

Abstract

WILDER, BLAKE AARON. *Manhood Matter: Lynching and the Politics of Constructed Masculinities*. (Under the direction of Jon Thompson.)

This study utilizes lynching as the focal point of a methodological approach to re-examine the language of American culture and several canonical works of literature from the lynching era. The emphasis on the symbolic values of the ritualized lynching event organizes theories of race, gender, and violence and provides an approach to decode the social constructions and literary representations that are based on the structural consequences of the ideological usage of lynching as a force of terror.

The lynching era, the ninety-year period from 1877 to the mid-1960s, begins with the collapse of Reconstruction that allowed lynching to emerge as means to reaffirm the destabilized white patriarchal power of slavery and ends when the Voting Rights Act finally reversed the direct political disenfranchisement that was, perhaps, the most restrictive social consequence of the violence of lynching. The direct connection between lynching and the destabilized power structures of slavery is often overlooked because the rise of lynching is commonly associated with the great surge of lynching murders in the 1890s and separated from slavery by the intervening period of Reconstruction. Looking at key works of American literature, through the interpretive lens of lynching as a metaphor, can serve the double purpose of illuminating the history of lynching in American culture and of uncovering a deeper meaning within the texts themselves.

Chapter one approaches Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with a theoretical understanding of lynching as an ideological terror that is both racial and sexual to reveal a reflective historical trajectory embodied in the fluctuating masculinity of Jim.

Moving from the subordinate masculinity of slavery to a full character of fatherly affection and protection on the river, Jim's forced return to the minstrel caricature under the romantic machinations of Tom Sawyer connects slavery to active re-imposition of racial hierarchies through the symbolic masculinities created in the ritual of castration and lynching.

Chapter two examines the intricate narrative juxtapositions and an exponentially complex use of symbolism of William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* to foreground a vast potential to expose and critique the lasting effects of the lynching era. Born in 1898, just one year after *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the institutionalization of "separate but equal" gave legal credibility to growing racial segregation, William Faulkner grew up in a world of indoctrinated racial difference and the continued presence of lynching, and much of his fiction is concerned with understanding the roots of Southern racism.

Chapter three looks to James Baldwin's 1965 short-story, "Going to Meet the Man," to illustrate not only the social constructions that were spawned by the rise of lynching but also the dynamics that allowed them to be so long misunderstood. By employing a sequential structure of retrospective investigation, Baldwin is able to trace the rigid racial categories of the segregated society back to lynching as the symbolic representation (as well as the physical manifestation) of the desire to destroy black masculinity and empower white patriarchy. Most importantly, by featuring a literal lynching event and incorporating the coded symbolic values of the segregated society, "Going to Meet the Man" becomes a representational illustration of the structures and consequences of lynching.

Manhood Matter: Lynching and The Politics of Constructed Masculinities

by
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Dedication

For Lucinda Mackethan,
a wonderful and inspiring teacher

Biography

Born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, I was immersed in the vibrant and multi-vocal traditions of the city embodied in sites such as Bealle Street, Sun Studio, the Peabody Hotel and Central, the city's oldest high school. Majoring in History and English at Oberlin College, I was inspired to pursue academic endeavors with a social and political significance. After graduation, I moved to North Carolina and worked outside of academia for several years before returning to pursue further study with a fresh perspective and a renewed fervor.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Page 1
MANHOOD MATTERS	
Chapter One.....	6
ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN	
Minstrelsy and the Making of Manhood from “Nigger” Jim to Jim Crow	
Chapter Two.....	50
GO DOWN, MOSES	
The Failure of “Separate But Equal”: The Structural Limits of Textual Desire	
Chapter Three.....	104
GOING TO MEET THE MAN	
“What’s the Matter?”: White Masculine Insecurity and the Black Body	
Conclusion.....	129
MAPPING MANHOOD	
Bibliography.....	
Notes.....	138

Manhood Matters more than we might think and much more than has been acknowledged in the study of American culture. Although the details have varied greatly, an archetype of manhood has guided the social organization of the historically patriarchal development of Western civilization. In America, patriots, frontiersmen, and statesmen have been at the center of myths of manhood that define an American cultural identity. To be Man is to be strong, virile, honorable, respected, an individual, a leader; to have, provide for, and protect a family; to have a successful and profitable career; to own property and wealth; to vote and to take an active role in the community. All these are “matters of manhood.” However, not every man has been allowed the freedom to fulfill these roles throughout history. Attempting to understand how the concept of Man has influenced American history has led me to investigate lynching as an event that not only actively creates Man as a symbolic ideal but also has the physical consequence of killing a corporeal man. The closer one looks, the more it becomes clear –deadly clear – that manhood matters a whole lot.

As I have tried to understand the connection between political, social, and economic power and the boundaries of symbolic masculinities, the investigation has become one of language and the structures that create and are created by lynching as an event that joins physical violence and symbolic representation. In the course of this study, I have discerned five structures that surround the ideological use of lynching:

- 1) Lynching is prompted by white masculine insecurity but also creates and represents the ideal of white patriarchal power.
- 2) The use of castration and emasculation to assert white “superiority” creates racialized masculinities and the imbrication racial and sexual identities. Thus, a cultural whiteness is always already a masculine identity.

- 3) Defining whiteness via the disassociation from negative traits written onto a symbolic Other creates an interdependence between black and white masculinities that requires constant regulation because any change in status to one provokes an inverse change in the other.
- 4) As the manifestation of the symbolic Other for the lynching era, the black body is seen as a taboo of uncontrollable brutality, a figure of chaos, to be abhorred and destroyed and also an eroticized figure of desire that is seen to contain an enviable sexual power.
- 5) By combining physical violence and symbolic representation into a single act, the consequences of lynching are both material and ontological. Thus, for nearly ninety years, lynching was a symbolic act that disenfranchised African Americans through the terror of violence and also limited acceptable social identities via reductive stereotypes.

Because these structures do not work in isolation but in constant and overlapping relation to each other and because each features underlying binary dynamic, the traces and figurations of these structures are not readily discernable in social interactions and within literary texts. The study of lynching inevitably struggles in its attempt to understand unacknowledged and unspoken dynamics, because as a liminal event, lynching constructs the limits of knowledge for ideological purposes. Consequently, these five principle structures and the interplay between them only became clear to me in the course of the present study. By highlighting the connection of the physical and the symbolic, I employ lynching as an interpretative metaphor to read cultural events and literary texts to illuminate the dynamics of a long and consequential history of racial oppression. Significantly, the functionality of lynching as an interpretative metaphor works both ways. Using theoretical insights concerning the language of race, gender, and violence can help us understand the actual, the real, the historical; but inversely, understanding the dynamics of lynching can help us understand the role of language, especially its complicity and its ability to produce violence and oppression. Looking at key works of American literature, through the interpretive lens of lynching as a

metaphor, can thus serve the double purpose of illuminating the history of lynching in American culture and of uncovering a deeper meaning within the texts themselves

Started in 1876 and completed in 1883, the composition of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* surrounds the Compromise of 1877 that ended Reconstruction. The rise of lynching and political disenfranchisement of African Americans that followed that event render Mark Twain's novel as a reflection of its critical cultural moment. Chapter One will draw heavily on theoretical perspective to develop a comprehensive perspective of lynching and enable its use as an interpretative metaphor to uncover traces within Twain's text of the historical consequences that accompanied the rise of lynching. Building upon this foundation, my reading of *Huckleberry Finn* posits a narrative unity based in a dual system of reflective historical corollaries and training in rhetorical critique for the reader. Taken together the historical corollaries and the push for a rhetorical critique help to contextualize the problematic closing sequence by revealing its function as a satirical critique of Twain's own cultural moment. While it becomes evident that *Huckleberry Finn* is shaped by and responds to the cultural stakes of masculinity and lynching, the lack of a singular figure of lynching within the text hinders an examination of lynching's structural properties. While the narrative structure of *Huckleberry Finn* reflects the usage of emasculation as control, the text's illustration of white male insecurity, racial interdependence, and the power of lynching to construct "truth" are vague at best.

Born in 1897, just one year after *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the institutionalization of "separate but equal" gave legal credibility to growing racial segregation, William Faulkner grew up in a world of indoctrinated racial difference and the continued presence of lynching,

and much of his fiction is concerned with understanding the roots of Southern racism. Chapter Two will build upon the analytical method of Chapter One to interpret Faulkner's 1942 novel, *Go Down, Moses*, by reading its symbols of racialized masculinities and will take advantage of the presence of a more direct and coherent symbolic figure of lynching to pursue a deeper understanding of the structures of lynching. Taking advantage of the coded discourse that developed along with the rise of lynching, Faulkner structures his novel as a dynamic and comprehensive investigation of racial identities and conflict through the exponentially complex symbolisms of the hunting stories. While Faulkner presents a desire to surpass the status quo through progressive contrasts to repeated cultural norms, the polarization of key figurations within the work reveals that *Go Down, Moses* continues to be bounded by and reinforce the fundamental structure of racial difference that supports the segregation of Jim Crow. *Go Down, Moses* shows that Faulkner was certainly aware of masculinity as the site of racial difference; however, it also suggests that Faulkner's interest in the ontological power of symbolism distracts from the full ramifications of racial interdependence.

By moving to the later figure of James Baldwin, whose drastically different social positioning allows a deeper understanding of identity categories than either Twain or Faulkner, Chapter Three will reveal that the 1965 short-story, "Going to Meet the Man," illustrates not only the social constructions that were spawned by the rise of lynching but also the dynamics that allowed them to be so long misunderstood. By employing a sequential structure of retrospective investigation, Baldwin traces the racial categories of the segregated society back to lynching as the symbolic representation of the desire to destroy black

masculinity and empower white patriarchy. Moreover, he exposes the continuing eroticization of the black body as the consequence of relying on black masculinity as a symbolic Other. The contrast between the certainty of the story's structure with the uncertain narrative voice of Jesse creates a dramatic irony that foregrounds the way in which the instability of the identity categories created through lynching prevents the understanding of those very identities. Most importantly, by featuring a literal lynching event and incorporating the coded symbolic values of the segregated society, "Going to Meet the Man" becomes a representational illustration of all the major structures and consequences of lynching as America approached the challenges of the Civil Rights era.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Minstrelsy and the Making of Manhood from “Nigger”¹ Jim to Jim Crow

During Reconstruction, African Americans eagerly embraced the opportunities that had been denied them under slavery: marrying, buying land if possible, forming churches, voting, and even running for political office (Messerschmidt 80-81). Between 1870 and 1876, more than six hundred African Americans served in state legislatures, two in the U.S. Senate, and fifteen in the U.S. House of Representatives (Foner 354-355). With the collapse of Reconstruction in 1877, all those political gains, and many social and economic gains, began to disintegrate. By 1900, there were no African Americans serving in Congress. The next African American elected to the House of Representatives was not until 1926, and it was another forty years after that before there was another African American senator. This retrogression of African American civil rights was enabled by and contributed to the entrenchment of a complicated matrix of race, gender, and violence.

While the late nineteenth century can be seen as a period of great change from various disciplinary perspectives, a focused attention on the development of structures of race, gender, and violence from the legal support of slavery through the fledgling and curtailed progress of Reconstruction to the violent entrenchment of Jim Crow ideology foregrounds the connection of language and power in socially constructed symbols. The institution of slavery created and supported specific legal structures of power by allowing or depriving material privileges based on race. Moreover, slavery inherently presented an ideological ordering of the world supported by theories of race, natural history, and early ethnographic studies. Rather than disappearing with the loss of legal justification, the ideology of racial hierarchy came to be expressed through less certain, and more violent, representation.

Started in 1876 and completed in 1883, the composition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* surrounds the Compromise of 1877, the event that effectively ended Reconstruction. Because *Huckleberry Finn*, as will be shown, is very much a reflection of its cultural moment, it provides the opportunity to examine how an ideological use of symbolism was integrally linked to the creation and entrenchment of the social role of lynching. By engaging in an informed and active investigation, the abolition of slavery and a destabilized status quo will be revealed as catalysts for the shifts in power that followed Reconstruction.

A review of the historical context for Twain's composition of the novel, and also for the end of Reconstruction and the subsequent rise of lynching, will point towards the features of the novel's form that are structured in response to historical corollaries. Working with and

against a language that has been shaped by hegemonic concerns and control, an integration of theoretical perspectives on gender, race, and rhetorical purpose will promote a comprehensive approach for evaluating the representation of lynching and the construction of masculinities in a way that illuminates Twain's desire to present a social critique within the text. A central part of these theoretical perspectives will be the revelation that the ritual lynching performance is a symbolic act as well as physical torture and punishment, giving it the ability to repress and solidify social discourse, but also, allowing it to serve as an interpretative metaphor to make inquiries about hidden structures of power in American culture. By employing such a detailed and recursive approach, I plan to illustrate that *Huckleberry Finn* is motivated by and reflects upon the collapse of Reconstruction, disenfranchisement, and lynching as political emasculation. A close reading of Twain's text illuminated by theoretical perspectives will reveal that the novel has a tightly woven formal unity that corresponds to its themes and elucidate Twain's rhetorical purpose and his awareness of dynamics that have only recently been explicated in detailed terms by critical theory. In the course of this discussion, I hope to reconcile adequately the debated status of the closing sequence by providing a context that allows readers to understand that while Jim and Huck both fail in their quests for freedom the novel succeeds in its purpose because of their failure and that the uneasiness evoked in readers by the closing sequence is produced by a subtle ironic tension that is a crucial part of Twain's satirical critique of the rise of emasculation as social control.

The Compromise of 1877: A Historical Turning Point

Juxtaposing the history of the writing of *Huckleberry Finn* with the history of the end of Reconstruction provides some clues to the central themes that shape the novel. *Huckleberry Finn* was written in segments over the course of seven years from 1876 to 1883. Significantly, Twain wrote what would become the first sixteen chapters of the novel in 1876 before abandoning the manuscript, petulantly destroying the raft with a steamboat, and even contemplating burning the manuscript itself (Steinbrink 104). The problem was that the book that had started as a sequel and supplement to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was floundering for a direction. “Twain may well have realized at this point that while he could contrive to keep Huck and Jim marginally alive, he had arrived at no satisfactory way to allow them spontaneously to thrive on the river below Cairo” (Steinbrink 104). More important than “no satisfactory way to” was the fact that Twain had no reason to; eleven years after the end of Civil War, the story of a slave’s quest for freedom had little relevance or interest for contemporary readers who saw the issue as settled. Twain set the manuscript aside to write *A Tramp Abroad*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Prince and The Pauper*, and other stories. He would not return to *Huckleberry Finn* for three years.

In the course of those three years, the trajectory of American history reached a major turning point, the Compromise of 1877. To settle the contested presidential election of 1876, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes agreed to withdraw all federal troops from the South in exchange for a cleared road to the White House. This agreement brought an end to Reconstruction and returned control of Southern states to local governments. “The effect of this restored power reintroduced oppressive measures in some states that were as severe in

their denial of the freedom of black people as were the Black Codes that had appeared in the southern states in the fall and winter of 1865-1866 to replace old slave codes” (Nilon 65). The end of Reconstruction meant a rolling back of recent progress in African American rights enabled by the reinstitution of a symbolic system of racial hierarchy, and Twain seems to have taken up *Huckleberry Finn* again in response to the social changes he saw around him.

The confluence of Twain’s writing process and his observation of the course of history has long been noted in Twain scholarship. Lionel Trilling asserted that “it is impossible not to suppose that this great creative drive was connected with – was perhaps the direct result of – the visit to the Mississippi he had made earlier in the year” (81). Trilling attributes Twain’s return to the manuscript with the river itself, but it would have been impossible for Twain to miss the changes taking place in racial relations along the river. Comparing *Huckleberry Finn* to the rest of Twain’s work, T.S. Eliot indirectly queried the reflection of historical events, noting that “when we find one book by a prolific author which is very much superior to all the rest, we look for the peculiar accident or concurrence of accidents which made that book possible” (Eliot 44). Although, Eliot does not propose what those accidents might be, textual details and theoretical perspectives will support the hypothesis that the “concurrence of accidents” that contributed to *Huckleberry Finn* was the rise of lynching as part of a system of racial control.

David Smith and Charles Nilon, two scholars included in a recent volume of black perspectives on *Huckleberry Finn*, make the connection between Twain’s writing process and racial politics more clearly. Smith observes that “Twain began his book during the final

disintegration of Reconstruction, and his satire on antebellum southern bigotry is also an implicit response to the Negrophobic climate of the post-Reconstruction era” (Smith 105). Nilon goes further to recognize lynching specifically as an influence on Twain. “The lynch mob helped to limit the freedom of black persons, and Twain was uncomfortably aware of the increase in lynching in the South” (Nilon 69). Moreover, Nilon implicitly identifies the structural designs that connect the final third of the novel to both Twain’s purpose of social critique and the effects of his historical situatedness, claiming that “the last twelve chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* show figuratively, and pass judgment on, this process of ‘freeing the free Negro’ that Twain became increasingly aware of after 1880” (Nilon 62). Similarly, Smith points out the significance of the historical context for Huck’s critical declaration to “go to hell” (Twain 228). “By the time Twain wrote these words, more than twenty years of national strife, including the Civil War and Reconstruction, had established Huck’s conclusion regarding slavery as a dominant national consensus; not even reactionary southerners advocated a reinstitution of slavery” (113). However, I hope to complicate this point by illustrating that although no one may have wanted to reinstitute legal slavery, the reinstitution of the power structures inherent in slavery did appeal to certain segments of society who were able – through the control of material and discursive resources – to influence the course of American history. Further, while Huck may have made a decision not to send Jim back to slavery, his view on racial equality is much more problematic, as numerous scholars have noted.

Moving forward, it will be important to keep in mind the key dates that unite the composition of *Huckleberry Finn* and the end of Reconstruction. Twain abandoned his

manuscript in 1876, only to pick it up again in 1879 after the Compromise of 1877 effectively ended Reconstruction and led to the reimplementation of strict racial hierarchies. Although these dates bring out an obvious connection to Reconstruction, the novel's reflection of the dynamics of lynching is less visible because the violence of lynching has always been problematically imbricated with the discourse of lynching. Incorporating theoretical perspectives on race, gender, and lynching will uncover structural dynamics that have been obscured by an ideologically instituted lack of language and will reveal that Twain's historical placement allowed him to observe first-hand the fluctuation and establishment of trends that would have a pronounced and lasting effect on American culture. "Sensitive as Twain was to racial and cultural difference, he was equally attentive to what scholars have recently come to call 'whiteness'" (Lowry 54). Richard Lowry's point in "Mark Twain and Whiteness" highlights that Twain was intuitively aware of cultural dynamics that have been named and explicated with precision only in recent years. Consequently, the argument that lynching and constructed masculinities are organizing principles of *Huckleberry Finn* is meant to show that Twain was aware of these dynamic of racial control, not that he necessarily understood them in the exact terms that we do today.

Language and Lynching: Theoretical Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Violence

Indeed, the modern understanding of lynching is the result of significant effort made to uncover hegemonic power structures that have been naturalized and written out of social discourse. Two important studies that have sought to expose the cultural role of lynching are Trudier Harris' *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (1984) and Jacqueline Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and*

Literature (2006). The former study investigates “documented historical lynchings that were commonplace enough to become stylized or ritualized, after numerous repetitions” (Harris x) and highlights the connection of ritualized violence to the creation of a cultural identity. *Exorcising Blackness* identifies a dynamic in the ritualized violence of lynching that descends from and perverts ancient pagan rituals responding to threats from the natural world, pointing out that the “claims [of white mobs] to executions for the sake of survival of their society were fixed in a mental perception of themselves as superior to other human beings, not in a belief in the physical annihilation of their culture from natural forces (Harris 12). The latter study considers the concurrence of the rise of lynching and modernity and, also, theorizes a “cultural logic of lynching”, i.e. “a networked, systemic phenomenon indicative of trends in national culture,” that allows us to “think more broadly about why lynching emerged when it did, why it persisted for so long, and what instrumental purposes the violence served over time” (Goldsby 5). These significant works of scholarship highlight many of the important dynamics of lynching. Moreover, the rigor with which they move to circumvent a cultural resistance to understanding the true causes and consequences of lynching illustrates the interconnection of hegemonic power and structures of language that makes the cultural role of lynching so difficult to address. This critical lack of language results from the control of discourse as an integral component of “the desperate need to maintain the status quo” (Harris 8) through lynching and its role in “the normalization of lynching’s violence” (Goldsby 9). The narrative of emasculation, created by ritual lynching and castration, employed reductive stereotypes of race and gender to support and propagate a

view of white masculinity as the cultural norm, and exposing the power dynamics obscured by those oversimplified symbols requires an engaged and committed investigation.

The interconnectedness of race and gender has been part of the discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* ever since Leslie Fiedler's 1948 "Come back to Raft Ag'in Huck, Honey." However, Fiedler only pointed out a theme that united the two and did little to unpack the significance and ramifications of that connection. In "'Innocent Homosexuality': The Fieldler Thesis in Retrospect," Christopher Looby – who maintains "that Fiedler's dense, elliptical essay is one that doesn't altogether know what it is saying" (Looby 529) – makes use of post-structuralist, feminist, and race theories that were unavailable to Fiedler in order to engage the dynamic of interracial male-male bonding in a more considered manner, observing that

the interesting thing about Huck and Jim is that their relationship can't be mapped onto our late-twentieth-century system of affectional relationships, a system in which loving friendships and sexual involvement are crisply distinguished from each other, and 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' people are thought to be separate and well-defined groups (Looby 529).

Looby's open-ended comment foregrounds the oversimplification of thought in Fiedler's argument that is the by-product of a reductive and totalizing ideology. In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," Ralph Ellison responds to Fiedler in an extremely productive comment that helps to highlight the reflective structural designs of *Huckleberry Finn*, the metaphysical and ideological roots of the discourse on lynching, and Fiedler's complicit critical stance.² According to Ellison, Fiedler was "so profoundly disturbed by the manner in which the deep dichotomies symbolized by blackness and whiteness are resolved that, forgetting to look at the specific form of the novel, he leaped squarely into the middle of that tangle of symbolism which he is dedicated to unsnarling, and yelled out his most terrifying name for chaos"

(Ellison 51). Ellison's attention to chaos foregrounds the pervasive foundation of social order that is bound up with issues of race, a dynamic that undergirds the ritual lynching performance and complicates attempts to interpret its social function. More than simply indicating separate peoples, racial categories, with their emphases on degrees of development, imply a global narrative of progress that privileges European culture, inherently suggesting a sense of order and inevitable historical progression seen in such ideas as Divine Right and Manifest Destiny. Ellison's comments on race, presented in broad terms, points to the extensive reach of such symbolism, and yet, it is also the restricted consequence of Ellison's historical placement near the end of, but still within, a society controlled by the effects of lynching and constructed racial difference. Although obscured for ideological and exploitative reasons, the phenomenon of lynching, and its concurrent discourse, is at the nexus of the reductive use of coded race and gender stereotypes and involves, as Ellison implicitly identifies in his criticism, "questions of order and chaos, illusion and reality, nonentity and identity" (Ellison 52). Exposing and understanding the specific causes and consequences of lynching as a functional tool of political power is instrumental in developing a comprehensive theoretical approach to counteract the inherently obscured features of lynching as a cultural phenomenon.

Lynching's implementation as both a racial *and* a sexual form of terror is made clear by two recent studies that consider the intersections of race and gender in lynching and castration. One of the most thorough and clearly articulated analyses of the social and economic motivations hidden behind the narrative of lynching as the protection of white femininity is " 'We Must Protect Our Southern Women': On Whiteness, Masculinities and

Lynching,” by James Messerschmidt. Organized in four sections – “Slavery,” “Reconstruction,” “Lynching,” and “Race, Sexuality and the Chivalric Phallacy” – Messerschmidt’s study traces the practice of lynching from the time of slavery through Reconstruction to the establishment of the white supremacist thought that would crystallize in the era of Jim Crow. Noting records that some African American men had been acquitted of rape of white women in courts of law prior to Emancipation, Messerschmidt delineates the social, political, and economic power struggles that actually motivated lynching:

lynching was a response to the perceived erosion of white male domination that had flourished under slavery, and an attempt to recreate what white supremacist men imagined to be the loss of their unchallenged supremacy. Disguised in chivalric intimations, as retributions for the alleged rape of a white woman by an African American man, lynching enforced racial dominance as well as gender hierarchies between men and women and *gender hierarchies among men* (Messerschmidt 77, emp added.)

The “gender hierarchies among men” is an extremely significant point to Messerschmidt’s argument because it highlights the presence of a “hegemonic” white masculinity and a “subordinate” black masculinity that were intrinsically supported by the legal codes of slavery and recreated after Reconstruction through the physical *and* symbolic emasculation of castration and lynching. Recognizing and tracing the representations of multiple, and inherently unequal, masculinities will foreground the ideological implementation of difference as a means to support a Manichean world-view and enable economic and political exploitation.

A useful complement to Messerschmidt’s insights on “hegemonic” and “subordinate” masculinities is the work of Marlon Ross in “Race, Rape Castration: Feminist Theories of Sexual Violence and Masculine Strategies of Black Protest.” Ross incorporates feminist thoughts on racial violence and attempts to attend to the bifurcation of sexual and racial

violence in critical discourse, claiming that “despite our best efforts to understand the *racial* ideology at work in the sexual torture of rape, we seems always at risk of understating the *sexual* ideology of castration as a racial practice” (Ross 308). The rape of African American women during slavery and Jim Crow is easily and commonly seen as involving racial dynamics in addition to the sexual, but the castration of African American men as part of a lynching ceremony has usually been seen as a purely racial torture. Failure to acknowledge the sexual component of lynching obscures the imbrication of racial and sexual categories and makes it harder to see the full complexities of the structures of power that are engendered by the lynching event.

Ross also comments on the eroticization of blackness as taboo, “the reversible dynamic by which the social norm of aversion can flip into an impulse of attraction, by which the castrating risk of white males supremacy must provoke a fantasy of black men’s penile supremacy and by which the focus on touching other men’s sex organs, purportedly to dismember them, must turn into a panic over being attracted to them” (Ross 316). The ritual lynching performance functions as a symbolic event to represent the security of white patriarchy by arbitrarily assigning values to reductive stereotypes. The consequence of the fundamental arbitrariness of the process is a profound insecurity that requires a strict control of discourse to avoid acknowledging such insecurity. Looking past the traditional narrative of pure white femininity, black bestiality, and chivalrous white masculinity, an irrational racial hatred is seen to be a more precise cause of lynching. And yet, even this view is incomplete because it fails to expose the simultaneous attraction to the mysterious virility that is written onto black masculinity. As Ross notes, “white men’s repulsion for, and thus fascination with,

Black men's bodies, particularly the size and potency of their penises, serves as a hidden ground for U.S. practices of racial domination" (Ross 316).

Like Messerschmidt's "hegemonic" and "subordinate" masculinities, Ross's observations accentuate how the domination of African American men by white supremacists was inseparably and simultaneously racial *and* sexual. The distinction between white and black masculinities, created in the complicated and violent moment of castration, positioned black masculinity as a sexual Other, not wholly man, enabling the symbolic elevation of white masculinity. Thus, lynching was the central and most violent component of a social discourse portraying black men as less masculine, and thus less entitled to political rights, than white men. Although this rationale of racial superiority did not have the legal framework of slavery, it allowed a conception of black inferiority and the accompanying disenfranchisement to thrive well into the twentieth century.

In "The Veil Rent in Twain: Degradation and Revelation in *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*," Mary Kemp Davis uses "degradation ceremonies" as a critical lens to view *Huckleberry Finn* and makes a lot of observations that fall easily in line with a discussion of the social role of lynching and castration. Drawing on insights from Harold Garfinkel and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, she makes some generalizations about degradation ceremonies that explicate the functioning and purposes of lynching:

First of all, they are communal events, not personal vendettas, although one or more persons may act as the galvanizing forces. Second, the victim becomes a one-dimensional object of censure and scorn because he supposedly subverts communal values. Third, the victim is identified as the reverse image of the community's idealized self. Fourth, the victim is verbally excoriated or physically punished or both because he is revealed to be antisocial or debased. Finally, the ceremony implicitly reinvigorates or strengthens a faltering, or at least a vulnerable, community (Davis 81).

The psychic projection of the patriarchal American culture of the late nineteenth century seems to have made the “reverse image” into the emasculated victim of lynching. Castration, which was often part of a lynching, physically removed the bodily sign of masculinity and, as Davis’s summation of the characteristics of degradation ceremonies illustrates, the purpose of such emasculation was to reinforce the white community’s sense of its own idealized masculinity.³ While degradation ceremonies and the ritual violence of lynching did enforce an ideologically motivated emasculation, it is important to note that lynching was not the only form of emasculation, simply the most extreme and violent. Social stereotypes, particularly as displayed in minstrel shows, presented an image of African American men as emasculated and unfit for political rights. Additionally, newspapers developed a standard narrative of lynching that depicted the justified punishment of a black beast for attacking a white woman, who was represented as the epitome of purity and femininity.⁴ These social discourses revolve around the symbolic act of the ritual lynching performance and serve to extend the violent power structures of that act throughout American society.

Racist Rhetoric: Discourse and Ideological Performance

Although these theoretical ways of analyzing the operation of the racist ideology that accompanied lynching are fairly recent, the discourse of race and political rights is not new at all. Understanding the rhetoric contemporary to the novel’s composition will foreground how *Huckleberry Finn* engages with the discourse of its time. In “Reading *Huckleberry Finn*: The Rhetoric of Performed Ideology,” Steven Mailloux approaches Twain’s novel in terms of its response to contemporary ideological rhetoric and, also, presents a clear picture of the unbalanced rhetoric of the times:

By the formal end of Reconstruction in 1877, a reunited nation had turned its rhetorical attention to matters other than those that had separated the states during the Civil War. This national change of subject included the North's relative silence on the race problem, which allowed the southern states to deal with emancipated slaves on sectional rather than national terms and to roll back Reconstruction attempts to guarantee the blacks their political and civil rights. By 1885, the ideological rhetoric of white supremacy, uncontested by the North, dominated southern politics and eventually became institutionalized in state laws regulating relations between the white and black races (Mailloux 110).

It is important to expand Mailloux's observation about legal institutionalization of white supremacist rhetoric to include public thought and discourse as well. Newspapers, theater, and other forms of social conversation were also involved in the discourse of supremacist rhetoric and the enforcement of disenfranchising identities. It is important to note the role of social discourse in establishing a national consensus because, as the tensions over abolition that greatly contributed to the Civil War illustrated, a dissonance between the social consciousness and legal institutions produces social strife with the potential for manifest and physical resistance. While large numbers of Americans might have been opposed to slavery, they did accept racial hierarchy and segregation.

More than just setting the rhetorical stage for *Huckleberry Finn*, Mailloux's article explores how the novel actively responds to contemporary rhetoric of racist ideology. "To investigate the novel's rhetoric is to unfold its complicated nature as ideological performance" (Mailloux 112). Mailloux's concept of ideological performance is key because *Huckleberry Finn* does not present its stance to the issues of racial ideology in a straightforward manner. Instead, it presents information through the limited understanding of Huck as the narrator and requires the reader to make judgments.

The ideological drama of *Huckleberry Finn* relies for its success as much on the reader's participation as it does on Twain's script. The celebrated humor of the various narratives in the book – its histories, dreams, fictions, and

elaborate lies – depends on the reader’s perception of the both the fictional speaker’s purpose and the discrepancy between his tale and the “truth” as the reader understands it (Mailloux 108).

Referring to the early verbal contests between Tom and Huck, Mailloux notes that “the dialogue is more than just entertainment; it serves as part of the reader’s rhetorical training” (Mailloux 113). Tom represents and appeals to certain authorities when he talks about “ransoming” as he understands it from books, giving Huck the opportunity to judge and reject Tom’s credibility as an example to the reader. Huck and Jim’s humorous debates about Solomon and Frenchmen on the raft continue the reader’s training in rhetorical critique. In these debates, readers are required to participate in supplying the traditional reading (Solomon) and to choose the better of two technically faulty arguments (Frenchmen) in order to understand the humor involved. Moreover, Twain employs through these passages to coax the reader to participate actively with the text (Mailloux 115-117). Understanding *Huckleberry Finn*’s engagement with contemporary racial issues and ideological rhetoric is critical to bringing out the structural unity of the novel, especially the final third. Smith notes that “as a critique of American racial discourse, these concluding chapters offer a harsh coherent, and uncompromising indictment” (112). However, the social critique inherent in the closing section of the novel has been, and is still, often misunderstood because it is forced behind a mask of satire by an anxiety over efforts to reinforce a destabilized status quo.

Although the bulk of criticism has failed to take note, the structure of *Huckleberry Finn* is shaped, in part, by an active social critique of the reification of a cultural whiteness that was accomplished through the violence of lynching. Considering Twain’s attention to race across his career, Richard Lowry identified “three characteristic strategies for writing about whiteness” that Twain commonly employed: 1) make whiteness visible, 2) “deflate

pretensions to purity and reverence that underlay white supremacy by deconstructing categories of race,” and 3) “trace the conversion of explicit racial ideologies into a transparent hegemony” (57). These three strategies undergird the three distinct sections of *Huckleberry Finn*. Indeed, the third strategy that Lowry identifies is essentially a transparent, or mock, normalization and, as I will argue, corresponds to the debated final third of the novel.

Given that a cultural whiteness is constructed through the use of lynching that is racial *and* sexual, it should be no surprise that hegemonic power is controlled through stereotypes of both race and gender. In “Mark Twain and Gender,” Peter Stoneley seems to neglect the full possibilities of gender analysis in looking at Twain’s writing, claiming that “[Twain’s] masculinity was constructed in relation to a feminine other” (Stoneley 68). This formulation of masculinity implies a singular masculinity and ignores the influence of racial categories on gender identities. Stoneley continues to overlook the possibilities of gender analysis when he states that “individual men may fascinate Twain, but manhood barely exists as a subject” (Stoneley 68). On the contrary, manhood seems to be the central theme of *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain’s letters reveal he consciously approached *Huckleberry Finn* as a “book in which boys were ‘run’ into manhood” (Steinbrink 87). What Leo Marx identified as the novel’s central theme, the “quest for freedom” (Marx 53), could be refined to be the quest for freedom to be a man.

Examining the text of *Huckleberry Finn* with the aid of lynching as an interpretive metaphor will reveal the unity of the novel’s structure. Foregrounding Twain’s awareness of lynching as a crucial part of disenfranchisement will accentuate the entwined racial and

gender dynamics of lynching and the reflective symbolic emasculation that organizes the trajectory of the novel. Additionally, Mailloux's analysis of rhetorical performance and Twain's strategies of critiquing whiteness as highlighted by Lowry will facilitate a reading that illustrate the text's simultaneous function as a critique of racist ideology and a rhetorical positioning that requires readers to participate actively in that critique.

One of the clearest conjunctions of rhetoric, lynching, and masculinity in *Huckleberry Finn*, is the speech made by Colonel Sherburn to the assembled lynch mob:

The idea of *you* lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a *man*! Because you're brave enough to tar and feather poor friendless cast-out women that come along here, did that make you think you had the grit enough to lay your hands on a *man*? Why, a *man*'s safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—as long as it's daytime and you're not behind him. (Twain 158, emp. orig.).

Admittedly, Twain uses italics throughout the novel to communicate excitement or expressive speech patterns, but when Colonel Sherburn's speech has "man" italicized three times in one paragraph, the typeset is perhaps more significant than simply trying to represent dialect. "Man" is italicized three more times before Colonel Sherburn is done and the lynch mob disperses. Colonel Sherburn is able to disrupt this would-be degradation ceremony by presenting himself as assertively masculine and the crowd as emasculated, which undermines the ideological purpose of the lynching event and renders it pointless. By the time this incident occurs in chapter twenty-two, Twain has led readers through various instances where they have been required to incorporate outside information in order to appreciate the novel's humor. Here, Huck reports the event and relates Colonel Sherburn's words without commentary. Twain uses the word "man," repeatedly italicized, to prompt the reader to notice the role that masculinity plays in lynching and to consider the ways in which

the conventional presentation of lynch mobs differs from Colonel Sherburn's description of them as "a hundred masked cowards" (Twain 158). In this episode, Twain further highlights masculinity with italics when Colonel Sherburn calls the instigator, Buck Harkness, "*half* a man" and "*part* of a man" (158). These comments contribute to the reversal of the degradation ceremony by emasculating Buck Harkness. Significantly, this is not the only Buck in the novel; only four chapters earlier Huck was staying with Buck Grangerford. This repeated name is only one small connection out of many elaborate but subtle connections that run throughout the novel and give it a cohesive unity.

For much of the novel's critical history, the narrative has been seen in terms of thirds: the opening section around Hannibal, the river section, and the closing section on the Phelps Farm. Critical commentary often makes a strong distinction between the river section and the closing section, asserting that the latter is flawed or an evasion on Twain's part. There are two compatible ways of viewing the three sections of the novel that unite the narrative in a coherent design. The first employs the theoretical understanding of the role that lynching and emasculation played in the reinstatement of white male superiority after Reconstruction to reveal a system of pervasive historical symbolism in the text that reflects the shifting racial dynamics of the late nineteenth century. The second uses insights of rhetorical purpose to illustrate how the three sections correspond directly to Twain's three strategies of critiquing whiteness as identified by Lowry. The second reading will be most effective after a series of close readings reveals the pervasive historical symbolism and sets the stage for the novel's engagement with contemporary racial ideology.

Reflections of Masculinity: A System of Symbolic Historical Corollaries

The first unifying reading of the text traces historical symbolism to reveal a progression that parallels the course of American history. Thus, the three sections correlate approximately with slavery, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction, or what would become the Jim Crow era. This pattern underlying the novel is clearest in the trajectory of Jim's character in the novel. In the opening third, Jim is presented comically as the emasculated minstrel stereotype, reflecting the institutionalized subordination of black masculinity under slavery. On the river, Jim's character dramatically develops, portraying what critics almost universally agree is a fitting portrayal of the humanity of African Americans. The growing masculinity that Jim achieves on the river reflects the embracing by African American men of the political, social, and economics rights that had been associated with hegemonic masculinity and denied to them under slavery. Jim's return to a minstrel caricature in the final third of the novel has provided problems for readers and critics alike and has prompted allegations that Twain lost control of his own narrative or that he was unable to transcend his ingrained racism. In actuality, Jim's emasculation in the final third reflects the rampant emasculation of African American men through lynching and castration in the decades following the end of Reconstruction.

Twain envisioned an overarching trajectory to his historical symbolism, but while his beginning and his ending points emerge clearly, other elements of historical symbolism appear in accordance with the flow of the narrative rather than a rigid structure of allegory. Critics Elaine and Harry Mensh observed that "In *Huckleberry Finn*, slavery seems fixed,

permanent, while everything else is in flux, transitory. Identities mutate as if in a dream, or nightmare” (57). While their statement blurs the movement of the narrative a bit, their point is essentially valid. The ambiguous positioning of some of the elements of historical symbolism in the middle section of the novel prompts their misinterpretation of slavery as ever-present. However, the reinstatement of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities through lynching, represented in the final third of the novel, created a racial power structure that was almost identical to the world of slavery except that it was not enforced legally but through violence. After the Civil War, African Americans moved to consolidate political rights and managed quite a bit of progress in twelve years. The campaign of violence that returned American society to the hierarchies of slavery must have seemed very much like a nightmare.

The rolling back of the political rights achieved by African Americans during Reconstruction was not an accidental or a passive process. Disenfranchisement was enforced through emasculation that was enacted both violently through lynching and symbolically through minstrel shows. These were the strategies by which a threatened white patriarchy attempted to regain and sustain power that had been lost with the overturning of legal slavery. Consequently, the fluctuations of Jim’s masculinity can be usefully analyzed in relation to the figures of white masculinity in the novel.

The feud between the Sherpherdsons and the Grangerfords is an excellent illustration of Twain’s use of suggestive historical symbolism rather than strict historical allegory, enabling the feud to serve a double function. It provides a figurative representation for the Civil War itself, but it also reflects the use of violence to regulate identities in a culture of

honor. While Huck stays with the Grangerfords, Jim is displaced to margin. He is represented as having nothing to do with the bloody conflict, just as the Civil War was presented as being fought over state's rights rather than slavery. However, neither family is strongly associated with either the Union or the Confederacy, and the feud relates equally to the use of violence in the society of honor that existed in the South before the Civil War. Granger is an antiquated term for farmer, and combined with obvious allusion to shepherds, they represent the Old South as agrarian, classic, and possibly mythic. Lowry comments on the role that honor played in the regulation of racial identity; "In a world of impure lineages, honor both supports and displaces the regulation of blood: only the unsmirched may make a claim to honor, but only the honorable may make a claim to pure blood" (Lowry 62). Under slavery, issues of mixed blood were easily settled by legal clauses that passed the status of the mother onto the child. Without legal support, the regulation of miscegenation became more and more violent as white men tried to maintain their position at the pinnacle of the social order. Given the use of lynching as a tool to reinstate power structures of the Old South, it is not surprising that Twain uses the name Buck to connect the lynching instigator with the feuding culture of honor.

Although his interactions with Jim are minimal and despite Huck's statements to the contrary, Pap provides an archetype of whiteness (Lowry 58). Pap's racial views are made blatantly apparent in his tirade against the free black from Ohio. As Lowry notes this dynamic responds to both gender and race. "For Pap, though, it is not just a matter of manhood; his rights are due to his whiteness as well" (Lowry 58). Lowry further explicates the power structures at play in Pap's character, saying "[his] need to 'boss' anticipates both

the haughty challenge of Colonel Sherburn to the lynch mob and the self-serving machinations of Tom Sawyer” (Lowry 58). Sherburn’s challenge and Tom Sawyer’s efforts in the final third both serve the purpose of emasculating an Other and reaffirming of self. In observing this connection, Lowry reveals a racial power relation that was recast through violence after the collapse of Reconstruction and which Twain highlights across the sections of the novel.

David Smith claims that “Pap’s indignation at the Negro’s right to vote is precisely analogous to the southern backlash against enfranchisement of Afro-Americans during Reconstruction” (107). Again the ambiguous placement of historical symbolisms leads to a slight critical misreading. It is true that Pap’s anger is an expression of a worldview that displaces the cause of white masculine inadequacy onto African American masculinity, where white masculinity is made to appear more secure through the suppression of black masculinity – a dynamic at the heart of lynching as degradation ceremony. However, the ways in which the King and the Duke, and later Tom Sawyer, infringe on Jim’s developing masculinity make them more precise corollaries to the backlash against African American advancement. Pap’s placement in the first third of the novel partially associates him with white masculinity under slavery, and significantly, one of the first instance where Jim plays the role of father for Huck, signaling his growth of character, is when he encounters Pap’s dead body.

On the raft, Huck wishes for a country without kings, that is, without a structure of imposed authority. “At least for a short time in the novel, the raft is that country, as America might have been, but it is no longer so when the Duke and King arrive and establish their

microcosmic aristocracy” (Oehlschlager 121). The Duke and the King are the two most prominent conmen in the novel, who lie and deceive for personal and economic benefit. The King and the Duke, reflect the white supremacist elements that resisted the advance of African Americans during and after Reconstruction. Through their projected identities, which construct a self-created importance similar to the notion of white superiority, the “Duke and Dauphin comically echo Pap’s sense of dispossession” (Lowry 58). Like Pap, the King and Duke project their anxieties outward and show no conscience about exploiting any advantage for economic gain. Significantly, the King and the Duke, as Mensh and Mensh note, only have status by virtue of their white skin (Mensh 62). While some critics have attempted to depict the raft on the river as a world free of social restrictions, the King and the Duke have instant authority based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy.

When they enter the narrative, Jim’s freedom on the raft is drastically curtailed. The initial life of freedom that Huck and, especially, Jim find on the raft “is surely idyllic compared to what it becomes when the two con men, the king/dauphin and the duke, arrive” (Mensh 62). Jim finds himself tied up on the raft while Huck accompanies the King and the Duke ashore in search of economic exploitation. Mensh and Mensh point out that when the King and the Duke show up “fantasized identities mushroom” (62). The attention to “fantasized identities” is key because it was through the traditional lynching narrative and enforced fictions of identity that the freedoms of African Americans were constricted after Reconstruction. Again, the textual details reveal a reflection of the interrelation between disenfranchisement and masculinity in the figures of *Huckleberry Finn*. Separate from being tied up, Jim is emasculated through the “sick arab” costume. The calico dress and painted

face present a “grotesque feminization” and horse whiskers evoke supposed animalism and its associated “brutal and licentious traits [that] the slaveowners attributed to blacks” (Mensh 67). Although they do not connect Jim’s emasculation with the widespread violence of lynching, Mensh and Mensh do note that “Jim’s changes of identities are imposed on him by whites” (66). Huck dreams of a country without kings, but when they arrive, he is merely inconvenienced not ideologically re-identified as Jim is.

As Jim’s companion and also a white male, Huck plays a crucial role in the unfolding system of historical symbolism. A possible historical corollary to Huck’s role in the novel would be the societal elements of white liberalism. Through slavery and Reconstruction, white liberalism advocated for abolition and civil rights for African Americans, but as Reconstruction collapsed few white liberals were ready or willing to advocate for full racial equality.

Notably, the King and the Duke are not outright invaders; “it is Huck who rescues them from the townspeople pursuing them and brings them aboard the raft” (Mensh 62). Huck’s relationship with the King and the Duke is complicated; he initially welcomes them and is enchanted by their claims to royalty, but he quickly becomes disillusioned with them. Huck’s shifting opinion of the King and the Duke is revealed through his representation of them to the reader. “Many of the episodes that occur on the voyage down the river, after he is joined by the Duke and the King (whose fancies about themselves are akin to the kind of fancy that Tom Sawyer enjoys) are in the themselves farcical; and if it were not for the presence of Huck as the reporter of them, they would be no more than farce” (Eliot 45). Eliot’s point about Huck’s reporting of the events elevating them above farce is interesting,

but it begs the question: does Huck's reporting of the closing section elevate Tom Sawyer's antics above farce? According to Marx, and other critics, "the most serious motives in the novel, Jim's yearning for freedom, is made the object of nonsense. The conclusion, in short, is farce, but the rest of the novel is not" (Marx 53). It seems that the closing section is commonly viewed as farce because Huck becomes a direct actor and does not present any critical distance in his reporting that would allow him to critique Tom as he critiques the King and the Duke.

The fact that Huck is critical of the Duke and the King but not Tom, who he sees as a respectable member of society and as an authority figure, reveals that a major shift has occurred in Huck's character. "Twain reveals in this final section of the novel the true nature of the (un)reconstructed South as represented by Tom Sawyer. Although Huck Finn is no longer the same Huck we met at the novel's beginning, Tom is the same Tom" (Chadwick-Joshua 118). It is true that Huck is not the same Huck of the beginning of the novel. However, what most critics and readers overlook is that Huck, like Jim, experiences character growth *and* regression. Thus, Eliot claims that "[Huck] is more powerful than his world, because he is more *aware* than any other person in it" (Eliot 45). This is true with the King and the Duke, who Huck recognizes as fakes even when Jim does not; but in the closing episode, Huck and Jim alike are hoodwinked by Tom. Chadwick-Joshua points out that "Huck resumes his secondary, supporting role" (115). Marx conveys the same sentiment, saying "Huck regresses to the subordinate role in which he had first appeared" (Marx 53). However, it is critical to point out that Huck has regressed beyond the start of *Huckleberry Finn* to his truly flat character of *Tom Sawyer*. In the opening section of *Huckleberry Finn*,

Huck quickly tires of Tom's games and fictions, but in the closing section, he follows along, meek and content. It is significant that he takes Tom's name upon arrival at the Phelps' farm in the novel's closing sequence, an event that Huck describes "like being born again" (Twain 237). He has become Tom's ideological doppelganger. In doing so, he abandons his identity of the river section, the mature Huck that made the declaration to "go to hell" for Jim's sake. Davis notes the importance of the Wilks episode in projecting "Huck as a hero" and also revealing "that in a world of deception and sham emotions, at least one person *is* what he seems to be" (Davis 86). However, by the time he arrives at the Phelps' farm, he has regressed. Huck relinquishes his agency and looks to Tom for direction. He only half-heartedly considers a plan for Jim's escape because he "knewed very well where the right plan was going to come from," i.e. Tom (Twain 247). In the Phelps episode, according to Chadwick-Joshua, "the dominant figure and the dominant culture dominate" (119). The emphasis on dominant and domination highlights that the character relations, particularly how Jim is dominated by various white males, reflect the implementation of cultural power through coded identities. Also, the similarity between the adjective form and the verb form accentuates that it is an action of domination, usually violence and lynching, which creates the dominant identities of society.

In failing to critique Tom Sawyer, Huck becomes complicit and contributes to the silence that is required for the stability of constructed black and white identities. "Huck's references to the 'style' and danger in Tom's plan and to Tom's 'bulliness' are significant because these aspects of the plan conceal Tom's real purpose" (Nilon 68). Tom's real purpose is self-serving and reflective of the cultural forces that sought stability and political

control through the emasculation of African American men. “Tom, a representative of the (un)reconstructed South, barely sees or hears Jim as a real person” (Chadwick-Joshua 125). While Huck was able to recognize and critique the selfish impulses of the King and the Duke, he is swayed by his closer association with Tom and accepts an authority that he previously rejected. This trajectory has a historical corollary in the failure of white liberalism to oppose racial inequality after an initial challenge of racial injustice in the form of slavery. “Huck is perplexed by the absurdity of freeing a ‘nigger’ who is already legally free, but he does not—indeed cannot—see the fundamentally absurdity that Clemens has prepared his readers to see. Huck should be asking Tom what gives him the right to set free a man whose freedom is already a matter of God-given natural right” (Oehlschlager 120). Huck’s failure reflects the capitulation of white liberalism and the successful reinstitution of racial hierarchies founded on stratified masculinities.

Twain’s system of symbolism reflects the historical dynamics of racial politics as they progressed in steps over many years. Thus, Jim’s and Huck’s characters both grow *and* regress gradually, and not necessarily at the same rate, rather than at any specific point or event. The gradual shift in Jim’s character from man back into minstrel caricature has allowed some critics to make cases for his enduring humanity within the closing section. Nilon sees Jim’s placing of “Tom’s care above his own freedom” as “a choice that affirms his humanity” (Nilon 73). There is some merit to this assessment, but it should be noted that this would be Jim’s last act of masculine (i.e. protective) agency before he becomes the fully subservient stereotype again. “He appears after he is paid, to have forgotten the discomfort and lack of respect that were forced on him. It is of crucial importance that he appears also to

have forgotten his interests in the condition of his wife and children” (Nilon 74). Chadwick-Johnson attempts to make a similar redemptive interpretation of Jim, claiming that “if, as opponents assert, the sound of Jim’s voice is diminished, it is not because the character fades but because the hope and promise of Reconstruction failed.” (Chadwick-Joshua 133). The character *does* fade, but this is an explicit technique of the narrative to represent the failure of Reconstruction in terms of masculinity and agency, the factors represented in the lynching event that were used for racial control to erode the advancements of Reconstruction.

The pervasive historical symbolisms that run throughout the novel reveal that, while not a true allegory, *Huckleberry Finn* is organized to reflect the trajectory of American history in terms of race, particularly the construction of stratified masculinities. In this reading, the three sections of the novel, which are commonly regarded separately, are shown to be linked parts of a deliberate implementation of clear plan by Twain.

Reflections of Whiteness: A System of Rhetorical Critique

A second way to understand the unity of the novel is to see it as a progressive framework crafted to elicit reader participation and encourage an active critique. The three sections are both Twain’s recursive strategies of critique as highlighted by Richard Lowry and the incremental stages of the reader’s rhetorical training. The first section, then, corresponds to Twain’s efforts to make whiteness visible as Huck provides examples of rhetorical critique. In the middle section, Twain “deflate[s] pretensions to purity and reverence that underlay white supremacy by deconstructing categories of race” (Lowry 57), and Huck provides the setup for the reader to practice rhetorical critiques. The final section of the novel, “trace[s] the conversion of explicit racial ideologies into a transparent

hegemony” (Lowry 57); Huck has now become the subject for the reader’s rhetorical critique. Thus, while the sections may appear distinct, they each build upon the previous to develop Twain’s subtle social critique and evoke critical thought.

In the first section of the novel, Huck not only reports events and speech but also provides his opinions of what is said. Moreover, he clearly regards his own judgment as sufficient support for action, such as his decision to quit playing games with Tom. “So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer’s lies. I reckon he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday school” (Twain 23). The verbs of this passage – “judged,” “reckon he believed,” and “think different” – reveal an active rhetorical critique of Tom’s assumed authority by Huck. This and other instances early in the novel are casually humorous allowing the reader to appreciate Huck’s voice and approach to the world around him. A similarly obvious, but more consequential, rhetorical critique occurs in Huck’s commentary on his father. Pap’s evident and overstated racial tirade against the “free nigger... from Ohio” (Twain 36) allows Twain to shift the focus of the rhetorical critique toward racist ideology and to foreground whiteness. Pap, according to Lowry, “sets the tone for Twain’s most compelling exploration of whiteness, particularly as it formed around a core of male anger” (57). Huck describes Pap as “agoing on so” (Twain 37) implying his opinion of Pap’s speech as irrelevant. In the midst of his rant, Pap stumbles over the tub of salt pork. Afterwards his diatribe continued “mostly hove at the nigger and the govment, though he give the tub some, too, all along, here and there” (Twain 37). In this scene, the reader and Huck alike are aware of the humor of Pap’s tendency to direct his anger outwards against whatever may be in front of him.

Moving into the river section of the narrative, Twain continues to present scenes that provide opportunities for rhetorical critique. However, he has now shifted Huck's relation to these situations, so that, readers are forced to supply outside information or their own critique. The rhetorical critiques before this chapter occur fully within Huck's voice, but here in the Solomon and Frenchmen debates there is no joke unless the reader supplies the traditional reading of the Solomon story or the logical argument that there is more than one way to talk like a man. Huck assumes victory, saying, "I see it warn't no use wasting words—you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit" (Twain 92). However, the reader is aware that Jim's argument is more technically sound. Huck's assertion that "you can't learn a nigger to argue" is revealed to be an unfounded response to Jim's actual argumentative victory. Accompanying the continued rhetorical training of the reader is Twain's attempt to undermine stereotypes of racial categories (e.g. Jim superior skills of argumentation). To this end, the middle section also includes multiple shifting identities, Huck's realization that Jim loved his family as much as white people, his apology to Jim for the "trash" incident, and both his internal debates that weigh what he ought to do concerning Jim and slavery. Up until this point in the narrative, most readers and critics succeed in following Twain's rhetorical moves and realizing the ways in which he shows racial categories to be inadequate.

The closing third of the novel far from being a technical failure on Twain's part is, perhaps, the novel's finest section. The fact that the final section has so often been read as a failure is partially because the presentational shifts that Twain makes moving into the closing sequence, both in terms of rhetorical purpose and the critique of whiteness, are extremely subtle and require knowledge of historical context, close reading, and possibly some

theoretical understandings of structurally created identities of race and gender. Peaches Henry notes that “having thus tantalized readers with the prospect of harmonious relations between white and black, Twain seems to turn on his characters and his audience” (36). The shift in Twain’s characters has already been described as a response to historical patterns, but the withdrawal of Huck as rhetorical coach could easily be misread as an abandonment of audience. Henry expounds on the ending in noting that “Reader’s discomfort with the ‘evasion’ sequence results from discrepancies between Huck and Jim who grow in stature on the raft and the imposters who submit to Tom” (36). Both the “reader’s discomfort” and the “discrepancies,” it seems to me, are part of a subtle attempt to instigate a rhetorical critique.

The discrepancies are obvious enough to notice, and readers who follow the rhetorical training of the novel will continue to critique the rhetorical performances within the text. “Either during or after reading the farce, they must realize that something is wrong, that there *is* a problem with the ending, one that the text will not help solve” (Mailloux 129). When Huck acquiesces to Tom, saying “if it’s in the regulations, and he’s got to have it, all right, let him have it; because I don’t wish to go back on no regulations” (Twain 254), readers should stop and consider the situation and other factors that might lead Huck to say something so opposed to his earlier views. Marx stated that he had “found only a handful [of students] who did not confess their dissatisfaction with the extravagant mock rescue of Nigger Jim and the denouement itself” (50). Continuing, he notes “the slapstick tone jars with the underlying seriousness of the voyage” (Marx 52). Readers intuitively realize something is wrong with the way Huck acts in the final action, and they recognize the contrast to earlier parts of the

novel. And yet, so many have failed to perform the rhetorical critique that the novel has instructed them to make.

The reason for this failure may have something to do with a cultural silence that is created by and required for the bifurcation of racial identities. “The logic –the rationalizations– that some of Twain’s southern contemporaries used to support the political suppression of black people was not only a logic that permitted the South to justify what it was doing in whatever ways it chose, but also a logic that would not bear close examination” (Nilon 71). Marx believed that the “ending of *Huckleberry Finn* makes so many readers uneasy because they rightly sense that it jeopardizes the significance of the entire novel” (Marx 51). On the contrary, there is every likelihood that the uneasiness evoked in readers is produced because this section of Twain’s novel implicitly violates a required silence in acknowledging that, rather than being natural, white superiority is arbitrarily created through a system of violence.

On top of this complicated rhetorical performance, the final third enacts a mock normalization of white superiority as a hegemonic value. In this move, Twain takes values that have been undermined previously in the text and restores them to their culturally created positions of authority. Doing this, Twain hopes that readers will not only see the workings of that process of normalization but also realize that a similar process has shaped the cultural values that they take for granted everyday. The doctor and the lynch mob, as Chadwick-Joshua observes, “represent the destructive and hypocritical Southern mindset that Jim and Huck have encountered in symposium down the river” (130). And yet, in this final section

they are positioned as authority figures. The purpose of this juxtaposition is to lead readers to realize that such sources of authority are not naturally valid.

One of the most abrupt and problematic – for readers – revelations of the closing action is Miss Watson’s freeing of Jim. “Had Clemens given this episode dramatic emphasis appropriate to its function, Miss Watson’s bestowal of freedom upon Jim would have proclaimed what the rest of the ending actually accomplishes – a vindication of the persons and attitudes Huck and Jim had symbolically repudiated when they set forth downstream” (Marx 52). Marx’s comment is interesting for two reasons. It calls attention to the fact that the end *appears to* validate forces that had been repudiated, and it notes that Miss Watson’s role in that is unconvincing. In this instance of Miss Watson, readers have an easier time following the training in critical engagement with rhetorical performances to judge that Miss Watson’s action is insincere and does not really nullify her earlier desire to sell Jim down the river. However, readers and critics seemed to have failed to connect Miss Watson’s problematic textual redemption to a possible historical corollary. While former slave owners were exonerated regardless of sincerity or continued racism, readers view Miss Watson’s parallel trajectory as unbelievable.

Attempting to present a transparent creation of hegemony mirroring the actual institutionalization of supremacist ideology, Twain developed intricate approaches to rhetorical performance and critiques of hegemonic values. The incremental nature of his adopted schema provided Twain with an organizational structure. Combined with the elements of historical symbolism, the social critique and rhetorical trainings reveal *Huckleberry Finn* to have a complicated but comprehensive unity.

The Final Third: An Insightful and United Critique

Ultimately, the insights that Twain built into the final section would turn out to be startlingly true. This is particularly striking with Tom, who works hard to keep the already free Jim from freedom for as long as he can, all the while, pretending to be working towards his freedom, and who “said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it. He said that in that way it could be strung out to as much as eighty year, and would be best time on record” (Twain 262). Published in 1885, the eighty years that Tom predicts correspond eerily with the Jim Crow period; in 1965, in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, the system of racial segregation created through the violence of lynching still restricted the political agency of African Americans. Throughout the length of Jim Crow, lynching and emasculation continued to be used to enforce racial hierarchies and reinvigorate an uncertain white community. Trilling asserts that the closing section is “too long” and “a falling-off, as almost anything would have to be, from the incidents of the river” (90). In light of the historical trends that inspired Twain’s fictional representation, this statement seems rather coarse. The Jim Crow period was a falling off from the freedoms of Reconstruction, and it was too long. But that is the fault of American culture not Mark Twain.

The reputation of the final third of *Huckleberry Finn* as flawed has become so common as to escape the realm of criticism and become almost consensus. I have posited the system of historical corollaries and the progressive schema of rhetorical training as contexts to understand how that final section rather than being out of control or evidence of engrained

racism is designed by Twain as part of a comprehensive structure. Given the importance of the final third to critical estimation of the novel, it is worth taking the time to examine some of the textual figures that tie the final third back to the earlier sections. The clearest connections that illuminate the structural unity of the final third are figurative degradation ceremonies, the calico dress, forty dollars, and undiscerning cons, but many more subtle connections exist.

Mary Kemp Davis employs her formulation of degradation ceremonies to reveal the strong connections between the events on the Phelps' farm and those involving the Wilks. "The Wilks episode is intricately linked to the Phelps episode on the levels of plot and theme. Both episodes contain verbal denunciations of supposed miscreants and end with the dissipation of physical violence. Also, both episodes exploit the revelatory tendencies inherent in the degradation ceremony" (Davis 85). Also, in both cases, violence is only averted because of money. The bag of gold in the coffin allows the King, the Duke, and Huck to escape, and the lynch mob at the Phelps' stops short of lynching Jim for fear that they would have to pay his owner. The centrality of economic concerns reflects the consideration of material resources that (although obscured) was part of the drama of lynching. Moreover, the extensive similarities of these episodes highlight the difference in Huck's character. While he goes to great lengths to help the Wilks sisters and save them from falling prey to the King and the Duke, he fails to make similar efforts for Jim in the closing sequence.

In "Run, Nigger, Run: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a Slave Narrative," Harold Beaver points out that both the sick arab ploy and Tom's escape plan force Jim into a calico

dress. Beaver highlights how this small detail of costuming reveals more complicated relations, saying that “Tom had merely repeated the Duke’s and the Dauphin’s vindictive triumph, of degrading Jim from a black slave to an exotic transvestite madman” (Beaver 353). The use of the calico dress as a method of emasculation by the King and the Duke, the infringing conmen of the river section, and Tom, the re-imposed authority of the final section, position these figures as analogous to the oppressive efforts of white supremacist that worked to enforce the limits of black masculinity.

The recurrence of the amount of forty dollars is yet another thread that ties the final third into the novel’s larger narrative and accentuates that section’s figurative reflection of the social repression that would crystallize as the policies of the Jim Crow period. The number forty not only evokes the forty acres and a mule that was considered, but ultimately rejected, as a means to provide ex-slaves with some economic basis and compensate for the injustices of slavery but also points back to earlier sections of the novel. While on the river, Huck and Jim evenly split the forty dollars that the slave hunters pay Huck to ease their guilt over abandoning his supposedly sick family. The King sells Jim for forty dollars when he is still thought to be a slave, and Tom pays Jim forty dollars “for conforming to the institutionalized fiction of himself as the patient, docile, and long-suffering slave” (Oehlschlager 121). The egalitarian splitting of the money by Huck and Jim on the river highlights, by contrast, the similarity of the other two incidents. The King receives forty dollars in exchange for a slave, an objectified piece of property, and Tom pays Jim forty dollars for his acquiescence in playing the culturally expected role of a subordinate masculinity.

As the culminating representation of white masculinity, Tom's character is connected back to various earlier textual figures. "Despite all his boyish pranks, Tom represents a kind of solid respectability – a younger version of the southern gentleman as exemplified by the Grangerfords and Sherperdsons" (Smith 114). This characterization is supported through emblems of time. In the very last paragraph of the novel, Tom is described as "always seeing what time it is" (Twain 307) on a watch around his neck. Tom also keeps his bullet on that chain, an emblem of violence that accompanies the imposed order represented in the watch. The Grangerfords also have a clock displayed prominently on their mantle of which they were "inordinately proud" (Oehlschlager 124). "Their lives, and that of Tom Sawyer, are ordered not by the continuous flow of nature that governs Huck and Jim's life on the raft but by artificial social institutions and values that themselves depend upon the central fiction of time conceived as a mechanical system of measurement represented by the workings of the clock" (Oehlschlager 125). Oehlschlager underscores the fiction of the very idea of time, the foundation for cultural narratives of progress including the belief that certain races were more developed (i.e. over time) than others. Tom's associations with imposed (and fictional) order and with the feuding culture of honor highlight his role in the final third of the novel as the reflection of a re-empowered and exploitive white masculinity. Additionally, Peter Stoneley points out that Tom's "point of reference" (71) is always an aunt (the morphographic similarity of the names of Tom's aunts – Polly and Sally – is another subtle connection that ties the novel's ending back to the beginning). The feminine figure at the center of Tom's relationship to the world is an analogue of the constructed ideal of pure white femininity that is central to the traditional narrative of lynching.

The details of the parallel degradation ceremonies, the calico dress, the recurring forty dollars, and linked figures of masculinity illustrate that the final third was attentively crafted to connect back to the early sections of the novel. These details in the closing section support the claim that Twain crafted the different sections as both the reflections of the historical trajectory of African American rights as they were eroded by the rise of lynching and as an incremental scheme of rhetorical training to coax the reader to take a closer look at the normalization of white patriarchy. These complementary designs are also foregrounded by the revisions that Twain made in finalizing his manuscript.

Revising the Manuscript: Tightening the Design

Twain may not have had a direction or a purpose when he set his manuscript aside in 1876, but after witnessing the political regression that followed the collapse of Reconstruction in 1877, he returned to *Huckleberry Finn* with renewed vigor and a clear plan. The 1876 manuscript ends shortly after Huck and Jim miss the turn to freedom at Cairo in a dense fog when a steamboat runs over the raft, dumping the pair into the river. If Twain returned to the story of Huck and Jim with a clear plan, one could reasonably expect the novel to follow a logical and coherent structural pattern after this episode. Chapters twelve through fourteen are inserted into what was originally the 1876 manuscript as a way to integrate the early section with the later parts of the narrative created after 1879. Not part of his original draft, these chapters – added to tie the opening to the ending and to facilitate the reader's training in rhetorical critique – accentuate the novel's structure as a reflection of Twain's design after his return to *Huckleberry Finn* in 1879.

Chapter fourteen presents the debates on Solomon and the Frenchman, which have already been noted as key elements in Twain's efforts to train the reader in rhetorical critique. Chapter fourteen is a pivotal point in the narrative unity as rhetorical training because the rhetorical critiques before this point involve Huck's judgments, but these two debates require the reader to become involved for the humor to work. Although neither Huck nor Jim are aware of it, the traditional interpretation of the Solomon parable is well known, and the contrast between the reader's knowledge and the character's is what makes this anecdote humorous. When both Huck and Jim make false suppositions about why a Frenchman does not speak like them, the reader is required to judge the result. By adding this chapter, Twain has started to elicit reader participation in anticipation of the final third, where Huck disappears entirely as critical narrator and becomes an actor to be critiqued.

Chapters twelve and thirteen are concerned with the incidents involving the wrecked steamboat, the *Walter Scott*. Added after Twain wrote *A Life on the Mississippi* this episode is clearly connected to what Twain described in that text as the "Sir Walter Disease." The clearest embodiment of the "Sir Walter Disease" is Tom Sawyer, whose faith in Romanticism is inextricably linked to his racial exploitation. The steamboat *Walter Scott* and Tom Sawyer as embodiment of the "Sir Walter Disease" create a connection between the first and the last third of the novel. Moreover, this connection is thematic as well as structural. Twain asserted that if it were not for the "Sir Walter Disease" the character of the Southerner

would be wholly modern, in place of modern and medieval mixed, and the South would be a generation further advanced than it is. ...It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a major or a colonel, or a general or a judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen

value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them. Enough is laid on slavery, without fathering upon it these creations and contributions of Sir Walter (Twain *Life* 375-6).

Twain identifies the “reverence of rank and caste” associated with the romanticism of Walter Scott as a major hindrance to the social progress of the South. “In describing the cult of honor as disease of the imagination, Twain here stresses the sheer irrationality of Southern ways, a perspective that frames the bloody feud in *Huckleberry Finn*” (Lowry 62). In his article, Lowry expounds on the “Sir Walter Disease” further, pointing to its connection with obfuscation, rituals of honor, and efforts to fortify whiteness. On the *Walter Scott*, the dark and stormy wreck, where depraved white men debate murder for economic gain, Huck evokes Tom Sawyer three times, wishing that he was there or imagining how he would act and Jim is “so scared he hardly had any strength left” (Twain 82). Jim is scared because this riverboat and Tom Sawyer’s actions in the final third of the novel are analogous to the threat to African Americans in the Jim Crow period. These textual figures are the embodiment of the “Sir Walter Disease,” Twain’s attempt to theorize the cultural dynamics that would allow the resurgence of racial domination that Twain witnessed in his later life.

Along with parallel degradation ceremonies, the calico dress, forty dollars, and intricate connections tying Tom to earlier figures of white masculinity, the inserted *Walter Scott* episode reveals that the final sequence of the novel is conceived of as inextricably linked to the overarching narrative and presented as such. Although numerous textual details connect the riverboat incident with the closing sequence, one key difference is Huck’s reaction. In the closing sequence, Huck unquestionably takes part in a symbolic emasculation and oppression of Jim. On the *Walter Scott*, Huck’s quick wits ensure Jim’s safe escape and

his boundless compassion even moves him to arrange a rescue for the murders. On the *Walter Scott*, Huck imagines himself as Tom Sawyer, but he has not yet become Tom and taken his name. This inserted episode is an often overlooked passage that highlights Huck's ultimate breakdown in the closing sequence when he fails to protect and Jim or live up to his own potential from the river section.

In addition to the added chapters, other details of Twain's editing emphasize a design that is conscious of the fate of African Americans after the failure of Reconstruction. In "*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: The Growth from Manuscript to Novel*," Victor Doyno carefully traces alterations from manuscript to final typeset to reveal one instance where Twain made a telling exception to Jim's pattern of speech. Contrary to most of his changes, which were made to enhance the dialect and impression of character voice, Twain changed the dialectical "nvvver" of the manuscript to the Standard English "never" that appeared in the final text. Because of this change, Jim says "never" twice in a single paragraph, an occurrence that Doyno connects with the repeated "Never, never, never, never, never" at the end of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This allusion is also supported by the changing of Jim's forced costume from that of King Richard in the manuscript to King Lear in the final text. Doyno notes many textual features of the Wilks episode –three orphan daughters, issues of inheritance, a storm scene, a trial scene, and the revelation of a body – that are parallels of *King Lear* (Doyno 116). Clearly, Huck would never recognize this, but the reader could and, perhaps, should. Remembering that Davis highlights the parallels of the Wilks episode and the closing Phelps episode in terms of degradation ceremonies and Beaver's observation that

the recurring calico dress of Jim's King Lear costume enacts an emasculation of Jim, it seems that Twain has presented the closing sequence as the tragedy of Jim.

Twain's attention to masculinity, and its role in racial domination, is presented structurally in *Huckleberry Finn* through Jim's growth from minstrel to man and his forced regression to minstrel. This trajectory reflects the fate of African American in the course American history as they were simultaneously disenfranchised and emasculated through the violent act of lynching. Twain was certainly aware of this unfortunate dynamic and the role that masculinity played in it. Writing to the dean of Yale Law school in the same year that *Huckleberry Finn* was published, Twain wrote "We have ground the manhood out of... [black men] & the shame is ours, not theirs; and we should pay for it" (qtd. in McDowell). Acknowledging the historical context of the rise of lynching and racist ideology and incorporating theoretical perspectives of lynching, masculinity, and rhetorical performance reveal that Twain constructed *Huckleberry Finn* around a key set of interests. Twain's plan was intended to present both a clear critique of racial hegemony and a guide to prompt readers to make a similar critique for themselves.

In 1876, Twain had a manuscript that was already shaping up to be more than just a boy's book. However, he was forced to set it aside because it lacked a clear direction or compelling motivation. As he watched the social upheavals that followed the collapse of Reconstruction in 1877, he found an inspiration that would give his novel form. Drawing on theories of race, gender, and violence informs some of the more subtle reflections of Twain's text and allows *Huckleberry Finn* to live up to its full potentiality. Because Twain was attempting to focus attention on dynamics that were actively suppressed within hegemonic

discourse his efforts have been subject to easy misinterpretation. By trying to expose unspoken elements, by presenting figures that were “off the map” of social patterns, *Huckleberry Finn* requires an active effort on the part of the reader to understand the issues of racial domination that Twain was attempting to critique. The substantial efforts to train the reader in rhetorical critique within the novel suggest that Twain anticipated this problem of interpretation.

While witnessing the collapse of Reconstruction and the rise of lynching gave Twain a perceptive understanding of the shifts in racial dynamics, his lack of distance prevented him from fully understanding the structures and social consequences that were shaped by the rise of lynching. It seems that while theories of lynching help to explicate *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain’s text can only illuminate the history and structures of lynching in the broadest sense. A reciprocal analysis is less fruitful because the varying aspects of lynching – the emasculation as control, the violence, the economic concerns, and the normalization of white patriarchy – are spread across multiple figures in the novel.

Go Down, Moses

The Failure of “Separate but Equal”: The Structural Limits of Textual Desire

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* employs a narrative trajectory that uses symbolic historical corollaries to represent the entrenchment of the racial politics that would crystallize as the oppressive ideology of the Jim Crow period. Through the violent acts of lynching and castration, along with the accompanying cultural narrative of emasculation, the power structures of slavery, which positioned white masculinity as the pinnacle of hegemonic culture, were reinstated after Federal troops were withdrawn from the Southern states at the end of Reconstruction. Of the approximately three hundred lynchings that occurred between 1840 and 1860 less than ten percent involved African Americans. Under slavery, cases of white women raped by black men were mostly tried in the court system, and African American men could be acquitted or pardoned. It was even occasionally acknowledged that certain sexual liaisons could be consensual (Messerschmidt 80). The

statistics *after* Reconstruction are starkly different. From 1885 to 1899, an average of 159 African Americans were lynched yearly (Wells-Barnett 201). Despite claims by government officials that lynchings occurred rarely and only as justifiable responses to “vile crime against women,” statistics compiled by anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells reveal that from 1882 to 1894 nearly seventy percent of all lynching murders were for reasons other than rape (108-109). Such a dramatic shift in patterns of violence directed at African American men, who were the primary targets of lynching violence following the end of Reconstruction, raises serious questions about what role lynching actually played in American culture after Reconstruction.

While *Huckleberry Finn* represents the emasculation of African American men that underpinned the perpetuation of white patriarchal power, the subversive potential of its satirical critique and the centrality of lynching have been obscured by a cultural silence that prevents the recognition of the construction and interdependence of racial categories. The direct causes and consequences of cultural emasculation, like the obscured juncture at Cairo, remain unseen. *Huckleberry Finn* shows an awareness of the rise of lynching, cultural emasculation, and political disenfranchisement in its narrative construction and arrangement, and yet, it lacks any scene or event that unites the various aspects of lynching into a single interpretative figure. Turning to an equally prominent and culturally comparable author of the American canon will further an understanding of the interplay between lynching and language by providing textual figures that more directly confront the structural dynamics of the lynching event.

By the time William Faulkner was born in 1897, a great surge of lynchings and various Supreme Court decisions had solidified and legalized the practice of “separate but equal,” a policy that justified and exemplified the notions of racial difference and white “superiority.” Growing up in Mississippi, the record-holding state for almost every undesirable statistic related to lynching (Kinney 12), Faulkner would have certainly been acquainted with public lynchings. One well-known example is that of Nelse Patton who was lynched in the square of Oxford in 1908 and would become the model for Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. A friend of Faulkner and contemporary historian, James W. Siver, “describes ‘[a] classic example of lynching as a means of social control’ in 1928—a story of a chase (with 3,000 cars and 6,000 whites) ending in an act of savage murder and gratuitous mutilation. But by then, the statistics on lynching in Mississippi showed that they were on the decline: there had been 57 in the 1910s, in contrast to 28 in the 1920s. Fifteen or fewer lynchings occurred in the 1930s” (Kinney 13). Arthur Kinney’s observation in *Go Down, Moses, The Miscegenation of Time* does not consider any broader social implication for the decline, but I would suggest that rather than a wholly positive trend the decrease in lynchings reflects an increasing internalization of racial difference that is still not fully understood.

According to critical thought, of such scholars as Trudier Harris or Mary Kemp Davis, a lynching primarily occurred as an opportunity to reassert the superiority of the white community in the face of social stress and uncertainty.⁵ I suggest that the decrease in lynching noted by Kinney might be due, in part, to a diminishing challenge to the fundamental structure of difference and, thus, the “superiority” of the white community. In the course of generations of segregation, the focus of resistance shifted toward the equality of

the races as the fundamental separation came to be taken for granted. Early activists advocated for human rights, challenging the idea of racial distinctions, whereas, later activists pushed for black rights, seeking equality without challenging the structural segregation of racial identities. The eventual acceptance racial difference, although not inequality, raises questions about the structural legacy of decades of lynching. It is worth considering both the social role of lynching (functioning as a tool of enforcement) and lynching's role in structuring society (shaping accepted ideas about racial and gender categories). The concentration of the various dynamics of lynching into two scenes in *Go Down, Moses* means that not only can an understanding of lynching illuminate the novel but also the novel can further an understanding of the structures that spin out from the ritual lynching performance.

Despite the interfering effects of a continued cultural silence, *Go Down Moses*, Faulkner's 1942 novel, directly engages lynching, language, and political emasculation in a way that enables an interpretation of the representational power of lynching. Paradoxically, the entrenchment of the racist ideology of Jim Crow facilitated the development of a coded discourse that made it possible for Faulkner to critique that very ideology. Observing how a temporal distance allowed Faulkner to do what Twain could not, Ralph Ellison states that, "Faulkner was free to reject the confusion between manhood and the Negro's caste status which is sanctioned by white Southern tradition, but Twain, standing closer to the Reconstruction and to the oral tradition, was not so free of the white dictum that Negro males must be treated either as boys or 'uncles' – never as men" (Ellison 50-1). The period of cultural flux at the end of the nineteenth century may have allowed Twain to better

understand the transition of power structures – figured in the narrative progression of *Huckleberry Finn* – but until the ideology of Jim Crow was solidified a cultural anxiety of uncertainty suppressed any direct critique. The non-sequential structure *Go Down, Moses* rearranges historical trajectories allowing complex juxtapositions of real-world dynamics of race and textual metaphors of hunting that critique and destabilize the symbolic masculinities that had become an entrenched form of control through the coded discourse of Jim Crow. However, the complexity of Faulkner’s narrative arrangement represents a potential to critique that is in danger of being obscured by its own elaborateness. While Faulkner may not have witnessed the ways in which the rise of lynching actively recreated the power structures of slavery as Twain did, he was immersed in a culture where lynching was used to enforce social boundaries of race, and much of his fiction reflects his interest in understanding the causes and consequences of Southern racism.

As with *Huckleberry Finn*, employing lynching, and the accompanying emasculation, as an interpretative framework illuminates broad structural designs and specific symbolic figurations within *Go Down, Moses*. Moreover, I see the narrative structure and unity of the work as significant indicators of the novel’s engagement with the cultural dynamics of race. Composed mostly of previously published material – the earliest being “Lion,” which appeared in 1935 and would ultimately become part of the “The Bear” – the status of *Go Down, Moses* as a collection of short stories or unified novel has been a crucial part of interpreting the text’s meaning. Faulkner’s arrangement and editing of previously published material produced textual traces that highlight the connection between the dominant cultural identity and the domination of nature and peoples as a thematic concern that Faulkner hoped

to emphasize in the final composition. Despite the variations in characters, locations, and chronology, the seven stories of *Go Down, Moses* have an underlying thematic similarity and, according to Richard Marius, are “united under the general heading of freedom, but it is a complicated kind of freedom, expressed through both black and white characters” (177). The “complicated kind of freedom” displayed in the novel is a direct result of the structural entanglements of black and white identities. Given that the ritual lynching performance creates racial difference through emasculation, it should be no surprise that the black and white characters of *Go Down, Moses* are negotiating forms of masculinity as they are working out a “complicated kind of freedom.” The overlapping themes of manhood and freedom and reflections of the role of lynching in American culture position *Go Down, Moses* as a parallel to *Huckleberry Finn*, offering the opportunity to investigate how the roughly sixty years that separate the publication of these two novels might have allowed the entrenchment of racial difference as an accepted social ideology but also produced coded symbols of racial and gender that could be appropriated as artistic tools to subvert and critique the social system that they were developed to sustain.

Examining *Go Down, Moses* reveals that Faulkner tried to push back against the cultural narrative surrounding lynching, desiring to prefigure or embody a more equitable society and to present an alternative to restrictive racial patterns. However, the inability to acknowledge the interdependence of constructed racial categories prevents *Go Down, Moses* from fully escaping its cultural mold. In order to understand the pervasiveness and influence of the cultural narrative of lynching and also Faulkner’s consideration of it, it is important to avoid a reductive analysis of *Go Down, Moses* and instead to present the

progressive and successful destabilizations of the novel alongside its failure to escape a conservative and bounded worldview.

By exploring Faulkner's use of wilderness and hunting symbolism as a metaphorical investigation into the creation of meaning, I will argue that the apparently disparate stories are revealed to be facets of a sweeping study on the roots of Southern racism. To start to untangle the knot that is Faulkner's novel, it is necessary to point out that it is confused for two major reasons. First, the underlying inquiry of the novel is focused on the violent and arbitrary imposition of racial difference and its consequences for identities, dynamics that hegemonic post-Reconstruction culture refuses to openly acknowledge; indeed, it is through the active ignoring of the fundamentally arbitrary, and thus inherently meaningless, identity categories, through the creation of ignorance and the limits of knowledge, that hegemonic culture is created as normative. Second, in writing the novel, Faulkner is following a desire to subvert the inherent restrictions of the racist ideology of his own society – an aspiration that can be seen in his presentation of Isaac McCaslin and Lucas Beauchamp as dramatic contrasts to repeated norms – but is unaware of and fails to account for his own inherent blindness to the structural interdependence of racial categories – which is transferred to the text in the polarization of Isaac's and Lucas's storylines and also the two scenes that collectively represent the structural dynamics of the ritual lynching performance. Both of these features of confusion affect the novel's complicated and overlapping use of symbolism.

The use of symbolism in *Go Down, Moses* is complex and multi-faceted. Therefore, there are certain textual figures of the novel that may stand as more conventional corollaries to ideas or real-world dynamics and, at the same time, as components of a metaphysical

investigation into the nature of symbolism and language itself. Additionally, Faulkner's use of apparently disparate stories allows him to create a novel with an incredibly dynamic face, that is to say, rather than standing as a monolithic edifice, *Go Down, Moses* presents Faulkner's conflicted feelings about the possibility of escaping racial inequality at different points of development. While the complex use of symbolism results in some ambiguous interpretations, it is also a flexible tool that allows Faulkner to use symbols of the wilderness and hunting to connect textual reflections of the ideologically employed symbolism of lynching with a metaphysical investigation into the linguistic roots of human domination.

Given the obscure entanglements of constructions of race and gender and the equally intricate form of *Go Down, Moses*, a conscientious and methodical approach can illuminate Faulkner's efforts and also enrich an understanding of the role lynching plays in shaping American society. Building upon the theories and applied approach developed in the previous chapter, I will argue that the design of *Go Down, Moses* parallels the symbolic structures of lynching and political emasculation and also embodies a subversive attempt to pre-figure alternatives that would surpass the limited identities of Jim Crow ideology. The novel's use of symbolism performs a complex yet thorough investigation of racial domination that features Isaac and Lucas as figures of contrast to repetitions of hegemonic norms. However, this progressive destabilization is undercut by the fact that Isaac and Lucas are only depicted together in one minor scene of the novel. This inherent polarization also occurs with the scenes that figure the power dynamics of the lynching – the death of Old Ben and the shooting of Isaac's first buck – and reinforces racial difference even as the inequality of racial differences is actively called into question. Moreover, the non-sequential time of the

novel's arrangement which produces the productive juxtapositions of Faulkner's investigations represents a problematic potentiality that is at constant risk of obscuring the more positive destabilizations of the novel. Persistent structural difference and textual obfuscation reveal that, despite his best efforts at transcendence, Faulkner is imbricated with and invested in a creation of a white masculinity in the traditional cultural terms. Ultimately, *Go Down, Moses* is a product that continues to be bounded by and reinforce the structures of racial difference and hierarchy in spite of its concerted and visible attempt to exceed the racial status quo.

“Was”: Introducing Hunting, Lynching, and Masculinity

In order to interrogate the complexities of *Go Down, Moses* and the lynching culture of Jim Crow, a close reading of “Was” that accents the interconnection with the novel's key figurations of lynching, which occur in “The Old People” and “The Bear,” will underscore the thematic unity of the novel and support the observation by Kinney that “each episode is related to the others in tracing the effects of plantation life and slave economy, while each chapter breaks from the others to examine those effects from a different perspective” (Kinney 5). It seems to me that the pervasive effects of the “plantation life and slave economy” are so prevalent in the Jim Crow era and troubling to artists like Faulkner because the reestablishment of power structures enacted by the rise of lynching produced a revised form of slavery (the object status of African Americans at the heart of slavery is a fundamental condition of the traditional lynching narrative) enforced through violence rather than law. It is helpful to begin by foregrounding the

varying but complementary approaches to a singular problem because as Kinney also notes “this is not the first impression *Go Down, Moses* generally makes on its readers” (Kinney 4). The confused first reaction to the text due to the apparent difference and isolation of the stories is part of the novel’s tentative escape from the ideology of its own historical moment and reflects the cultural silence that masks the interdependence of constructed racial identities. By drawing out the specific devices, of neck imagery and symbolic power relations, that expose an awareness the centrality of lynching to a whole system of racial domination, it becomes possible to observe the connections that structure *Go Down, Moses* as a full and united attempt to surpass the racist dogma of Jim Crow *and also* the narrative structures that simultaneously obscure those connections.

Go Down, Moses uses hunting as an exploratory metaphor of both lynching, specifically, and human domination, generally, to unite the seven nominally separated stories of *Go Down, Moses* into a multi-faceted but cohesive project. “Was,” the only included story not previously published in any form, is crafted as an introduction to the novel. Looking at the imagery and themes of this opening story and the ways that it links to later significant scenes of the novel reveals a subtle allusion to lynching and its connection with the pervasive hunting symbolism of the novel. Although the tone of “Was” appears to set it apart from the more serious and deadly stories that follow, it introduces many of the themes and structural features that continue through the novel. As Carl Anderson notes in “Faulkner’s ‘Was’: ‘A Deadlier Purpose Than Simple Pleasure’,” this story “of a manhunt and of poker games with human beings as the stakes, has resisted easy integration with the somber and tormented realities of black and white relationships explored in the six tales that follow it” (Anderson

414). However, Anderson highlights here and goes on to explore the issues of race and exploitation in “Was” that do, indeed, connect it to the rest of the novel. Despite being presented comically, the poker game “insists that any body may be monetized by the master’s decree” (Matthews 40). This point by John Matthews foregrounds the master’s position as one that defines other social identities as object. Set in 1859, the white male privilege to trade African Americans and women portrayed in “Was” reflects the legal creation and support of a hegemonic white masculinity under slavery.

It is important to note that the legal superiority of whites during slavery, in effect, created a controlling gender differentiation between the races. White masculinity became the hegemonic masculinity and black masculinity was relegated to a subordinate status. A system of stratified masculinities was reinforced by numerous features of society under slavery: the inability to vote or testify in court prevented political agency, laws against reading and owning property precluded economic advancement, and the splitting of families and the rape of African American women undercut African American men’s social role as protectors of the family. During Reconstruction, African American men sought the political, economic, and social rights associated with masculinity that had been denied to them in slavery.

The response of white men to the loss of absolute political, economic, and social dominance was a concerted effort to reinstate their previous privileges through the coded representations of gender and racial superiority. The expedients of these efforts were lynching and castration, which enacted a physical *and* symbolic emasculation of African American men. Lynching was important to white patriarchy by sustaining a narrative that

obscured the denial of rights with a more emotionally charged alternative. As I argued in chapter one, that obscuring narrative was, of course, the narrative of the black rapist, the uncontrollable black beast, who must be controlled, through violence if necessary, to protect the “virtuous” and “pure” white woman. This traditional lynching narrative revolved around a ritual lynching performance that violently enforced disenfranchising identities through a participatory spectacle. In this story, African American men had only three options of identity: the subservient “Uncle Tom” figure, the raging black beast, or the victim of the lynch mob. All three of these options deny manhood in different ways. The “Uncle Tom” figure will never be allowed political, social, or economic equality; the black beast is animalistic and lacking any sense of higher thought; and the victim of lynching has been objectified and denied any sense of agency. Even if he has not actually been castrated, he has been symbolically emasculated.⁶

Although the dynamics of domination are presented as a light-hearted hunt in “Was,” the animal symbolism positions Turl as the hunted, a status that takes on greater weight in the later stories. By understanding the destabilization of white male power enacted by the abolishment of the legal privileges of slavery, the greater weight given to the hunting stories set in 1877-1883 (“The Old People” and “The Bear”) can be seen as a reflection of the rise of lynching as a symbolic act to enforce racial difference and hierarchy. The serious and in-depth consideration of human domination that shapes the hunts of “The Old People” and “The Bear” recurs throughout the text and, according to Thadious Davis, begins with the blithe games of “Was.”

Beginning with Tomey’s Turl running, *Go Down, Moses* deploys games (fox-hunting with dogs, gambling with cards and dice, racing) as

constructions both of chance and of strategy that represent the arbitrariness and the boundedness of forms of identity and of economic and social interaction as these forms intersect with the regularity, protection, and compensation of law (Davis *Games* 44).

Notably, Davis mentions not only the hunts but also the dice game that is the occasion for Rider's transgression and lynching. This commentary helps to focus an reading of *Go Down, Moses* that highlights the overarching thematic unity of its investigations into racial identities: the ritual lynching performance not only created arbitrary and bounded racial categories, but also a cultural silence that obscures those features, and understanding this dynamic prompts an active reading to uncover traces of unequal structures of power relations that have been hidden by hegemonic control of discourse.

In addition to the obvious hunt for Turl and the scene of domination portrayed in the poker game, it is significant that "Was" presents a repeated emphasis on the neck. There is Buck's necktie, which is associated directly with the hunt for Turl; "the only time he wore the necktie was on Tomey's Turl's account" (Faulkner 7). Sophonsiba wears a "red ribbon around her throat" (Faulkner 10) that becomes involved with her courting of Buck. At the second poker game, "it was just like last night, except that Uncle Buddy had no necktie" (Faulkner 24). While these characters are all white, Faulkner is using the neck imagery to create and accentuate difference based on gender distinctions. It is significant that Buck and Buddy, who are clearly designed as a complementary pair, are allowed to exist in the same story. The fact that the two white characters can coexist in the same story highlights, by contrast, that Isaac and Lucas who are complementary in a similar way cannot because the injection of the issue of race makes gender distinctions a deadly subject.

The closing scene of the “Was” is almost the same as the opening, a structural parallelism that mirrors the reinstatement of racial domination through lynching. While Turl has been returned to his “proper” place, the dogs again chase the fox through the house. The fox runs through a crate and out the back, but the dogs just crash into it. “Old Moses was still wearing most of the crate around his neck until Uncle Buddy kicked it off of him” (Faulkner 28). In addition to the emphasis on the neck, one of the previously unnamed dogs is now called Old Moses, a telling detail since the only other named dog in the entire novel is the very prevalent Lion. The name Old Moses, of course, creates a link with the closing story, “Go Down, Moses,” which features the dead Butch Beauchamp as a representation of an objectified and mastered black masculinity. The recurrence of the structurally restricted role of a subordinate black masculinity in the closing story gives the novel a repeated structure similar to that of “Was” and foregrounds the role of lynching in reestablishing the power structures of slavery.

The repeated emphasis on neck imagery in “Was” alludes subtly to hanging and lynching. This becomes clear because the tied necks of the story – involving the most prominent figure of white femininity in the novel, the economically-based scene of domination depicted in the poker game, and a ritual hunt – collectively mirror the dynamics of lynching by structuring the creation of a dominant figure and regulating access to economic and material resources. The fact that “Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy both used the necktie just as another way of daring people to say they looked like twins” (Faulkner 7) reveals that the necktie is used, like lynching culturally, for the creation of difference and

identity. Just as the necktie is used to establish and represent difference between the otherwise so similar men, lynching created and enforced difference between white and black masculinity.

The significance of the neck imagery and the hunting motif in “Was” is highlighted by textual connections between that story and the hunting stories that carry the brunt of the novel’s figurative investigation of human domination and exploitation. In the midst of the key scene when Isaac McCaslin kills his first buck in “The Old People,” Faulkner describes the relation between Isaac and McCaslin Edmonds in terms almost identical to the first presentation in “Was.” In “Was”:

His own father being near seventy when Isaac, an only child, was born, rather his brother than his cousin and rather his father than either (Faulkner 4).

In “The Old People”:

the boy’s father had been nearing seventy when he was born, more his brother than his cousin and more his father than either (Faulkner 158).

This nearly identical description is embedded in the scene that figures Isaac’s initiation as a man and a hunter, highlighting heritage and figures of white masculinity. These lines of white masculine heritage implicitly connect that stable and empowered identity to the act of hunting and reflect the perpetuation of white hegemonic power through violence under the racist ideology of Jim Crow.

Part 4 of “The Bear” also plays, perhaps, the most crucial role in the novel’s use of hunting and wilderness symbolism to investigate the fundamental structures of supremacist ideology by juxtaposing the death of Old Ben with Isaac’s consideration of the racial exploitation of the McCaslin plantation revealed in the ledgers. It is no surprise, then, to find a plot summary of “Was” set into the ledgers themselves.

Tennie Beauchamp 21yrs Won by Amodeus McCaslin from Hubert Beauchamp Esqre Possible Strait against three Treys in sigt Not called 1859 Married to Tomys Turl 1859 (Faulkner 259).

The fact that “Was” is reduced to a single scene of domination and a transfer of property reflects the cultural inability of white masculinity to acknowledge the role of the ritual lynching as an event that creates the identity of the master. The cultural silence that protects the fundamental instability of white masculinity does so by representing the struggle to create white masculinity and its cultural privilege in symbolic terms that become seen not as symbols but as truth. White masculinity, then, views its own identity and its apparent privilege as natural and unremarkable features, as I will show with a subsequent reading of “The Old People.”

“Was” is also linked directly to the hunt for Old Ben in parts 2 and 3 of “The Bear,” as Stanley Tick points out, noting that Turl is hunted,

as though Turl were a deer or fox. Hounds are used to track Turl, and when they fail a fyce is tried. (Exactly like the order of dogs used in chasing Old Ben in ‘The Bear’ –save for Lion, of course.) Though Buck and Buddy do not violate their slaves with the arrogance of their father, they nevertheless view the chase of Turl as a challenging hunt (Tick 72).

In addition to noting the order of dogs that links the opening story to the central hunt for Old Ben, Tick’s comment foregrounds the pervasiveness of the hunting motif that organizes *Go Down, Moses*. The many associations between the separate stories of the novel unite the work as a holistic investigation of lynching and racial domination. These pervasive connections also serve a more basic of function of foreshadowing and serve to enrich textual events, and yet, the first-time reader is likely to overlook the intricacies of these connections among Faulkner’s dizzying use of stream-of-consciousness and flashbacks.

Although initially obscured, Isaac's role as teller of "Was" is heavily influenced by the meanings explored in the later hunting stories.

While revising ten published stories for the seven in his novel, *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Faulkner composed three paragraphs ... and set them at the head of the first story, 'Was' (3-4). Every story in the novel amplifies that distillation of a life and its dual guiding principles. In short, old Uncle Ike's presence at the start looms over every tale (Rio-Jelliffe 132).

The two guiding principles that R. Rio-Jelliffe references in "Structure and Meaning in *Go Down, Moses*" are Isaac's love of the wilderness and his desire not to own property. These two guiding principles reveal a symbolic engagement with white masculinity as the cultural norm. Isaac's love of wilderness encapsulates the appropriation of the idea of "good" as an expression of a "superior" self, and the desire not to own property is Isaac's attempted abstinence from a cultural form of racial oppression and economic exploitation enabled by the othering of African Americans, stretching back to the condition of slaves as legal property but also including the system of sharecropping that made African Americans wage slaves to whomever owned the land. Given that the creation of identity is only valid in terms of difference, Isaac's two principles are shown to be problematically contradictory. Isaac cannot maintain the cultural identity of whiteness and truly abstain from domination. Although he seeks to avoid active exploitation, Isaac's social status is enabled by institutional oppression. Parallel to Isaac's textual efforts to escape guilt and participation in cultural racism are Faulkner's attempts to transcend the rigid structures of racial identities and performances necessitated by the creation of whiteness through the ritual lynching performance. *Go Down, Moses* embodies Faulkner's desire for transcendence in the investigation of cultural domination that underlies the hunting trilogy as a means to find a

way to make Lucas Beauchamp's tentative equality and masculinity a valid alternative to the deadly fate that both Rider and Butch Beauchamp find in the novel.

Isaac's two principles of life are concentrated in two key moments in the text, "when [Isaac] refuses to slay Old Ben" and "when he repudiates the patrimony that descends to him from Old Carothers," that Doreen Fowler reads as "the focal point, the nexus, of Ike's life and of the novel" (Fowler 128). Her use of psychoanalytic theory to interpret *Go Down, Moses* in terms of an Oedipal drama is useful because it reveals the connection between violence and the oppression inherent in socially constructed racial identities.

The hunters are the sons who harbor the not-so-secret desire to kill the father-representative and assume his position as the master of the wilderness. Chief among these son-figures is 'the boy,' Ike McCaslin, for whom the hunt is an initiation into manhood. To become a man, he must ritually enact the Oedipal drama. He must kill the symbolic father, the bear, and lay claim to his domain, the wilderness (Fowler 128).

The emphasis on Isaac's "initiation into manhood," his "becom[ing] a man," vis-à-vis a psychological drama echoes the analogous position of white masculinity as the hegemonic identity of the Jim Crow period. The symbolic stakes of manhood are as central to the culture that associates manhood with political, economic, and social dominance as they are to the psychological drama that associates manhood with selfhood. Fowler makes this clear by associating this dynamic with not only the physical violence of the hunt but also with the social domination of African Americans.

When Ike repudiates his paternal inheritance, he is once again disclaiming the paternal signifier: he is refusing to accede to a place of power and authority identified with the father and with fatherly repression, as exemplified by the killing of the bear or by Old Carothers's dehumanized treatment of his black family (Fowler 129).

Including both moments in the Oedipal drama underscores that the chief attribute of patriarchal power is the ability to dominate, which can only be played out in relation to a

constructed Other. *Go Down, Moses*'s weighty symbolic investigation of the roots of racial oppression is based on the paired structural principles that are already present on the first page of the novel in the two guiding principles of Isaac's life.

As Richard Marius notes, "what we have in the opening sketch about Ike is a sort of introduction to the whole" (Marius 182). Although "Was" is ostensibly set in 1859, the first words of the novel introduce "Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike,' past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more" (Faulkner 3). The significance of Isaac's age is not immediately clear, but with the later information that Isaac was born in 1867, it is clear that Isaac's age indicates a date contemporary with the novel's publication. While the novel makes many narrative excursions into the historical past, this prominent detail reveals that those investigations of the past are for the purpose of understanding the present. "Was" becomes the link between the metaphorical investigations of the hunting stories and the direct look to racial issues in the stories of the present. "Was" is told in the contemporary present of the novel's writing and of the stories set in 1940-41: "The Fire and The Hearth," "Pantaloon in Black," "Delta Autumn," and "Go Down, Moses." And yet, the events "Was" narrates are preceded only by a few paramount but briefly described events. Thus, the opening paragraphs effect a compression of time, according to Rio-Jelliffe, that sets "the narrative spiraling backward to the sources of [Faulkner's] beliefs and forward to their unfolding through time" (Rio-Jelliffe 134). Late in his revision process, Faulkner produced the opening sketch, the three reiterative paragraphs without a single period, to introduce the use of structural repetitions and symbolism, to unite the pieces and themes that he had been developing in other areas of revision, and to acknowledge the temporal expansiveness of the

problem of human domination and language, which seemed to stretch backwards and forwards beyond his powers of sight.

The misleading tone of “Was” figures the limited vision of white masculinity. Isaac is both auditor of the events of the story and re-teller. However, when he heard the tale and when and to whom he retells it are not specified in the text. On a first encounter, the decontextualization of “Was” denies the subjective voice of white masculinity that controls the discourse of the story and renders the very serious themes as comedy. Faulkner essentially makes it impossible to fully comprehend “Was” upon a first reading because so much of its narrative stance is only understood through the detailed investigation of Isaac’s character in the later hunting stories. Through various details and echoed dynamics Faulkner produces “Was” as an introduction to *Go Down, Moses*, but by delaying the necessary information to understand the story, the connections across the novel barely operate as functional foreshadowing for first-time readers. Rather, the links between the stories only really emerge from a sustained critical view and serve to highlight the various angles of a comprehensive project.

Into the Wilderness: Symbolism and Faulkner’s Dynamic Investigation

By pursuing an analysis of *Go Down, Moses* that acknowledges and foregrounds that the abstract structures explored through the hunting stories as a reflection of those that support the political control enacted through symbolic masculinities I hope to illuminate the investigation of racial domination that underlies the entirety of the text. The fact that Faulkner’s goal of positing a fully equal black masculinity exceeds his limited vision to see the interdependence of racial categories that creates white masculinity not just as superior but

as apparently cogent in and of itself renders his textual investigation both dynamic and unresolved. This intricate and expansive investigation is presented in the textual relationships of the wilderness and hunting symbolism. In addition to supporting an overarching unity based in the hunting motif, the wilderness symbolism and the depicted hunts actively engage the use of symbolism in the traditional lynching narrative in a way that reveals roots of domination in Western thought deeper than the commonly touted forms of racism unique to America.

In “Touching Race in *Go Down, Moses*” Matthews incorporates insights from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno to stresses that the dynamics of both oppression and identity formation have deep roots in Western thought and the structure of language itself. Matthews notes that the control of the natural world and subject formation both “rest on the mechanics of value production –differentiation and abstraction. Here lies the theoretical ground for Faulkner’s entanglement with the mystery that the very language of freedom for the bourgeois social subject rests on the logic of enslavement” (Matthews 34). This pertinent point foregrounds the figurative implications of Western thought and language that run throughout *Go Down, Moses*. Noting that Isaac had to relinquish more than just his gun as symbol of phallic power, Fowler observes that “he still relies on instruments of repression: the watch and the compass. With watch and compass, patriarchal culture attempts to govern, divide, and categorize that which is essentially chaotic, undifferentiated and one. To see the bear, Ike must give up all such attempts to create difference and meaning” (Fowler 135). The ubiquitous role of difference as a prerequisite for meaning is the basis for the expansive and conceptual inquiry that Faulkner builds into the hunting stories. According to Matthews “the

southern instance conforms to the general condition. The brutality internal to the project of enlightenment – the violence inherent in abstraction and equivalence-making – makes the southern racist ideology, like an otherwise so different European fascism, a conceptual product of Western idealism” (Matthews 38). In the Jim Crow South, the ritual lynching performance actively and violently created racial difference, providing the grounds for the construction of a supposedly “superior” white masculinity. The fundamental structures of thought behind this phenomenon are not unique, but the economic, social, and political stakes bound up with this particular identity formation and the use of violence to regulate it give great impetus to exposing the creation of power through the arbitrary assertion of racial difference.

Subsequent critical discourse, hampered by the reductive and emotional discourse of racism, has overlooked the fundamentally human structures at play in this creation of normative American culture. Specifically struggling “to stare down the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race” (xix), Ellison points out that “Faulkner fights out the moral problem which was repressed after the nineteenth century, and it was shocking for some to discover that for all his concern with the South, Faulkner was actually seeking out the nature of man” (43). Ellison’s observation points to the universal basis that guides the figurative investigation of *Go Down, Moses* and, also, calls attention to the repression of discourse at the end of the nineteenth century that is, it seems to me, more than coincidentally contemporaneous with the greatest surge of lynching violence in American history. Yet, as a Westerner and a white male, Faulkner is significantly within the intellectual traditions that he is attempting to understand and surpass, and unable to

imagine acknowledge (or possibly to even understand) the interdependence that gives coherence to racial categories, he fails to reach his ultimate goal of positing a true equality between white and black masculinities. Thus, the use of hunting and wilderness symbolism reveals a dynamic and unresolved examination of human domination, and reading the character of these symbols in the three hunting stories reveals the complexity of Faulkner's thinking on the possibility of escaping domination through imaginative language.

To understand these three stories in the context of the novel, it can be helpful to think of the structure of *Go Down, Moses* as an essay, as Faulkner's attempt to understand, present, and critique the oppressive ideology of the Jim Crow era. "Was" serves as the introduction to the themes of hunting and human objectification as well as the novel's structural repetitions. Lucas Beauchamp's endeavors in "The Fire and the Hearth" illustrate the novel's goal of trying to imagine a black masculinity that escapes objectification and is allowed to be equal to white masculinity. "Pantaloon in Black" depicts the lynching of Rider and establishes the current situation from which the investigations of the novel will begin. The next three stories – "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn" – all feature Isaac as the protagonist of a hunting story. Although these may be the most studied stories of the novel, not enough attention has been given to the fact that they are three different stages of an extended investigation into the cultural forces that create and are created by white masculinity as the hegemonic norm. The idealized wilderness of "The Old People" is the manifestation of a probing look at the possibility of a positive white masculinity without domination – which is why the violent slaying of Isaac's first buck is masked and the story ends with the salute to the grandfather buck of the noble wilderness. "The Bear," the second and most complex

interrogation of racial construction, comes closest to exposing the interconnectedness of black and white racial identities. Beginning with the revered wilderness of “The Old People” in parts 1 and 2, “The Bear” uses the same hunting device to consider the prevalence of domination in human relations to nature. Part 3 implicitly recognizes the domination of an inferiorly constructed Other with the death of Old Ben. The subsequent study of the ledgers in part 4 connects the violence of human domination with racial exploitation, and Isaac’s salute to the snake in part 5 implies an admission of guilt inherent to whiteness. The receding wilderness and the desperate killing of a doe in “Delta Autumn” accentuate a bleak situation, and yet, that story also features the hope that change and progress can one day come about through the actions of individuals, such as Isaac’s abstinence from blatant economic exploitation and violence or Faulkner’s subversive efforts to expand the limits of an inherently oppressive discourse. Tellingly, the novel concludes with “Go Down, Moses,” a story that appears to show that not much has changed in the eight decades that have passed since the setting of “Was.” This posited essay structure provides a context for focusing in on the hunting stories to examine how Faulkner imagined the complicated use of wilderness symbolism as part of his overall project.

Revisions and the Hunt: Pulling the Design Together

The importance of the expansive investigation of language and domination vis-à-vis the hunting motif is revealed in the revisions Faulkner made in collecting together the material that would become *Go Down, Moses*. These bring out his interest in a core of domination at the center of human engagement with nature as a way to understand the racial issues of his cultural moment. “In the fall [of 1940], he changed the original protagonist to

Isaac McCaslin, added an extensively revised story that became ‘Delta Autumn,’ and composed part 1 of ‘Was’ and part 4 of ‘The Bear,’ shifting the focus to the hunt and man’s relationship with nature” (Rio-Jelliffe 174). While these might, at first, seem like disconnected revisions, I would argue that they reveal an emphasis on the creation and ramifications of a symbolic white masculinity. The changing of the protagonist underscores the similar purpose of these revisions as measures to sharpen the exploration of created racial identities by making Isaac Faulkner’s vehicle for exploring white masculinity and, thus, normative cultural representation. Moreover, the attention to details, the insistence that editors not alter his final version of “The Bear” in the slightest, and the removal of the erroneous “and Other Stories” that appeared on the first edition highlight that Faulkner imagined *Go Down, Moses* as an intricate but unified exploration of the problems that were consuming his mind (Minter 133). This should be no surprise given that *Go Down, Moses* was Faulkner’s most personal novel and deeply influenced by his sense of self, according to Arthur Kinney who collects an array of specific anecdotes and evidences to conclude that “Faulkner’s obsession with miscegenation in *Go Down, Moses*, then – his need, like Ike, to understand it and, like Roth, to respond to it – is urgently autobiographical” (Kinney 27).

In preparing “The Old People” for publication in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner made some telling revisions that accentuate that story’s role as the first of three successive hunting stories that explore the idea of white masculinity through the character of Isaac. In “Faulkner’s Imagination and the Logic of Reiteration: The Case of ‘The Old People’,” David Minter is able to trace modifications from the short story’s publication in *Harper’s*. Through Faulkner’s alterations and expansions, “the story is made into a crucial episode in the life of

Ike McCaslin, the protagonist of *Go Down, Moses*” (Minter 135). While “The Old People” on its own had been a coming-of-age hunting story, in the context of *Go Down, Moses* it is the first sustained usage of metaphorical hunting to probe the structures that might be at the heart of Southern racism. By the time the reader gets to “The Old People” in the context of the novel,

three important developments have modified its action: first, Ike’s is one of several names that have become heavily freighted with significance; second, the theme of initiation into ‘manhood’ has become deeply problematized; and third, themes having to do with race and slavery have been deeply inflected by stories like ‘Pantaloons in Black’ (Minter 135).

“Was,” and the looming shadow of Isaac McCaslin, introduces the book’s symbolic themes of hunting and domination; “The Fire and The Hearth” and “Pantaloons in Black” explore contemporary oppositions between white and black identities and perspectives: Lucas and Zach in the former and Rider and the white sheriff in the latter. Lucas’s frustration at the lack of resolution in his conflict with Zack Edmonds and the white sheriff’s inability to understand Rider’s actions and death leave Faulkner, and the reader, no closer to understanding the ultimate causes and consequences of Southern racism and, thus, unable to offer a way forward. Consequently, Faulkner imagines the hunting stories as a way to represent the symbolic dynamics that underlie racial domination and creates “The Old People” as a first attempt to understand the stakes of white masculinity.

Developing a hunting motif across stories not ostensibly about hunting and exploiting the cultural symbolism of African Americans as animalistic (thus allowing their symbolic connection to the object of the hunt) Faulkner builds an exploratory narrative structure that progresses parallel to his own thinking on the possibility of surpassing Southern racism by understanding its ontological roots. Probing the wilderness and hunting symbolism and

observing Faulkner's revisions foreground a complicated and dynamic investigation of language and domination that unfolds across the hunting stories. "The hunt" according to Faulkner "was simply a symbol of pursuit" (qtd. in Schreiber 31). The idea of pursuit as the core consideration of the hunting trilogy is an essential nexus for an analysis of *Go Down, Moses* that seeks to uncover the novel's reflection of the cultural dynamics of lynching because the idea of pursuit implies an active relation between the hunted and the hunter. This inherently unequal relation of power, which is constituted only symbolically and tentatively through violence, is able to reflect the equally arbitrary distinction between a hegemonic white masculinity and a subordinate black masculinity that is constructed violently through the ritual lynching performance. Rather than being a monolithic conception the wilderness symbolism in *Go Down, Moses* is variegated and representative in numerous ways. This usage allows the wilderness and hunting to reflect the multiple symbolic values involved in identity formation. An identity, of a personal self or of a cultural white masculinity, only has meaning when it is contrasted against difference.⁷ In the traditional lynching narrative, the bifurcation of the symbolic Other is visible in the constant interrelation between white femininity and black masculinity. Both identities are subservient to white masculinity and serve to define that imagined identity. The former contains the ideals of virtue, purity, and sexual restraint; all the attributes the unstructured subject desires to possess. The latter is wild, violent, and uncontrollably lustful; all the characteristics the active subject wants to deny in his self.

The use of wilderness symbolism in *Go Down, Moses*, especially as it relates to Isaac's character, reflects these complex and entangled dynamics. As a whole, the wilderness

stands for an undivided symbolic Other. While the amorphous use of wilderness as both eroticized and oppressed Other has led to confusion concerning the novel's primary direction for readers and critics alike, this usage allows hunting to represent a bifurcating event that mirrors the ritual lynching performance. Figures such as the grandfather buck of "The Old People" can be read as the "good," the sign of the noble wilderness that renews Isaac's sense of self. Significantly, Isaac's conception of the wilderness is often feminized. "Despite his acknowledgment of the ravages of ownership," according to Schreiber, "Ike maintains an eroticized, sexual image of the wilderness as timeless and nurturing, 'his mistress and wife' (311)" (Schreiber 30). This feminization of the wilderness is crucial because the identification with the noble wilderness that sustains Isaac's sense of self correlates to the protection of an idealized white femininity that invests white masculinity with a chivalrous honor.

Go Down, Moses also symbolically presents the domination of an Other as a means to define one's self through hunting as a way to master the wilderness. In the creation of racial and gender identities enacted by lynching, black masculinity is used symbolically to contain the "bad" elements of humanity that the normative force of culture seeks to dissociate from itself. In this dynamic, the "bad" is not essential to black masculinity and could be (and has been) represented in other symbolic terms. This feature allows Faulkner to explore the root of racial inequality through symbols not directly related to race. As Thadeous Davis notes in *Faulkner's Negro*, the concept of the Negro was used as abstraction with symbolic value, representing parts of the human spirit. But also, as an abstraction, the Negro can easily be represented in other terms. "The bear represents the Negro, and becomes an analogue to the

role of the Negro in this work” (Davis 245). Old Ben is the most coherent and visible manifestation of the wilderness as symbol, and the persistent search for him, with the implicit goal of killing him, imbues the hunters with a sense of self defined by the projected ability to dominate him through violence. “The search for Old Ben, the tracking of this huge beast with the trap-mangled foot, concentrates the mind on itself and shuts out for a time all moral complications and perplexities of a ‘civilized’ world” (Marius 185). Marius’s observation of an isolated drive is suitable, but he misreads the “‘civilized’ world,” overlooking the fact that the reductive opposition of the hunt is the same dynamic of racial difference that defines the Jim Crow South. By contrast, Matthews rightly notes that “in an effort to flee patrimony and ravishment, Ike encounters their specters in the wilderness” (35), and the emphasis on “specters” highlights the different representation of an essential dynamic. The accounts of the hunts enact and make central the ritualized killing of an Other, as a parallel form of domination to that which creates white masculinity as the norm of society. Thus, Old Ben, textually, and black men, culturally, must be killed and dominated so that the active subject can create a identity that is associated with the “good” by destroying the “bad.”

Understanding the symbolic function that Old Ben plays in the Oedipal drama illuminates the significance of Isaac’s refusal to shoot. The mythical bear is the spectral figure that is conjured to enable the son to supplant the father and achieve phallic power. As Fowler notes, “Old Ben, then, is the representative of the symbolic Other, the place of the constitution of the self. And, as the locus of the self, old Ben is a ‘phantom’ (185), an absence” (Fowler 136). Reading Faulkner’s description of Isaac’s first encounter with Old Ben who materializes and disappears without seeming to even move, Fowler states that “the

substanceless representation aptly figures what Lacan calls the phallus or the symbolic Other, the place of the constitution of the self, to which we turn for the fulfillment of desire and which does not exist in the Real” (Fowler 137). Given the dynamics of the symbolic Other that “does not exist in the Real” but is “the place of the constitution of the self,” the struggle to kill Old Ben as part of a dramatic performance of ritual hunting is seen to be a reflection of the traditional lynching narrative that constructs a virtuous and virile white masculinity through the emasculation and violent oppression of the supposed bestial, black rapist.

While the use of wilderness and hunting symbolism is intricate and prevalent throughout *Go Down, Moses*, it is the creation and addition of part 4 of “The Bear” that draws together the speculative survey of human domination that Faulkner employs as a means to understand the causes and consequences of Southern racism. “Part 4 joins and caps the conflict between nature’s values and human rapacity; it also prefigures the declining wilderness in part 5 of ‘The Bear,’ the ravaged woods in the third hunt story, ‘Delta Autumn,’ and the deleterious effects of greed that, initiated in the first story, ‘Was,’ climaxes in the final story, ‘Go Down, Moses.’” (Rio-Jelliffe 139). The “deleterious effects of greed” and the declining wilderness are parallel reflections of an investigation that cannot image a way to surpass the structures of domination. By representing an undivided symbolic Other in the various wilderness symbols and dramatizing the creation of meaning through the domination inherent in hunting, *Go Down, Moses* underscores pervasive patterns of abstraction and reification in Western thought.

Combined with the revisions to “The Old People” and the creation of “Was,” part 4 of “The Bear” plays a major role in the novel’s investigation of human domination, combining

the “wilderness lessons of man’s unique humanity with his moral responsibility” (Rio-Jelliffe 138). Although the events are nearly five years later, the examinations of the ledgers and Isaac’s repudiation of patrimony in part 4 are placed between the climatic death of Old Ben in part 3 and Isaac’s symbolic admission of guilt in his salute to the snake as grandfather in part 5. The juxtaposition created by this narrative arrangement connects the investigations of lynching and racial domination through the symbolic hunts with the explicit history of racial exploitations on the McCaslin plantation.⁸

By making Isaac the protagonist of “The Old People and crafting the introduction to “Was,” Faulkner makes the status of white masculinity central to the focus of *Go Down, Moses*. In adding part 4 of “The Bear,” he foregrounds the material consequences of the violence that is inherent in the representation of difference. Reviewing these revisions helps bring into focus the goals of Faulkner’s elaborate investigation into the social system of racial hierarchy that ultimately rest on the symbols of the ritual lynching performance.

Old Ben and the “Blood Baptism”: Textual Figures of Lynching

Heightened by revisions and supported by structures of repetition and symbolism woven intricately through the text, *Go Down, Moses* presents itself as a dynamic and discursive dossier on the roots of racism and also, to a degree, American culture. The productive consequence of these textual devices is the presence of figures that stand parallel to the ritual lynching performance. The analogous structuring via an active and interdependent relation of domination allows an understanding of the creation of racial identities to be read out of the hunt – “the symbol of pursuit” (qtd. in Schreiber 31) – and the interdependence of hunter and hunted. As Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber observes in “Patriarchy and

Male Subjectivity in *Go Down, Moses*,” “The object necessary to gratify a drive is only ostensibly that object of desire because the subject actually engages in the *pursuit* itself rather than in the gratification of a need. (Lacan equates the actual fulfillment of desire with dying.)” (Schreiber 26). The brief parenthetical comment on fulfillment as death is actually crucial to an understanding of the interdependence and structural creation of racial identities. The cultural validity of a “superior” white masculinity requires the perpetual presence of an “inferior” black masculinity. The quandry of resolving the relation of domination is reflected in the disappointment, rather than triumph, that accompanies the death of Old Ben. Scrutiny of the structural creation of racialized masculinities and *Go Down, Moses*’s intricate use of wilderness symbolism reveals that the death of Old Ben nullifies the signification of the noble wilderness that sustains Isaac’s sense of self, as Richard Marius observes, “something is not gained, but something is lost” (186).

Although an informed view of lynching and constructed identities reveals the interdependence of a “superior” white masculinity and an “inferior” black masculinity, *Go Down, Moses* polarizes and isolates the consequences of the ritual lynching performance into two separate scenes of death – that of Isaac’s first buck and that of Old Ben. The separation of these moments is part of *Go Down, Moses*’s shortcomings in acknowledging the direct connection between a “superior” white masculinity and an “inferior” black masculinity, and yet, viewing these two scenes collectively, as the center of the novel’s active investigation, with an awareness of the complicated use of wilderness symbolism and the structural dynamics of the ritual lynching performance will enable the limits of the novel’s understanding of its own moment to become visible.

Given the symbolic weight that Old Ben carries in the complex investigation of human domination that positions him as a textual analogue to an oppressed black masculinity, it should not be surprising that the description of his death suggests a lynching. As Isaac watches with “both hammers of the gun” drawn back, Lion and Boon charge in to bring Old Ben down (Faulkner 230). The great bear stood

on its hind feet as a man would have walked and crashed down. It didn't collapse, crumple. It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man dog and bear, seemed to bounce once (Faulkner 231).

In this short description, various details call to mind the imagery and dynamics associated with a ritual lynching performance. Lion has been characterized as a tool of the hunt. He is “*the dog*” that will hold Old Ben (208); he possess “the will and desire... to pursue and kill ...the will and desire... to overtake and slay” (227). Involved in the pursuit that structurally defines difference between the hunt and the hunted, it is significant that Lion’s “strange color like a blued gun-barrel” associates him with the gun, the symbol of dominant phallic power (209). Lion is a tool in the struggle to kill the symbolic Other, and when it comes to Old Ben’s death, Lion is “clinging to the bear’s throat” (230). The focus on the bear’s throat and the description of falling evoke a hanging, a lynching. Old Ben is briefly portrayed as a man; just as the black rapist is allowed a sort of masculinity before he is killed, embodied in the virility and the sexual prowess as qualities of masculinity that the lynchers will appropriate for themselves. After his brief manhood, Old Ben “crashed down,” he “didn’t collapse, crumple.” The description conjures the image of a dramatic drop, as if a stand was pulled away and gravity suddenly took effect. Moreover, Faulkner could have described the stiff, toppling fall of the embroiled characters in any number of ways, but by describing it “as a tree falls,” he is able to subtly invoke the image of a tree. The tree is significant as the most

common site of a lynching, so that Old Ben, with the tool of the hunt “clinging to [his] throat,” “crashed down” suddenly as if fallen from a tree, and “seemed to bounce once” as if a rope had snapped back up from being over-stretched by the weight of a falling body. Having explored how the slaying of Old Ben is involved with creating the identity of the hunters and intuitively sensing – although unable to fully acknowledge – that the “superior” white masculinity is as problematic as the racist stereotypes of African Americans, Faulkner places great weight on Isaac and the possibility of a white masculinity apart from domination.

The killing of Isaac’s fist buck in “The Old People,” a scene that Rio-Jelliffe appropriately calls a “blood baptism” (Rio-Jelliffe 136), represents Isaac’s participation in a position of patriarchal power contrary to primary associations of Isaac as removed from racial oppression. In viewing his participation in the hunt as part of a noble tradition, Isaac is following the same pattern of the active subject that consumes the “good” of the symbolic Other. Because *Go Down, Moses* divides the consequence of the ritual lynching performance this scene shows only the formation of Isaac’s positive identity while downplaying any violent domination.⁹ Although he does exert his power through violence in killing the buck, his romantic view of the wilderness leads him to think of “the blood with which Sam had marked him forever one with the wilderness which had accepted him” (Faulkner 171). The blood as symbol of violence does forever link Isaac with the Other but not as equals as he would like to believe. Matthews observes the violence and oppression inherent in the death of the buck, noting that “Ike’s learning to ‘spill the blood he loves’ marks him with the achievement of mastery over nature; it distills the essential relationship of humans to nature

through domination” (Matthews 35). Although a theoretical perspective reveals that the identity of an active subject is dependent on a dominated Other, Isaac believes that he is actually renewed and made part of the noble wilderness by taking part in a ritualistic heritage of mutual respect.

The inability of white masculinity to see the socially constructed and naturalized dynamics of power and identity is reflected in Isaac’s failure to see the appearance of the buck he kills. “Then the buck was there. He did not come into sight; he was just there” (Faulkner 157). Isaac’s failure to see mirrors the operation of a cultural silence that prevents close scrutiny of identity categories; in the Jim Crow South, an “inferior” black masculinity and a “superior” white masculinity were “just there.” The functionality of racial identities depends on the obfuscation of their arbitrariness and also of their creation in the violent act of lynching. Thus, even Isaac’s act of violence is obscured from his consciousness. “The boy did not remember that shot at all. ... he would never hear that shot nor remember even the shock of the gun-butt. He didn’t even remember what he did with the gun afterward” (Faulkner 158). This absence of violent action is the product of Faulkner’s attempt to consider and present a white masculinity that escapes the inherent violence of normative cultural hierarchies without acknowledging the interdependence with and reliance on black masculinity.

What Isaac does remember is Sam Fathers showing him how to cut the deer’s throat and the “hot smoking blood” (Faulkner 158) that Sam wiped on his face. Being marked by blood, “[Isaac] ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man” (Faulkner 171). Although the act of domination is obscured, it is the blood, as the consequence of violence,

that confirms Isaac as a “man” and a “hunter.” Given the symbolic value of manhood in the traditional lynching narrative, the simultaneous confirmation as man and hunter reinforces the symbolic association of hunting with lynching and highlights the obscured oppression and objectification of an Other that creates white masculinity as a cultural identity. This scene, which Minter calls “the most famous rite of initiation in Faulkner’s fiction” (136), complicates the possibility of a more positive white masculinity considered independently of its connection to an oppressed black masculinity. The blood in place of the unremembered shot reveals that while the appearance of the Other or the actual act of violence may remain unseen the effects of violence – the loss of vital life force or the cultural and political disenfranchisement – are persistent and implicative.

“The Old People,” which contains the blood baptism scene and was heavily revised as Faulkner tightened his textual investigation, feature Sam Fathers as the descendent of the eponymous old people who lived on the land before Carothers McCaslin and the representatives of a European worldview arrived on the scene to divide and organize the land as property. Although a human character, Sam’s association with the land and his key role in the hunting stories gives his character a symbolic value worth examining. Minter observes that Faulkner expands one sentence about Sam living on the plantation into four paragraphs giving “greater economic as well as social weight to the themes of his story.” Moreover, he makes Sam “a bridge between Rider’s wild and doomed resistance to the boundaries and practices that define institutionalized racism” and “Sam’s exalted, mythical status in ‘The Bear’ ” (Minter 138). This complicated relationship between the figures of different stories is best understood in the context of their symbolic functions vis-à-vis identity formation. Rider

is the symbol of the objectified Other, the dominated “bad.” In “The Bear,” Sam becomes the emblem of “good,” the figure that maintains the noble relationship with the wilderness, which is why he must die when Old Ben does (the sign of “good” cannot exist without the sign of “bad” as difference). But in “The Old People” before the act of domination – since Isaac’s killing of the buck is portrayed as act of transubstantiation instead of domination – Sam is associated with the undivided symbolic Other, the wilderness before it is abstracted and organized by Western culture. This state is represented in the mixed heritage of Sam and his mother whose, “mixed blood metaphorically represents fusion; it figures the undifferentiated state before the advent of the father and the sign of difference” (Fowler 132). Just as Fowler’s comment reveals his mother to be symbolically connected to an amorphous status of pre-identity, Minter notes that Sam himself functions as a figure across boundaries. “Sam remains ‘a wild man’ in the sense that he refuses to belong to either of the worlds constructed and sanctioned by his society – the ‘black’ one offered him or the ‘white’ one denied him” (Minter 139). To be wild is to refuse to conform to social boundaries, to lack a coherent, but constructed, identity. Functioning as a “bridge” between the objectified Rider and the idealized Sam of “The Bear,” the narrative progression into “The Old People” allows Sam’s hunting instructions and connection to the wilderness to shift the focus from the real-life context of Rider’s death to the metaphysical investigations figuratively presented through the hunting and killing of symbols of the wilderness.

In using the blood baptism and the death of Old Ben as separated poles of the dynamics of lynching as a bifurcating event, *Go Down, Moses* presents “The Old People” as a corollary to the ritual creation of white masculinity through the drama of lynching. Minter

notes that revisions to the blood baptism scene “stress the ‘dark’ and ‘savage’ heritage” – symbolic values attributed to African Americans but problematically linked to whiteness in the event that creates that distinction – “that ‘had marked’ Sam Fathers and that through him touches Isaac, ‘the white boy,’ not merely in formal consecration but in ‘tutelage’ that has forever changed him” (Minter 136). Drawing out the social relations that structure and are structured by violence, Rio-Jelliffe also comments of the role of tutelage.

The blood baptism in ‘The Old People’ retraces the genesis of Ike’s double legacy to Sam’s forbearers and portends as well the direction of his whole life. That synoptic-prophetic ‘moment’ uncoils through the hunt stories and, chiefly by contrast, the other stories as well. The twelve year old knows that the blood of his first buck ‘had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under man’s tutelage, *he had already accepted*, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too’ (168, italics added)” (Rio-Jelliffe 136)

The act of killing the buck and being marked by the blood scene shapes “the direction of [Isaac’s] whole life” by confirming him as a man. That is to say, it confirms him as white man. The fact that the consecration is merely confirmation of what “he had already accepted” under “tutelage” reflects the cultural role of lynching as simply a symbol, albeit an inherently and oppressively violent symbol, of the racial difference and white “superiority” that had become a major factor of social indoctrination. The revisions to the “The Old People,” as Minter points out, foreground the interplay between the violent act and social constructions.

They subordinate ritualistic initiation into ‘manhood’ to ‘tutelage’ that is social and historical as well as personal – which is to say, tutelage in a kind of traditional yet secular and even pagan religion in which the most basic human desecrations are those that do violence to the earth and to other human beings, especially as seen in slavery as a social institution that extends and perverts the institution of property (Minter 138)

Noting the domination inherent to human involvement with nature and the connection of that dynamic with the racial exploitation of slavery in conjunction with a social tutelage, Minter’s

commentary and Faulkner's complex investigation of racism reveal lynching to be at the center of the oppressive racist ideology of the Jim Crow South.

"The Old People" is set in 1879, two years after the withdrawal of Federal troops from the Southern states, and the eleven-year-old Isaac has not yet renounced his claim to the land nor withheld Old Ben's deathblow. This historical setting is important because it presents this story as contemporary to the rise of lynching that enforced white masculinity as the hegemonic norm and resulted in the "separate but equal" policy of the Jim Crow period. Already in 1879, the culture in which Isaac's white privilege is founded rests upon the violent oppression of African Americans through lynching as a reconstitution of power structures that no longer had legal validity. The psychoanalytical commentary of Doreen Fowler highlights the dynamics of violence and domination behind the death of Isaac's first buck:

when at the age of ten, he kills his first deer, a symbol of the wilderness, he ritually dramatizes the advent of the father, or phallus; he recreates the splitting that gives rise to the empty subject. Ike's slaying of the deer marks a turning point; with this slaying Ike becomes a man, as Sam outwardly signs by anointing him with the blood of the slain deer. The tacit cultural identification of manhood with hunting is put into words by Sam Fathers, who says to Ike, 'You'll be a hunter. You'll be a man' (170). Manhood, not surprisingly, is equated with the gun, symbol for the phallus, and with subordination of the signified to the signifier (Fowler 134)

Fowler builds her analysis of *Go Down, Moses* on Freud and Lacan to read the hunts as an Oedipal drama, revealing that even if Isaac is unaware of the implications, the hunting symbolism shows him playing out the cultural dynamics of violence that created and supported racial difference. The use of theoretical insights to uncover this normative performance reveals a tension with Isaac's symbolic relinquishment of power when he lays aside his gun in "The Bear." As Fowler notes, "the gun symbolizes the phallus, the object of

the mother's and the Other's desire" (Fowler 135). More than the physical similarity to an erect penis, the gun is a symbol for the phallus because of its violent power to kill and objectify, to divest a creature of agency and enforce the status of oppressed symbolic Other. Laying aside the gun and refusing to shoot, Isaac attempts to distance himself from the domination of patriarchal power, but the creation of his self through a communion with an idealized wilderness is only possible through the violent creation of difference that allows the wilderness to appear noble. Although the absence of a textual figure for shot that kills the buck seems to be a technique to distance Isaac from domination, it actually functions as an implicit link to the death of Old Ben. In that scene, there is also a lack of violent action on Isaac's part, and yet, the symbolic Other has been killed and objectified for the purposes of identity formation in both instances.

Attempted Destabilization: Alternatives to A Repetitive Culture

In the attempt to destabilize the presentation of white masculinity as naturally "superior," Isaac is presented as boy-like, countering the cultural narrative that would make him a man based on the color of his skin alone. The major signs that distance Isaac from manhood are the lack of children, the renunciation of his land, and his refusal to assert himself as a force of domination. At no one's insistence, he goes out of his way to see that Turl's belated patrimony is delivered. In the hunts, Isaac repeatedly forgoes the opportunity to shoot Old Ben. The significance of Old Ben as symbolic Other renders Isaac's refusal to strike the killing blow as emblematic of his refusal to take part in the system of racial dominance created by the traditional lynching narrative. Isaac's insistence on boyhood rather than manhood reflects a desire to escape the guilt of acknowledged complicity in the system

of racial dominance that created white masculinity through the violent emasculation of African Americans. Even his common appellation of “Uncle Ike” is emasculating. The term “uncle,” most often seen with the “Uncle Tom”-type identity, is a lingering trace of the domestic apologists that represented slaves as happy dependents of the white male patriarch. Regardless of the undercutting effects of persistent structural difference, Isaac is clearly presented as an emasculated white man in order to suggest that being violently dominant is not the only option of identity possible for white masculinity.

The continuation of traditional white patriarchy, to which Isaac is contrasted, is presented through character names and Faulkner’s manner of blurring character distinctions for the reader. The name Carothers follows white patriarchy throughout the novel. The original patriarch, Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, is most often referred to as simply Carothers McCaslin. The full name of the next head of the plantation, Cass, is actually Carothers McCaslin Edmonds, and his grandson, Roth, is actually Carothers Edmonds. Additionally, for the first time reader, the figures of Cass, Zack, and Roth appear indistinct and interchangeable. This is because Faulkner often uses their shared last name, Edmonds, and refers backwards or forwards out of time to one of them that might not be present in a given scene. Zack Edmonds does not have Carothers as part of his name because Lucas – of the same generation, born only a year earlier – has it as part of his name. This is part of Faulkner’s attempt to shift the power usually held by white patriarchy to a black character.

The structural dynamics that underlie the continuation of white patriarchy are strongly represented in Roth’s character and actions. Describing Roth’s remembrance of his

rejection of Molly in part 3 of “The Fire and the Hearth,” Thadious Davis notes the racial and gender dynamics inherent in his sense of self.

Carothers must sever identification with Molly as mother, not merely so that he can emerge from childhood into manhood but, more significantly, so that he can become white. Without this racial separation, he cannot enter into his racial identity. His self-identification and personhood are invested in his whiteness. Masculinity and manhood are not unmarked by race in Carother’s culture, and therefore, in order to become an independent being within a racially explicit southern culture, he must distance himself from blacks and accept his racial identity as white (Davis *Games* 201).

Roth’s whiteness is created and defined in terms of difference related to both race and gender, thus, conforming with the structural creation of white masculinity via the ritual lynching performance. In “The Unity of *Go Down, Moses*,” Tick points out how Roth’s actions in “Delta Autumn” are directly reflective of Carothers McCaslin’s, stating that the story represents a “closing of the circle of racial evil. Like his ancient ancestor, Edmonds has committed miscegenation; like Lucius McCaslin, again, Edmonds refuses to acknowledge the child but instead offers a legacy anonymously” (Tick 70). Roth not only commits miscegenation but also, like his ancestor, incest because his mistress, the “Doe,” is descended from Carothers McCaslin through Turl and then Jim, Lucas’s brother. Observing the setting of “Delta Autumn” in 1940, only two years before the novel was published, Tick notes that “its contextual significance concerns the duplication of Lucius McCaslin’s sins in the present day –i.e., when the *novel* was written” (Tick 70). This figuration represents, for Faulkner, the persistence of a racial oppression in the mid-twentieth century stretching back to the early nineteenth century. Roth himself hints at the continuity when he says that “for twenty years now, he had run [the plantation], tried to even with the changed times, as his father and grandfather and great-grandfather had done before him” (Faulkner 112). Despite the

acknowledged change, Roth attempts to maintain a status quo of social order on his plantation. The central authority that he embodies in this continuation correlates to the perpetuated role of white masculinity as “superior.” This continuation is present in Roth’s attitudes in 1940, when the novel is written and the majority of the stories are set. “Roth’s conclusions about Lucas, who ‘beat’ his father, ‘*even a nigger McCaslin is a better man, better than all*’ white men (115-6), belies his stereotypical view of the superior white over inferior black. Isaac’s defense of the black’s enduring qualities in ‘The Bear’ goes against conventional preconceptions” (Rio-Jelliffe 142). Rio-Jelliffe’s observation in “Structure and Meaning in *Go Down, Moses*” highlights the racial difference at the center of social hierarchies and also Isaac as a figure of contrast.

Just as the emasculated Isaac is presented as a cultural contrast, the figure of Lucas plays a prominent role in Faulkner’s critique of symbolic masculinities by appropriating the signs of hegemonic masculinity, countering expected representations of black masculinity. His contrast to figures of stereotypically emasculated black men in the novel – particularly Rider and Butch Beauchamp, who embody the more common narrative of African American experience in the early twentieth century – is intended to figure the possibility of an undominated black masculinity. Both Rider and Butch face a system that precludes their economic prosperity, and both are killed for seeking some form of justice in an unjust world. Matthews says of Rider’s fleeting economic prosperity in his brief marriage (which significantly exists only before the text itself thus avoiding any tension as a figure not possible under the racist ideology of Jim Crow) that “Faulkner indulges his own fantasy of the black who earns his way to freedom and equality” (Matthews 29). Lucas would seem a

much more appropriate figure for Faulkner's imagined possibility of economic prosperity. Regardless, Matthews' attention to "fantasy" highlights the symbolic value of masculinity and Faulkner's attempt to destabilize it. In the racist ideology of Jim Crow, black masculinity was severely limited to the minstrelsy "Uncle Tom" or the black brute, which was only a brief stage before lynch victim. The repetitions of the novel allow Faulkner to acknowledge the disenfranchisement of the contemporary social order and also pre-figure an alternative to oppression in the figure of Lucas. George Wilkins – who Lucas himself describes as "a jimber-jawed clown who could not even learn how to make whiskey" (Faulkner 40), echoing the minstrel stereotype – is another repetition of the cultural stereotype of black masculinity against which Lucas is juxtaposed. Lucas takes great pride in producing illegal alcohol, one of his numerous methods of striving for economic power. George's inability to function equally in business highlights Faulkner's portrayal of Lucas as economically empowered. Rider, Butch, and George are comparatively minor characters, used primarily to figure an emasculated black identity and a cultural mechanism of repetition¹⁰ that was used to enforce that identity. The central black male figure of the novel, Lucas, is an envisioned end to a cycle of black death and the disenfranchisement inherent to the traditional lynching narrative.

As James Early notes in *The Making of Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner's first conception of Lucas in the short stories that eventually became "The Fire and The Hearth" "conformed to a comfortable white stereotype of the negro" (7). Lucas gradually became more complicated in revisions, but really became central to Faulkner's thinking only after he developed his final version of "The Bear" exploring the domination and commodification of the natural world (Early 74). That is, after Faulkner produced his in-depth investigation of

symbolism and the domination inherent in language itself. Attempting to pre-figure an alternative to culturally produced identities, Faulkner takes traits of white masculinity and writes them onto Lucas' character. The qualities that complicate Lucas's character are those that identify him with his (publicly) unacknowledged grandfather, Lucius McCaslin: independence, the will to possess, and integrity – the characteristics of white masculinity.

While Lucas descends fictionally from Lucius within the text, in Faulkner's process, the character of the patriarch, Lucius McCaslin, was conceived of after and named for the character of the black descendent Lucas Beauchamp. Faulkner had to imagine the ancestor of Lucas, a character based on the innumerable unacknowledged sons of slavery whose ancestry was widely known but never named. The link between Lucas and Lucius is an example of Faulkner's use of imaginative intervention to address what is normally rendered incomprehensible by a cultural silence. It is Lucas's similarity to the rapacious Lucius that leads Lucas to heavy-handedly oppose his daughter's marriage until it becomes legally advantageous to him, to trick and take advantage of the salesman for economic gain, and to maintain his refusal to compromise with Molly until the last possible moment. Counter to the narrative that justified lynching and perpetuated white power, Faulkner creates an African American character who is often portrayed as masculine, a character who exists in tension with what is presented as true. By giving Lucas characteristics that were reserved for hegemonic, white masculinity, he is depicting a character type that is "off the map." That is to say, that in the Jim Crow era, society does not recognize the possibility of African Americans being assertively or positively masculine. Through such a depiction of Lucas, Faulkner calls attention to the imbalance of racialized masculinities that would otherwise be

normalized and invisible and, also, suggests the possibility that the status quo of racial and gender identities might be made more equitable. Just as Lucas alters his own name from that of his white patriarch, Lucius, creating a blend that is part inherited identity and part assertion of self, Faulkner, likewise, fashions Lucas by mixing the coded stereotypes of white and black masculinities to create a hybrid that does not conform to, and inherently subverts, the restrictive patterns of identity that originate in the drama of lynching.

Isaac and Lucas are the figures of Faulkner's desire. It is the wish for the viability of masculine identities outside the traditional lynching narrative that leads Faulkner to push the use of wilderness symbolism further and further. However, in *Go Down, Moses*, Isaac and Lucas exist almost exclusive of each other, reflecting the novel's failure to acknowledge the interdependence of constructed racial identities. The one minor scene where they are depicted together reveals the fragility of Faulkner's imagined alternatives. Isaac's role in managing and distributing the money that Carothers McCaslin had left as a patrimony for Turl in his will is repeatedly emphasized as a telling detail of his attempt to dissociate himself from the inherently oppressive patrimony of whiteness and is often contrasted with the meager allowance that Isaac accepts from Cass in exchange for control of the McCaslin plantation. Announcing Lucas on his twenty-first birthday, Isaac's wife snidely quips that he has come from Cass to stop even that small pittance. However, he has merely come for the money intended for Turl, and so,

the white and the negro cousins went side by side to the bank... stood side by side at the window... while Lucas wrote out the check, writing it steadily under the white man's direction in the cramped though quite legible hand which the white man's mother had taught him (Faulkner 106).

Successfully transferring the money to Lucas's control, this scene would seem to suggest a racial equilibrium. However, Isaac's supervision and the significant association of the hand imagery with the authority of white masculinity reveal a racial relation that, although masked by the good will of individual altruism, persists in being defined by an actively empowered agent of whiteness.

Throughout *Go Down, Moses* hands are heavily weighted with symbolism metonymically to the act of writing and ordering and synecdochically to the figure of white masculinity that controls the social discourse of race and gender. In the ledgers, Isaac encounters "the hand which he could now recognize at first glance as his fathers" (Faulkner 254). He also contemplates how Carothers McCaslin "tamed and ordered" (Faulkner 243) the wilderness, "cleared it, translated it into something to bequeath to his children" (Faulkner 245), a description that foregrounds how human domination of the natural world is imbricated with the structures of language. When the "Doe" of Delta Autumn says that "James Beauchamp –you called him Tennie's Jim though he had a name – was my grandfather" (Faulkner 344), she calls attention to the novel's habit of naming African American characters with possessive appellations that emphasize a subordinate or property status. The example of "Samuel Worsham Beauchamp" (Faulkner 352) or "Butch Beauchamp, as the youth had been known during the single year he had been in and out of the city jail" (Faulkner 354), similarly, illustrates how the ability to name and control language is involved with structures of power and the control of social identities by connecting the renaming of "Butch" with the prison system, an institution firmly under the control of hegemonic interests. The use of hands as the metonymical symbols of white

discourse in *Go Down, Moses* and elsewhere – Ellison notes that the minstrel performer, the epitome of emasculated blackness, “could appear only with his hands gloved in white and his face blackened with burnt cork or greasepaint” (Ellison 48-9) – reveals that the invasive and controlling presence of white hands continues to shape Lucas’s life and identity in an inherently unequal manner. Failing to address the structural interdependence of racial categories that creates the social status for white patriarchy, *Go Down, Moses* arrives at a roadblock in its drive to figure truly equal masculinities.

In addition to the usage of Lucas and Isaac as alternatives to constructed identities, *Go Down, Moses* also attempts to imagine a different outcome to the conventional scenes of domination that run throughout the novel: the poker game in “Was,” the altercation with Birdsong that results in Rider being lynched in “Pantaloons in Black,” the hunts of “The Old People” and “The Bear,” the confrontation with the “Doe” in “Delta Autumn.” In each of these examples, the situation is resolved with a clearly dominant figure. (The scene in “Delta Autumn” is a subversive reversal that repositions Isaac as the target of emasculating verbal domination.) The scenes of domination reflect the violent creation of difference enacted by the ritual lynching performance that is the structural basis for racial hierarchies. Faulkner’s attempt to portray an alternative to the act of domination at the center of the traditional narrative of lynching can be seen in the scene of confrontation between Lucas and Zack over Molly. Parallels connect that scene with Faulkner’s earlier work *Absalom, Absalom!*, and yet, particular adjustments highlight Faulkner’s effort to provide an alternative to the cultural necessity of black death. As Neil Watson points out in “The ‘Incredibly Loud ... Miss-fire’: A Sexual Reading of *Go Down, Moses*,” the dynamic of Molly, Lucas, and Zack mirrors that

of Judith, Bon, and Henry from *Absalom, Absalom!* with the exception that the bedroom confrontation in *Go Down, Moses* (with its sexual undertones and phallic symbols) ends in a sort of armistice rather than death (Watson 122). By keeping the basic features present in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the structural dynamics of lynching but changing the violent outcome, *Go Down, Moses* attempts to counter the stabilization of hegemonic power that was engendered through the recurring lynching performances of the Jim Crow period. Additionally, it focuses attention on the usual outcome of black death, which in a social setting would be naturalized and made invisible by a cultural silence. The opposition between Lucas and Zack is, also, interesting because it highlights the inseparability of racial and gender categories. Lucas descends through the male but black line; Zack descends through the female but white line. In a racist ideology, one would assume that the white would win out automatically. However, the coding of racial superiority through a gender hierarchy enacted by the emasculating act of lynching creates a stalemate out of a relation that pits dominant gender against dominant race.

The resolution of the altercation between Zack and Lucas destabilizes cultural presentations of black masculinity as inferior. Lucas “transgresses society’s rules to show his white kin, Zack, a measure of manhood other than property” (Rio-Jelliffe 142). Rio-Jelliffe’s comment on exceeding a status of property highlights Lucas’s tentative escape from the object status of black masculinity as the symbolic Other that is oppressed in order to elevate the identity of white masculinity as “superior.” This key scene of confrontation, which ends in armistice rather than domination, is also linked to the central event of Old Ben’s death. Arthur Kinney observes the textual details that evoke this reference:

Grasping Zack in what is ‘almost like an embrace’ (56) (recalling the way in which Boon clasped Old Ben), Lucas presses the pistol into Zack’s side and shoots – but the pistol misfires (Kinney 92).

The connection between Old Ben’s death and the misfire accentuates the break that Faulkner attempts through this contrast to the repetitions of usual outcomes in scenes of domination. Knowing that it will mean his death, Lucas achieves a sense of masculinity in his willingness to kill Zack to defend his wife, but this boldness is undercut through the revolver misfire as *dues ex machina*. The only thing that breaks the cycle of lynching and black death is the hand of the author. The fact that Lucas does not die is not the product of an equalized power relation. The same cultural structures persist. Had Faulkner allowed the revolver to fire, Lucas would have been lynched because any other option Faulkner might have considered would have been utterly unintelligible under the racist ideology of lynching. The only way Faulkner can portray an assertive (to the point of violence) black masculinity is to not allow the gun to fire. Although he is unable to fully abolish the system of racial dominance engendered by the traditional lynching narrative, Faulkner’s alterations to the culturally accepted repetitions of masculinity focuses attention on what is usually unseen, destabilizing that system without straying into a realm of fantastical and unimaginable equality. Thadious Davis comments on the optimistic desire that reshapes the themes of *Absalom, Absalom!*.

While *Absalom* achieves the full aesthetic and imaginative reach that Faulkner could make of the special circumstances of his divided world, *Go Down, Moses* assess and distills the meanings that Faulkner could take the most comfort in believing and presenting: that is, those aspects of faith and love which can somehow save the individual from the catatonic state to which Quentin succumbs in *Absalom* (Davis 241).

Whereas Bon died in the previous novel, Faulkner now envisions a resolution to racial conflict that ends in conciliatory peace and mutual coexistence rather than death for the African American character.

Faulkner's driving desire to escape the racial status quo of the Jim Crow South motivates the construction of *Go Down, Moses* as an intricate and in-depth exploration of the roots of racism through the complicated use of wilderness symbolism and structural repetitions and juxtapositions. However, the fundamental inability to see the interdependence of racial categories figured in the inherent polarization of textual figures undercuts the textual desire for transcendence, preventing a definitive conclusion and subverting the strength of Faulkner's imagined alternatives. The tension between the desire for progress and equality and the structural limits that prevent that goal results in the expanding complexity of the novel's wilderness symbolism and the tortured juxtapositions that complicate the narrative direction of *Go Down, Moses*. Implicitly supporting a reading of the hunting motif as the primary organization of Faulkner's exploration into the roots of racism, Marius points out that "it is after the hunt that Ike McCaslin mediates on the prodigious and unjust inequality that brings with it the exploitation and the troubling issue of race that neither Faulkner nor his characters can resolve" (Marius 186). Matthews also notes the centrality of hunting to the novel's project and its ultimate failure, observing that "*Go Down, Moses* exhausts itself trying to perform the hunting ritual as an adequate sublimation of slavery's blood-mad bloodletting" (Matthews 23). Crashing into the unacknowledged limits of his, admittedly expansive, vision, Faulkner's novel never finds the conclusion or the form it ultimately seeks.

In the use of metaphorical hunting as an investigation of racial violence and inequality, “The Bear” performs much of the work and becomes a structural microcosm of the larger narrative movement. At the close of “The Bear,” Old Ben (the prominent animal symbol of unconquerable wilderness) is dead, Isaac has saluted the snake (symbol of evil and the biblical fall) as grandfather, and Boon has tried to possess and dominate the tree of squirrels which is both the tree of knowledge and the diminished and fractured symbol of the wilderness, shouting madly “Get out of here! Dont touch them! Dont a one of them! They’re mine” (Faulkner 315). “Here is puny, idiotic man striving to claim the wilderness as symbolized by the moil of frenzied squirrels, and why? So he can kill them. That is the ultimate metaphor of this book, that men seek to claim the wilderness so they can destroy it” (Marius 185). As Marius observes, this image at the close of “The Bear” gives the ultimate shape to an investigation that is frustrated in its desire to reach a goal beyond its own limits. The progressive endings of the hunting stories figure Faulkner’s diminishing hope for a change to racial oppression as he works through his investigations of power and language. The hope of mutual respect and coexistence with the Other (the reverence for the mythic buck) has given way to the unavoidable death of a symbolic Other and recognition of guilt (Old Ben’s death and Ike’s salute to the snake) and, finally, to the repeated domination of an already emasculated Other (the killing of a doe and the forced and stagnant racial categories for the Doe) that is mitigated only by a weak hope that change will happen, “maybe in a thousand years or two thousand years” (344).

Born a year after *Plessy v. Ferguson* established “separate but equal” and coming of an age in an era of strict regulation and violent enforcement of racial identities, a

fundamental change in the society of Jim Crow may very well have seemed thousands of years away to Faulkner. However, that system of racial segregation was founded upon a constructed difference that was controlled through coded stereotypes of race and gender, providing Faulkner with the means to craft *Go Down, Moses* as an exposing and destabilizing critique of the racist society. More deeply enmeshed in the structures of race than he might have imagined, Faulkner is able to probe the ways in which the violence of lynching organized the racist society and yet unable to ultimately break free. Through intricate narrative juxtapositions and an exponentially complex use of symbolism, Faulkner creates a novel that possesses a vast potential to expose and critique the lasting effects of the lynching era; although the social reluctance to acknowledge many of the dynamics foregrounded in the novel and its problematic complexity are compounded by Faulkner's incomplete understanding of the workings of interdependence. The many progressive destabilizations alongside the inherent limitations render *Go Down, Moses* as a liminal text that can be pushed to reveal significant insights but that does not offer them up freely.

The most significant feature of Faulkner's text is the presence of textual figures of lynching. Although problematically bifurcated into the two scenes, the death of Old Ben and the shooting of Isaac's fist buck, taken collectively, these scenes reveal reflections beyond the text itself and illuminate the ways in which American culture was shaped by lynching. A distillation of the textual relations within *Go Down, Moses* reveals that racial difference is only given meaning through an interdependent relationship, the social privileges of white masculinity are inherently bound to the social oppression of African Americans, and the segregated society is made possible and stable only through violence both of the lynching act

itself and the representation of that act in social symbols. While Faulkner's novel can further an understanding of the structural dynamics of lynching in American culture, it does so only with significant effort by the reader or through the use of theoretical perspectives to pull its pieces together.

“Going to Meet the Man”
“WHAT’S THE MATTER?”: White Masculine Insecurity and the Black Body

The legal stability of Jim Crow segregation began to erode in 1954 when the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed the segregation of public schools. The following year, the fourteen year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered in Money, Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Although the slaying was not a public spectacle and lacked the symbolic representation of controlling a “bestial” black masculinity, the response to the “threat” to white femininity indicts the enduring gendered narrative consistent with the ideological use of lynching. At the insistence of his mother, Till’s mutilated body did become a public spectacle; the horrific brutality inflicted upon his body nullified any possibility of the trite narrative of white masculinity as just or chivalrous and gave impetus to the growing resistance that would become the Civil Rights movement.

In the ten years following the death of Till, Rosa Parks would refuse to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama; four African American college students would hold a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina; young “freedom riders” would embark on missions to the South to challenge Jim Crow laws and register black voters; the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. would deliver his inspirational “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington D.C.; and Congress would pass the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. However, these successes were in the face of constant, concerted, and often-violent resistance by white supremacists. The NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers was murdered outside his home in Jackson, Mississippi; four girls were killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama; and 50 people were injured by police on “Bloody Sunday” in Selma, Alabama. The events of this tumultuous decade foreground that the cultural anxiety over the unraveling of segregation during the Civil Rights Movement represented a crisis of identity, for white masculinity and American culture in general, that had its roots in the instability of social identities created through the violence of lynching.

While *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Go Down, Moses* inherently question the hegemonic assumptions of a “superior” white masculinity through their structural and symbolic presentations, neither contains a figure that directly confronts the significance of the lynching event. The coalescence of reflective structures into two scenes in *Go Down, Moses* is an improvement from the variously represented dynamics of *Huckleberry Finn*, but the polarization and heavy symbolism of those two violent scenes obscures any conclusive critique. Though both Twain and Faulkner pursue a progressive agenda of critique, it seems

that, as white men, they are invested in a cultural identity that prevents a direct and unflinching view of lynching and its role in creating racial categories. Their failure to present a critique in a manner that cannot be obscured or misinterpreted allows the full subversive potential of their work to be suppressed.

In contrast, Baldwin's position temporally (late in the era of segregation) and socially (on the margins of racial and gender identities) allows an understanding of the social structures and consequences of interdependent identity categories created through the ritual lynching event. Baldwin presents this understanding in "Going to Meet the Man" by making a literal lynching event the center of the story's structure, and the symbolic values that radiate from that event are not figurative imaginings of literary art but the same symbolic values of social identities that shaped the segregated society. In presenting his story as such, Baldwin directly confronts the centrality of lynching to the creation of racialized masculinities, to pervasive histories of violence, and to the material conditions of the lives of African Americans. The claims of "Going to Meet the Man" do not require theoretical perspectives for comprehension but rather illustrate them through the devices and textual figures that Baldwin employs.

Baldwin makes use of dramatic irony and a finely wrought sequence of soliloquies and flashbacks to present a compressed depiction of lynching as the misunderstood source of persistent and restrictive identity categories. "Going to Meet the Man" essentially tells two stories at once: with the character of Jesse, Baldwin tells a story that traces the white masculine insecurity of the Civil Rights era to unstable identities of power created in the ritual lynching of Jim Crow, while Jesse's voice as narrator, reveals the story of a cultural

ignorance of structural interdependence and a refusal to acknowledge the social consequences of a violent past. The tension between the two levels of the story creates a dramatic irony that is key because it allows Baldwin to simultaneously trace the origins and motivations of the racial conflict of the present to its roots in historical lynching *and* illustrate the structural restrictions of identity categories that are created in the ritual lynching event. The present action of the story occurs within mere hours, but through an internal sequence of memories and commentary, Baldwin connects the shape of Jesse's racial and sexual identity as an adult back to the lynching he witnessed in childhood and, also, foregrounds Jesse's complete inability to see this connection. The sexual torture that Jesse repeats in the present is the ideological descendent of lynching as a means to create a symbolic smoke screen to obscure the invention and instability of white masculinity. The temporal sequencing of the story through successive flashbacks allows certain devices to function doubly as foreshadowing of the climatic lynching scene for the reader and as the later (chronologically) consequences of that event on Jesse's character.

"Going to Meet the Man" makes forceful assertions about lynching as a troubled and unstable site that is motivated by white masculine insecurity, and yet, also creates and gives value to the ideal of white male heterosexuality as powerful. Parallel to the paradoxical overlap of insecurity and power as part of white masculinity, lynching renders the black body as both a figure to be hated and destroyed and a figure of enviable sexual prowess. Beginning with an assessment of Baldwin's artistic project that foregrounds the significant difference of his understanding of social structures from that of Twain or Faulkner will enable a successive reading that contrasts Jesse's uncertainty with the certain logic of the story's structure to

reveal how Baldwin renders his superior understanding as the structured narrative of “Going to Meet the Man.” A focused reading of the literal lynching in the social context of Jim Crow will enable the structural similarities with the sexual torture in the present to become fully transparent. By pushing the textual relations of “Going to Meet the Man,” I hope to show that lynching, for Baldwin, is a symbol of the desire to destroy blacks in a racist society that arises as an overcompensation for the insecurity of white masculinity. Moreover, through the eroticization of taboo, the black body, in Baldwin’s understanding of social identities in the segregated society, signifies an unrepressed sexuality, a liberated sexuality, that is at once threatening and attractive to a patriarchal white culture.

Beyond the Bounds of Safe: Baldwin’s Artistic Project

Baldwin’s cultural position both as an African American and a homosexual places him outside the dominant discourse in multiple ways and gives him a pronounced understanding of identity categories. In “Everybody Knew His Name: Reassessing James Baldwin,” Robert Corber notes that “the category ‘queer’ which has recently emerged in literary studies to describe identities, desires, and practices rendered illegible by the available sexual taxonomies seems more appropriate” to describe Baldwin and his work (Corber 168). The examination of normative identities and relations at the core of queer studies provides a more inclusive approach for exploring the work of Baldwin. As Corber notes, “critics are now better equipped to assess Baldwin’s work, for they have learned to analyze race in relation to other crosscutting axes of difference and subordination” (Corber 170). Such a perspective is particularly important because the history of lynching, which has had a profound effect on the social identities available to African Americans, is revealed to be both

racial *and* sexual in nature. Although harder to imagine, lynching's ability to render a positive and assertive masculine identity as not only a dangerous but also an unintelligible option for African Americans is, perhaps, even more oppressive than the physical violence itself. As Yasmin Degout notes in “‘Masculinity’ and (Im)maturity,”

Baldwin renders coming of age in the wake of hegemonic ideology as an encounter with normative assumptions symbolically specified as institutionally white and male in origin—i.e., as ‘the man.’ In using ‘the man’ to specify this discourse, Baldwin, as did popular colloquialism of his time, underscores the gendered denominator of this discourse, rendering ‘masculinity’ as a model of identity resulting in a larger behavioral complex that is linked to broader societal ideologies (Degout 141-2).

Degout's commentary foregrounds that masculinity exists as part of a matrix of relational identities, and the “larger behavioral complex” created through the institutionalization of white masculinity means that the behaviors of other identities (black, female, and with the assumed heterosexuality of masculinity, gay) must be regulated so as to not infringe on the position of privilege that is reserved for white male heterosexuality. Thus, Baldwin's rightly seeks to illuminate the causes and consequences of lynching in terms of both race and gender, not in isolation but in dynamic relation. Overlooking the interplay between race and gender would omit not only crucial structural details surrounding the lynching event but also some of the subtleties of the encompassing understanding of American race relations that Baldwin presents in “Going to Meet the Man.”

Indeed, Baldwin's project is one that seeks to illuminate American-ness in the broadest sense, and “Going to Meet the Man” exposes the lingering complexities of bifurcated racial identities through the intricate and minute details of its highly condensed portrayal. Baldwin's story asserts that what had been commonly referred to as the “Negro problem” was, in fact, part of a relational matrix of American identities. As Beau Fly Jones

comments, “the alleged ‘Negro problem’ in America as Baldwin sees it is not in fact a Negro problem but a white one” (Jones 107). That is to say, the “Negro,” as critics such as Ralph Ellison and Thadious Davis have acknowledged, has been used by hegemonic (white) culture as a symbolic abstraction to represent and contain negative aspects of human nature and, consequently, reflects the anxieties of white patriarchy rather than the actualities of African American experience. Because of his cultural position and understanding, Baldwin is able to “provide a viewpoint that white writers and academics are simply not in a position to contribute” (Jones 107). This generalized claim that Baldwin is able to offer a unique perspective on the problem of racial identities is clarified by remarks Baldwin made in “Faulkner and Desegregation” (1961).

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or thought one knew; to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed. (Baldwin 209).

Defined culturally by a subordinating and imposed identity, Baldwin is better able to see and has less to lose by imagining what might lie beyond the cultural definitions of white manhood. Baldwin’s commentary on the tendency to cling to an imagined identity (rather than embracing change) in the face of “the breakup of the world as one has always known it” casts light on why the uncertainty that followed Emancipation and the end of slavery, which had legalized and validated a system of white patriarchy, was met with a violent effort to return the social structure to one of white male superiority through the systematic use of lynching. Baldwin refers to these psychological reactions to real change as “one of the irreducible facts of life” and “almost [his] only means of understanding what is happening in the hearts and minds of white Southerners” (Baldwin 209). Baldwin’s ability to understand

the “hearts and minds of white Southerners” is significant because the convincing and, to a degree, sympathetic rendering of Jesse’s voice imbues “Going to Meet the Man” with an impressive narrative depth.

The opening presentation of white masculinity in “Going to Meet the Man” takes a markedly different tone than *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *Go Down, Moses*, highlighting how Baldwin’s superior understanding of identity categories allows him to present his story as a more definitive critique than either Twain or Faulkner.¹¹ Although the opening line “ ‘What’s the matter?’ she said” (Baldwin 229) is told from Jesse’s point of view (as is the entirety of the story), it features the embedded voice of Grace, his wife, and rather than playing the complacent and ego-boosting role of white femininity in the traditional lynching narrative, she calls direct attention to Jesse’s sexual inadequacy. As Roger Whitlow notes, “Baldwin immediately establishes the problem to be resolved—white male impotence—as the story opens” (195). Instead of establishing a sense of authority, the opening question of “Going to Meet the Man” reveals the failure of white male heterosexuality, creates a tone of uncertainty within the narrative voice, and puts Jesse on a defensive footing. Like *Huckleberry Finn* and *Go Down, Moses*, “Going to Meet the Man” starts with a figure of white masculinity, but the tone and that figure’s relation to the reader are drastically different, signaling that Baldwin’s text will deliver a more piercing investigation of white masculinity than that of Twain or Faulkner.

Not surprisingly, Baldwin exhibits frustration at the gradualism, represented in their work and espoused publicly by Faulkner, particularly his advice to “go slow,” saying that Faulkner is not

very persuasive when he suggests that white Southerners, left to their own devices, will realize that their own social structure looks silly to the rest of the world and correct it of their own accord. It has looked silly, to use Faulkner's rather strange adjective, for a long time; so far from trying to correct it, Southerners, who seem to be characterized by a species of defiance most perverse when it is most despairing, have clung to it, at incalculable costs to themselves, as the only conceivable and as an absolutely sacrosanct way of life (Baldwin 209).

For Baldwin, the “perverse” and “despairing” clinging to “an absolutely sacrosanct way of life” reveals a fundamental insecurity that undergirds the violent Southern battles over segregation. While Baldwin would have surely been able to discern the subversive intent within the work of Twain and Faulkner, the limited effects of their works to produce a significant change in the oppressive racial system of Jim Crow society (an indirect effect of their white male identity and its consequences upon the use of symbolism within their art) seems to create in Baldwin a sense of urgency to expose, directly, the complicated and actively obscured structures of difference and subordination created through lynching.

Confronting Insecurity: Sequence and Structure

Baldwin illustrates the need to address the insecurity of white masculinity as the prime motivator of racial violence by presenting “Going to Meet the Man” as the narrative of Jesse's psychological struggle to make sense of his own inadequacy and the social turmoil around him. The carefully structured sequence of scenes in “Going to Meet the Man” connects Jesse's impotence back to its source in the symbolisms of the ritual lynching event. Additionally, the juxtaposition of the private scenes of sexual inadequacy with the public scenes of racial conflict foregrounds the consequences of building a social system on the tentative power symbolized in the dominance of white masculinity in the traditional lynching narrative. “Going to Meet the Man” is, according to Carolyn Sylvander, Baldwin's way to

explore what racism “has done to a Southern white male, to ‘the man,’ whose previously stable world is daily changing around him” (Sylvander 121). Although the story clearly takes on more than the tortured psyche of one man, Jesse becomes the center of “Going to Meet the Man” as the figuration of not only the white masculine insecurity that is the catalyst for the violence of lynching but also the rigidly defined archetype of white male heterosexuality that, along with the other social constructions of Jim Crow, is the consequence of the ritual lynching performance.

As Arthenia Millican notes in “Fire as the Symbol of a Leadening Existence in ‘Going to Meet the Man,’” the key to understanding Baldwin’s stance is through the sequencing of Jesse’s flashbacks. Each transition deeper into Jesse’s memory sharpens the focus of Baldwin’s assertion that the root of the present identity crisis lies in the trauma of the past. “Through Jesse’s reverie, we can rebuild the framework for his destruction, which, of course, exempts the decadence of the racist society that helped form him. Baldwin does this by grafting upon Jesse’s consciousness the necessity for him to keep the black man in *his* place” (Millican 171). By contrasting the power relations and identity performances that guide Baldwin’s controlled structure with Jesse’s lack of control or understanding of those transitions, I hope to highlight a framework of retrospective investigation in “Going to Meet the Man” that explores problems of racialized masculinities through insecurity and lynching in the past. However, I disagree with Millican that the story’s structure “exempts the decadence of the racist society,” and that Jesse’s “lack of a surname indicates that he is a scapegoat for the white-racist ideal” (Millican 177). I would suggest Jesse is actually a synecdoche for white patriarchy and that his personal struggles against sexual insecurity are

directly reflective of a cyclical need to affirm white masculinity and “superiority” by exorcising fears of social chaos through the symbolism of the lynching event. Jesse’s need “to keep the black man in *his* place” is not “grafted” on by Baldwin but rather an expression of the cultural need for African Americans to stay within a restricted set of behaviors and identities, thus enabling the appearance of a stable and “superior” whiteness, a need which “Going to Meet the Man” reveals to be never more than tentatively or temporarily attained.

Although presented as the unconscious memories of Jesse, the scenes and transitions of “Going to Meet the Man” are carefully orchestrated to create a narrative movement that leads to the historical roots of present problems. Peter Freese charts a framed pattern of temporal (flashbacks) and spatial (setting) presentations within the story that “show[s] that the seemingly arbitrary and aimless chain of Jesse’s thoughts is arranged in a symmetrical pattern, both halves of which begin and end on the level of the present action” (Freese 175). By moving chronologically backwards from the present of the first half to the past in the second half, “Going to Meet the Man” embodies a retrospective investigation that exposes lynching as the origin of strictly segregated identities. The first half of the story features Jesse as an adult and exposes the troubled intersections of race, gender, and social authority during the Civil Rights movement and the unraveling of Jim Crow. The second half moves back to Jesse’s childhood at the height of Jim Crow segregation, contrasting Jesse’s insecurity in the present with the confidence of his parents and the white community in the past. Moreover, the graphic description of the lynching that Jesse witnesses as a young boy underscores feelings of both revulsion and fascination,¹² combining racial and sexual imagery to reveal that Jesse’s sexualized torture of the “boy” in the present as another instance in the cyclical

need to bolster white masculinity through the brutalization of a black scapegoat. As Paul Griffith observes, “Baldwin’s strategy of unraveling his protagonist’s experience is connected to his recognition of this ever present influence of the force of history” (Griffith 512). Thus, by presenting “Going to Meet the Man” through the retrospective interiority of Jesse, Baldwin can illustrate how events of the past shaped and defined Jesse’s sense of whiteness and masculinity.

Present Problems: The Nightmare of Impotence

This temporal pattern of presenting a situation and then revealing a past as explication holds for the sequence of scenes within the separate halves as well. The first half of the story presents Jesse’s encounters with the black Civil Rights leader, who Jesse only ever refers to as “boy” despite his refusal to conform to subservient expectations. As the narrative moves from the bedroom to the scenes earlier that day in the jail cell and several years before when Jesse first met the “boy” as an actual boy, “Going to Meet the Man” exposes the imbrication of Jesse’s racial and sexual identities by connecting Jesse’s impotence to the destabilized social identities of the Civil Rights era. Jesse answers “what’s the matter” by saying “I don’t know... it’s not my fault!” (Baldwin 229), and without further thought, he shifts to the stress of being a sheriff of a small town in the South plagued by Civil Rights activists. While Jesse overlooks the significance of this juxtaposition, it allows Baldwin to exemplify the pattern of displaced insecurity that is at the root of the lynching drama. Like the angry tirade directed at the free black from Ohio made by Pap, the “archetype of whiteness” (Lowry 58), in *Huckleberry Finn*, Jesse finds comfort in addressing his contempt toward an external figure rather than acknowledging any internal shortcoming.

To highlight the connection between the scene of troubled sexuality in the bedroom and the scene of troubled whiteness in the jail cell, Baldwin embeds repeated or parallel questions, a device that accentuates the uncertainty of Jesse's narrative voice. Jesse asks "wouldn't you think they'd learn?" (Baldwin 229, 232) directly to his wife as he abandons his hopes of sexual consummation and again as he remembers his troubles with Civil Rights activists earlier that day. When Jesse asks the Civil Rights leader "you hear me?" (Baldwin 232) as he tortures him in the jail, it recalls his earlier question to Grace: "you listening?" (Baldwin 232). While Jesse's tone in the jail cell is more authoritarian, the basic question is the same. Through juxtaposing sexually charged scenes with scenes of racial conflict and through overlapping racial and sexual imagery in the jail torture scene and the lynching scene, "Going to Meet the Man" reveals the authority of whiteness to be connected to the authority of masculinity, so that when Jesse says " 'What a funny time... to be thinking about a thing like that' " (Baldwin 232) as he thinks of his torture of the "boy" while in bed with his wife the reader realizes the connection is more apt than Jesse is aware of.

The next transition from that afternoon in the jail cell to several years before when Jesse worked for a mail-order house accentuates the social interdependence that enables white power by highlighting Jesse's response to increasing challenges to his racial authority. When the Civil Rights leader defies Jesse "to call our women by their right names," Jesse's memory is pulled back to the house of one of his customers, whom he simply calls "Old Julia." The attention to naming is not simply the minor details of a particular name but rather a technique to foreground the power of discourse, the privilege of naming. What "Going to Meet the Man" reveals is that the power of naming extends to (or is perhaps founded upon)

the cultural identities of masculinity, so that, through the use of lynching – as the violent conjunction of the physical and the symbolic – white patriarchal power names black masculinity as hyper-sexed, bestial, or emasculated and suppresses any possible validity of representing black masculinity in the positive and empowered ways reserved for the hegemony of white masculinity. As Jesse recalls his first encounter with the “boy,” Baldwin further highlights the limits of Jesse’s understanding by showing a contradiction between Jesse’s memory of the scene and the conclusions he draws from it. Before the defiant Civil Rights leader forces Jesse to revisit his memory, Jesse remembers that time as a period of happy segregation: “he never really had any trouble. Hell, they all liked him. The kids used to smile when he came to the door” (Baldwin 231). Although Jesse’s memory has reconceived the past as a narrative of stability and contentment, his own recollection shows a starkly different scene. Incredulous at the child’s haughty “*White man*,” Jesse “didn’t have time to be fooling around with some crazy kid” (Baldwin 234). As he struggles to get the young boy to answer a simple question, the scene becomes “charged with malevolence” and is transformed into “a nightmare dreamed by a child; perhaps one of the nightmares he himself had dreamed as a child” (Baldwin 234, 235). Jesse’s reflexive commentary on nightmares and childhood (implicitly pointing to the manhood that follows childhood, at least for whites) unconsciously juxtaposes the past and the present and also white authority and black defiance.

The density of significance in so simple a comment results from Baldwin’s compression of his expansive understanding of American racial identities into the figures of “Going to Meet the Man.” The nightmare of the present is the destabilized world where the

boy who refuses to acquiesce to the expected role of “boy” challenges Jesse’s white authority. By connecting this to Jesse’s nightmare of the past, in which his younger self is appalled and intrigued by the violence enacted upon the body of the lynch victim, Baldwin again points to roots of racial identities in the violence of the past and exposes the structures of interdependence by balancing the event that shapes Jesse’s sense of white masculinity with the destabilization of that identity in the face of a defiant black masculinity. The retrospective movement to the short scene where Jesse first meets the “boy” functions to enrich the earlier link between the bedroom and the jail by illuminating the interdependence of whiteness and blackness, which is shown to be both racial and sexual as a consequence of the emasculation that is central to the lynching event and the creation of a cultural whiteness. In addition to the illustrated consequences, this scene, especially the nightmare of an instable manhood, functions as a foreshadowing of the past action in the second half and moves the narrative forward as it leads right back to the scene of sexual torture in the jail cell – the diminished but persistent equivalent of the lynching event in the present – where Jesse wants to “pistol whip him until the boy’s head burst open like a melon. He began to tremble with what he believed was rage” (Baldwin 235). What the structural juxtapositions and reflective symbolisms of “Going to Meet the Man” show, and what Jesse continually fails to understand, is that Jesse’s assumptions of rage obscure the twining of abhorrence and attraction. This problematic paradox of revulsion and fascination is illustrated when to Jesse’s “bewilderment, his horror,” the object of his scorn causes him to become aroused as “he felt himself violently stiffen” (Baldwin 235). Through the reverie of Jesse’s day, and informed by his recent past, “Going to Meet the Man” shows white masculinity to be

connected with violence and with the black body in a troubling way. Thus, the first half of Baldwin's story illustrates the consequences of the interdependence of white and black and the overlapping imbrication of racial and sexual identities.

A Retrospective Explanation: The Roots of White Masculine Desire

To the expose the roots of the complicated structural dynamics embodied in the first half of the story the narrative of "Going to Meet the Man" moves back to the past and Jesse's childhood. Following the same contained pattern of temporal retrospection, the second half presents, first, a virile white masculinity as a contrast to Jesse's impotence and, then, the unchecked power of lynching that engenders that identity. Although the certainty of the transition from the present to the past is highlighted by the technical devices¹³ of Baldwin's structure, the dramatic irony created through the tension with Jesse's uncertainty reveals the failure of white masculinity to understand the origins of its bounded identity and the problems that arise from the need to maintain a defined boundary. Jesse's self-deluded insecurity will focus on anything but the possibility of an impotent masculinity. Consequently, in the middle bedroom scene, while Jesse lies with his wife still unable to sleep or copulate, he can only obsess about the challenge to his white authority, the singing of the black protestors. Jesse "could not remember the first time he had heard it" (Baldwin 235), but as the narrative moves to the second half, Baldwin presents the answer to the question that Jesse asks – "where had he heard that song?" (Baldwin 239) – as well as the question that he is unable to ask – "what's the matter" with his manhood?

As the story's progresses in its retrospective pattern, the singing protestors become the black mourners heard from the car coming home from a lynching. Jesse's father

comments that “even when they’re sad, they sound like they just about to go and tear off a piece,” revealing an eroticization of blackness (Baldwin 239). Moreover, saying “Well, that’s what we going to do” he illustrates that the eroticization of blackness is key to the empowerment and desire of white masculinity (Baldwin 240). At home, Jesse “heard his mother’s moan, his father’s sigh; he gritted his teeth. Then their bed began to rock. His father’s breathing seemed to fill the world” (Baldwin 241). As this scene “fill[s] the world,” Jesse is exposed to an expression of the “proper” gender roles that he will be expected to follow in adulthood. The sexual triumph of white masculinity embodied in Jesse’s father contrasts to his own impotence and provides the context to answer “what’s the matter?” (229) with white masculinity by probing the social conditions that successfully empower it here.

Following the pattern of sequential retrospection, the narrative moves back to the morning of that day, as Jesse accompanies his excited family and community to a lynching. When Jesse asks if they are going to a picnic, his father tells him, “You won’t ever forget *this* picnic—!” (Baldwin 243), highlighting the freedom and glee of the social pageantry of white violence in the Jim Crow era and pointing to the lasting effect the event will have upon Jesse. As Freese notes, the lynching is the “traumatic experience which has determined his future development and formed his racial and sexual attitudes alike” (Freese 175). Significantly, the 8-year-old Jesse becomes a man (i.e. aware of his sexuality) and white through the same series of events. As the caravan proceeds to the lynching site, Jesse realizes that there are “no black faces on the road this morning” (Baldwin 243). Thus, as the traditional lynching narrative plays out and Jesse comes into the cultural sense of whiteness, he is dramatically separated from the blackness that had previously seemed so benign to him. “Going to Meet

the Man” figures the implementation of racial difference and separation, when Jesse, perplexed by the drama unfolding before him, realizes “he could not ask Otis about this” even though he thought that Otis had the “solution to such mysteries. He felt Otis knew everything” (Baldwin 243). Through Otis, Baldwin also represents a specter of encompassing certainty that is nostalgically longed for by white masculinity; the misguided belief in such a chimera combined with an essential insecurity leads to the attempt to regain a lost order through the lynching drama. Jesse’s racial separation from Otis, which insists that black and white cannot be equal in adulthood, is shown to be intimately connected to his sexual development, not only in the witnessing of his father’s triumphant sexuality but also in his first orgasm during the lynching.

“Going to Meet the Man” reveals that lynching creates an overlap of racial and gender categories which links the fate of both white and masculine power to a single system of coded enforcement that would become institutionalized under the laws of Jim Crow. Moreover, through the linking of physical force and symbolic representation, lynching is both the act that creates and enforces power and the symbolic representation of that power. This coded system of symbols becomes available for artistic appropriation as a vehicle for critique, which Baldwin does more successfully than his predecessors. As Degout notes “the lynching in this story is both the site of Jesse’s racialization and Baldwin’s metaphor for this process” (Degout 139). Tracing the black figures in Jesse’s memory of the lynching day from Otis to the “bad nigger,” and ultimately, to the black body, Degout observes that

racialization proceeds from the idea of an African American as an individual to the idea of the African American as an indistinguishable racialized and sexualized (de-sexed) black body—a body identified not as an individual but as a racial and sexual category, a body made sexual not

only in its nudity but also through the very act of castration that also signals (e.g., for Jesse) the threat of this race-sex category (Degout 139).

The progression that Degout highlights from good to bad to emasculated in “Going to Meet the Man” reflects the trajectory of the conventional lynching narrative, in which an African American who stepped out of the accepted and subservient minstrelsy stereotype would be labeled as the brutal black beast before being castrated and lynched. While Degout’s metaphor of racialization does not focus on the intermediate, “bad” stage, the parallel to lynching still holds because, even in the traditional discourse of lynching, the black beast is not so much an identity in and of itself but the precursor and justification for the emasculation, the de-sexing, that is the ultimate goal. Thus, lynching is not only responsible for the enforcement of racial hierarchies but also provides the gendered symbolism that supports such a power structure by representing blackness as the embodiment of Otherness, both racial and sexual.

Building upon the essential Otherness symbolized by blackness, Baldwin reveals the paradoxical feelings of both hate *and* love for the black body in the description of the scene of castration.

The man with the knife took the nigger’s privates in his hand, one hand, still smiling, as though he were weighing them. In the cradle of the one white hand, the nigger’s privates seemed as remote as meat being weighed in the scales; but seemed heavier, too, much heavier, and Jesse felt his scrotum tighten; and huge, huge, much bigger than his father’s, flaccid, hairless, the largest thing he had ever seen till then, and the blackest. The white hand stretched them, cradled them, caressed them. Then the dying man’s eyes looked straight into Jesse’s eyes—it could have been as long as a second, but it seemed longer than a year. Then Jesse screamed, and the crowd screamed as the knife flashed (Baldwin 247-8).

The emphasis on the hands – the “one hand,” “the one white hand,” and the implied other hand still holding the knife – and the image of the scales reflect the racial interdependence

that is created in the lynching event as an act of bifurcation that imposes difference. The moment of castration links not only black and white but also the aversion and attraction that comprise white masculinity's troubled feelings toward the Other. In this passage, the knife is the symbol of impending violence that continues the feelings of hate that Baldwin presents through imagery of fire and blood just prior to the actual castration. The increasing emphasis on weight and size throughout the passage suggests a growing erection in response to the fondling of the "one white hand," and the tightening of Jesse's scrotum is tellingly presented between the "much heavier" "meat" of the victim's privates and the "huge, huge, much bigger than his father's, flaccid, hairless, the largest thing he had ever seen till then, and the blackest." Presented between the descriptions of genitals, the "joy [Jesse] had never felt before" foregrounds the eroticization of the black body that is the resulting desire for what is forbidden. As the symbolic Other of the traditional lynching narrative, black masculinity is imbued with a bestial virility that must be controlled through castration as an act of revulsion, and yet that virility is also channeled into white masculinity through castration as an act of fascination. Thus, with the spectacle of the castration and lynching "the idea of the black man's dangerous and enviable potency is unforgettably implanted in the child's mind" (Freese 178-9). With the look between the victim and Jesse that "seemed longer than a year," Baldwin suggests that this moment, this event stretching out through time, will shape the rest of Jesse's life. It is the "great secret which would be the key to his life forever" (Baldwin 248).

Confining Consequences: The Continued Eroticization of the Black Body

What all the complex structural dynamics surrounding lynching have in common is that the lynching act is the liminal point. It is the point where white masculine insecurity is reinvigorated by a representation of white masculine power. It is the point where white is differentiated from black. It is the point where racial and sexual identities intersect. It is the point where white patriarchy's revulsion and fascination for the black body come together. In all these ways and also, most importantly, as the conjunction of physical manifestation and symbolic representation, lynching embodies the boundary, the limit of knowledge,¹⁴ with one side representing what is culturally true or accepted, while the other side is exiled from knowledge, from discourse, from existence. Consequently, addressing lynching, in art or in criticism, is always already hindered by the linguistic violence of lynching to arbitrarily render what is true or not. Understanding the structural dynamics that surround lynching almost requires the incorporation of theoretical perspectives on the language of race, gender, and violence.

And yet, in "Going to Meet the Man," Baldwin presents a carefully crafted structure and appropriates the coded symbolism of Jim Crow to create a representative illustration of the operation and consequences of the numerous facets of lynching. The resulting story is dense with figures of overlapping significance that, with a little focus, offer up crucial aspects of all the key dynamics of lynching. By presenting the story through the "warped, perverted mind of a white deputy sheriff," a perspective that according to Mary Louis Pratt is helpful "because it provides us with an insight into the distorted reality upon which the white psyche depends" (Pratt 45), Baldwin is able to employ a dramatic irony that shows the

difficulty of understanding the structural dynamics of lynching without pulling back from his indictment of the negative consequences that stem from the ideological use of racial violence. What “Going to Meet the Man” reveals is that, failing to understand even the general principle of socially created racial identities, white supremacists will never be able to engage in the search for root causes that leads back to the lynching event. According to Griffith, Baldwin shows that the

fear associated directly with the central symbol of the lynching... derives from and continually demands power of myth to relieve what is a deep-seated anxiety, a communal urge for absolution. The myth becomes, ironically, an illusory principle of order in a world disturbed by the very myths that are the source of the disorder. (Griffith 522).

Without recognizing that the racial hierarchies of the segregated society are created through the symbols of racialized masculinities engendered and enforced by lynching, white supremacists, according to Baldwin, are doomed to repeat the tragic violence of that event, which is exactly what Jesse does. Thus, the sexual torture of the “boy” in the jail cell not only foreshadows the climatic lynching scene for the reader but also represents the later (chronologically) effects of that event on Jesse’s character.¹⁵ Trying to get the Civil Rights leader to stop the protest singing, Jesse shoves the prod into his testicles as he begins “to hurt all over with the peculiar excitement” (Baldwin 232). When Jesse shouts “You lucky we *pump* some white blood into you every once in a while—your women!”, the identification of the feminine as the object of desire is an after-thought (Baldwin 235). The black body, for Jesse, has been de-sexed and eroticized, a telling detail that reveals the continued structural dynamics that are created in the lynching event. Refusing to be coerced into obedience, even by violence, the Civil Rights leader asserts a masculine agency that the segregated culture of Jim Crow would deny him by declaring “—And those kid’s ain’t going to stop singing. We

going to keep on singing until everyone of you miserable white mothers go stark raving out of your minds” (Baldwin 233).

Instead of complying as he is expected to, he questions “the Man” and refuses to call off the singing, which serves as a symbol for voice, agency and art and functions as the textual stand-in for the challenge to hegemonic discourse, “white superiority,” and the persistent effects of lynching that Baldwin presents in the structure of “Going to Meet the Man.” The bedroom scenes of Jesse and his wife comprise the frame that contains all of the internal action, book-ending the story and separating the near and distant flashbacks. Frustrated in the opening and middle bedroom scenes, the dramatic recovery of Jesse’s manhood in the final bedroom scene, after flashbacks to the pivotal lynching picnic, foregrounds a connection that Baldwin is making between violence, race, and sex. In discussing the lynching scene, Roger Whitlow analyzes the diction to identify an element of symbolic communion in which the community, including Jesse, has “eaten (beaten, burned, cut) the flesh and drunk (brought pouring forth) the blood” (Whitlow 197). The insinuation of communion in the scene represents the taking of black prowess *into* the white body, perhaps the most crucial dynamic of lynching; white masculinity is empowered by its dominance over a figure that is both reviled and desired. When Jesse revives his manhood and takes his wife, saying “I’m going to do you like a nigger, just like a nigger, come on, sugar, and love me just like you’d love a nigger,” he reveals his ability to allay his masculine insecurity through the domination of the black body and the psychological incorporation of its taboo virility (Baldwin 249). Although Jesse has lost the power to kill back victims with

impunity and his brutality has been forced out of the public view, his worldview is still structured by the consequences of the lynching event.

Starting “Going to Meet the Man” with the question “what’s the matter?” (Baldwin 229), Baldwin positions his story as an unrelenting investigation into the roots of white masculine insecurity and all the social ramifications associated with it. While the direct problems is quickly revealed to be Jesse’s sexual impotence, the presentation of “what’s the matter” as the stark first words of the story emphasizes the question without context. Consequently, it also becomes “what’s the matter” with the town and society (in the mind of Jesse)? And, perhaps more importantly, it also suggests: “what’s the matter” with the way Jesse sees things? Through Jesse’s inability to answer the opening question and his failure to understand the connections between the memories that emerge from his subconscious, Baldwin asserts that the cultural certainty of white supremacy, which is built upon the exaltation of white masculinity, hides the fact that white supremacists are, perhaps, more unaware of the structures empowering their social privilege than anyone.

Written nearly ninety years after the collapse of Reconstruction, “Going to Meet the Man” illustrates not only the social constructions that were spawned by the rise of lynching but also the dynamics that allowed them to be so long misunderstood. By employing a sequential structure of retrospective investigation, Baldwin is able to trace the rigid racial categories of the segregated society back to lynching as the symbolic representation (as well as the physical manifestation) of the desire to destroy black masculinity and empower white patriarchy. Moreover, he exposes the continuing eroticization of the black body as the consequence of othering blackness. The contrast between the certainty of the story’s

structure with the uncertain narrative voice of Jesse creates a dramatic irony that foregrounds how the instability of the identity categories created through lynching prevents the understanding of those very identities. Most importantly, by featuring a literal lynching event and incorporating the coded symbolic values of the segregated society, “Going to Meet the Man” becomes a representational illustration of the structures and consequences of lynching.

Mapping Manhood, the effort to discern and understand the boundaries of symbolic masculinities in modern American culture is an expansive and incomplete project, and yet, a study of racial terror during the lynching era can show how the limits of acknowledged truth set by social symbols of masculinity were used to control social, political, and economic powers and privileges. Today, almost everyone recognizes that lynching is a horrible and oppressive act of malevolence. However, it is also seen as an evil of the past that has been conquered and compensated for, but such a view overlooks lynching's lasting effects on the language of American identities. Investigating the traces and effects of racialized masculinities as symbols in language and literature reveals a linguistic lack that accompanies the historical implementation of lynching as both a physical enforcement and coded representation. What this study of lynching shows is that an attempt to understand lynching that overlooks, even in part, the multiply complicated dynamics of lynching obscures the lasting effects that lynching has on the construction of social identities in American culture.

Although some would label it only partially as Jim Crow or the segregated society, I approach the ninety year period from 1877 to the mid-1960s as the lynching era because it spans from the collapse of Reconstruction that prompted the resurgence of a destabilized white patriarchal power through racial and continues until the mid-1960s when the Voting Rights Act finally reversed the direct political disenfranchisement that was the most tangible effect of the violence of lynching. The direct connection between lynching and the destabilized power structures of slavery is often overlooked because the rise of lynching is commonly associated with the great surge of lynching murders in the 1890s and separated

from slavery by the intervening period of Reconstruction. By incorporating theoretical perspectives that allows us to understand lynching as a racial and sexual terror for ideological purposes, the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* reveals a reflective historical trajectory embodied in the fluctuating masculinity of Jim. Moving from the subordinate masculinity of slavery to a full character of fatherly affection and protection on the river, Jim's forced return to the minstrel caricature under the romantic machinations of Tom Sawyer connects slavery to active re-imposition of hierarchies through the symbolic masculinities created in the ritual of castration and lynching.

The rise of lynching as tool to alleviate the insecurity caused by the abolition of slavery and the destabilization of a long-supported patriarchy suggests that the study of lynching is only the study of a particular period. That is to say, that the specific symbolic manifestations and the propagation of a hegemonic cultural identity associated with an idealized white masculinity during the lynching era were the continuation of a cultural dynamic that preceded both slavery and the settlement of America. Understanding the study of lynching as the study of a bounded period reveals the lynching era as a thing in motion, and the dynamics uncovered are the particular symbolic representations and the particular physical consequences of deep-seeded ideological structures. Thus, lynching both does, and does not, create white masculinity. It does not create white masculinity in the fact that such an identity was conceived and represented many times before the origin of lynching, and yet, white masculinity is an empty signifier, a false identity, that is only cogent through a constant repetition of an active domination, a function most certainly performed by lynching. Until the end of slavery, white masculinity had for centuries been supported by a hegemonic control of

law that shaped the cultural domination of varying manifestations of a symbolic Other: feudal serfs, colonies, native Americans, African slaves, among others. The erosion of slavery and a long-standing legal support forces white patriarchy to rely almost solely on the symbolic power of social constructions, producing the coded discourse of the lynching era. Because the coded symbolism of racialized masculinities relies so heavily on the power of language to establish the limits of knowledge, study that probes the effects that lynching has on literature and language reveals the consequences of the particular manifestations of the lynching era *and also* more general patterns of the structural creation of knowledge and cultural truth.

Throughout the lynching era there were those who recognized the injustice of lynching. The narrative structure of both *Huckleberry Finn* and *Go Down, Moses* is shaped by a progressive intent to criticize, destabilize, and surpass the inherent inequality of a culturally reified whiteness. However, the necessity of including theoretical perspectives to understand the full subversive potential within the texts of Twain and Faulkner foregrounds how a limited understanding of the structural restraints of language disrupts the desire to uncover lynching's negative effects on the limits of American identities. Such a revelation gives an impetus for an active effort to counteract the lack of language, to expand the limits of knowledge, and to find new ways of understanding and talking about lynching. It seems to me that such an effort should include the delineation, in the most methodical way possible, of structural causes and consequences. Illuminated by theories of language related to race, gender, and violence and a sustained study of relevant literature, the cultural phenomenon of

lynching, in my understanding, is shaped by five overlapping structures that are each individually governed by a binary dynamic:

- 1) Lynching is prompted by white masculine insecurity but also creates and represents the ideal of white patriarchal power.
- 2) The use of castration and emasculation to assert white “superiority” creates racialized masculinities and the imbrication racial and sexual identities. Thus, a cultural whiteness is always already a masculine identity.
- 3) Defining whiteness via the disassociation from negative traits written onto a symbolic Other creates an interdependence between black and white masculinities that requires constant regulation because any change in status to one provokes an inverse change in the other.
- 4) As the manifestation of the symbolic Other for the lynching era, the black body is seen as a taboo of uncontrollable brutality, a figure of chaos, to be abhorred and destroyed and also an eroticized figure of desire that is seen to contain an enviable sexual power.
- 5) By combining physical violence and symbolic representation into a single act, the consequences of lynching are both material and ontological. Thus, for nearly ninety years, lynching was a symbolic act that disenfranchised African Americans through the terror of violence and also limited acceptable social identities via reductive stereotypes.

These five structures are presented in terms of the particulars of the lynching era, but the conjunction of power and language and the creation of meaning through a binary opposition seem to be overarching structures of human culture. Because the legal domination of slavery was translated into a symbolic representation of difference that was given cultural validity a study of the lynching era is particularly effective in illuminating the interplay of power and language.

While the Civil Rights movement closed the lynching era by bringing an end to state-sanctioned disenfranchisement and segregation, the idea of racial *difference* was irrevocable entrenched. American society might have reached a legal equality, but reductive racial stereotypes continue to permeate the media and the cultural consciousness today.

Significantly, a study of *Go Down, Moses* and the polarization that undercuts Faulkner's subversive desires illustrates that separate is inherently unequal. Moreover, what the conclusion of "Going to Meet the Man" suggests, especially through Jesse's identification with the eroticized taboo of the black body and his empowerment through that association, is that even without the legal support of oppression and the social acceptance of violence the identities constructed through the lynching act continue to hold sway over American culture well into the twentieth century. Finally, the fact that the 1969 Stonewall riots, which began the modern gay civil right movement and brought homosexuality to the forefront of social consciousness, so closely followed the end of lynching era and the African American Civil Rights movement suggests that symbolic masculinities continues to affect on our society in ways that are not understood and deserve continued scholarly investigation. The continued importance of symbolic masculinities sheds lights on the brutal violence that often accompanies hate crimes directed at figures who fail to conform to mainstream ideas of masculinity or heterosexuality, such as Matthew Shepard or Brandon Teena. Moreover, the Supreme Court decision in *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*, which allowed the Boy Scouts of America to exclude homosexuals, reveals that a regulated masculinity is still thought to be a legitimate part of a larger American cultural identity.

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Notes

¹ In “Twain’s ‘Nigger’ Jim: The Tragic Face behind the Minstrel Mask,” Bernard Bell points out that the appellation of “ ‘nigger’ Jim” appears nowhere in Twain’s text, despite the fact that it is often used in criticism. I have chosen to use here in the title (but nowhere else) because the role of criticism in shaping the meaning of *Huckleberry Finn*, especially the value of Jim’s character and the difficult final section. In this work, I set out to uncover how that system works and how it shapes Twain’s text, hoping to transcend the limitations of early criticism while not making them the subject of the current study. I hypothesize that a reevaluation of much of the criticism of *Huckleberry Finn* using theories of lynching and constructed masculinities would reveal that most criticism could be placed in one of two categories. The first grouping would be those criticisms that have denigrate the final third, exalt the figures of masculinity within the novel, particularly Huck without problematizing their relation to race, or exalt the novel as the pinnacle of American literature for reasons that further obscure Twain’s satirical critique. These criticisms are inherently in reinforcing a silence that is created by and required for the stability of the segregated society that developed around the symbolic values of lynching. The second grouping of criticisms would be those works that have sought to highlight Twain’s problematization of racial categories. The arguments of criticisms within this second category would be strengthened by the theoretical perspectives of an approach organized around the figure of lynching.

² Throughout the first half the Twentieth century, criticism of *Huckleberry Finn* valued the novel for one primary moment, Huck’s declaration to “Go to Hell.” This tendency, a dynamic which Jonathan Arac referred to as nationalization, was problematically complicit in supporting the cultural silence that obscured the role of lynching in the creation of the segregated society. Ernest Hemingway’s famous declaration that the novel would be better without the last 10 chapters is an excellent example; his interpretation would strip Twain’s work of its most insightful social critique.

³ Davis’s analysis of degradation ceremonies strongly echoes Trudier Harris’s observations – on “the social and psychological forces so essential to the carrying out of the ritual [of lynching]” (11) – that point out that punishment “ensued to restore the ‘threatened’ white society to its former status of superiority” (xi) and that “symbolic punishment becomes communal because the entire society has been threatened; thus the entire society must act to put down the violator of taboo” (Harris 12).

⁴ The rise of lynching also corresponded to the professionalization of journalism, and despite trends toward a purported objectivity, accounts of lynching tended to belie a distinct racial prejudice at the level of fundamental narrative and description. Ida B. Wells not only collected statistics on lynchings but also attempted to expose the bias of mainstream media by parodying journalistic conventions, reversing the bias to depicted lynch mobs as animalistic rather than virtuous.

⁵ In *A Festival of Violence*, Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck test competing explanations of the causes of lynching finding that fluctuations in the price of cotton affected the frequency of lynching, with increases in lynching correlating to drops in price of cotton. Additionally, it is worth considering the proximity of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the murder of

Emmet Till in 1955. That *Brown v. Board of Education* ended “separate but equal,” as accepted doctrine if not in practice, was a major challenge to the stability of the segregated society. Till’s murder, while lacking the public spectacle of violence, did follow the gendered narrative and violent pattern of lynching.

⁶ This broad summary of the role that lynching and emasculation played in the transition from slavery to the lynching era draws heavily on the work of James Messerschmidt and Marlon Ross, particularly the specific points that were addressed in the Chapter One. Additionally, the role of stereotypes as symbols in racial discourse is influenced by the pamphlets of Ida B Wells, the organization and presentation of a symbolic event borrows from Jacqueline Goldsby, and the revitalization of the white community is also observed by Trudier Harris. I find contribution to the discourse to lynching to be in drawing together earlier criticisms to reveal how they illuminate various aspects of the network of structures that interact with the lynching event.

⁷ Faced with the indeterminable and varying multitudes of the real, the active subject seeks to create a previously non-existent identity to allay the anxiety of uncertainty. Needing a contrast to provide meaning, the active subject imagines a symbolic Other for the purposes of juxtaposition. However, at this point, the Other is only different from the undefined subject and consequently itself absent of essential meaning. Motivated by a desperate desire to possess identity and security, the active subject splits the symbolic Other in half. Rupturing its totality, this inherently violent act divides the symbolic Other into a binary pair. When the active subject bifurcates the symbolic Other, he separates all he could imagine as “good” from all he could imagine as “bad.” The “good” is to be consumed by the active subject, thus, becoming the self; the “bad” is to remain separate in the manifestation of Other.

⁸ The dynamics of “the Bear,” and *Go Down, Moses*, are highlighted by Richard Marius, who claims that the story contains one of the most prominent and enduring of American myths, “the lonely man confronting the vast uncanny power of the wilderness in all its grandeur, mystery, and terror” (Marius 185). Marius’ allusion to the Freudian “uncanny,” an experience or encounter that is simultaneously foreign and familiar, highlights an intertwined relation that structures both the drama of racial identities and a broader American narrative about the frontier. In *Heartless Immensity*, Anne Baker notes that “as important a component of the mid-nineteenth-century anxiety about national form as slavery, then, was a less tangible set of concerns about boundaries, boundlessness, and the incorporation of space not yet mapped according to Euro-American conventions or organized according to Euro-American principles of order (such as property ownership)” (Baker 4). Anxiety over form, efforts to enforce boundaries, and the symbolic use of land and race all unite in “The Bear,” where the reader encounters not only the drama of the hunt for Old Ben and the examined ledgers of the McCaslin plantation but also the story of the original land grant that Carothers McCaslin wrested from Ikkemotubbe.

⁹ According to Rio-Jelliffe, by moving the baptism out of chronological and placing it before ‘the bear’ the “irony” and “the paradox of killing to nurture life” are in part obscured (140).

¹⁰ A cultural mechanism of repetition is engendered by the fact that definitive act of oppression, such as occurs at the moment of castration and lynching, resolves the tension and

opposition with an Other as the sign of difference. The unsatisfactory release of tension (after a brief euphoria of domination) that would result from the culmination of the lynching narrative would ultimately require that another cycle of the lynching narrative begin. Rather than provide the security and reassurance that a lynching promised on the surface discourse, the act would actually eliminate the figure of difference that imbued white masculinity with the appearance of superiority thus producing the anxiety that would require further violence to continue the illusion of white male potency. Bodies, left hanging for extended periods of time, and the cultural presence of emasculated “Uncle Tom” figures would serve as signs of the previous relation of domination, but eventually, the ever-growing anxiety of white masculinity would reach a critical point, activating a mechanism of repetition, requiring another supposed black beast to function as symbol of difference to be dominated. As Marlon Ross notes, “The administration of a racial system requires the constant threat of torture as a means of managing surveillance and maintaining the ideology of mastery” (309).

¹¹ The reluctance to abandon the safety of perceived identity offers a possible explanation for why the intuitive recognition of an inherently unjust racial system by Twain and Faulkner is stifled by the hegemonic use of racialized symbolism. Notably, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Go Down, Moses* open with figures of white masculinity. In the former, the eponymous narrator and protagonist famously addresses the reader:

You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth mainly. There were things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth (Twain 9).

While the careful reader may be aware of the intended critique of authority that is hidden behind a subtle irony, the opening of *Huckleberry Finn* recognizes an earlier cultural document as precedent and establishes an admittedly qualified authority for the author and the speaker. The latter work opens with a circuitous introduction to the novel’s central character:

Isaac McCaslin, ‘Uncle Ike’, past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one / this was not something participated in or even seen by himself... (Faulkner 3).

The ambiguous voicing of this description brings Ike to the forefront without making any direct statement about him. Although he was not participant or witness, his textual presence itself suggests some sort of authority. Both Huck and Ike take on central roles in their respective texts, serving at times as voice-piece for the author’s opinions and at others as the object of ironic critique. While the opening figures of white masculinity in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Go Down, Moses* do introduce a cultural identity to be critiqued, the fact that they both retreat to conventional performances of white masculinity in the closing sections of their respective texts signifies that Twain and Faulkner are unable to embrace the relinquishment of white male privilege that *must* accompany the elevation of black masculinity.

¹² Marlon Ross notes that “white men’s repulsion for, and thus fascination with, Black men’s bodies, particularly the size and potency of their penises, serves as a hidden ground for U.S. practices of racial domination” (Ross 316).

¹³ Peter Freese observes several details such as the sound of car tires, a dog barking, and a rooster that unite the scene of Jeese's bedroom anxiety (which is the opening and closing of the story) with parallel details in the flashback to Jesse's childhood. Also, the young boy at Old Julia's house (inversely) parallels Otis as the boy who disappears in the face of the unchecked power of Jim Crow. His refusal to comply with Jesse signifies the increased resistance that would lead to the Civil Rights movement and is connected to the diminished authority of white "superiority."

¹⁴ The identity of white patriarchy is an invention created at the intersection of language and power, propagated over centuries of unchallenged control of material resources. As long as the symbolic representation of white masculinity had force of law, founded upon implied violence, that identity was secure. With the abolishment of slavery, the patriarchal culture of America was facing an unprecedented challenge to its political, social, and economic dominance. Thus it is the insecurity of a challenged white masculinity that motivates the lynching, which is the means to represent a reinforced white masculinity. Beyond the problematic interdependence on the persistence presence of a symbolically dominated Other, the allaying of white masculine insecurity with an arbitrary symbolic representation of white masculine power requires the willed ignorance of that process which creates a false security.

¹⁵ In addition to functioning as foreshadowing and embodied consequence, the torture of the Civil Rights leader with the cattle prod also illustrates Marlon Ross point that "Although race castration historically has been committed by mobs of white males and females, most often it is imaged in literary, historical, and critical texts as white men's violation of black man, whose subordination is determined solely by race even as it is marked symbolically *and* materially as a *sexual* wound" (Ross 316).