” “[glaring]” at each other with “neither of our voice raised, as though we spoke to one another free of the limitations of speech and hearing” (111). When Clytie does speak, she speaks “that quiet, that still” –language that echoes Mr. Compson’s identification of “that father”— and Rosa thinks how “it had not been [Clytie] who spoke but the house itself that said the words—the house which he had built, which some suppuration of himself had created about him as the sweat of his body might have created, produced…in which Henry and Judith would have to be victims and prisoners, or die” (111). In this moment, the “communal blood” to which Miss Rosa has referred takes on the same sublingual qualities Mr. Compson described as “free of the limitations of speech and hearing.” Clytie does not have agency over her voice; it is so visceral that it seems to excrete from the house “he had built,” flowing out of Sutpen’s structure, the force of his “clairvoyant will.” Rosa’s use of “suppurates” to describe Sutpen’s creation of his house turns the whole environment into a by-product of his being. Sutpen’s essence leaks over into the physical world and into his children, imprisoning them in a speechless “clairvoyant will,” and miring them not only in the father’s house but in the father’s substance. As a child of Sutpen wrought by both blood and circumstance, Sutpen’s will overtakes Clytie’s voice at this crucial juncture, transforming her into the paternal force and erasing her actual identity.
The force of the Sutpens’ sameness is found most often in the family’s withholding of their voices. But when they do use their voices, as evidenced above by Clytie, children channel the voice of the father and become almost indistinguishable from each other. Not one of Sutpen’s progeny is distinct: all derive from the same original voice in the father, the same original substance of the father. While Mr. Compson and Miss Rosa disagree on how confined that substance is to blood, there is no question in either of their minds that the substance shared by the children derives from Sutpen himself and that his overwhelming, “clairvoyant will” drives the sublingual communication, here-to-fore “rapport,” between Henry, Judith, Sutpen, and Clytie. As the father, Sutpen epitomizes the strongest substance, the determining factor, and the circumstances are only so powerful so long as they are an extension of him, the blood only so powerful so long as it is his, and the vocal and non-vocal likeness only so powerful because it comes from him, from the father.

Quentin Compson is exposed to both his father’s and Miss Rosa’s ideas about Sutpen’s line, and takes both into consideration as he retreats into his own mind for a moment at the very end of Chapter 5. Miss Rosa’s italicized monologue has reached a critical junction: she recounts hearing of Thomas Sutpen’s death and her own disbelief that such a “walking shadow” should find “severance (even if not rest and peace) at last in the stroke of a rusty scythe” (139). Upon hearing, she addresses the idea of Sutpen and gives him the lie over his death: “‘Dead?’ I cried, ‘Dead? You? You lie; you’re not dead; heaven cannot and hell dare not have you!’” (139). Her inability to imagine Sutpen being capable of dying because, as she explains lines earlier, “he was not articulated in this world,” echoes Quentin’s inability to imaginatively process the confrontation between Judith and Henry. Tripped into his own mental wrestling, Quentin is unable to sustain his attention to Miss Rosa’s italicized monologue, and as her exclamation ends,
the narrator breaks in and uprights the text, overturning the italicized voice that has dominated for a whole chapter now, to say: “But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass—that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, …the white girl in her underthings… the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin and lace…held before her as the door crashed in and the brother stood there, hatless, …the pistol still hanging against his flank” (139). Quentin seizes upon the moment between Henry and Judith following Bon’s death and the confrontation between the siblings that must have ensued, with the sister in next to nothing but a “yellowed” wedding dress and the brother still holding the weapon that ended the groom. Although the moment is dubiously sexualized, Quentin, like his father and Aunt Rosa, attributes most of the tension (including the physical tension) to Judith and Henry’s similarity, an idea Quentin has already introduced with his thought about the “continuation” of a sound. He obsesses over “the two of them,” ruminating on the situation between “brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, almost unbearable, similarity” (139).

Quentin reasons against the grain of Mr. Compson’s ideas about Henry and Judith by involving their “common blood” and their “difference in sex” that somehow “[sharpens]” the blood. The tension building from their “almost unbearable” likeness, from that “common blood,” emerges in Quentin’s mind through Henry and Judith’s voices. They “[speak] to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps, as if they stood breast to breast striking one another in turn, neither making any attempt to guard against the blows: Now you can’t marry him. / Why can’t I marry him? / Because he’s dead./ Dead? / Yes. I killed him. He (Quentin) couldn’t pass that” (139). The equality of the enmity between them breaks out as their voices strike each other in “staccato sentences like slaps,” and Quentin does not differentiate between Henry and Judith,
as they echo each other. The reader has a context, line breaks to create an exchange, and pronouns to clarify their addresses, but no proper names are ever used and the tone remains eerily similar, with Judith often repeating Henry’s phrasing, causing the lines and indeed the voices to run together. Neither is stronger than the other, Henry antagonizes with statements, Judith with questions, but both are equality short and raw as they “strike one another in turn.”

The physicality of their language is an emphasis Quentin himself puts on their voices—he imagines his way into the exchange between Henry and Judith, two people the reader never hears speak first-hand. Henry and Judith’s imagined dialogue filters through the voice of Mrs. Rosa and the mind of Quentin. The dead-voices are called into life by their imaginations and memories but almost no verbal or orated dialogue is original or articulated, as if the re-oration by any voice not shaped by Sutpen’s will cannot fully capture the intensity of the actual language exchanged and must retreat into the sublingual, the physical feelings and the sounds produced by the remembered exchanges in order to articulate their power. Mr. Compson retreats from actual language in just this manner when he conjures an exchange between Henry and Sutpen from the night Henry gave Sutpen the lie. His description leans into the audible and the physical, passing over any actual words:

I can imagine him and Sutpen in the library that Christmas eve, the father and the brother, the percussion and the repercussion like a thunderclap and its echo and as close; the statement and the giving of the lie, the decision instantaneous and irrevocable between father and friend, between (so Henry must have believed) that where honor and love lay and this where blood and profit ran, even though at the instant of giving the lie he knew it was the truth. (72)

The reverberating closeness of a “thunderclap and its echo,” used by Mr. Compson to describe the loud (and matched) closeness between a father and son, suggests a connection between the

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2 In *The Sound and the Fury*, published prior, Faulkner writes two memory passages from Quentin’s perspective that describe exchanges between Quentin and Caddy. Their voices are similarly indistinguishable in those passages. They often repeat each other and alternate their voices, one questioning and the other answering. See p. 111, 150, in *The Sound and the Fury.*
sound of the two voices and the relationship between the son and the father. Although Quentin and Mr. Compson both understand the necessary vocality of the son giving the father the lie, Henry calling Sutpen a liar is not imagined as spoken speech by them but it is imagined as loud. The pervasive, “clairvoyant will” of the Father that Mr. Compson and Miss Rosa have tried to articulate surfaces in the exchange, as does the violent physicality and staccato “rapport” that Quentin imagined and Miss Rosa experienced. The relation of “percussion and [repercussion]” supplants whatever actual language was used, and it is the loudness of the “blood” (here, Mr. Compson relents and allows Henry to think about “where [his] blood” runs) that makes an echo in the son just “as close” as the original “thunderclap” in the father. Mr. Compson equalizes them in everyway, even orienting them not towards each other, but with equal fidelity to Judith: “the father and the brother” were in the library, not the father and the son. But their equanimity “merely [sharpens] the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable similarity,” bringing the likeness between them to an audible level at the moment when the son, the echo, rejects the father, disavowing “blood and profit” in favor of “honor and love” and a lie.

The pathetic irony is that Henry can no more “find severance” from his father than he can from himself; even as he attempts it, he audibly proves they are the same substance: “the percussion and the repercussion…the statement and the giving of the lie.” Mr. Compson’s inability to fully articulate the words father and son actually exchange corroborates and heightens his instinct that the two men are the same substance and that the father (the percussion) is the inescapable origin point for the echo of the son (the repercussion). By describing the exchange in sounds and physical sensations, using placeholders like “the statement” and “the giving of the lie” for the presumed exchange of real words taking place, Henry and Sutpen are forced into audible likeness with no boundary between them but a little bit of time. The
deafening closeness between them erases the specific language they use. It no longer matters, the only thing happening is Sutpen hearing his own substance echoing the paternal power in an attempt to break with the father—that, as I have observed, only proves them “as close” as a “thunderclap and its echo.”

Mr. Compson follows up his own assertion later in the chapter, returning to the giving of the lie. For him, the story still misses something and he strains towards the unknown thing that would make Henry “[repudiate] father and blood and home” only to kill Charles Bon for “the very identical reason which four years earlier he quitted home to champion” (79). Mr. Compson cannot think of what would have caused this turn around, but he does have a theory about why Henry gave Sutpen the lie: “it was not the fact of the mistress…to which Henry gave the lie, but to the fact that it was his father who told him, his father who anticipated him, the father who is the natural enemy of any son and son-in-law” (83). Henry’s attempt to throw off his father by asserting his own voice is corroborated by the “natural [enmity]” between them as father and son, and driven to its futile end by Henry’s anger that his father “anticipated him” not only in this matter, but in this life. By way of coming before the son the father has “anticipated him” in all ways, deriving the son from his own substance, and, as I have shown, stranding the son in the “shadow” (79) of the father.

Just as “some effluvium of Sutpen Blood and character” plagues Henry, Quentin also senses the ways in which he too was derived and “anticipated.” Quentin finds himself down river in the same stream from his father, his grandfather, and indeed the whole South. The same sublingual rapport that characterized Sutpen’s paternal influence on his progeny crops up for Quentin too. Quentin notices how the male voices in his family run together as he relays three generations of information to Shreve, his college roommate.
A narratorial voice omnisciently speculates about Quentin and Shreve’s curious connection, citing the Mississippi “in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough, that River…the geologic umbilical, …is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature” (208). The narrator even echoes the structure of Mr. Compson’s metaphors for Henry and Judith when he describes Quentin and Shreve, locating their connection and their sameness in the ideas of paternal inheritance already present: “the two of them who four months ago had never laid eyes on one another yet who since had slept in the same room and eaten side by side of the same food and used the same books from which to prepare to recite in the same freshman courses” (208). The direct structural echoes with Mr. Compson’s metaphor of “cadets in a crack regiment” who “chance the same destruction” immediately embroils Quentin and Shreve in the same questions of identity under the influence of paternity, this time in the narrative present day. The “geological umbilical” stands in for the blood relationship, the “Continental Trough” extends the scope of the solitude, and “that River,” which just is “very Environment itself,” capitalized like a surname, expands into a whole context that “runs through…the beings within its scope,” and wields enough influence to pull Quentin and Shreve together into “rapport” until Quentin notices how

_He sounds just like Father_ he thought, glancing (his face quiet, reposed, curiously almost sullen) for a moment at Shreve…smelling (Quentin) the cigar and the wisteria, seeing the fireflies blowing and winking in the September dusk. _Just exactly like Father if Father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back_ (148).

In retelling Quentin’s telling of a story that hinges on a pervasive father, Shreve begins to “sound just like” Quentin’s own father, Mr. Compson. Quentin echoes Mr. Compson as well, and a little while later, Shreve calls him out: “Don’t say it’s just me who sounds like your old man” (210).
Quentin muses on the vocal similarities between them all, how the voice, and the substance, doesn’t change with the individuals:

Yes Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe is never once but like ripples on water hover as the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite and unchanging sky, it doesn’t matter: that pebble’s watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple space, to the old ineradicable rhythm thinking Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us (210)

Quentin’s metaphor of pools joined by “narrow umbilical water-cords” asserts that even that “next pool” is subject to “the original ripple space” transferred to it by “the first pool” that feeds it. Even if the “next pool,” or the son, did not “even see” the “fall,” “it doesn’t matter: that pebble’s watery echo” will “move across its surface…to the old ineradicable rhythm” thus linking father and son and Shreve and Thomas Sutpen in a continuous, permanent stream. The old rhythmic dysfunction carries the repercussions of some original percussion intense enough to confuse even the order of the relationships that ensue: “Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.” Quentin implicates himself in multiple ways here: as a participant and cohort to his own Father’s will, as part of a rapport with Shreve that brings to power by mimicking or operating under the force it claims to be shaped by, and subjugate to, that other father Sutpen, and the original force of “will” still acting out his legacy.

Quentin’s melancholy at having been anticipated intensifies with the sense of futility he articulates with the endless truths of the “maybe” statements. He admits or realizes that something crucial “doesn’t matter.” Quentin cannot get out from under that “old ineradicable rhythm” that joins him to these other men and blurs the boundary between them as individuals by
subjecting them to the same “pebble” of event or circumstance. When Quentin posits “maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished” he admits not only his sense of everything as a continuation of something unfinished and repeating, but also hints at the lack of individual singularity: just as nothing is ever finished, no individuals are either. Instead, people continue on within the substance of whatever came before them, accruing knowledge and stories from the original substance and, to use Quentin’s own word, never letting any of it “pass.” Paternal figures enforce the retention of the past, creating the “shadow” (79) in which progeny absorb the unfinished inheritance. Mr. Compson quotes Grandfather Compson to Quentin, imbuing his son with the words of his own father, so much so that Quentin draws on information that “Grandfather said” (194), which in fact he only knows because his father said grandfather said. The conjoined voices create a sublingual, communal, memory out-of-time and hold it in the atmosphere:

*_But you were not listening, because you knew it already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do: so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering (172)_*

The father strikes those “resonant strings of remembering” with an audible, physical action that undercuts whatever words the father is “saying” and instead uses each “word” as a note that produces the “remembering.” The intensity is recalled, not created—within this accruement of lore, the past has already been “absorbed” “without the medium of speech somehow.” The particular atmospheric exposure to “it”—a place holder for something about the inheritance and the South—permeates the whole context of southern existence and links that existence with a paternal power to activate “it.” The book opened with the warning that although Quentin “was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost” he was “nevertheless having to be one for all that…since he was born and bred in the deep South…in the long silence of notpeople in
notlanguage” (4-5). The erasure of identity, “notpeople,” and language, “notlanguage,” in this quotation is liked with death: Quentin has to be a “ghost,” at least in part, because of “all that.” The ambiguity of the “all that” encompasses the “old ghost-times” (4) and the “deep South dead since 1865” (4), and “all that” necessitates Quentin’s submersion in the inheritance of death and futility that makes him into a partial “ghost” when he’s supposed to be “Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard,” but he cannot fully exist as an independent, active young man living in present time because he remains “in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening” (4).

The secretion of the father’s substance into the built environment and into the progeny has a determining impact on communication and self-hood within the family that is linked to the limits the substance of the South places on individual existence. Both region and father irrevocably change individual experience and implicate all progeny in their own, same substance of the original design. Sutpen’s substance locks his family together (“to chance the same destruction”) so closely their blood-tie to the father and their marooning in his construction (Sutpen’s Hundred) erases self-hood entirely. Similarly, Quentin’s self-hood erodes as he comes to hear the voices shared between himself, his father, and his grandfather, which fill him from those other “pools” and cause him to fall into step with an “ineradicable rhythm” that overpowers and pre-determines him.
PART II

Inheritance and Futility

Insular Crisis in *The Sound and The Fury*

Quentin Compson’s chapter of *The Sound and the Fury* opens with an awakening, on June second 1910, to shadow and to time: “When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch,” (76). A single sentence from Quentin situates him “in time again”—a turn of phrase that foregrounds Quentin’s sense that time is something one is “in” and thus something that one could be *out* of. Quentin’s addition of “again” suggests that he thinks that he has been out of time or that he desires to be out of time; “again” further suggests a return to being “in time” or a recurring feeling that one is “in time.” Perhaps when he was not “in time again” he was asleep, or perhaps the phrasing of the first sentence already prompts the reader forward to Quentin’s suicide. Regardless, with the first word of his chapter, whatever state out-of-time had prevailed up to that point, the temporal “when” vanquishes immediately.

The beginning of Quentin’s chapter divulges important information about how his southern ‘inheritance’ interacts with time. Faulkner condenses a legacy of failure into the first few paragraphs and establishes Quentin in that pre-existing pattern, which was initiated by the heroic generation in the South. The problems associated with that legacy of failure repeat throughout the chapter as Quentin wrestles with how time is a part of his inheritance. As Quentin’s day progresses, his hyper-aware fight against external time (i.e. audible or
synchronized with certain events outside the self) opens the way for an interior struggle with that inheritance.

Anyone trying to understand Quentin’s longing for an existence outside of time must first try to pin down why Quentin perceives being “in time” as undesirable. The second sentence of the chapter reveals one way in which time burdens Quentin, as he articulates one conception of time weighing on him—passed down by Compson men in the form of a watch:

> It was Grandfather’s and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reductio absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s. (76)

Barely a sentence passes in Quentin’s interior voice before Mr. Compson’s cynical voice intrudes, the first instance in an ongoing pattern of interruptions plaguing Quentin’s narrative. Mr. Compson’s commentary functions twice-over, to fix Quentin in a line of men and to fix that line of men in time. Time outlives each previous father in the form of the bequeathed watch, bringing Quentin into a “mausoleum” of past, dead men along with their “hope and desire.” Mr. Compson denies the possibility that the watch would “fit” Quentin’s “individual needs,” or even that his needs are “individual” at all by citing all the past fathers, himself included, for whom the watch’s powers were insufficient. Instead of attributing to the watch (or Quentin) any power to rise to individuality or hope, Mr. Compson takes back the gift of time in the act of giving it; with so many cobwebs of inheritance attached, Quentin cannot possibly prevail against time.

Since Quentin can only come into his inheritance when his father has lost the battle with time, the concepts of ‘time’ and ‘inheritance’ are already co-dependent. When a bequeathed watch becomes the symbol of Quentin’s lineage, time becomes a part of the inheritance itself. By encompassing lineage, time, and failure, the watch goes beyond symbolizing Quentin’s inheritance and plants it in his mind: the watch creates the circumstances for the inheritance by
moving time forward, serves as a physical reminder of the male precursors, and predicts, by its infallible mechanism and attachment to the Compson bloodline, Quentin’s own doomed repetition. Mr. Compson’s presentation of the watch prefigures it as a torment, an “excruciating-ly apt” reminder of repeated failure (a failure, in Mr. Compson’s logic at least, because death still overcomes the previous male possessors despite the possession of the time-piece). While Quentin will only recall the watch’s origins one other time in the chapter, within the first paragraph Faulkner prepares the reader to recall the watch not just as a simplistic representation of time, but as an external representation of Quentin’s paternal and time-bound inheritance.

Mr. Compson passes on some advice along with the watch: “he said…I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it” (76). While giving his son a constant reminder of time, Mr. Compson hopes that Quentin will “forget it now and then,” so that by abstention from thinking about time Quentin would be able to “conquer it,” without “trying.” Certain misery springs from the challenge of the construction, which presents a momentary, conditional assertion foiled by forceful negations. Mr. Compson’s flimsy expression of hope (while passing on a symbol of his own cynicism) preserves the watch as a reminder of the failure of those before him—a failure perhaps hinted at here by Mr. Compson’s second negation, “not spend all your breath” (emphasis mine).

Mr. Compson’s voice concludes: “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 philosophes and fools” (76). Mr. Compson distorts linear time by practicing self-revision: he asserts that “no battle is ever won,” a statement that would suggest that fighting had occurred or is occurring; but then he moves backwards in time to conditions pre-dating the action, to suggest

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3 See page 119 in *The Sound and the Fury.*
“they are not even fought.” His use of “they,” standing for battles, still asserts the existence or experience of a battle, despite the impotence stipulated by the now not-fighting. “Field” upholds the structure of an opposition or a location for this impotent battle even after Mr. Compson preempts the assumed violence. Mr. Compson intervenes between human will and the product of any actions taken by that will—his idea interpositions enough chance between human will and result to make striving useless. The construction demonstrates the Father, Mr. Compson, thinking about the past and weaving in and out of his own theories, in a pattern of assertion and revision, to enforce the futility of the present. *Absalom, Absalom!* is rife with examples of Mr. Compson’s metaphysics and circumlocution.⁴ In that novel, the significant expansion of Mr. Compson’s voice reveals many more specifics about his pedagogical and vocal influence over Quentin.

But in *The Sound and the Fury*, with the more developed voice heard in *Absalom, Absalom!* yet unpublished, all Mr. Compson’s logic is transmitted through the voice of Quentin. The fragment of paternal philosophy at the beginning of Quentin’s chapter demonstrates how Mr. Compson looks towards the powers of the past, namely the Civil War generation of his own father (Quentin’s grandfather), and seeks to extract from them a cynicism by which he can understand the futility he has experienced. The futility, irony even, evident in the idea that “no battle is ever won…they are not even fought,” pervades Quentin’s own logic. While Quentin’s inheritance differs from his father’s, Quentin’s ideas will remain similarly philosophical, detached from realism, and tied to the feeling of futility and incapacity for action his father plunged into cynicism to understand. The chapter’s exploration begins with the distinct knowledge that Mr. Compson’s logic imparts, both in practice and by legacy, a methodology for revisiting the past that binds Quentin’s existence to an inherited, temporal identity infused with a

⁴ My favorite example in *Absalom, Absalom!* of such logic ‘weaving’ is the New Orleans episode, where Bon takes Henry to New Orleans to reveal his other wife, and Mr. Compson tries to inhabit their logic and Bon’s power to understand Henry’s reaction to what he must have encountered (86-95).
feeling of futility. By using the watch to articulate inherited methodology for grappling with time and inheritance, Faulkner has wound the watch, so to speak, with the pressure of generations of Compsons. Having coiled these ideas about time, the past, futility, and paternal failure so perfectly in Quentin’s mind and in the reader’s, Faulkner can simply let the watch run—and it ticks unrelentingly for the rest of the chapter, until Quentin leaves it behind in Shreve’s drawer before committing suicide.

As Quentin shifts in and out of present-consciousness and memories, the sound of the watch fades in and out of the background, an accompaniment that Quentin foreshadows in the second paragraph. As his father’s voice recedes into memory, Quentin observes the watch:

[The watch] was propped against the collar box and I lay listening to it. Hearing it, that is. I don’t suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You don’t have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn’t hear. (76)

In this passage, Quentin revises himself as he goes along, echoing his father’s self-revision, but with more anxiety and self-awareness: “listening” lessens into the less active “hearing,” with Quentin nervously adding on “that is,” a small admission of his previous error and current unease as he realizes he doesn’t have to “deliberately” listen to the watch. His anxiety about his lack of choice in the action climaxes “in a second of ticking” which retroactively furnishes all those moments he was “oblivious to the [watch’s] sound” with the same ticking he hears in the specific “second.” Time conjures itself “unbroken,” denying that Quentin’s attention or awareness has any influence on “the long diminishing parade of time you didn’t hear.” The threat of duration hijacks Quentin’s “mind” and establishes the “parade” “unbroken.” Quentin’s rhetoric echoes his father’s constructions by curbing activity and moving to reveal something continuous. He philosophically explicates how each tick of the watch creates the historic, time-bound inheritance
in his mind, linking the most minute instances of silence and sound to a historic “parade,” further indicated by the watch’s bequeathment from his military grandfather.

Through his own observations of the watch, Quentin answers his father’s wish that he “might forget [time] now and then.” For Quentin the “unbroken” nature of time and the active, “[creative]” force it exerts over his mind, negate his father’s hope that he will be able to “forget” time. The watch’s victory over him is absolute: even if he remains “oblivious to the sound for a long while,” time will still so prevail that he will return to consciousness only to be re-brainwashed into understanding that time never stopped. Set up by Mr. Compson’s monologue and by Quentin’s observations, the sound of the watch mechanism returns the reader to the original notions about time and inheritance. The southern inheritance Quentin struggles with confuses ideas about time, the strata of the human condition, with time, the historical, regional progression of events. This confusion between time as a philosophy and time as a history is crucial to understanding Quentin’s inheritance and his struggle with time throughout his chapter. Evidence shows already that Quentin cannot really delineate one struggle from the other: he mixes possible meanings of time. Even when Quentin starts making general “You” observations about hearing watches, he ends with the “long diminishing parade of time,” which has a close relationship to his father’s ideas about continuing and futile regional time. Early in the chapter, Quentin smashes his watch against a corner of a dresser in an attempt to silence it, prying off the hands (78). But the mechanism survives and it continues to tick, though unable to tell the time. In an “excruciating-ly apt” action, Quentin has created the specter of his inheritance: the handless, injured watch is no longer tied to his specific experience of time and the ticking expands to represent time itself, or it contracts to represent the “long diminishing parade” of southern men
that Quentin feels himself the latest installment in. The duplicity and confusion Quentin faces when trying to confront the version of time he experience is shaped by his inheritance.

Quentin visits a clock shop in a tricky move to fully silence his own watch’s ticking using the noise of other clocks: “I put it in my pocket. I couldn’t hear it now, above all the others,” (84-85). He observes all the clocks “contradicting one another” and realizes he can hear his own watch “ticking away inside [his] pocket, even though it could tell nothing.” The realization prompts him to remember how “Father said clocks slay time…time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life,” (85). The mention of “slay” in Mr. Compson’s current theory revisits his earlier usages of “conquer” and “battle.” The dynamic Mr. Compson creates between time as “dead” and time as “come to life” further confuses the reader’s understanding of Quentin’s experience. Mr. Compson’s language suggests that he (Mr. Compson) is comfortable with time “as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels,” i.e., dead. Within the context of his Father’s notion Quentin’s inability to break his grandfather’s watch would represent not his inability to kill time, but his inability to resuscitate it out of a constant, insistent death (80). Mr. Compson’s language also works to separate out the clock from time itself. The clock becomes a weapon against “time” that works in fractions to keep time at bay. But Mr. Compson’s philosophical approach suggests that he himself is outside of the clock’s specific help: his own awareness of conceptual time as a combatant that he must face betrays his inability to apply his own assertion that clocks provide a special defense; Mr. Compson has to come up with philosophy to defend himself against time.

The phrase “contradicting one another” almost reappears as Quentin describes the three boys he meets talking over one another: “They all talked at once, their voices insistent and contradictory, making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words” (117).
Though they both pursue philosophical reflections on time, Quentin’s relationship with time remains less clear than his father’s. Quentin’s temporal location stifles him and his notion of being “in time again” presents time as an inescapable, as a dead strata in which nothing new can be generated. For Quentin, the dead quality of time is better described as a non-generative sense of the present, a sensation derived from the futility Quentin struggles with under the weight of his personal inheritance. As a landed southerner with an inheritance (a cultural ‘insider’) Quentin’s dissatisfaction with his present is closely linked to the idea that a place in the past, indeed his past, had a momentum and an access to agency or to power missing from the present. Saddled with the expectations of heroism and rightness passed down from the chivalric war generation of his grandfather, but born into a culture and a land that have both fallen into failure, Quentin experiences an internal crisis in the form of an unbridgeable abyss between his chivalric inheritance and time’s erasure of the perceived purity and rightness of the High South. The insider’s crisis created by that dichotomy is Quentin’s actual inheritance, and the tie between that crisis and a particular regional past cut him off from temporal reality. Like his father, Quentin looks back towards a higher past in order to find a solution to his non-generative, disconnected present. The dead and continuously dying progression of time entraps him apart from a past he wishes to reach. Unlike his father, Quentin must contend with himself as a repetition of that obsessive impulse to look backwards, which has pre-determined him.

In seeking ways out of his cyclic existence, Quentin’s desire to escape his temporal, inherited identity mutates into a desire to disembody himself. He attempts to secede from his body, which he experiences as a physical problem keeping him stranded in linear-moving present time. Quentin remembers how “Father said that constant speculation regarding the position of mechanical hands on an arbitrary dial [is] a symptom of mind-function. Excrement Father said
like sweating. And I saying All right. Wonder. Go on and wonder” (77). Quentin refuses to check the time, instead forcing himself to “go on and wonder,” a phrase he will repeat later in another moment of temporal temptation. By not looking at a clock, he literally refuses to fulfill what his father has theorized is a bodily need, and thus refuses to embody his father’s certainties.

Quentin draws close correlations between time and the body when he observes Spoade’s apparent mastery of time, signified by Spoade’s physical location and clothing (or lack there of):

It was his club’s boast that he never ran for chapel... About ten oclock he’d come in Thompson’s get two cups of coffee, sit down and take his socks out of his pocket and remove his shoes and put them on while the coffee cooled. About noon you’d see him with a shirt and collar on, like anybody else. The others passed him running, but he never increased his pace at all. (79)

Some jealousy on Quentin’s part is inherent here as he recounts Spoade’s cool behavior, perhaps even mimicking the other boy’s nonchalance by beginning each phrase with “about” prefacing the time of day. The easy physicality of Spoade’s interactions with time read like a super power, a mastery that ensures he “never ran” and yet stays naturally synchronized with time. Quentin truly never feels at ease in time or in his body, rather he feels distinct from his body yet finding himself “in time again” and in a body again whether or not he likes it. Quentin might be trying to emulate Spoade in some way today, taking time with his manner of dress, not rushing in the slightest, despite Shreve’s wide-eyed questions and nagging (78, 81).

Later in the day, Quentin sits underground in a train avoiding lunch. He meditates on how “You can feel noon” and wonders whether or not “even miners in the bowels of the earth” can “feel noon” (104). He notes how complicated hunger and other physical needs make not interacting with time due to how bodily functions locate one within “space and time”: “Eating the business of eating inside of you space too space and time confused Stomach saying noon

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6 Spoade is easily physical in sexual arenas too, see 79. To add insult to injury, Spoade is from South Carolina, technically another southerner.
brain saying eat o'clock All right I wondered what time it is what of it...The trolley didn’t stop so often now, emptied by eating. Then it was past” (104-105). To my ear, Quentin sounds remarkably like Bloom here, letting language fuse itself into new phrases as his organs try and tell time, “stomach saying noon brain saying eat o'clock.” Another similarity between Quentin and Bloom can be observed here in their recorded responses to unrecorded internal information, derived from the voices and information clouding their internal consciousness. Quentin must hear his father’s voice because he responds to some unrecorded antagonism with “All right,” the same response recorded earlier (77), and “what of it” to shove down the inaudible retort. Both Bloom and Quentin engage in such off-the-record behavior when they actively avoid a certain voice or a certain line of thinking that might disrupt or upset them internally: for Bloom, such repressive ‘leaving out’ often has to do with his father’s suicide and his own guilt and emotion around that event; for Quentin, it most often appears connected to his father’s suffocating cynicism threatening to pass some unfair judgment on his current state.

Despite the similarity in the interior voice, Quentin and Bloom remain quite different in their relationship to time and to their bodies. Bloom too, throughout his day, is hyper-conscious of his relationship to time, waiting for the 4 pm liaison between Molly and Blazes Boylan to take place. But Bloom’s bodily functions reassure him and distract him with physical minutia, spiraling his thoughts towards his immediate physical needs and away from his anxious mind. Quentin, however, in resisting time also resists his own body and the physical markers that would bring him down from the philosophical struggle and into the moment. Ironically such a base and regular feeling like hunger, instigated by the stomach, should provide Quentin a link to the present. But he won’t take it: over and over Quentin refuses his natural connection to his body, disrupting his connection to time.
One of Quentin’s few memories to take place outside the family reveals that the unsettling connection he feels between time and his body is nothing new. The passage also hints that Quentin’s obsession with time has been almost life-long, beginning at a very young age when he was still in grade school:

I wouldn’t begin counting until the clock struck three. Then I would begin, counting to sixty and folding down one finger and thinking of the other fourteen fingers waiting to be folded down, or thirteen or twelve or either or seven, until all of a sudden I’d realize silence and the unwinking minds, and I’d say “Ma’am?” “Your name is Quentin, isn’t it?” Miss Laura would say. Then more silence and the cruel unwinking minds and hands jerking into the silence. “Tell Quentin who discovered the Mississippi River Henry” “De Soto” Then the minds would go away and after a while I’d be afraid I had gotten behind and I’d count fast and fold down another finger, then I’d be afraid I was going too fast and I’d slow up, then I’d get afraid and count fast again. So I never could come out even with the bell… (88)

As Quentin attempts to keep up with time he deepens his anxiety about how time works and progresses. His repetition of “I’d be afraid” three times emphasizes his anxious need to understand time and to harmonize with it. Quentin’s characterization of the other kids as “unwinking minds” prompts more questions about the extent to which Quentin conceptualizes himself, or would like to conceptualize himself, as a mind apart from a body—and detached from the physical parts of life he cannot seem to handle. But even as he describes the “minds,” Quentin makes use of his “fingers” to interact with time at the end of his school day. The control he exerts over his own body corresponds with the control he wants to exert over time, but both attempts fail—“I never could come out even with the bell.” The passage makes explicit Quentin’s longstanding anxiety about time and the early connection he formed between that anxiety and a frustration with his body.

That frustration and anxiety continues in the present. Quentin earlier observed his body’s connection to time with paranoia, leading him to try even harder to control his body and retreat further into his mind. Reflecting shortly after his observations of Spoade’s easy physical
interactions with time, Quentin assesses his response to the presence of the clock tower as he walks through the square: “There was a clock, high up in the sun, and I thought about how, when you don’t want to do a thing, your body will try to trick you into doing it, sort of unawares. I could feel the muscles in the back of my neck and then I could hear my watch ticking away in my pocket” (83). The idea of a physical reaction to time, or really of a physical existence signified by the reaction, annoys Quentin; what he can “hear” and “feel” become responses of a “body” separate from the self, a body he feels will “try to trick [him]…sort of unawares.” For a character notably hyper-aware, any kind of unawareness unsettles Quentin. The body’s “trick” is simply the feeling “in the back of the neck” a reaction against his active attempt not to look up at the clock. But Quentin’s language refers out from the word by itself to consider the body as a force of trickery separate from the self (the “you”), a force that will make you “do a thing” even if you don’t want to. Quentin’s discomfort in and suspicion of his own body are plain, and his language further implies that there may be more bothersome “[tricks]” of the body of which he is “unaware.”

Despite what Quentin might prefer, both his body and his mind are implicated in his inheritance: both are subject to his father’s philosophy, both experience time’s power over them, and both are part of a blood lineage that links Quentin to his family and to the South. Quentin himself establishes most of these links by trying to disprove them. Just after what Noel Polk refers to as “The Little Sister Episode,” in which Quentin picks up a straggling little Italian girl and tries in vain to take her home, Shreve, Spoade, and Gerald Bland locate him and set out on the picnic organized by Gerald’s mother, Mrs. Bland, which Quentin was trying to avoid. Sparked by the irony of an angry brother accosting him for stealing his little sister, Quentin falls

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7 Quentin gets his body back on 92-93 by tricking his shadow.
into a maddened state where even more intense memories start to encroach on his consciousness. The transition into uncontrollable memory is marked by uncontrollable laughter: “I could feel it in my throat and I looked off into the trees where the afternoon slanted…I couldn’t stop it…I thought about how I’d thought about I could not be a virgin…but if it was that simple to do it wouldn’t be anything and if it wasn’t anything, what was I…I quit trying to stop it” (147). As Quentin “[quits]” “trying to stop it,” he stops stifling his mad laughter but also quits stopping the memories from coming into his mind. Quentin questions his identity, “what was I,” just as he surrenders to uncontrollable functions of both body and mind, underscoring his deep discomfort with his body and suggesting that he may only understand himself as a figure of his own past.

The minute Mrs. Bland mentions a “grandfather,” Quentin’s memories start to encroach on his present consciousness more severely: “‘…although my father, Gerald’s grandfather’ ever do that Have you ever done that In the gray darkness a little light her hands locked about” (147). While the content here diverges (Quentin is not remembering his own grandfather), I find it fascinating that it is not until Mrs. Bland locates Gerald in a southern lineage that Quentin starts recalling multiple memories that begin to consume his consciousness. The memory he is sliding into is of Caddy, and he paraphrases her voice asking him if he’s ever had sex, “ever do that Have you ever done that,” a question that Quentin often refits to his attempted confession of incest. The italicized interruptions continue, Quentin follows his memories to the image of Dalton carrying Caddy over his shoulder, “running the beast with two backs” (148), a double entendre that refers to Quentin spying on their sexual activity as well. The sequence runs parallel to the conversation still happening in the present, but as Mrs. Bland continues to describe her father, Gerald’s grandfather, and how “he always said,” Quentin jumbles up the voices of the
present into one voice, making them indistinguishable. Mrs. Bland’s construction echoes Quentin’s own reports of his father’s voice, usually introduced by something similar in the form of ‘he said’ or ‘Father said’ or ‘Father always said.’ Mrs. Bland’s remark makes direct reference to a southern, male inheritance; her chatter about lineage and things “always said” echoes Quentin’s own language too closely to be ignored. The juxtaposition of her nod to the methods of the past with Quentin’s lapse into a narrative flood of personal memories illustrates the close relationship between the general notions put forth about inheritance and time and those about Quentin’s own life and known past.

Quentin wrestles with these twin, crucial junctions: between inheritance and self-hood and between time and his own past. Throughout his day in *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin yearns for a time when he was not as self-consciously and philosophically aware of time and of the weight of southern history. He displaces his desire for a time innocent of his particular historical, regional, temporal inheritance onto his childhood. He wishes to distill his childhood with Caddy out of the ideas about time and about legacy that haunt him and keep him from returning fully to what he perceives as a place of desirable stasis. Yet while Quentin conceptualizes his childhood as a static place, it still lives in his memory and functions as a part of the same “unbroken” time-line that he cannot escape. It is undoubtedly a part of his inheritance. His articulations of wished for peace, or that “still and violent fecundity” (113), or that “water running swift and peaceful in the secret shade” (135), do not escape from within the inheritance unscathed. The “flowing” “fecundity” is fertile and natural, not pure—and further it is “violent.” Caddy’s sexual exploits and “secret surges” complicate the “secret shade” especially “beyond the cedars,” where Grandfather’s voice is also overheard (149, 176). Quentin, entering

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8 Polk says this jumble of voices in the present is highly unusual, strengthening my idea that this moment is an important trigger (Polk, 128).
the deep articulation of memory triggered by Mrs. Bland, describes how he sees Caddy lying in the branch:

I ran down the hill in that vacuum of crickets like a breath traveling across a mirror she was lying in the water her head on the sand spit the water flowing about her hips there was a little more light in the water her skirt half saturated flopped along her flanks to the waters motion in heavy ripples going now where renewed themselves of their own movement (149)

Quentin’s use of “vacuum” already suggests the wished-for stasis Quentin appears to seek. Caddy’s “half saturated” suspended skirt, subject to the “waters motion” which keeps renewing ripples of its “own movement,” embodies the kind of contained, suspended, almost preserved vision Quentin tries to force the past to be. Locating Caddy in the branch “half saturated” connotes the cleansing that counteracts Quentin’s previous muddy encounters with her, such as their semi-sexual fight in the barn, or his glimpse of her muddy underwear on the night Dammudy dies. However, Caddy is only “half” saturated—whether the “sand spit” or the branch is safer or cleaner, Caddy resists full submersion in either. Her half-and-half physical positioning mirrors Quentin’s half-and-half temporal positioning between the present and the past, and perhaps hints at a similar feeling in Caddy

But Quentin’s “vacuum” vision is still subject to his inheritance and still impacted by time. He has come to the branch to confront Caddy about her loss of virginity. Within the context of Quentin’s chapter, “heavy ripples” which “[renew] themselves of their own movement” echo the “long diminishing parade of time” that can “create [itself] in the mind unbroken” (76), both of which emblemize a self-contained agency Quentin does not have. The ripple imagery is also found in Absalom, Absalom! in Quentin’s metaphor of ripples travelling through connected pools of men. The self-renewing “heavy ripples,” as desirably static as they may appear, also depict the mechanism of the legacy with which Quentin contends: as he looks to a static moment for a
solution to his temporal inheritance, the memory embodies the legacy that makes time so difficult to bear by looking to the past—miring the mechanism of stasis in a larger obsession that is itself part of the legacy he seeks to escape.

The narrative explanation for why Caddy becomes the prime target of Quentin’s obsession is severely lacking in *The Sound and The Fury*. Quentin’s idolatry of Caddy, and in particular her virginity, displaces his desire for temporal innocence and heroic agency (long-lost to his grandfather’s generation) onto a symbol of what the chivalric South strove to protect the most: white feminine purity. Quentin reaches into the past and towards Caddy for access to an innocent, heroic time before the model of southern female virtue was put under pressure of the collapse of the southern system and emancipation of slaves. Despite the demise of the structure it was developed to protect, the idea of southern honor and the lie of southern gentility remain a part of Quentin’s inheritance. Quentin articulates their continued presence outright when he describes (or imagines) how he and his father trailed Caddy on one of her liaisons: “*The street lamps would go down the hill then rise toward town* I walked upon the belly of my shadow. I could extend my hand beyond it. feeling Father behind me beyond the rasping darkness of summer and August the street lamps  Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women” (96).

The articulated sensation of “feeling Father behind me” is a keen moment in Quentin’s psychology. While his father is usually a source of conflict for him, a cynical world view that jump starts Quentin’s own rebellion, Mr. Compson is still a man in the line of men; but he is not a man aiding, beside, leading, or ahead of him in any helpful way, rather “behind” him. Quentin is driven forward by his “feeling” of his father “behind him.” Moreover, they form their line for a joint cause to “protect women from one another from themselves,” a protection that seeks to go
against a natural carelessness in women that self-generates danger. The phrasing locates the agency of danger in the women, while also deflecting more conventional external threats such as black men or poor whites. Ambiguously, “one another” and even “themselves” could also be read as referring to “Father and I” in the context further confusing the threat (and thus the agency). And not just any women are at stake, Quentin importantly adds “our women,” identifying the corresponding possessors at the beginning of the sentence as “Father and I.”

Quentin’s inheritance propels him to enact the fallen honor codes of the High South and protect his white sister’s virginity. But the conduct inherited is that of southern privilege, of placement and agency in a system that created a notoriously small class of insiders while subjugating all other outsiders. Quentin’s refusal to look for any solutions or options outside of the failed southern narrative reflects his inheritance of a mindset shaped by a society divided between extreme cultural privilege, such as his family once possessed, and extreme cultural subjugation, such as Dilsey or the boyhood Thomas Sutpen experienced. The cultural dichotomy created by those extremes traps Quentin by making it highly unlikely that he will seek ‘outsider’ experiences to get beyond his cyclic existence. Faulkner makes clear how even outsiders like Thomas Sutpen and Dilsey are still encased in the stratification of the High South: both are still subject to the inheritance that disinherits them.⁹ In Quentin’s mind, there is no full outside: even the pseudo-escape to Harvard was sought for him by his cynical father to swap out a futile cultural inheritance for a different inheritance derived in the geographic heart of the Civil War’s victors.

Caddy, and Quentin’s childhood with her, becomes a personalized microcosm of the heroic age of Grandfather, when one’s location in time, space, family, and in a physical body

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⁹ Jason and Caddy may have more ways around this that require modernity, capitalism, and a break with tradition, none of which attract Sutpen or Dilsey.
could be (or seem to be) integrated. Caddy recalls Spoade in her vigorous, easy access to ‘being’. Quentin tries to control her and finds out that he can’t. He comes close to admitting she may be a better successor to their Grandfather’s heroic, masculine legacy than he is: “You know what I’d do if I were a King? She was never a queen or a fairy she was always a knight or a giant or a general” (173- Italics Caddy). Caddy’s physicality goes beyond androgyny to verge on masculine roles. Her capability for action, even sexual action, is a form of agency, of power; she has effectual experiences, often outside of the family or just out of reach.

Quentin does not have anything close to that kind of agency nor does he fully understand it. Quentin has made attempts in the past to strip Caddy of her mysterious, decidedly male powers. By remembering them today, he dredges up symbols of his own powerlessness, perhaps attempting to reconstitute his control by mentally controlling the memory. During the scene (already quoted\(^\text{10}\)) when Quentin goes down to the branch and discovers Caddy half-submerged in water, he pulls a knife on Caddy to punish her for her sex activity. In his attempt to kill Caddy, Quentin remembers their dialogue and himself asking questions and her affirming him: “it won’t take but a second Ill try not to hurt / all right / will you close your eyes / no like this you’ll have to push it harder …/ …don’t cry / Im not crying Caddy / push it are you going to / do you want me to / yes push it / touch your hand to it…” (152—Alternating Q, C). As their voices swim together in Quentin’s memory without punctuation or any division but line break, the separating force between them is Caddy’s total retention of agency—despite Quentin’s knife, presumably at her throat, she remains powerful and independent where Quentin is dependent on their dialogue effectively giving her control. She instructs him on how to cut her throat, “you’ll have to push it harder.” She challenges whether or not he’s even going to do it, “are you going to.”

\(^{10}\) See p. 48
needs her to put her own hand to the knife, cementing his inability to take action by himself and locating the agency in Caddy’s body, rather than his own.

Especially with the sexual Dalton Ames content circulating in this dialogue, the knife, as Polk points out, flagrantly symbolizes Quentin making a sexual attempt with Caddy; his failure to penetrate her figures his own sexual impotence (Polk, 130-131). That said, my own reading goes beyond the sexual failure to see how the episode embodies Quentin’s more general perception of how complete Caddy’s capability is even as he tries to combat it. Their fight in the branch is preceded by Caddy’s half-saturation and surrounded by Quentin’s descriptions of how intolerant the atmosphere seems to him. I think while the impression of sexual impotence is present, a larger sense of impotence and ineffectuality looms over Quentin in the memory of this encounter that includes but goes beyond sexuality to represent a feeling about his inheritance as a whole. The feeling combines the pressure of his masculine legacy on generative activity with the impossibility Quentin’s inheritance makes any effective bodily action.

The only medium through which Quentin can access generative activity is mental and imaginative. Even then, when facing Caddy, Quentin’s power over her depends on corroboration by their shared father, which—even within the bounds of Quentin’s own imagination—is withheld. Quentin’s attempt to revise his past and Caddy’s past to include an act of incest betrays just how deeply cut off he feels from personal agency and effectual action by his inheritance. He has to make up a recklessly bold act he cannot actually commit and then further he has to tell his father to make the fiction true. In a passage that predates the remembered confrontation at the branch, Quentin opens up about his plan to admit to the “terrible crime” (148) of incest:

Poor Quentin youve never done that have you and Ill tell you how it was Ill tell Father then itll have to be because you love Father then well have to go away amid the pointing and the horror to the clean flame Ill make you say we did Im stronger than you Ill make you know we did you thought it was them but it was me listen I fooled you all the time it
There is a duplicitous reading available in this passage that makes the object of Quentin’s imagined agency ambiguous. He begins the tirade in response to Caddy’s remembered observation about how he has never had sex, “Poor Quentin,” but as he continues, the object abruptly switches to “Ill tell Father,” though he is presumably still addressing Caddy. If Mr. Compson is the object of the force Quentin displays, then he joins Caddy as a possible target of Quentin’s assertion that he’ll “make you know” and the “I fooled you all the time” and even the “I’m stronger than you.” That “you” remains unspecified, allowing Quentin’s wishful force to fluctuate between Caddy and Father, two discrete loci of power and agency for Quentin within the context of his inheritance: Caddy’s physical, male power of action and his Father’s cerebral, philosophical power and passivity. Quentin’s anxiety about both Caddy and his Father is apparent here. He needs to overpower them both using the conceit of incest in order to revise his inactive past self into the active realm, beyond the all-important “cedars” which are the source of Grandfather’s voice (176).

Quentin’s desire to overpower the natural agency of Caddy and the cynical powers of Mr. Compson results in his frantic attempt to revise the past in order to work against the actual historical conditions of his inheritance; he strains to access the now fallen notions of purity and stasis promulgated in the High South. Quentin’s false or imagined claim to incest exemplifies the futility he cannot escape in his own existence; it underscores how his inheritance strips him of any hope for action. By imagining the incest being committed with Caddy, Quentin tries to undermine what he perceives as her unfair ease and agency and make her embody the southern virtue he believes she should have. By keeping the sexual blame within the family, Quentin
preserves both of them on the *inside* of the southern design beyond the harm of external forces. But by trying to do all this by revising the past and revising memory, Quentin enacts the inheritance of his Father—he has looked back to the past and tried to make it into something that fits his philosophy, repeating his Father’s mistakes with new vigor.

Quentin’s fixation on his childhood suggests that he conceptualizes it as a time (and a past) over which he has a unique ownership. Evidence such as his policing of Caddy, often using the threat of the “father” as conceit for his own burgeoning, but individually impotent, male power, suggests that childhood is the closest Quentin came to having a masculine identity of his own. As he ages, his sense of his inheritance expands, from the voices of siblings and blacks (quite close to his own), to the voice of his mother which serves to emphasize the role of Quentin’s father, whose voice in turn channels the past and the voice of his father. The expansion of Quentin’s identity crests when Quentin is sent North, where in *Absalom, Absalom!* he channels for others the voice of the South. Even in Quentin’s most visceral memories of a pure childhood, he never truly escapes the problem of time or the cyclic futility induced by his obsession, and thus never evades the paternal inheritance. No such pure space exists: even Quentin’s memories are troubled by his inheritance. Time continues to unfold, bringing with it sexual awakening (i.e. Natalie, Caddy), violence (Dalton Ames), and death (Damuddy). Further apparent are the ways in which Quentin’s desire for “pure” space forces him to circle back to the past. He obsessively holds onto his inherited mindset. Unable to let go of the deep conviction that the past, however accursed, contains something better or higher, he lacks any vision of a future that could free him from the now compound burden of the original failure of the South and his own father’s failing cynicism.
But the trajectory is always inward, moving further into the past of the Compson family and the past the South created and lost. Quentin tries to imagine an escape from his inheritance without abdicating the original ‘design’ that failed the heroic generation of men. His entrapment feeds his obsession, which feeds his entrapment in a cyclic narrative of futility that stoically refuses to operate outside the bounds of the South, or outside the most insular perspective toward it. The depth of Quentin’s distress tests any romanticism about the gentility of such a high-born cycle. Memories devour Quentin from the inside: his father’s voice becomes a demon of repetition he cannot overthrow even in his own mind, and all the possible pure spaces are either stranded too far in the past, or corrupted by time, or corroded by the inheritance. Bluntly, Quentin cannot contend: not with his existence, not with his inheritance, not with his identity, not with the cycle he enacts, and not with his own awareness of all of the above. This is not Stephen Dedalus’s restlessness misanthropy: Quentin’s chapter renders a more traumatic, insular, stagnant existence, which continues to fall into dilapidated irony. The lack of victory is no longer the irony, but rather the lack of action itself in the generations post-dating the loss of the war. Further irony will come in *Absalom, Absalom!* when Faulkner reveals there was nothing to defend in the first place, and that the powers of Sutpen were all linked to trying to penetrate to the inside of the design. Having had the fortune of “getting [himself] born below Mason and Dixon” with a “blundering sense of noblesse oblige” (91), Quentin is already inside the design—but the design has failed (if it ever really succeeded). Quentin inherits a tarnished abstraction of honor and a propensity for philosophy that both displace him from real time, modernity, and progress, dooming him to futility. But being inside the failed design, according to his inherited philosophy, is not just better but the only existence, however doomed it might be. And Quentin figures out on June Second 1910 he cannot live within that cycle and he cannot live outside it.
His inheritance is compound, additive: something of Grandfather’s honor pulls him back in, fragments of his father’s cynicism push him to rebel, Caddy’s power draws him back to the family, while his individual impotence makes it impossible for him to look elsewhere.

The inaccessibility of any purer existence—or any solution to the closed cycle of time—fuels Quentin’s distress with his place in this cyclical inheritance. His anguish manifests itself in small observations scattered throughout his chapter. In a moment of such desperation, he thinks about a story Versh told him of a man who castrated himself in the woods, flinging the testicles away: “But that’s not it. It’s not not having them. It’s never to have had them then I could say O That That’s Chinese I don’t know Chinese” (116). Once again, Quentin echoes Mr. Compson as he sets up a series of negations in order to migrate into the answer or the feeling he already has in mind. The answer turns out not to be castration, because “not having them” isn’t enough—rather the ideal state, the only state that could satisfactorily remove Quentin from the pressure of his inheritance would be to “never to have had them” in the first place. He uses the notion of language as a metaphor to explain the level of innocence he wishes for: as if to wish that his masculine inheritance was as remote from his knowledge as “Chinese.” Quentin moves to identify masculinity as an essential part of his inheritance structure, a native language, which he ought to know. Ironically though, in the next few lines he alludes to the insubstantial nature of language to accuse his father of lies: “And Father said…Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It’s nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That’s just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don’t know” (116). And he doesn’t know: but neither does Quentin. While Mr. Compson fills his doubts about not-knowing with cynical metaphysics, Quentin tries to answer his philosophical qualms with a purity of ignorance, like the language comparison to Chinese. He strives towards an existence that would defy the flesh and escape his own inability
to liberate himself. But in his movement towards purity he moves against nature, as his father accuses him, and against reality.

A remarkably similar exchange occurs on page 78, with Quentin less vehemently accusing his father of being wrong. But a similar idea about purity and virginity is presented: “Father said…it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it’s like death: only a state in which others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn’t matter and he said, That’s what so sad about anything: not only virginity” (78). This comment occurs extremely early in the chapter, further supporting my assertion that Faulkner condenses the problems Quentin struggles with and positions his condensed version at the onset of Quentin’s chapter. The chapter enacts the same frustrations over and over: at the crux of which lies Quentin’s need for things to “matter,” for meaning to be fixed. But the parallels he’s drawing to language are contradictory. On one hand, Quentin needs meaning to be attached to words in order to use language to create meaning, or, alternately, to unlearn language to un-understand meaning. On the other hand, Quentin’s desire to undercut his father’s words, which carry paternal power, leads to a desire to undo the meaning of language when he wants to subvert his father, “That’s just words.”

For Quentin, time makes impossible an existence without an inheritance, including the inheritance of language. His inheritance weighs on him both corporeally and cerebrally, paralyzing him within a non-generative present (a dead version of time) and trapping him apart from the momentum and agency of great men like Grandfather. Before the chapter ends, Faulkner orchestrates Quentin’s mental return to his grandfather, drawing the narrative back to its origins in the first paragraph of the chapter which dealt with Grandfather’s watch. As Quentin recalls the memory of his grandfather, he intertwines ideas of death into the scene, hearing his grandfather’s voice from “beyond the cedars” and thinking how “grandfather was always right”
even when talking with death itself. Quentin’s atmospheric articulation of the “high place” “beyond the cedars” disembodies his grandfather, who becomes only a voice and a desk and a “uniform” that are “always” present and “always right.” Quentin articulates the continuous nature of the “high place” scene alongside the inaccessibility of it—the consistency is watered down by disembodiment, and both the consistent nature and the atmospheric representation collide with ideas about death to create a twilight zone in which Grandfather can be both constant and present, distant and dead.

While the scene portrays the past, its placement close to the end of the chapter suggests Quentin’s consciousness in the final piece of his life. The passage forges a continuum from childhood through the present, reaffirming the original continuum forged by the watch in the opening paragraph of his chapter. Grandfather’s voice permeates the land and the area, and then proceeds to permeate the consciousness, defying temporality, living in memory without ever being heard from directly. In articulating the impact of Grandfather’s disembodied power, emanating from that “high place,” the memory reveals the inescapable nature of the desire to look back and listen in on the “high place.” Quentin interacts with his grandfather’s voice without Mr. Compson present in a rare jump to the older generation without the intermediary Father. The instinct to look to a past that was in someway higher, better, ideal and disembodied echoes how Quentin instinctively looks to his childhood for those same qualities. The twin existences beyond the “cedars” of Caddy and Grandfather are both inaccessible to Quentin, and both exemplify his desired capacity for important action. Quentin’s perception of this desirable quality proves tricky; as remembered by him, Caddy’s active and powerful agency fused together disparate threads of life, including the physicality that is still beyond Quentin’s reach. His dead Grandfather, on the other hand, no longer has any physical component. Grandfather’s
atmospherically imbedded sense of power, action, and “[rightness]” appeals to Quentin as much as it haunts him. His inheritance overwhelms his experience completely, both externally and internally. Quentin’s awareness of his overwhelmed existence undermines his ability to exist apart from the particular, failed historical structure of the South he was born into: he knows his sincere attempts to purify his existence are still operating within the context of his inherited southern design, which he knows he does not actually want to escape because that same inheritance contains everything he knows and the few things he loves.

The final dialogue between father and son—all taking place within Quentin’s mind—occurs at the end of his chapter as an internalized discussion that escalates as Quentin makes a futile attempt to combat his burdensome inheritance from within by claiming incest with Caddy to his Father. Quentin’s attempted confession ends in a discussion of the problem that underlies his drive to get to that “clean flame” (149): how to get out from under the crushing weight of his inheritance. Whether imagined or real, the only thing known in the text is that Quentin has internalized this conversation into an interior dialogue, if we can really call it a dialogue. Structurally, the barriers between the voice of the father and the voice of the son have fallen almost entirely: Faulkner attributes only “and he” and “and i” to introduce father and son, separating out Quentin’s lowercase “i” from the masculine tag “he” given to the father. In this exchange, Quentin reaches the height of his need to control time, by controlling his body and his sister’s body as well as their memories, and by opposing his father’s conception of time while simultaneously attempting a revision of the past. His confused reasoning betrays, simultaneously, his investment in the existing structure of power as well as his desire for a pure experience with nothing external to the most honorable strain of his inheritance:

and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you
try to make her do it and i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it wouldn't have done any good but if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldn't be and the world would roar away (177)

Quentin’s impulse to “isolate” Caddy “out of the loud world” thus stripping it away by “necessity” and not just stopping the “sound” of the outside world but making it “as though it had never been” enacts again that protective southern code he has inherited: the code which prizes female virtue as a symbol of the greater integrity of the southern structure. But here the language verges on Quentin transferring to Caddy a protection of the purity that he wants for himself. The sounds produced by the “loud” world that Quentin does not want to hear have plagued him throughout his chapter. In this explanation to his father, the force of the outside world is sound: reality exists orally, and the voice of the outside world is the sound Quentin wants not just to silence but to erase, for Caddy, but mostly for himself. The act that could erase the oral existence of reality and make it “as though it had never been,” however, is actually just a vocal claim, a sound, without any physical grounding in reality. His father asks him, or Quentin imagines him asking, “did you try to make her do it” and Quentin answers that he “was afraid she might and then it wouldn’t have done any good” and knows that: “but if i could tell you we did it would have been so.” The perversion has to stay at the level of language: only Mr. Compson’s acceptance of Quentin’s claim as the truth can make it true, because Quentin, devoid of agency thanks to his inheritance, cannot actually commit incest. His own deprivation of agency and power forces Quentin to fully articulate the power of his father and his father’s voice over him and to articulate to his father his inability for real action.

As he is thwarted, Quentin develops a strong desire to run the generative power of will, which he perceives as being couched in language, backwards. He wants to undo all of Caddy’s sexual experiences by verbally claiming incest, to erase knowledge of his body from his mind by
unlearning it like a language, to “isolate [Caddy] out of the loud world” in order to extinguish the sound so that “it had never been,” and further to undo his own existence by negating it, “not be,” releasing him from his existence as repetition, as an “again.” Quentin wants to run-backwards the linguistic algorithm of his inheritance, reverse all the voices, un-say the words that brought his existence into a pre-existing pattern. The negative space he wishes to create still hinges on the past, however. Quentin reaches back through his inheritance for an original atmosphere that his own voice could fill and where he could effect his will, the way Grandfather and Thomas Sutpen did. That attempt fails the instant Quentin’s voice fails to use language to create, to his father, the fact of incest. Thwarted again and stung by the father’s cynical and acute assessment of his attempt, Quentin settles instead for creating the negative space in himself instead. By his suicide, Quentin silences the voices inside of him and un-creates himself—throwing off the ties to his inheritance, to time, and to language that have weighed him down. His suicide also exemplifies a futile act, as it embodies the inescapability of his obsession.

Quentin’s awareness of his own obsession and his inheritance of that obsession brings to its apex his sense of futility. At the end of their back and forth during the passage, Quentin imagines or remembers Mr. Compson describing “was” as the “saddest word”: “and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until was” (178). In Mr. Compson’s formulation, “was” is the “saddest word of all” because nothing even exists until it is past: “was” marks “time” as there was “not even time until was.” Mr. Compson doesn’t sound incongruous with his son here: he too emphasizes the importance of language, and the way he articulates the past reveals his own inheritance. Mr. Compson is also obsessed with the past, burdened down to cynicism by its inaccessibility and relegated to the realm of philosophizing about how the present becomes the past, how it moves to “was.”
But earlier in the chapter, Quentin has presented an argument of his own, perhaps not refuting his father entirely, but modifying his father’s assertion with his own experience. As he thinks about the hats the Harvard seniors wear, he thinks

In three years I can not wear a hat. I could not. Was. Will there be hats then since I was not and not Harvard then. Where the best of thought Father said clings like dead ivy vines upon old dead brick. Not Harvard then. Not to me, anyway. Again. Sadder than was. Again. Saddest of all. Again. Spoade had a shirt on; then it must be. (95)

As Quentin forecasts his suicide and toys with the idea that if he “was not” then “will there be hats then” or if Harvard wouldn’t be if he was not in it. At the close he identifies “Again” as the saddest word, “sadder than was…saddest of all.” Quentin’s awareness of why “again” would be “sadder than was” for him shows up his father’s logic. “Again,” unlike “was,” is not always reaching back into the past, but being affected by it—by making “again” Quentin’s “saddest of all” words, Faulkner signals the generational difference between Quentin and his father. For one, the past is the unattainable goal that drives him to cynicism and drink. For Quentin, the past is the inheritance that wrecked his father and tainted by what prefigured, corrupting Quentin’s existence and destroying the possibility of a future. Quentin acknowledges, here as later in Absalom, Absalom!, the ways in which he is a repetition of his father, his father is a repetition of his father, while perhaps Grandfather and his friends and Thomas Sutpen were the “was” that generated the “again” in a continuous but ever more hopeless lineage. Quentin doesn’t have the luxury of being an outsider: he is mired in the closed version of time, unable to reconcile with it or form an identity outside of it, stuck as a repetition, a Compson “again,” “in time again.”

Further ironic and paradoxical in Quentin’s narrative, Quentin’s assertion that “again” is the saddest word of all precedes his discussion with his father. Faulkner arranges the chapter so that Quentin seems to revise his father’s assertion before the reader hears it. The positioning of Quentin’s counter argument conveys a strong desire in Quentin to position himself as the
precursor to his father. But that exact pattern of revision that seeks not only to revise but to predate the previous assertion (often making an effort to corrode the temporality of the first statement) engages in Mr. Compson’s particular brand of metaphysics. By revising the father’s “was” into an “again” and positioning the revision before the original statement, Faulkner has Quentin partake in the father’s own metaphysical pattern in an attempt to articulate himself [Quentin] as a repetition. Faulkner doubles the tragedy when the novel “reveals” that not only is the past inescapable, but that the structure itself (for thinking about time and for thinking the inheritance) is looped and enclosed. Thinking about the inheritance leads to performing the inherited logic and moving towards the inherited desires, thus the obsession even at the narrative level of Quentin’s chapter is a part of the inheritance rather than an escape from it. Some of the narrative constructions Faulkner uses extend to the same obsessive loop to enclose the reader too in the same inherited logic.

Faulkner’s ability to draw the reader into the Compson obsession that Quentin suffers from speaks to both his gift as a regional writer and to the role of regional inheritance in The Sound and the Fury. Quentin’s chapter allows the reader to crawl inside the most insular inheritance the South has to offer, and Faulkner asks the reader not just to accept it but to absorb it and, by way of trying to follow Quentin’s logic and Mr. Compson’s logic, perform the same struggle as Quentin. Inevitably, the way the narrative itself reflects Quentin’s obsession leads to the question of Faulkner’s own obsession. In singling out Quentin’s chapter of The Sound and the Fury, I have, in many ways, chosen to focus on the most extreme case Faulkner presents: the character most (knowingly) wracked by his inheritance, most driven to rebel against the father, most influenced by others’ voices—the chapter presents the most philosophical version of the experiences of this generation of the Compsons. Quentin cannot help but feel that he is a
repetition, and that all that could be right, and could be engaged in action, has become an unreachable, yet continuing past erasing his individuality and leaving him with nothing but futility. But Quentin is one of three brothers, and one of four chapters in *The Sound and the Fury*. Jason is nowhere near so fatally entrapped (although that potentially has more to do with his position as the son who is not the father’s son, constantly claimed by his mother). Yet he is the son who carries the father’s name directly, and he offers the most criticism of the family, albeit coarse and shrill. Jason’s idea that he was denied an inheritance is focused on a lost future, not a lost past. The major object of his cynicism and anger is not a failed paternal figure but a successful female figure: Caddy. He blockades the inheritance Caddy creates for Miss Quentin, searching for a monetary version of the stasis Quentin longs to preserve. But Jason, like Quentin, ultimately fails at keeping apart from life that which he feels life has kept apart from him, thwarted by the generative product (daughter) of his original adversary. But unlike Quentin, Jason doesn’t operate within philosophical time, but historical time: he sees himself and Caddy on a concrete time-line, a continuum that she created and disrupted and which he now stalls in order to recoup his losses. When he fails, it is not a failure with philosophical ramifications—only historical, sequential ramifications. His siege comes to an end in a last, unexpected, tactical move, and Jason moves on to control other pools of money and other women.

In Benjy’s chapter Faulkner uses Benjy’s irregular memory functions to erase time and thus erase the idea of a “past.” His nonlinear, but still pattern-driven, existence exemplifies the ways in which the Compson inheritance functions in the raw by releasing it from the conscious obsession exemplified by his brothers and father, and burying that obsession in the subconscious. Benjy’s mentally-inhibited narrative cannot distinguish past from present, thus in his chapter time may in fact “come to life” as the clock (in the sense the clock signifies an imprisoning,
linear progression) stops. Benjy embodies the halted sense of progression that plagues his family; linear time necessitates progress but that the weight of the past, the running inheritance for all the brothers, prevents that progression from meaning anything, shaping it into instead a dooming “long diminishing parade of time you didn’t hear.” Benjy hears time, and by Mr. Compson’s definition, he should hear a living version of it—in contrast to the “dead” time affecting Quentin. Even Benjy’s associative memories, however, still feel the impact of the inheritance. As out of time as his brain may allow him to be, he still operates within the design associated with his family and with the South. His whole experience is composed of his family and the blacks who work for them, his whole knowledge of the world contingent upon the dwindling southern place he inhabits: he can’t revise the past he cannot even conceptualize it. Whatever voice he might have had is repressed into a bellow. His retarded holding pattern, positioned outside of linear time and conscious awareness, symbolizes the inheritance that cannot reveal itself to him but that nonetheless entraps him. He too was born into the mausoleum; he too is a victim of obsession (if mainly subconscious here).

Benjy’s chapter reveals that being outside of the inherited concept of time fails to break the obsessive patterned cycle. Instead his narrative interacts with the most alive version of time but cannot escape the “folly and despair” that Mr. Compson has predicted. Benjy’s chapter precedes Quentin’s chapter and Jason’s chapter, and even Faulkner’s fourth chapter. Each chapter written revises the previous to supplant and predate it: until the most deconstructed, atemporal version of the story subsumes the others and, by its new, revised position in the order, prefigures all the other attempts at the narrative idea.

Faulkner observes from four angles that fourth sibling whom each brother looks at in his own way: Caddy. The escape-hatch Faulkner leaves in the obsession with inheritance is the
Compson sister, who is never granted her own narrative. She’s represented differently by all three brothers: Benjy perceives her environmentally, a symbol that should be fixed in time and never change or go away (but of course does do both of those things); Quentin perceives her as a conceit for the fall of the High South, an embodiment of the honor that must be protected, but also his closest connection to the original form of the inheritance, shaped by blood and by circumstance, like the Sutpen siblings; and Jason, who perceives Caddy as a threat, a deceptive counter-agent whom he intends to out-smart for revenge. Faulkner sets up Caddy in a unique position: she is the constant object of obsession, but even seen through all three brothers, she herself remains apart, far afield and unattainable—privy to womanhood, modernity, generative behavior, potentially much less obsessive, with a greater capability for action. Faulkner himself cannot quite get to Caddy, and circles around her using the four chapters, unable to articulate that voice individually. But the other chapters show how he is similarly obsessed if not with Caddy herself then with the obsession with Caddy. Each brother’s obsession is characterized by his own futility, and by the need to prevent, stop, or undo action and agency that none of them can understand.

This is not to say Caddy escapes trauma—we know from the appendix Faulkner added that his vision of her future by no means restores her to honor in a Nazi general’s limousine, by any standard. But even in that later vision Caddy offers a fracture in the cycle of futility. Caddy complicates any attempt to ascertain how entrapping the regional inheritance of futility is. It would be easy to see Faulkner as absolutely trapped as the Compson brothers, and to see a whole South made of Quentins, drowning in the super-refined irony of their own existence. But

11 Sykes helpfully articulates the impact fathers had on Faulkner without burdening the connection to entrapped characters too much, articulating how Faulkner “thought of his region as the domain of fathers” perhaps due in part to how “his great-grandfather, after whom he was named, was a minor legend in north Mississippi” (Sykes 6), and implies how the “confrontation with the father” “led [Faulkner] to face an entirely new kind of shaping force, that of nationalism” (Sykes 6.)
just as Faulkner created Quentin, he created Caddy, and she eludes entrapment even at the narrative level. She remains at large in the novel, preventing the reader from having all the evidence about the inheritance experienced by the four Compson children.

I have suggested that there are ways to interpret the narrative structure as partially succumbing to the obsessive pattern that Faulkner produces in Quentin’s chapter. Could finding such a pattern at the narrative level suggest its intentional construction? Perhaps it is the paranoid theory of an infected reader like myself, but the possibility has to be left open that the novel as a whole enacts the philosophy of the Compson inheritance, and thus the most insular burdens of southern inheritance by proxy. Absalom, Absalom! provides a much fuller articulation of the design of the High South than The Sound and the Fury does, interweaving vocal textures to reveal how ambition that declined to futility bleeds from one generation to the next. But to my mind, The Sound and the Fury, which Faulkner wrote first, may cut closer to the heart of the inheritance it wants to understand. By doing so it becomes subject to the mysterious forces surrounding that inheritance, and asks the reader to succumb as well—by crawling into Quentin’s obsessive awareness, partaking in Jason’s fuming criticism, and inhabiting Benjy’s erasure of temporal boundaries. Faulkner refuses to succumb to total criticism or total pathos. Instead he walks a fine line, to figure out the impact of the inheritance and to search for its parameters, ever moving back and forth to find the place of highest accuracy. Faulkner has mastered the two handed trick: he articulates an absolute with one hand, often using language and concepts of time, but with the other hand he acknowledges the things that do not fit and that cannot be reconciled. An obsessive task, to be sure, but infectiously so. In an unusual modernist victory over the mind, Faulkner incites readerly obsession with a regional inheritance, mimicking
the inheritance but leaving one almost certain of how looped and enclosed in the regional
inheritance the characters, the author, and the reader actually are.
Peripheral Survival in *Ulysses*

The third question in “Ithaca” asks of Bloom and Stephen, “Did Bloom discover common factors of similarity between their respective like and unlike reactions to experiences?” The answer, given in the omniscient catechistic style of the chapter, offers a clear counterpoint in Joyce to the argument I have built around Faulkner. The narrator answers the narrator, articulating Bloom’s discoveries:

Both were sensitive to artistic impressions musical in preference to plastic or pictorial. Both preferred continental to insular manner of life, a cisatlantic to a transatlantic place of residence. Both indurated by early domestic training and an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance professed their disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social and ethical doctrines. Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism. (666)

All these “Both” statements describe similarities Bloom discovers between himself and Stephen. By this point in *Ulysses*, Bloom’s paternal interest in Stephen is established, cemented by how Bloom follows Stephen into nighttown (“Circe”) and then attempts to sober Stephen up, feed him, and see him to a place of rest—conveniently Bloom’s own house. “Ithaca” opens with a question about Stephen and Bloom’s “parallel courses” and one does feel that Bloom has a vested emotional interest in seeing the “[parallels]” between himself and Stephen, in part fueled by curiosity and good spirited concern, but in part fueled by his own search for a potential heir, a son or a young man who might be something like him. Thus set up, any articulations of similarities between Stephen and Bloom produced by Bloom, or from his perspective, stem from a line of thought about inheritance and about filial compatibility.
The omniscient narrator reports four crucial similarities between Bloom and Stephen. The first observation, preceded by Bloom’s lengthy ideas about a potential musical career for Stephen at the very end of “Eumaeus,” is that they both like music. Within the context of how important listening, hearing, and voice are for Joyce and in *Ulysses*, this artistic “preference” carries more importance than may appear. Bloom and Stephen both look for compatible male voices that won’t overrun or triumph over their own and that won’t bring the past into the present. The idea that they both like music also indicates that they are both potentially good listeners, or appreciate things they hear.

The second statement in the passage uncovers a crucial difference, distancing Stephen and Bloom from other characters in the novel, but also Joyce from Faulkner. The narrator reveals a desire for a “continental” “manner of life,” which is perceived as preferable to an “insular” one. Enclosed, looped, and “insular” are all words I have used to describe Faulkner’s depiction of Quentin’s experience. While Faulkner by no means presents the “insular manner of life” as a desirable one, I find it fascinating that Joyce specifies the opposite way of living as the preference shared by his two main characters: one who looks to escape a weighty inheritance, and the other who experiences a couple of different inheritances. The use of “continental” further connotes a European perspective from “the continent,” as opposed to the more “insular” geographical nature of Ireland as an island. Joyce strengthens this association by categorizing the “preferred” “residence” as “cisatlantic” vs. “transatlantic.” Cisatlantic, in this case, refers to the eastern side of the Atlantic (aka Europe and the British Isles). The preferred “continental” existence does not necessarily encompass North America or other continents; Joyce makes explicit throughout the novel that the location of this “continental” manner of life is in Europe. Ireland’s geographic proximity to Europe puts it in the shadow of a larger European inheritance
that dwarfs its regional one, and the narrator’s observations here show how Bloom and Stephen share an attraction to a larger inheritance over the “insular,” regional, Irish inheritance. Joyce criticizes and parodies the ramifications of the less desirable “insular” life and, for that matter, “insular” inheritance, especially in “Cyclops.” A continental lifestyle may pose a concrete alternative to the empowered but suffocating “insular” experience of Irish men.

The third observation of parallels between Bloom and Stephen further separates them from Quentin Compson’s mindset: Stephen and Bloom engage in a hardened form of dissent from “orthodox…doctrines.” While Quentin does exhibit a strong capacity for resistance to structural power and the cynical philosophic doctrines of his father, he remains at least partially invested in and imbedded in the regional orthodoxy of the American South, really the High South. Bloom and Stephen, by contrast, are both characterized by Joyce as successors to “an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance” and “professed disbelief.” Their “inherited tenacity” allows them to be skeptical and heterodox when regarding their own culture’s doctrines and other cultural doctrines in a way that Quentin Compson cannot comprehend due to his inherited investment in such doctrine’s power. This is a powerful distinction between the conceptions of Irish inheritance and southern inheritance: Joyce builds dissent into what is “inherit ed” in Ireland, leading his characters to question all “doctrines,” especially those which were imposed on them by outside forces.\(^\text{12}\) Not all Joyce’s characters engage in this kind of skepticism, however,

\(^\text{12}\) Faulkner builds multiple types of affirmation and rebellion into *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom Absalom*, but undoubtedly the inheritance he articulates contains, at its core, some veneration that leads to interest in the doctrines of the past. Faulkner allows that veneration feeling to sour into cynicism and skepticism (as in the character of Mr. Compson), but he also allows it to abide and watches closely to see how it transforms when the character is torturously separated (by time) from the period or doctrine that is venerated, as in Quentin’s experience. Undoubtedly, veneration figures into Joyce’s work around inheritance as well: all day long in *Ulysses* people continue to mention Parnell, and other great Irish fathers of rebellion or culture. But Joyce builds in an “inherited tenacity,” presumably “inherited” from a nation with a long history of divided loyalties, between political parties, between languages, over invaders, and by successive wars. Irish skepticism in that “tenacity” differs from southern cynicism; where southern
especially not towards Ireland. By observing this correlation between Stephen and Bloom, Bloom affirms a kind of Irish skepticism as an inheritance, but hints at a specifically hardened form of “disbelief” in himself and Stephen, not just for certain oppressive doctrines, but rather for all orthodoxy, spanning “religious, national, social and ethical doctrines.”

Last comes the observation about men: “Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism” (666). In Bloom’s opinion, transmuted by the narrator, Stephen and he share a nuanced response to masculinity that proves ambivalent. Whether the response is positive (“stimulating”) or negative (“obtunding”), Bloom senses how “heterosexual magnetism” is potent for them both; the use of “influence” suggests that Bloom and Stephen are both susceptible somehow and in a reactive position to heterosexual feelings they are under the “influence” of sexuality—a position not always “stimulating.” The structure of the sentence separates out the subjects at hand, encompassed by “Both,” from the “heterosexual magnetism,” suggesting that while Stephen and Bloom are manipulated by this magnetism, they do not emanate it themselves. The construction leaves the reader to wonder whether it is generalized heterosexuality they feel under the “influence” of, or their own “heterosexual magnetism” that they are somehow in passive position to, or if the “magnetism” experienced derives from other powerful, heterosexual men, or possibly all of the above.

Regardless, the answers the narrator provides suggest that Bloom feels he has found in Stephen several potential correlations on big issues that matter to him. Joyce’s terms for what is at stake for Bloom and Stephen correlate to those used by Faulkner in relation to Quentin in The

cynicism (such as Mr. Compson expresses) appears to be a tone taken in rebellion against sentimentalizing the loss of the grandeur behind the inheritance, Irish skepticism has had much longer to establish itself as a key part of the inheritance. The repetition in Irish history of failed rebellion and false promises cements the “tenacity” as something that can be “inherited.” Joyce further singles out Bloom and Stephen in their reluctance to venerate any doctrine or orthodox state of mind, even those indisputably Irish doctrines.
*Sound and The Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Joyce doesn’t shy away from the use of “inherited” either—acknowledging that his characters are inheriting something, even though he doesn’t specify from where.

With the similarities pinpointed, differences show themselves: Stephen and Bloom are clearly different, as a comparison of their parentages reveals. The narrator discriminates between their parentages using their relationship to their fathers and the father-lands: “Bloom, only born male transubstantial heir of Rudolf Virag (subsequently Rudolf Bloom) of Szombathely, Vienna, Budapest, Milan, London and Dublin…Stephen, eldest surviving male consubstantial heir of Simon Dedalus of Cork and Dublin,” (682). Stephen’s old “consubstantial” terminology appropriated from Catholicism comes back into the narrator’s language here, indicating that Stephen and his father are the same substance but making Bloom transubstantial—a change from the original into something different. Stephen is the “eldest surviving male…heir” to a father from two cities on a single colonized island. However frustrating his father’s pre-determining influence is, he comes from something similar to himself. Bloom, on the other hand, instead of being “eldest surviving,” is described more diminutively as the “only born” heir to a father from whom he differs and heir to a fragmented sense of place, being the child of an immigrant.

The use of “only” to describe Bloom further communicates to the reader what an outsider Bloom is, not just from a distinct, true Irish inheritance, but also from a true Jewish familial inheritance. Bloom finds himself subject to a couple of different cultural inheritances, most prominently Judaism and Irish nationalism. His past further cuts him off from any communal inheritance: a father who committed suicide and a still born son, Rudy. The Irishmen think of Bloom as a Jew despite his being born and raised in Ireland, making Bloom a character unto himself in the novel, not outright ostracized, but certainly not an insider. He is peripheral:
circumnavigating some true-er Irish cultural inheritance, but still affected by it himself and still living in its shadow. Unlike Stephen, who strives towards the periphery to escape his father’s voice and the weight of Irish failure (a mission that may actually have its sights set on the inside of a different, more successful inheritance), Bloom doesn’t choose his peripheral state of being. In the place of failed rebellion, he experiences a failure to unite—he consistently fails to join the ranks of the true Irish men of action and of rebellion. Joyce, however, does not present this as a tragedy. Instead he uses Bloom’s excluded perspective to comment on the insiders. While not a tragedy, Bloom’s peripheral position hardly merits envy. He’s lonely. The different strands of inheritance remain somehow incongruous, and Bloom tries to weave them together, but it doesn’t really work—and further, he wouldn’t have a son to pass on a new inheritance, even if he could construct one.

In “Sirens,” Bloom literally takes the peripheral position, listening in to conversations, voices, and singing going on in the other room of the bar in which he eats. Mr. Dedalus, a beautiful tenor, is among these voices, and for a short time so is Blazes Boylan, whom Bloom has been trying to avoid due to Boylan’s liaison with Molly Bloom, scheduled for four o’clock. Boylan makes Bloom anxious, about the time and about his own helpless position. He worries about Boylan and, seeing him, he moves: “between the car and the window, warily walking, went Bloom, unconquered hero. See me he might” (264). Bloom can’t stop anticipating the moment of Boylan’s departure for Bloom’s house, his interior sentences seem to cringe into little wads as he waits: “Not yet. At four he. All said four.” Bloom hears how the “Clock whirred…Clock clacked” and decides, fitfully, to sit near the door: “Aimless he chose with agitated aim, bald pat attending, a table near the door. Be near. At Four. Has he forgotten?

13 Literally, Bloom survives his (albeit bad) day in Ulysses, making the book by definition not a tragedy. By the same criteria, Quentin’s suicide gives his chapter the aura of tragedy.
Perhaps a trick. Not come: whet appetite. I couldn’t do. Wait, wait. Pat, waiter, waited” (266). The “wait” that Bloom is engaged in slows time down and makes him “agitated,” a sentiment that doesn’t lead to any action. All Bloom can do is “be near” when the action happens, and wonder if memory has failed Boylan or falsehoods have been spun. When Boylan does leave for the tryst, Bloom hears it happening: “Bloom heard a jing, a little sound. He’s off. Light sob of a breath Bloom sighed on the silent bluehued flowers. Jingling. He’s gone. Jingle. Hear” (268).

Bloom’s devastation is fragile, composed of only a “little sound” and a “light sob of breath,” really just things that one might “hear” anyways. But the moment wrenches Bloom, and his passive relationship to the event devastates him even as the foreboding anticipation is relieved. In place of the jingling and the clock, the imagined noise of Boylan knocking on the door of Bloom’s house (“Tap. Tap. Tap”) replaces the anxiety Bloom felt before, and morphs into a sexual pun.

Bloom’s position in this scene puts him in proximity to action and to full voices, but does not allow him to participate. He waits on the outside instead, unable to join Mr. Dedalus’s crew and sing arias and Irish songs cut off from his father (he’s eating his second pork kidney of the day), and cut off from his wife by another man. The other men in the bar go on talking, flirting with the women (who don’t find Bloom attractive), singing songs he doesn’t understand, or is late to place. When they sing “The Croppy Boy,” Bloom manages to pick up the thematic information and applies it to his own isolation. He paraphrases the content of “The Croppy Boy,” a ballad about a young Irishman who felt himself the “last of his name and race” (285) after his fathers and brothers were killed in risings. The content causes Bloom to muse on the similar situation he is in: “All gone. All fallen. …I too, last my race. Milly young student. Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now. Or if not? If not? If still? / He bore no hate. / Hate. Love.
Those are names. Rudy. Soon I am old. / Big Ben his voice unfolded. Great voice…” (285). He cannot, he feels, pass his “race” onto Milly, and he has “No son” because it is “too late” for “Rudy.” Bloom expresses a bizarre hope that he might still be able to beget a son—in the context, such fragmented questions are fraught with Bloom’s anxieties about Boylan and Molly and his own sexual helplessness. In the statement that follows, set off from the questions, Bloom ponders another paraphrasing from the ballad, “He bore no hate.” Multiple readings of the statement suggest Bloom’s potential absolution of Molly and Boylan (He “bore no hate” towards them), or that Bloom speaks of Rudy, who “bore no hate” i.e. never knew hate because he died in infancy. But Bloom remains skeptical about what “Hate” and “Love” indicate at all, saying “Those are names” separating the word-marker out from the content in the world. He applies the same division to “Rudy” – who remains a name, and nothing more.

Bloom’s cut-off experience means he operates outside of the traditional sense of inheritance. He feels disconnected from his immigrant father by his suicide; he’s disconnected from Ireland by his Jewish inheritance; the idea of Rudy cuts him off from a future, and Blazes Boylan cuts him off from action in the present. He’s relegated, in no uncertain terms, to the periphery of active life and has to figure out what to do with himself. Yet Bloom is anything but trapped: Joyce allows Bloom to wander in and out of different places in Dublin, even going and coming from the narrative itself as the style changes, relegating Bloom further towards the periphery. “Sirens” steps back from Bloom by positioning him in a passive, waiting position adjunct to and over-hearing the action. But it is “Cyclops” that fully disassociates the reader from Bloom’s internal consciousness while still letting him hang around. “Cyclops,” written from the perspective of “the citizen”—a masculine, Irish, nationalist voice in another bar—orchestrates a dialogue that exaggerates the inside of the Irish inheritance complete with Celtic past and fallen
heroes of resistance. The chapter reveals in no uncertain terms how Bloom’s perspective differs from “the citizen’s” and also how desperate he is to participate in the insiders’ conversation—but not necessarily by joining their mindset.

The citizen doesn’t like Bloom. He thinks him Jewish and dull, indicting him for over-contributing to the conversation. One of the many unfortunate examples of the citizen’s impatience with Bloom occurs on the topic of Irish sports: “And of course Bloom had to have his say too about if a fellow had a rower’s heart violent exercise was bad…if you took up a straw from the bloody floor and if you said to Bloom: Look at it, Bloom. Do you see that straw? That’s a straw. Declare to my aunt he’d talk about it for an hour so he would and talk steady” (316). Bloom is not ignorant of his cold and anti-Semitic reception from the citizen; when the citizen growls about Ireland getting “[filled] with bugs” he observes how “Bloom lets on that he heard nothing” (323). Throughout the chapter, Bloom keeps getting cut out of the Irish inheritance, pushed to the other side of the argument, or ignored altogether. The citizen’s language repeatedly names Bloom’s exclusion, implicitly if not directly, as when he asks two other Irishmen who come in “what’s the latest from the scene of action?” (324). The citizen means this sarcastically, following with a joke about the “tinkers” in city hall and undercutting them and their lack of action. But the statement continues to suggest that a “scene of action” exists—perhaps not in city hall, but it is that kind of scene that the citizen and the two other Irishmen participate in when they exchange information about Ireland and even when they sarcastically pass judgment on their fellow citizens or the fact that their colonial situation denies them citizenship. J.J. Malloy and the citizen are active, they are “arguing about law and history,” whereas Bloom is just “sticking in an odd word” (326). Bloom’s outsider status reaches its crux in “Cyclops” when
Bloom must provide an answer to what a nation is, and starts to betray his non-nationalist mentality:

Bloom was talking and talking with John Wyse and he quite excited…
--Persecution, says he, all the history of the world is full of it. Perpetuating national hatred among nations.
--But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.
--Yes, says Bloom.
--What is it? says John Wyse.
--A nation? Says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
--By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that’s so I’m a nation for I’m living in the same place for the past five years.
So of course everyone had a laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
--Or also living in different places.
--That covers my case, says Joe.
--What is your nation if I may ask, says the citizen.
--Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland.
The citizen said nothing only cleared the spit out of his gullet. (331)

As the language used to trace his father’s locations in “Ithaca” will suggest, Bloom does not have a good concept of what a “nation means.” Even as the men taunt him, Bloom takes the question in stride with sincerity, but his definition reveals what a simplistic view he has of nationality and how easily he boils down something the other men have spent the whole chapter lauding and elaborating with the trappings of cultural significance, heroic resistance, and racial strength. Bloom’s answer, however simplistic, is not wrong: and notably, none of the Irishmen present provide any better alternative definitions, preferring to stop at undercutting Bloom. The tone changes entirely towards Bloom when he reveals that he was born in Ireland. The good “laugh” had before at his weak definition transforms into silence from the citizen when he discovers it was his nation Bloom spoke of so factually. At a loss, he clears the phlegm in his throat as an answer. There’s some confusion and discomfort apparent in the awkward transition that stems from how the perceived outsider could be privy to some of, if not the same, inheritance the citizen claims by right and race.
Joyce will pick up the thread of this conversation again on the next page, but in between one of the episode’s many interpolations elaborates a list of famous Irish scenes and artifacts, concluding with the observation that “all these moving scenes are still there for us today, rendered more beautiful still by the waters of sorrow which have passed over them and by the rich incrustations of time” (332). This sentimental glorification of beautiful Irish scenes cements those landscapes in time and in regional history, restricting them to an exclusive group with the use of “for us.” Joyce’s language clearly parodies this inherited pathos: the language transforms Irish defeat and decay, clear signs of futility, into intensifications of beauty. This form of nationalism distances true Ireland and true Irishness from Bloom’s definition of a nation as “the same people living in the same place,” a description devoid of pathos. Bloom doesn’t quite understand this sense of place—his legacy, his outsider’s inheritance, allows him to see the similarities between all places and gives him access to a different idea about injustice. He follows up on his statement of Irish birth: “--And I belong to a race too, says Bloom, that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment…/ --Are you talking about the new Jerusalem? says the citizen. / --I’m talking about injustice, says Bloom” (332). And indeed he is, but he’s conceptualizing it outside of nationalist bounds from a more universal perspective, moving beyond nation and race to philosophy. By universalizing the ethics to transcend any particular location, Bloom expresses the futility of any action, especially violent action. When John Wyse shakes his proverbial fist at Bloom over injustice (and potential injustice), saying “Stand up to it then with force like men,” Bloom simply responds “—But it’s no use…Force, hatred, history, all that. That’s not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it’s the very opposite of that that is really life” (333). Bloom argues the uselessness of any action, especially violent action and emotion, and further, the uselessness of “history,” especially a
history that drives one to “Force” or “hatred.” He knows the futility of such forceful actions, and he willingly separates them out from “life” pointing to them as something that is “not life” for “men and women.” Bloom doesn’t think that violent rebellion, that “history,” presents a way to live—rather it presents the “very opposite,” a way to suffer. Bloom’s disconnect from history and lack of attachment to place feminize him in the view of the citizen and the other Irish men hanging around.

But what Bloom actually strives to represent in his simple, almost cliché, language is a universality and an appetite for “life” that extends beyond any singular inheritance: “—Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred” (333). His desire for human relationships trumps his desire for national connections and the entrapping perspective of forceful men. Bloom expands on John Wyse’s comment about “men” to include “men and women” in his own assertion. He tries to get at what for him is “really life” and comes up with “love” which he means as “the opposite of hatred” and somehow the opposite of “history” and “force” as well. Yet the flimsy quality of his language suggests he resists arguing hard for any absolute. Bloom can’t define “love” except through its opposite, “hatred:” the word acquires meaning only through the other word. Bloom’s more encompassing philosophical view of things appears more detached—both from a sense of place, that might yield discrete meanings and from stirring emotions that might put more force in his language. He empties out the very words he uses, boiling down “Force, hatred, history” to “all that.” His continuous negatives— “not life,” “opposite of hatred,”—undercut his own positive assertions, never allowing them, or anything, to be absolute or weighty. The contrast to Faulkner’s language for Mr. Compson’s metaphysics further illuminates how Bloom’s theories operate untethered to any certain space or regional idea of inheritance. Mr. Compson’s philosophy takes the American South as the setting and atmosphere for his theories:
Bloom doesn’t set his theories in Ireland or anywhere else in the same way. Where Mr. Compson seeks a metaphysics from regional and familial ties. Bloom tries to universalizes his understanding of things but by doing so loses a temporal-spatial foot hold for his concepts, meaning that he begins to operate in just language. A parallel to Quentin Compson forms tandem with the impression that Bloom, like Quentin, is more involved in the realm of language and voice than in the relationship between words and action. Quentin struggles with the words and concepts that are absolute for him (such as time), or that he attempts to control and pin down meaning (such as virginity). Similarly, Bloom fumbles to pin down meaning, reaching for something large and full of meaning, like “Love,” but retreating to language without anywhere to deploy his concept or for whom to prove it. Neither Bloom nor Quentin have generative experiences with language: Quentin finds himself unable to create truth through words and he experiences how intimidating and cloistering language can be, and Bloom cannot quite generate the right language to eloquently express himself and relies on the ambiguity of language to protect himself from being forceful.

While Bloom cannot quench his desire to partake in Irish national conversation, he also cannot reconcile his own ideas with the inheritance weighing on the other men. He boils things down, makes things too simple, and migrates away from violence, which he sees as a perpetual male cycle of injustice, and towards a more enveloping and personal sense of the world in his idea of love. By juxtaposing Bloom with the anti-Semitic, nationalist, Ireland-glorifying “citizen,” the text makes plain the degree to which Bloom is cut out of the inherited conversation and the inherited cultural material. The citizen does not consider him fit to pass judgment. He considers him a “bloody mouseabout” derived from “his old fellow before him…old Methusalem Bloom, the robbing bagman that poisoned himself” (336). Bloom’s exclusion from the larger Irish
narrative rests on his perceived lack of connection to an inheritance that functions to connect other men deeply to their place, their history, and their burden, that nationalist call-to-arms. Peripheral Bloom can only circle the content that these men possess, knowing the deliberate nature of his own exclusion despite being born in Ireland. He alternately expresses a desire to be included, a desire to change the minds of those insiders, and desire to walk away from the conversation he doesn’t fit into.

Bloom’s desire for personal connection to assuage his feeling that he is “the last” of his race often takes him into recesses of memory and into ideas about the past. In a favorite pattern, pleasant memories draw Bloom back to the past and ignite feelings of hope or strength, only to shake Bloom back to consciousness with the re-realization of the facts of his aloneness. Two such passages occur on the same page in “Oxen of the Sun.” In the first instance, as Bloom sits, listening to the younger men talking in the hospital, the narrator opens the door to Bloom’s memories and orchestrates a reflective moment:

No longer is Leopold, as he sits there, ruminating, chewing the cud of reminiscence, that staid agent of publicity and holder of a modest substance in the funds. He is young Leopold, as in a retrospective arrangement, a mirror within a mirror (hey, presto!), he beholdeth himself. That young figure of then is seen, precociously manly, walking on a nipping morning from the old house in Clambrassil street to the highschool… Or it is that same figure, a year or so gone over, a fullfledged traveller for the family firm…brought home at duskfall many a commission to the head of the firm seated with Jacob’s pipe after like labours in the paternal ingle…reading through round horned spectacles some paper from the Europe of a month before (413)

The “retrospective arrangement, a mirror within a mirror” allows Bloom senior, “staid agent of publicity,” to “beholdeth himself” young again. Bloom’s memories recall how “precociously manly” he was, a “fullfledged traveller for the family firm” reporting back to his father each night with “many a commission.” His father, “the head of the firm,” seated at the “paternal ingle,” or hearth, reads through “some paper from the Europe of a month before.” Despite Bloom’s
“precociously manly” youthful self, helpfully occupied with his father’s business, the passivity and behind-ness of the father himself undercuts whatever successful familial legacy is at stake. Rudolph Bloom suffers from running behind, the image of him reading a month-old newspaper suggest a certain futility or uselessness as situations have already changed and time has passed. In addition, Rudolph works from home, from the “paternal ingle” or the fatherly hearth, a position that feminizes him and insulates him from the outside world, while Bloom travels door to door to get commissions. The insular quality of the “paternal ingle” mixes with the sense of behind-ness created by the “paper from the Europe of a month before” to create an even stronger sense of futility and isolation. As the memories touch the futility and pathetic isolation of the father in the last lines quoted, the attitude shifts and the narrator begins to take us out of Bloom’s memories: “But hey, presto, the mirror is breathed on and the young knighterrant recedes, shrivels, to a tiny speck within the mist. Now he is himself paternal and these about him might be his sons. Who can say? The wise father knows his own child” (413). The present day, older Bloom returns to consciousness from the “retrospective arrangement” of mirrors. His vital, chivalrous young self “recedes, shrivels” even and time forces him to assume his father’s role, along with the futility and isolation therein. The narrator observes how now Bloom “is himself paternal and these about him might be his sons” (413). While there is hopeful possibility in the idea that any of these young men could be a son to him, the observation also indicates how old Bloom feels himself to be—he could have fathered any of them but he doesn’t recognize any of them as his own: “Who can say? The wise father knows his own child” (413). The last statement in that quote Bloom lifts from something Mr. Dedalus said in “Sirens” to a man with a daughter. Mr. Dedalus’s comment rings with irony due to his difficulty in realizing people are talking to him about Stephen, whom he doesn’t recognize when described (262). The statement further
recalls Bloom’s early memory of his father’s ideas about voice and his father talking about Abraham’s recognition of the son by the voice. The importance of recognizing one’s progeny bears down on Bloom as Milly changes into a woman and the non-memory of Rudy continues to haunt him. Bloom’s isolation, despite his “paternal” age, among “these about him” who “might be his sons” is painful. That desire to recognize one’s self in someone else will be picked up on later in “Ithaca” as Bloom tries to fit himself and Stephen together.

The second instance of a happy memory resulting in a turn back to reality occurs just a few lines later as Bloom thinks about the first girl he slept with, “Bridie! Bridie Kelly! He will never forget the name, ever remember the night, the first night, the bridenight…She dares not bear the sunnygolden babe of day” (413). Bloom’s memory of “Bridie Kelly” turns from being “intertwined in nethermost darkness” to the lack of a “babe” to come from that coupling (413). The narrator continues in a style that sounds almost self addressing: “No, Leopold! Name and memory solace thee not. That youthful illusion of thy strength was taken from thee and in vain. No son of thy loins is by thee. There is none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph” (413-414). Quickly the trip into memory, a memory that shouldn’t necessarily be associated with paternal feeling, reshapes into a hopeless reminder of Bloom’s lack of successor, which neither “name” nor “memory” can solace. The successor, a son, having died a babe, was “taken from” Bloom and took with him the “youthful illusion of [Bloom’s] strength.” Bloom feels increasingly distanced from that “strength”: time breathes upon the reflection of the “young knighterrant” who “shrivels,” turning Bloom into a failed paternal figure, connoting futility and making him feel behind time. Bloom’s inability to produce a son undercuts his paternal position and age; the successor that should have preserved the “youthful illusion of [his] strength” never
came, and now he is probably the last of his name and race with none to “be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph.”

The “Oxen of the Sun” section is famous for Joyce’s parodies of literary styles and conventions. Occasionally, Joyce disrupts this language, such as the “(hey! presto!)” from above, creating a sarcastic effect. By this point in the chapter, the stylistic mimicry has devolved into a mish-mash of literary conventions, and while certain parallels can be drawn, large chunks remain elusive hybrids with an un-regional sound. Joyce’s sarcasm in the face of generations of language deepens the question of inheritance: as Bloom muses on a piece of his inheritance and the significance of his failed fatherhood, Joyce parodies styles from his literary inheritance, subverting his literary ‘fathers.’ The backdrop of a mother in a long and arduous labor in the hospital scene further foils Joyce’s masterful re-spawning of various literary traditions and Bloom’s concerns about himself as a paternal figure. The change in the language in “Oxen of the Son” doubles the potential inheritance by bringing the concept in at the authorial level. Joyce and Bloom are decidedly different, and while Joyce reveals much about the concept of inheritance through Bloom’s character, by picking an outsider to the Irish inheritance he deliberately cuts any direct cord one might assume runs between protagonist and author. In the second half of Ulysses, the narrative itself offers glimpses into Joyce’s ideas about inheritance; the influence of literary inheritance at the narrative level reveals more pressures of the past on Joyce’s own literary creation. His authorial control over the style and his power of parody suggests a creative freedom lacking in his main character. Yet the degree to which Joyce involves himself with inherited styles in Ulysses suggests something of an obsession in and of itself. By cracking open the archive weighing upon him and using all the traditions subversively, Joyce makes a Bloom-
like attempt at universality, while at the same time demonstrating the impossibility of operating outside his literary inheritance.

Following the observation that there is no son to “be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph,” Joyce begins a new paragraph in which Bloom’s futility and shame change into entirely different sensations: “The voices blend and fuse in clouded silence: silence that is the infinite of space: and swiftly, silently the soul is wafted over regions of cycles of cycles of generations that have lived. A region where grey twilight ever descends, never falls…” (414). According to Gifford and Seidman, the style here echoes that of English romantic Thomas De Quincey (G&S 432). The way that “the voices blend and fuse in clouded silence” doesn’t sound altogether comforting; the “silence that is the infinite of space” sounds grim. The image of a resolute, unchanging “grey twilight” which “ever descends” but “never falls” over a specific “region” containing “cycles of cycles of generations that have lived” creates an atmosphere of “clouded silence” that encompasses all “the voices” and all the “cycles of generations,” incorporating them into one silent, entrapping “region.”

Joyce’s use of an inherited style to articulate “cycles of cycles of generations that have lived” shows his awareness that an inheritance can be an entrapping force, pulling the individual voice into a conceptual whirlpool that is “infinite” and inescapably stuck. Bloom, however, without an heir to his fragmented inheritance, can only be “wafted over regions” like this one, never lighting or participating. The dichotomy between the infinite twilight of inheritance and the futile sonless existence outside of it leaves Bloom with almost no good options when it comes to his sense of his own failed paternity and his place in a pattern that might extend beyond himself.
When thinking about what kind of an inheritance Bloom experiences, a reading of his experience in nighttown unearths many of Bloom’s hidden emotions and desires around facts already known: for example, that his father was a German-speaking Jew, that he is considered an outsider to Irish culture and politics, that he much prefers peace to persecution, that he feels futile as a man and a paternal figure without a son. In the portions of *Ulysses* that use a narrative style that openly articulates Bloom’s internal consciousness, Bloom evades thinking about his father, or his son Rudy, or his relationship to the true Irishmen. He distracts himself, making quick mental turns in order to stay afloat and avoid the depths of emotion in which he worries he might sink. His habits of evasion mean that although memories and anxieties come to the surface often, they only available briefly and in contracted, fractured language.

In nighttown (“Circe”), Joyce disrupts the developed internal voice he initially gave Bloom,\(^\text{14}\) so that the individual character “Bloom” becomes one voice among many equally strong voices in a phantasmagoric drama made up of all the things Bloom has not been thinking about in a sustained manner. The various cultural factors Joyce has set up throughout the novel emerge as concrete characters with whom Bloom interacts. The proverbial melting pot of inheritance that ensues creates a less truncated experience of the forces acting upon Bloom’s life. By extending a controlled opportunity for Bloom’s “consciousness” to interact and ‘play out’ the influence of his inheritance and experiment with his outsider position, “Circe” opens a space where the confines of orthodoxy, even narrative orthodoxy, drop away more fully than in other chapters.

\(^{14}\) Starting in “Wandering Rocks” Joyce begins to change the narrative style, doing away with an interior representation of his main protagonist for the most part, although Bloom’s thoughts come back in “Sirens” and in “Oxen”—but stylistically diverge from earlier representations.
The scene where Bloom is elected mayor of imaginary Dublin acquires a special importance as it reverses the normative role Bloom plays in most power dynamic: that of the subjugated, the reactor, or the outsider (thus, often, the feminized role). The mayoral election provides a conceit that brings together Bloom’s desire to unify the various strands of his inheritance with his qualms about his status as an outsider. The Lord Mayor saga begins when, early in nighttown, Bloom reaches a point of deep dissatisfaction with humanity. Emerging from lecturing the prostitute Zoe about tobacco and potatoes, he ends his tirade with the punctuating: “Suicide. Lies. All our habits. Why, look at our public life!” In true “Circe” form, the object of thought quickly emerges as the next improvised plot fragment. “The Chimes” speak next, calling for Bloom to “Turn again, Leopold! Lord mayor of Dublin” (478). The reference paraphrases an English story involving Dick Whittington, who met with misfortune in London, but is called back by the bells and has a change of luck (G&S 470). Elected the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Bloom is led through the city in a torch light victory procession. Joyce directs us to imagine how “Several wellknown burgesses, city magnates and freemen of the city shake hands with Bloom and congratulate him. Timothy Harrington, late thrice Lord Mayor of Dublin, imposing in mayoral scarlet, gold chain and white silk tie, confers with councilor Lorcan Sherlock, locum tenens. They nod vigorously in agreement.” (479). The respectful and celebratory treatment Bloom receives from Dublin’s most prestigious men comes fresh on the heels of the trial scene earlier in nighttown, in which he was branded an outcast and was almost hung for his crimes.

15 Gifford and Seidman clarify that “Turn again, Leopold! Lord Mayor of Dublin” is a reference to the story “Dick Whittington and His Cat.” The story follows Dick Whittington as he seeks and fails to find his fortune in London. But as he leaves “the bells call after him, ‘Turn again, Dick Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London.’ He turns and all goes well” (G&S 470).

16 Bloom’s election to mayoral office is not by popular vote: in Dublin a council elects a mayor from the pool of already influential aldermen (who are also elected by the council) (G&S 470). This could corroborate Bloom’s desire for social acceptance at the highest echelon, but it also undercuts the compliments the common people pay him.
The mayoral celebration and acclaim would then appear to stand in for the fulfillment of the societal acceptance denied him in “Cyclops” and in “Sirens.”

In this experimental moment in Bloom’s subconscious, Bloom’s desires give birth to a different Dublin, in which one might see “a streamer bearing the legends Cead Mille Failte and Mah Ttob Melek Israel” (479). “Cead Mille Failte” is Irish for ‘A hundred Thousand Welcomes’ (G&S 471), while “Mah Ttob Melek Israel” is Hebrew for ‘How goodly are [thy tents] King of Israel’ (G&S 471). Bloom’s newfound status fuses two disparate pieces of his cultural inheritance: Bloom’s leadership interweaves the Irish language and the Hebrew language and they fly on the banners of Bloom’s mental Ireland, signaling their equal importance. The Lord Mayor scene runs the mental course of what social acceptance would mean for Bloom. Imagined celebrity magnifies Bloom’s identity: if Bloom were Lord Mayor of Dublin the twin pieces of his inheritance, the Irish nationalism embodied by Irish language, and the Jewish heritage embodied by the Hebrew language, would come together. Ironically, in reality Bloom does not know either of those languages well. The farcical impossibility of this victory only exposes Bloom’s intangible and futile social reality and the grandeurs of what would be required to overcome it.

The Bishop of Down and Connor presents him as “your undoubted emperor president and king chairman, the most serene and potent and very puissant ruler of this realm. God save Leopold the First!” (482). Bloom’s imagined power spirals into a crowning ceremony, marked by the “The Peers” swearing their allegiance to him as king, and by his marriage to one “princess Selene” (483) of mythical Greek origin. John Howard Parnell17 comes forward and expresses his goodwill towards Bloom: “Illustrious Bloom! Successor to my famous brother!” (483). The use of “successor” here fixes Bloom firmly in that line of Irishmen who stood strongly for reform and “Home Rule.” Bloom and John Howard Parnell embrace and Bloom expresses his gratitude:

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17 Brother to Charles Steward Parnell, Irish reformer and fierce advocate for Home Rule.
“We thank you from our heart, John, for this right royal welcome to green Erin, the promised land of our common ancestors” (483). Bringing in Parnell, who was protestant, aggregates yet another tradition to the amalgamation of inheritance the allusions in the text have created.18

The phantasmagoria of nighttown allows Bloom to claim “green Erin” for himself, mixing in Zionist ideas of the “promised land” to create a new city, indeed a new place, where his inheritance is royal decree, and defines the lives of all—Protestant as well as Catholic and Jewish. The Lord Mayor passage undercuts itself through humor, especially as it mixes up British, Irish, and Jewish traditions and names, and mixing lofty public rhetoric with commonplace detail (for instance Bloom, upon being presented with the keys to the city, “shows all that he is wearing green socks” (483)). “Bloom’s weather” appears in the north west: “a sunburst,” a humorous extension of Bloom’s relatively optimistic spirit but also an allusion to “Home Rule” (482; G&S 473). The joyous self-mocking leaves no doubt that Joyce deliberately makes this experiment with Bloom in power absurd. But the real correlation Bloomian preoccupations remains: were he in power, had he any power to create a legacy, to start again with a new wife, what would happen? If nothing else, this staging of Bloom in a dominant position reveals a thwarted desire for respect—not national or martial respect—but loving, generous respect and allegiance given freely among equals. He desires to be acknowledged as a “successor,” at least in part, to Parnell and the gang of “peers.” And further, the passage indicates that Bloom desires reform—which is exactly what his phantasmagoric double has in mind: “My beloved subjects, a new era is about to dawn. I, Bloom, tell you verily it is even now at hand. Yea, on the word of Bloom, ye shall ere long enter into the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future” (484).

18 Gifford and Siedman point out how the “ruby ring” is a Scottish sovereign’s right, and the Latin spoken over Bloom is a parody of new papal announcements, and many accouterments featured, like “St Edward’s staff,” relate to the English monarchy.
While Bloomusalem turns out to be a deathtrap and a razed version of Dublin, it presents a legitimate desire for a “new era” associated with action—but not traditional, Irish nationalist action, at least not totally. Bloom-in-power wants to make his own new inheritance and his own new form of action, positioning himself at a new center vs. the old periphery. The way Joyce allows Bloom to first imagine his wish before undercutting the wishfulfilment reveals the desire and the futility in one imaginative blow. Futility still takes hold intermittently, with the structural failure of Bloomusalem, and the eventual displeasure of Bloom’s subjects, who revolt and claim him “bisexually abnormal” (mimicking the fall of Parnell over an adultery catastrophe). But before that occurs, Bloom experiences social acceptance even with his different inheritance. He moves among his fellow citizens with activity and action, he “consoles…dances…kisses …trips…whispers…eats…gives” (486)—a slew of meaningful interactions that concludes with the return of “the citizen” who says (of Bloom), “May the good God bless him!” (487). Just before his fall from power, Bloom articulates his position and the reform he wishes to bring even further, echoing his soft spoken argument for Love in “Cyclops” with a powerful voice: “I stand for the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments. New worlds for old. Union of all…Tuberculosis, lunacy, war and mendicancy must now cease…esperanto the universal brotherhood. No more patriotism of barspongers and dropsical imposters. Free money, free love and a free lay church in a free state” (490). Such a place that Bloom identifies and wishes to stand for, while idyllic, is also “free” of any national inheritance or any national language, preferring universal “union of all” over “patriotism” and insular specification of any. In an extreme and fictional way, Joyce creates space in nighttown for an imagined fulfillment of Bloom’s repressed wishes: what the mixed bag of suffering he has inherited from his father, from
Ireland, and from his position as an outsider makes impossible in reality: a questioning and attempted reform of anything that is not “free.”

Bloom’s fantastical expression of his wishes in “Circe” dramatizes many of the sentiments he has already partially expressed. Joyce elaborates using different terms in the catechism of “Ithaca.” Stylistically, “Ithaca” continues the detachment from straightforward representations of consciousness characteristic of all the later episodes of *Ulysses*. Instead, style drives the structure, and Joyce creates a catechistic, scientific, cross-examination of a strong and long-winded narratorial voice. The style also verges on parodying Bloom, who, as other characters have observed, can talk to exhaustion. The pseudo-scientific nature of the style mimics the objective validity Bloom craves, and parodies, through exaggeration, one form of that desired authority.

In “Ithaca” as Bloom fills a kettle to make cocoa for himself and Stephen, the narration posses the question, “What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, water carrier returning to the range, admire?” and the answer follows, “Its universality; its democratic quality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level” (671), then launching into a scientific list of water’s various qualities and forms that Bloom admires—but placing “universality” first. Bloom proves comically talented at distracting himself with such philosophy, an impulse that Joyce narratively indulges. The connection with water reassures Bloom: water embodies an ability to survive by taking many different forms and always “seeking its own level”—a transcendence of egotism that Bloom has tried to sustain throughout his day. He knows, for instance, that he does not fit with the men in the bar in “Lestrygonians,” nor into the arguments “about law and history” going on between the citizen and JJ Malloy, nor into the group of upstarts who could be his sons

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19 “Circe” notoriously dramatizes Bloom’s submerged fears and sorrows in equally fantastical forms as his desires. I have treated a positive experience here, but more negative fantasies take place such as the judgments passed on Bloom.
in “Oxen.” It is not simply his exclusion that causes Bloom grief (in many of these cases the feeling is mutual or realized with acceptance) but his continuing search for his “level” and for anyone common to it. Isolation has its advantages, in that it allows him to come up with a new kind of inheritance for himself. But that same isolation undermines Bloom’s ability to conceptualize his wishes and fears, thus fragmenting his philosophy and his inheritance all over again. This interior cycle in Bloom operates quite differently from the interior crisis Quentin feels in *The Sound and the Fury*; Quentin is over-connected to others and to history. But similar to Quentin, Bloom does not see the point in betraying his position for the sake of commonality, and he remains constant to his peripheral position. Even though Bloom longs for a son, he does not necessarily long to become another voice in the “region where twilight ever descends;” though he wants to be heard by the other Irishmen, he doesn’t subscribe to their violent definition of masculine nationalism, nor to their alcoholic basis for conviviality. Quentin cannot conceptualize anything beyond the inside of his inheritance; Bloom isn’t sure he wants very much to do with the inside of the Irish inheritance. Both remain skeptical about being inside a cyclical, regionally bound inheritance, but, just as importantly, both remain unsatisfied with either the reality or the idea of being an outsider. Bloom would rather stay outside, in a “continental rather than insular manner of life.” But narratively, his fate has been mostly sealed—Rudy remains in the past, unable to continue the pattern of men from Bloom’s grandfather, Leopold Virag, to his father, Rudolph Virag, to himself, Leopold Bloom, to a son, Rudy (Rudolph) Bloom.

Searching for solutions to Bloom’s isolation appears futile in the context of his age, marital strain, and Jewish heritage in Ireland, but Bloom continues to “seek [his] own level.” He copes: not thriving, but coping. He copes with time, despite how it further isolates him by aging
him away from his youthful vigor (a loss symbolizing Molly’s infidelity) and he copes with the loss of his son, taking an interest—even unrequited—in Stephen, and exploring the ways in which he might be a young man who could become a kind of “successor.” The first half of “Ithaca” takes up just this question of compatibility for heirship, probing for commonalities and differences. The catechism explores the relation between their ages, observing how “the disparity” between their ages was “diminishing according as arbitrary future years were added” (679). The questions try to measure the proximity between Bloom and Stephen, looking at their educational careers, their temperaments, their understanding of advertising. A couple of implausible coincidences are put forth: Stephen sets an idea for an advertisement at the Queen’s hotel, where Bloom’s father committed suicide, and Stephen tells a story the moral of which centers around “what to do with our wives” (685), a question which Bloom is sensitive to today because of his own fidelity concerns. One test of compatibility that carries special import centers around the “points of contact” between ancient Hebrew and ancient Irish language (688), which Bloom and Stephen start to explore and try to derive:

the presence of guttural sounds, diacritic aspirations, epenthetic and servile letters in both languages: their antiquity, both having been taught on the plain of Shinar 242 years after the deluge in the seminary instituted by Fenius Farsaigh, descendent of Noah, progenitor of Isreal, and ascendant of Heber and Heremon, progenitors of Ireland…their dispersal, persecution, survival and revival: the isolation of their synagogical and ecclesiastical rites in ghetto…the proscription of their national costumes in penal laws and Jewish dress acts: the restoration in Chanan David of Zion and the possibility of Irish political autonomy or devolution. (688)

The list of commonalities is nothing to be trifled with. The narratorial explanation of the similarities and intersections between Irish and Hebrew deals with finding a common “progenitor,” and a common evolution and reception in the “dispersal, persecution, survival and revival” of both languages, trying to reconcile them nationally. The experiment leads to Stephen
and Bloom sharing pieces of Hebrew and Irish aloud, using their voices and their languages to
test the compatibility of their inheritances.

Bloom and Stephen have different reactions to this verbal test, revealing how invested
Bloom is in finding a kindred spirit with whom to share his inheritance. Stephen hears “in a
profound ancient male unfamiliar melody the accumulation of the past,” and Bloom sees “in a
quick young male familiar form the predestination of a future” (689). That Stephen still feels the
“accumulation of the past” in Bloom’s voice (even in an “ancient male unfamiliar melody”) is
probably not reassuring to him, but he has never been immune to anything “profound” so the
“ancient male unfamiliar melody” might have some appeal. Bloom’s vision of masculine
youthful vitality allows him to glimpse the “predestination of a future” in the young man across
from him, so wished for in earlier episodes. Even though the two men are unrelated, the audible
language connection allows them to bridge their two inheritances and try each other out as a
paternal pre-figure, and as an heir, a post-figure of the youth of the pre-figure. These short
descriptions represent the climax of Bloom and Stephen’s mutual compatibility: their
inheritances synchronize and each briefly sees the other as a possibility. The brevity of the
observations, in comparison to the rambling of surrounding explanations containing less crucial
interchanges, paradoxically indicates the importance of the moment even as the mutually
experienced possibility quickly expires.

Stephen botches the moment by beginning to “chant in a modulated voice a strange
legend” (690), which turns out to be an anti-Semitic ballad about a Jew’s daughter who lures a
schoolboy (responsible for a broken window) into her house and kills him. This song and
Stephen’s commentary about the “victim predestined” prompt Bloom to think about Milly—a
Jew’s daughter, and a sleep walker, an occult behavior Bloom associates with “the possible
evidences for and against ritual murder” (692). As Bloom thinks about Milly, the question and answers report the trails of fatherhood of a daughter, primarily focusing on the knowledge of inevitable separation due to her encroaching womanhood. Bloom remembers the letter he received earlier this morning that included a “brief allusion to a local student (faculty and year not stated)” (693). In a bizarre link to Faulkner’s description of Quentin remembering Caddy in the Branch, Bloom has another memory of Milly observing rings of water: “on the free surface of the lake in Stephen’s green amid inverted reflections of trees her uncommented spirit, describing concentric circles of waterings indicated by the constancy of its permanence the locus of a somnolent prostrate fish” (694). Milly’s girlhood relationship to concentric circles of water, to a “permanence,” diverges from Caddy’s: where Caddy is her own static locus, at least in Quentin’s mind, Bloom recalls Milly pinpointing the source of the “waterings” as a sleeping fish. Bloom allows Milly to be privy to such mysteries, obscurely understanding that some parts of her nature inevitably separate her from him. He accepts this natural movement; it affects him but “less than he had imagined, more than he had hoped” (693).

In another telling contrast to Faulkner, Bloom gives his daughter “a clock” which he imagines as a “matrimonial [augury],” an omen of Milly’s aging into womanhood and matrimony. Characteristically for Bloom, as science pedagogue, the gift is also an “object lesson to explain…the principle of the pendulum, exemplified in bob, wheelgeer, and regulator, the translation in terms of human or social regulation of the various positions clockwise of movable indicators on an unmoving dial, the exactitude of the recurrence” (694). Joyce’s exaggeration of engineering terminology here may cloud the significance of the clock: Bloom uses the mechanism to explain to Milly how mechanical “regulation” affects existence, and hint at the relief found in “secular process” (694). But less positive terms strung throughout Joyce’s
language also load the gift with further qualms about time and legacy. Bloom presents the clock as an omen, an augury, similar to how Mr. Compson’s figures the watch he passes on to Quentin. The “unmoving dial” and permanently “clockwise” motion both allude to the permanence of forward movement in time and the inability to go back to the past. In the case of a daughter, the clock preserves something of an inheritance for her by augmenting the connection between father and daughter with inherited knowledge and affection. But, as Bloom acknowledges a few questions later, his position is relative to Milly’s memory of him and dependent on her sustained interest in his “science” (694). His position as Father differs from the position of the Mother, Molly, which is fixed and mutual: “the way to daughter led through mother, the way to mother through daughter” (695). It is this mutual likeness through a direct channel of inheritance that Bloom lacks with Milly who is divided from him, separated by another, mysterious “tradition.”

Bloom’s attempt to fit Stephen into such a direct relationship with himself begins to dissolve as the guest turns down his invitation to stay the night. Bloom, frustrated with the “mutually selfexcluding propositions” he and Stephen have come up with as they try (and fail) to set up a place to study Italian together, sinks into some depressing thoughts about the “irreparability of the past” and the “imprevidibility of the future” (696). As examples of each, the narrator cites respectively from Bloom’s memory a clown’s “public [declaration] to an exhilarated audience that he (Bloom) was his (the clown’s) papa” and an attempt at chance in which Bloom marked a florin and then paid for something with it to see if it would return. But the coin has not returned making the future unforeseeable, and the “quest for paternity” now also irreparably part of the past. Bloom’s dejection increases with “speculation,” so he “desists”—Stephen “[affirms] his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown,” but Bloom is comforted by a “misapprehension”: “that as a
competent keyless citizen he had proceeded energetically from the unknown to the known” (697). Bloom’s comfort in his “[energetic]” movement from the “unknown to the known” keeps him philosophically afloat, even though isolated. Stephen’s investment in moving towards the unknown lines up exactly with his desire to secure himself a voice outside of the “known” inheritance and “known” voices pressing down upon him. Bloom is less certain this movement towards the unknown is the way. As he ponders whether celestial life forms might be better off than humanity, he thinks about how “though an apogean humanity of beings creating in varying forms with finite differences resulting similar to the whole and to one another would probably there as here remain inalterably and inalienably attached to vanities, to vanities of vanities and all that is vanity” (700). Bloom’s understanding demonstrates the inescapability of vanity and the continuing desire to produce a likeness, furthering the cycle of inheritance.

After Bloom despondently extends the futility he feels to celestial beings the narrator’s catechism follows as he looks at the “constellations” (700). In a lengthy passage, Bloom or Joyce or both tries to match up the period certain stars were born with the period certain men were born: effectively trying to map significant men and create a paternal constellation. Among those men are Shakespeare, Leopold Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus, with a last mention going to Rudolph Bloom, junior. Bloom attempts to use the celestial map to correlate himself and Stephen and Shakespeare. But the past comes into the present and Bloom dredges up Rudy, who was “birth and death” all in one moment. His “logical conclusion having weighted the matter and allowing for possible error” is that in looking at the sky, he is looking at a “Utopia” of “a past which possibly had ceased to exist as a present before its future spectators had entered actual present existence” (701).
That statement signals a conclusion by Bloom, but also a comment by Joyce on how Bloom perceives the past. It recalls Mr. Compson’s idea of battles being “not even fought” in *The Sound and the Fury*. The statement sounds like a scientific version of the same idea about a past that has somehow “ceased to exist as a present before its future.” By attaching such a strong concept like “Utopia” to the scene, Joyce insists on something completely unreachable: “there being no known method from the known to the unknown” and locates the unknown in “a past which possible had ceased to exist” (701). That Bloom admits his own “possible error” in any such “logical conclusion” allows him, and the reader, to entertain the idea without sentencing himself with it. Moreover, Bloom has already articulated that his own course of action pleads the reverse movement, not attempting to get from the “known to the unknown” but rather trying to do the opposite, finding himself realistic about the “past which possibly had ceased to exist” and instead attempting to “[proceed] energetically from the unknown to the known” (697). While that path certainly isn’t a happy-go-lucky experience, Joyce presents no alternative that Bloom can conceptualize: there is “no known method” to the “Utopia” of “a past which possibly ceased to exist as a present before its future.” In accordance with there being no other options for him, Bloom “[proceeds]” as “energetically” as possible, knowing the “irreparability of the past” and the uncertainty of the future, if there is any at all without a son.

Just before Stephen leaves, Bloom and Stephen hear the same echoes of the “bells in the church of Saint George” as they are hanging out in the garden. But they perceive them quite differently. Stephen hears the echoes as Latin, while Bloom hears “Heigho, heigho / Heigho, heigho” (704). The divergence in their hearing signals the change from the intersection of their hearing at the previous juncture between Hebrew and Irish: while Stephen’s hearing is clouded by his Irish, Catholic inheritance, Bloom’s is simple, known, and repetitious. After Stephen
leaves through the back gate, Joyce’s language reveals even more Bloom’s entrapment in his own cycle, a completely different one, partially filled with his own philosophy, but also lonely and still subject to the same sense of repetition. As the sunrise begins, Joyce asks, “Did he remain?” i.e. did he remain in the garden to watch it. The answer that follows details Bloom’s return from unknown possibility and return to his own acceptance of confinement in his own pattern of repetition:

With deep inspiration he returned, retraversing the garden, reentering the passage, reclosing the door. With brief suspiration he resumed the candle, reascended the stairs, reapproached the door of the front room, and reentered. (705)

The emphatic insistence on “re” action negates any sense that Bloom undertakes original action here, depicting it instead as a kind of mere retracing of steps. But despite the pattern divulged, Joyce asserts that Bloom is filled with “deep inspiration.”

Now that Bloom is alone, Joyce articulates the modulations in his mood and thoughts more closely through the rest of the episode. In a rare word choice, Joyce raises a question about Bloom’s “ambition,” a word not often readily associated with Bloom:

In what ultimate ambition had all concurrent and consecutive ambitions now coalesced? Not to inherit by right of primogeniture, gavelkind or borough English, or possess in perpetuity and extensive demesne of a sufficient number of acres…but to purchase by private treaty in fee simple a thatched bungalowed shaped 2 storey dwelling-house of southerly aspect, surmounted by vane and lighting conductor, connected with the earth…. (712)

The structure of the answer seeks to acknowledge all the things limiting ambition, bearing down on limitation under the “Not” clause, before moving to separate itself even more thoroughly with the “but” clause. Bloom’s ambitions, despite his work for the family firm, have never been attached to the “right of primogeniture,” i.e. inheritance via the first born, or the “borough English,” i.e. inheritance via the “youngest son” (G&S 590). Abandoning the idea of paternal

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20 Faulkner’s language for Mr. Compson, especially in *Absalom, Absalom!*, similarly defines by disavowal or elimination of possibilities.
inheritance, Bloom’s ambitions turn towards commerce in order to “purchase by private treaty” and thus claim as an *individual* (not familial) right a nice, small house, the details of which he describes at length.

Despite Bloom’s ongoing skepticism about his paternal lineage and his ambition to create something that more accurately represents himself, whether that be an inheritance, a philosophy, or a house, he retains his shame and his grief about his father. Upon investigating drawers in Bloom’s house, the narrator finds “objects relative to Rudolph Bloom (born Virag)…in the 2nd drawer,” including an “indistinct daguerreotype of Rudolph Virag and his father Leopold Virag” (723); the “ancient hagadah book” and “pair of hornrimed spectacle,” both of which Bloom recalled earlier in the day; a “photocard of the Queens Hotel, Ennis;” and “an envelope addressed *To my Dear Son Leopold*” (723). The physical as opposed to mental investigation of these objects leads Bloom to experience “remorse”—an emotion for which Joyce provides an explanation: “Because in immature impatience he had treated with disrespect certain beliefs and practices” and explains how though the “certain beliefs” were “[not] more rational than they had then appeared” an older Bloom perceives how they were “not less rational than other beliefs and practices now appeared” (724). Bloom’s youthful impatience with the traditions of his father and of Judaism doesn’t appear to make him regret such questioning of orthodoxy, but in the more universal context where no “other beliefs” or “practices” are more rational or fit for him, he experiences “remorse” at being cut off from those he was at least privy to, if not invested in. The outside of the inheritance is lonely: without his father to tether him to that orthodox tradition Bloom wanders—untethered, a “Everyman or Noman” (727), twin “denominations” the narrator puts for him just a couple pages later.
Ironically, Molly’s sexual past and adultery offer one sequence that Bloom can be a part of. As Bloom crawls into bed with Molly, Joyce asks and answers:

If he had smiled why would he have smiled? / To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first time of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be first, last, only and alone, whereas he is neither first nor last not only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity (731)

The sequential nature of Bloom’s relationship with Molly reveals the “series originating in and repeated to infinity.” While that “series” paralyzes Quentin, it has the potential to reassure Bloom. The idea of being a term in a sequence rather than “alone” makes him “smile” even as the reality of the adultery that places him there provokes anger, jealousy, and envy. But Bloom also feels “abnegation” and “equanimity.” Bloom conceptualizes Molly’s adultery “as natural as any and every natural act” (733) and he makes a valiant attempt to locate Molly’s adultery on both a universal and individual scale: observing how it is “not as calamitous as a cataclysmic annihilation of the planet,” “less reprehensible than theft,” and “not more abnormal than all other altered processes of adaptation” but also, and finally, “as more than inevitable, irreparable” (733).

Bloom’s understanding of the inevitability of his position leads to one of the most outright comments by Joyce on the nature of time and inheritance, positioned quite close to the end of “Ithaca,” the last episode that looks into Bloom’s experience. Couched in a grammatical conceit and imbedded with difficult language, Joyce poses and answers a question that tries to get at how Bloom “a conscious reactor against the void of incertitude, [justified] to himself his sentiments” (734):

the natural grammatical transition by inversion involving no alteration of sense of an aorist preterite proposition…from the active voice into its correlative aorist preterite proposition…in the passive voice: the continued product of seminators by generation: the continual production of semen by distillation: the futility of triumph or protest or vindication: the inanity of extolled virtue: the lethargy of nescient matter: the apathy of the stars. (734)
Joyce depicts a move in Bloom’s mind from the “active voice” into the “aorist preterite.” Gifford and Seidman explain that “aorist” is a “tense of a Greek verb indicating that the action took place in an indefinite past time; ‘preterite’ means belonging wholly to the past” (G&S 604). The difficult passage, slightly decoded, reveals not just a description of Molly’s affair with Boylan moving into the “indefinite” tense but also language for understanding Bloom’s relationship with a temporal inheritance. The past becomes something that never really ends, but endures in an “indefinite past time” and itself belongs “wholly to the past” (G&S 604). Bloom’s inheritance, even in its fragmented components belongs to such an aorist voice, the passivity of which ensures “the continued product” like the “continual production of semen by distillation” creating and imbedding Bloom with “futility,” “inanity,” “lethargy,” and “apathy.”

Joyce however, does not allow that “futility” to prohibit satisfaction, as Bloom’s “antagonistic sentiments” “converge” in a “final satisfaction” as he gets into bed with Molly at the end of “Ithaca.” While I do not suppose to create a direct correlation between Joyce and Bloom, something in the knowledge of futility and of an “aorist preterite” existence that undoes “active voice” can be applied to Joyce himself, the evidence for which is in the text of Ulysses and the concerns it has presented all along about style and voice and its own inheritance as a work of literature. While Joyce biographically is much more strongly aligned with Stephen’s character, it is Bloom’s experience of inheritance that more fully articulates the relationship to the past, the impact of inheritance in the present, and the method of dealing with it that Joyce wants to present. Stephen goes away, leaving the reader with no idea of how he deals with his Irish inheritance, but supposing that he will not be taking on Bloom as a quasi-paternal figure any time soon. But Bloom abides, and “Ithaca” allows Joyce to fully articulate by cross-
examination, the weight and tone of all the forces acting upon or not acting upon Bloom as he stands very much alone.

Despite how well Joyce undercuts any pathos or romantic feeling (the difficulty of the grammatical allusions and constructions above creates such an effect in what could be an emotional moment for Bloom), he also denies Bloom total reconciliation and positivity, allowing “antagonism” to become “satisfaction”—which is not the same as resolving antagonism. But Bloom feels as though things “converge”: various pieces of his identity, various emotions he has, various bad things that have happened to him, various good things that have happened to him, and his various fragments of inheritance intersect in the final moments of “Ithaca.” Afloat in the universal, he seems to survive by allowing for flux, by retreating from the philosophical realm and moving towards the known. For Bloom the physical world, extreme detail of the known, tethers the mental tinkering he has done throughout the day. It is not that he is happy, he is simply alright: he survives, aware of his position on the periphery and aware of his own isolation. He’s sympathetic, but also bizarre in his reluctance to engage action against the futility—instead he just succumbs to it and goes about his futile business. In a way, Bloom’s choice of survival over potential death reacts against his inheritance: the book makes it no secret how deeply Bloom’s father’s suicide affected him and made him feel alone and guilty. Insofar as Bloom’s father’s suicide represents an inability to cope with the futility of life, Bloom chooses otherwise. He settles for staying afloat by whatever means necessary, wary of the orthodoxy and heavier regional inheritances he sees leading to death. Bloom shapes himself into a micro-repetitive force, creating his own pattern and following it, a personal pattern that keeps him from feeling overwhelmingly isolated and futile. He acts, just on a micro-scale, a micro-immigrant moving

21 Perhaps made more futile for Rudolph Bloom by the absence of Bloom’s dead mother and the Irish intolerance for his own inherited traditions.
across the city of Dublin the way his ancestors moved across the continent, a micro-thinker putting bulky philosophy into smaller instances of everyday activity. The story of his family ends with him, and there is nothing he can do about it. Bloom too is trapped in a certain existence created by his inheritance, and he just has to keep going or risk becoming his father if he stops.

In a way, Bloom and Joyce identify the same thing to release the mental pressure created by the “irreparability of the past.” Both author and character involve themselves with what Quentin Compson probably meant when he described the “loud world,” i.e. the archive of words, languages, ideas, references, and *specifics* external to the self and the family that cushion the blow of a doomed inheritance.

Of course, Joyce himself mines that archive of specifics. *Ulysses* as a narrative desires to encompass the whole archive: the literary legacy, European history, Irish culture, politics, and current events. *Ulysses* displays how Joyce chose not to try and escape his inheritance, but to confront, absorb, and redesign every tiny piece of information it ever imparted. Bloom can’t do anything different, he just has to live in his smaller archive of memories, history, phrases, and doctrines inherited from Ireland, Judaism and his life. Fragmented and lonely as it is, Bloom’s archive resists being insular: the less regionally defined nature of his identity and his much less zealous struggle with futility allow Bloom to keep himself permeable; just as Joyce attempts to keep his own claustrophobic Irish inheritance permeable by encompassing so much of the larger, continental inherited archive in *Ulysses.*
“All right. But let me know if you want the coats. Jesus, if I was going to have to spend nine months in this climate, I would sure hate to have come from the South. Maybe I wouldn’t come from the South anyways, even if I could stay there. Wait. Listen. I’m not trying to be funny, smart. I just want to understand it if I can and I don’t know how to say it better. Because it’s something my people haven’t got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at everyday to remind us of it. We don’t life among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) bullets in the dinning room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entitled birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forever more as long as your children’s children produce children you won’t be anything but a descendent of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett’s charge at Manassas?”

“Gettysburg,” Quentin said. “You can’t understand it. You would have to be born there.”

“Would I then?” Quentin did not answer. “Do you understand it?”

“I don’t know,” Quentin said. “Yes of course I understand it.” They breathed in the darkness. After a moment Quentin said: “I don’t know.”

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Shreve to Quentin Compson, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Faulkner 289)

Over his untestable apology for a cup of coffee, listening to this synopsis of things in general, Stephen stared at nothing in particular. He could hear of course, all kinds of words changing colour like those crabs about Ringsend in the morning, burrowing quickly into all colours of different sorts of the same sand where they had a home somewhere beneath or seemed to. Then he looked up and saw the eyes that said or didn’t say the words the voice he heard said—if you work.

--Count me out, he managed to remark, meaning to work.

The eyes were surprised at this observation, because as he, the person who owned them pro. tem. Observed, or rather, his voice speaking did: All must work, have to, together.

--I mean of course, the other hastened to affirm: All must work, have to, together. Also literary labour, not merely for the kudos of the thing. Writing for the newspapers which is the readiest channel nowadays. That’s work too. Important work. After all, from the little I know of you, after all the money expended on your education, you are entitled to recoup yourself and command your price. You have every bit as much right to live by your pen in pursuit of your philosophy as the peasant has. What? You both belong to Ireland, the brain and the brawn. Each is equally important.

--You suspect, Stephen retorted with a sort of half laugh, that I may be important because I belong to the *faubourg Saint Patrice* called Ireland for short.

--I would got a step further, Mr Bloom insinuated.

--But I suspect, Stephen interrupted, that Ireland must be important because it belongs to me.

--What belongs? queried Mr Bloom, bending fancying he was perhaps under some misapprehension. Excuse me. Unfortunately I didn’t catch the latter portion. What was it you?...

--- Bloom & Stephen, “Eumeaus” (Joyce 644-645)
A Few Last Thoughts

With apologies for adding still more textual example to these already crowded pages, these passages are irresistible for crystalizing the themes and problems I have been articulating and analyzing. They both also reiterate the tone each author takes on the issue of regional inheritance in situations where insiders interact with outsiders. The language of Quentin’s Harvard roommate, Shreve, summarizes Faulkner’s intense effort to convey the legacy of the defeated South and to figuring out this “entitled birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving.” In the passage, the northern and southern roommates are almost equally bewildered by the inheritance. Similarly, Stephen reverses Bloom’s notion of participatory nationalism by reversing the possessive: “Ireland must be important because it belongs to me.” Neither Stephen nor Bloom adheres to the self-sacrificing patriotism of public nationalist rhetoric, rooted in history. Nor do they share (or even understand) each other’s alternative formulations.

The quotations display how deeply the idea of inheritance is enmeshed in language and the sub-lingual absorption I dealt with in Part I of my thesis. Shreve’s question about “What is it? something you live and breathe in like air?” endeavors to understand both the inheritance but also how it is imbued. The answers pulled together by the characters in Absalom, Absalom! begin with notions about shared circumstance and shared blood, but end with the father’s voice acting as a medium through which the mysterious substance of inheritance passes. Voice and inheritance intertwine in Ulysses as well. Above, Stephen hears “all kinds of words;” he hears “the voice speaking” and resists their claims on him by moving them around but he is still entrapped in in, what Kenner described as, a particular “climate of mind.”
In all three of the novels I discuss, the characters try to understand what is inherited from the father and from the region: through voices, language, blood, and circumstance, the ramifications of paternity or lack-thereof show through as Bloom, Stephen and Quentin struggle with what they each inherit. In “Scylla and Charybdis” Stephen asserts, “Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten.” (Joyce, 207). The “mystical estate” of the father stands apart from the conscious making of new life a mother might experience. The concept that Stephen applies to Fatherhood can extend to the regions Faulkner and Joyce inhabited in imagination: Ireland and the South in all three of these novels appear to impart their own, regionally bound “mystical estate” onto successive generations, especially the generations of men.

Quentin Compson feels burdened by the mystical estate left to him by the South and by the line of men behind him. For Quentin, the brief past of southern chivalric action forms the noose around his neck because he cannot let go of the past nor can he live with the awareness of how his desires fulfill the cycle that entraps him. His obsession escalates and the caliber of his intense memories increases. Quentin struggles to find a path to the existence he wants. He doubts, rebels, and rejects like Stephen Dedalus, but Quentin’s chapter also reveals him desperately trying to reconcile the things that he loves about his inheritance with the things that he hates about it. Throughout his day, he remains mentally obsessed with this problem. Even when his inheritance overwhelms him, Quentin keeps trying to confront it by understanding it and comparing it to what he believes in and wants, even if such a comparison reveals that he would be happier dead.

While Quentin struggles with how his inheritance confines his understanding of life to the South, Bloom struggles with the fact no single place makes total sense. Bloom is denied
access to a regionally tied “mystical estate” or an “apostolic succession,” in the form of a living son or father, before *Ulysses* even begins. Bloom forever skirts his own longing for a successor and his grief over his father’s suicide. His truncated conversation with Stephen typifies his failure to hear others and to make his own voice heard. As he tries to assert his own participation-based form of nationalism, focused on basic, everyday work rather than expansive or heroic history, he exemplifies once again his need to pull together from the disparate pieces of his inheritance a philosophy of his own. He tries to share it with Stephen, his chosen son figure, but they miscommunicate over belonging—a vexing topic for both.

Bloom often feels mixed up and futile in his effort to identify meaning without having a son to receive that created meaning as an inheritance. For Quentin, the past is overwhelmingly certain, filling (or emptying) his future with futility and excluding other possibilities. The past continues to confront Bloom as well. They both experience the past in the present; the past continues to continue: irreparable, irrevocable. Sundquist and Kenner both adopt Stephen’s word “nightmare,” taken from an exchange with Mr. Deasy in “Nestor”: “—History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (Joyce 34; Sundquist 15; Kenner 33). Kenner adopts it to describe the inescapability of the past for characters in both Joyce and Faulkner’s works. But a nightmare implies that the characters hate and fear such an existence. That might be true for Stephen Dedalus, who is undoubtedly plagued by history. But being plagued by history is different from being haunted by the past; the latter is a much more confusing and continuing experience. For Quentin and Bloom, the nightmare is only half true. Even Quentin, who is driven to suicide by his sense of futility and his unquenchable desire for original action, proves attached to his inheritance and to his memories. Even though remembering further entraps him in a cycle of futility, Quentin cannot repudiate the memories correlated with his regional inheritance,
because they are all he has. Bloom’s experience is also haunted by the past, and while he attempts to avoid the pathos such memories bring with them, the past keeps intruding on his consciousness. He cringes away from it, but he does not divorce himself from it: the memories and fragments of his inheritance are important to Bloom—in a way, they are all that sustains him during his long day.

The other reason I do not like the word “nightmare” in the context of my analysis is because it implies one can awaken, as Stephen strives to, and thereby simply escape the past. For the characters by Faulkner and Joyce I discuss, this metaphor fails to do justice to the ongoing nature of their experiences, sleeping or awake. In the South and Ireland, the weight of inheritance—no matter how tragic it figures for an individual—endures. The regions cannot wake up from the past and in many ways don’t want to. Joyce and Faulkner both write about this condition and the obsessions born from it. Both the passages I quote above end with Quentin and Bloom’s bewilderment with their situations, “I don’t know” Quentin says, “What was it you?...” Bloom asks. That bewilderment around a still elusively inarticulate inheritance continues and acquires seductive power for the reader of both authors. However disabled the characters are by cycles of futility, their authors generate original and mesmerizing novels out of what Quentin calls “that old ineradicable rhythm.”
Works Cited


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22 This single volume text is a condensed and updated version of Blotner’s original 2-volume biography of Faulkner, which is also indispensable. Blotner expresses in his “Foreword” to the 1 volume text that “This edition has afforded the opportunity to correct earlier errors, and where it differs should be regarded as the best information now available…it is to some extent a new book” (viii). I found this text slightly more approachable while still offering valuable content.


