

ABSTRACT

Hospitality in the Novels of William Faulkner

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The American South prides itself on and identifies itself by its hospitality. Based on the Christian call to minister to the needs of the poor, the outcast, and the needy, Southern culture espouses hospitality as one of its most foundational beliefs. However, the same culture that purports to value hospitality so highly is often guilty of withholding it from the needy on the basis of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. In his novels, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*, William Faulkner examines this discrepancy between the American South's supposed ideals and actual attitudes. In my thesis, I argue that Faulkner condemns this hypocrisy and calls for a practice of hospitality consistent with the Christian model of love for one's neighbor.

HOSPITALITY IN THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In his novels *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*, William Faulkner paints an unflattering picture of the American South. Free from much of the nostalgia and romance that colors other southern literature, Faulkner portrays life in the South as difficult, ugly, and marked by a unique set of social codes and challenges.

Hospitality shows up time and time again in Faulkner's novels. It comes as no surprise that a southern writer should deal with this theme—after all, hospitality is reputed to be the South's main export. But Faulkner is as intrigued by the failures of hospitality as by the successes, particularly in the light of the South's hospitable reputation. Faulkner's novels, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* all criticize a southern culture that espouses a Christian view of hospitality, but whose execution of hospitality is largely dependent on the extent to which a person conforms to the south's expectations of race and gender. His works serve as an indictment of such conditional hospitality, particularly in a region that prides itself and identifies itself under a banner of unconditional love.

Hospitality has featured prominently in the Western literary tradition long before the Bundrens made their trek to Jefferson or Henry Sutpen pulled the trigger. From the lavish feasts of Homer's Phaeacians, to Jesus' call for welcoming the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, the collective Western psyche cannot seem to

shake the idea that people have a responsibility to minister to their neighbor's needs. To be sure, different cultures in different times have prescribed varying codes and expectations to govern hospitality. But they are united in their affirmation that hospitality is indispensable to a thriving society.

It is an idea that has enchanted minds for millennia. Hospitality colors the pages of Homer's two most famous works: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, James Hefferman considers the role that hospitality plays in each of these foundational Western texts. He writes, "Hospitality [furnishes] a respite from war, a moment of sympathy which...transcends the murderous hatred...of the other, the stranger, the alien, the enemy" (Hefferman 14). He is specifically considering *The Iliad* in this quotation, but it certainly applies to *The Odyssey* as well, though hospitality is a respite from wandering, not war, in the latter text. Hospitality, according to Hefferman, functions as a transcendent force in these two texts, an expected show of goodwill in spite of the differences between host and guest.

Hefferman goes on to assess the differences in hospitality in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, demonstrating that the set of ideas and expectations surrounding hospitality are and have always been varied and evolving. For example, he writes that, in the *Iliad*, "Feasting involves men who know and owe each other for services rendered or who belong to a circle of feasting companions" (Hefferman 14). In *The Iliad*, he argues, there is a clear expectation of reciprocity or friendship among hosts and guests. This is what Haswell calls the "Homeric warrior model" of hospitality (Haswell 20).

In *The Odyssey*, however, hospitality is expected in a broader range of contexts. Hefferman writes, “In the *Odyssey*, hospitality is often blind, for the master of a household is expected to entertain a stranger before even asking him who he is” (Hefferman 14). The differences in the codes and expectations governing hospitality in these two texts are shocking, especially considering that they were authored by the same man. If these codes and expectations can change so much in the course of one man’s experience and lifetime, might they not be distorted beyond recognition all these thousands of years later?

And yet, despite their differences, Hefferman identifies a single, uniting thread in the hospitality of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. He writes that hospitality in these texts follows, “Something like the golden rule: others have fed us, we should feed them, regardless of who those others are” (Hefferman 15). It is not that the differences in expectations in the two texts are meaningless or superficial, but that they are undergirded with a profound core value that transcends the specific cultural settings of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Hospitality, at its most fundamental, relies upon doing unto others as you would have them do to you.

Perhaps that sounds overly simple or reductionist. But this invocation of the golden rule in requiring hospitality is not by any means unique to Homer. The Christian scriptures, too, emphasize the importance of hospitality—of welcoming others just as you have been welcomed. Long before Jesus appears on the scene, the Bible calls God’s chosen people to be hospitable. Leviticus 19:34 says, “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” The structure of this verse is fascinating. There is a command, treat foreigners as if they were native-born, and then there is a warrant: “for you were foreigners in Egypt.” The reason that the

Israelites ought to welcome those in need is that *they* were once in need, too, and God appeals to this memory to inspire hospitality among his people. It is a kind of retrospective rewording of the golden rule: do unto others as you would have had them do to you when you were in their position.

The New Testament is replete with calls to hospitality. The gospel of Matthew contains the golden rule itself, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). Time and time again, Jesus appeals to a kind of reciprocity when calling for hospitality. In Matthew 24:35-36, Jesus says, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” He goes on in verse 40 to clarify, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Again, Jesus makes this appeal to reciprocity: show hospitality to others because you want and expect to receive hospitality from me.

The Bible’s call to hospitality extends beyond the words of Jesus: the rest of the New Testament is as emphatic about this topic as the red-lettered text is. The epistles remind believers to show hospitality again and again, not only to fellow believers, but to everyone. Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers” and 1 Peter 4:9 echoes, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

In *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, Hefferman includes a chapter on Biblical Hospitality. He recognizes the centrality of hospitality to Jesus’ teachings, and writes, “In making hospitality central to his teachings, Christ makes it

universal...a form of welcome that must be made to cross all borders, ethnic, religious, social, and economic” (Hefferman 64).

If hospitality is, as Hefferman posits, central to Christ’s teachings, it would follow that any society or group that identified itself under a banner of Christianity would also have to champion hospitality as one of its central values, for the sake of consistency.

The American South in particular prides itself on its Christian culture, and, consequently, on its hospitality as well. It is a characteristic they claim as an identifier, a unifier, a cornerstone of Southern culture. This is a deeply-held, pervasive myth, and one that is widely recognizable to the American public. It is furnished with images of lemonade on porches, home-cooked meals, and Pecan Pies on sweltering summer nights. It has captivated the minds of those who live in the South, and of those who do not.

An example of someone taken with the myth of Southern hospitality is Telfair Hodgson, a Confederate veteran and reverend. In his plea for mercy from the victorious northerners, he cites the South’s signature hospitality as an indicator of the treatment they should receive in light of their desperate economic straits after the Civil War. He argues, “These...were men noted for their generosity, for their hospitality to strangers” (Szczesniul 147). The claim is fascinating, because it not only argues that the South showed hospitality, but that they were renowned for it. This demonstrates a kind of self-awareness about the South’s hospitality: not only does the South value and strive to extend hospitality, but it also seems influenced by its own myth, aware of its own reputation.

Hodgson elaborates, “No one, I may safely assert, has ever been turned away from them hungry, when they had it in their power to feed them” (Szczesiuł 147). This seems an absurd overstatement, generalizing a valued characteristic to every member of Southern society on every occasion. It is particularly absurd in light of the institution of slavery, marked by a cruelty that is completely incompatible with the southern ideal of kindness to those in need.

As if aware of the absurdity of his claim, Hodgson tucks tail and abandons his claims of fact, and appeals instead to the public’s romanticized vision of Southern hospitality. He refers to “Men of education, and women of refinement,” contrasting their pre-war grandeur with their post-war “nakedness” and “hunger” (Szczesiuł 147). In doing so, Hodgson strives to elicit a kind of nostalgia, a sense of loss for the good old days of kindly Southern men and gentle Southern women, destroyed by the war.

But it is a false nostalgia, a lament for what never was. In “Reconstructing Southern Hospitality,” Anthony Szczesiuł points out this major flaw in Hodgson’s argument: Hodgson mourns the loss of something the South never achieved in the first place. He concedes that, while hospitality “may have first existed as a narrowly-defined body of social practices among the antebellum planter class” that sense of the word “hospitality” has been completely divorced from and overshadowed by another sense. Hospitality in the second sense, he argues, “exists as discourse, as a meaning-making story continually told and retold about the South” (Szczesiuł 148). That is, Southern hospitality has taken on a life of its own in the form of conversation and myth surrounding the South, independent of and often in disagreement with the reality of Southern life.

Haswell, too, is critical of the myth of Southern hospitality. While he believes that there may be an increased emphasis on caring for those in need in the South, this hospitality is often marked by a “reduction of hospitality to a capitalist gambit, church promotion, or domestic grace” (Haswell 24). This is a far cry from hospitality in its fullest sense. He writes that whereas hospitality ought to include a kind of equality and mutual respect between guest and host, Southern hospitality often involves “self-serving ostentation, threats of God’s vengeance, or codified formulas of etiquette” (Haswell 24).

For these reasons, it is important to distinguish between the myth and the reality of Southern hospitality, lest the expectations and legends surrounding it be conflated with the actual practice. In fact, it is the dissonance between the ideal and the actual that is of particular interest to me for the purposes of this project. It would seem that Faulkner, too, takes an interest in this dynamic of legendary hospitality largely unsupported by fact, as it features prominently in several of his works.

However, before considering the extent to which Faulkner’s characters extend hospitality, and the significance thereof, a definition of hospitality must be decided upon. Up to this point, my use of the word “hospitality” has depended largely on the reader’s own impressions and experiences of hospitality. The word most likely conjures thoughts of generosity, of welcome. Perhaps it evokes images that serve as symbols of hospitality: an open door, an extra place setting at a dinner table, a hearth aglow with a warming fire.

Certainly, these general impressions have a place in this discussion of hospitality, because that is what the general public has to work with in reading Faulkner’s writings and in forming an opinion of the disparity between myth and

reality. It is certainly appropriate in a discussion of the mythic aspect of hospitality itself, because that is what the myth draws on: cozy feelings, fond memories, and romanticized impressions.

For the remainder of this project, however, a more concrete definition of hospitality will be necessary. Since this thesis will analyze the spectrum of successes and failures of hospitality in Faulkner's novels, and the implications of these successes and failures, it will need a basis by which to judge each instance of hospitality. That is, it will require a standard against which to compare character's actions. For that matter, it will require a standard by which to decide if a situation warrants hospitality in the first place, or whether it should be considered hospitality at all, as opposed to mere goodwill and generosity.

The Oxford Dictionary defines hospitality as, "The friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers" (hospitality, n) Though certainly not perfect for the purposes of this project, this definition is a good place to start. For instance, it is preferable to another definition of hospitality, which renders it, "the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way." The emphasis on the actions of "reception and entertainment" in the Oxford definition is preferable to the emphasis on the more indistinct "quality or disposition" in the latter. My argument will not be about anything so vague or immeasurable as the sentiment of hospitality a character harbors in her heart, or about her reputation for openhandedness. Instead, it will focus on specific instances of action or inaction.

The Oxford definition does stray a bit from the meaning of "hospitality" as it will be used in this project, particularly in its inclusion of the word "entertainment."

That word, too, is clouded by misleading connotations. If, for example, “entertainment” is taken to mean a kind of lavish, performative catering to a guest’s interests, it certainly has no place in this discussion of Southern hospitality. If, however, “entertainment” is taken in its most Spartan sense, as mere provision, then it is certainly relevant.

Perhaps the biggest weakness in the Oxford definition of “hospitality” for the purposes of this paper is the lack of complexity or restriction regarding who may be the recipient of hospitality. The inclusion of “guests, visitors, and strangers” is far too simplistic for a consideration of Southern hospitality, and must be severely narrowed down before any real evaluation can take place. To identify such a broad range of recipients of hospitality is to give an undue credit to the man who merely hosts his friends. Such an inclusion would undermine the demands of the Christian perspective of hospitality which furnishes the foundation of Southern hospitality. In the words of Jesus himself, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:32).

Rather, the definition of hospitality must be limited to those in need. In her article, “Hospitality from the Edge,” Christine D. Pohl argues that hospitality must be marked by what she calls “marginality.” The marginalized, she says, are “vulnerable strangers, those in need,” and that without this marginality, a host-guest relationship cannot really be categorized as hospitality at all. In fact, she dismisses any view of hospitality which would settle for “entertainment of friends and family” and fail to recognize that need is an essential element of hospitality.

Pohl’s view of Christian hospitality is robust and insistent that only the excluded, the weak, the hungry, and the outcast can be the recipients of hospitality

proper. She lays out her vision of ideal Christian hospitality, claiming that it should, “transcend prevailing social boundaries, build community, meet significant human needs, and reflect divine hospitality” (Pohl 121). It is a tall order, to be sure. As it should be. If we are to continue to view hospitality as a virtue, there must be something virtuous about it—something challenging and worthwhile—lest we collectively pat ourselves on the back for doing what people naturally do: inviting the friend, and eschewing the stranger.

While Pohl’s commentary on the necessity of marginalized guests is convincing, she goes one step further, suggesting that hospitality is most fully realized when the host is marginalized, too, and can sympathize with the guest in some capacity. As an insight to the workings of hospitality and the host-guest relationship, this claim is appropriate and convincing. However, if it is taken as a categorical requirement of hospitality, it seems to be overstepping. Pohl’s claim about the importance of a marginalized host certainly seems to be the former rather than the latter—a commentary on a particularly successful subset of host-guest relationships, not a definitional, across-the-board prescription for how hospitality must work.

Certainly, this observation bears an interesting weight on several of Faulkner’s novels. *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* come to mind most readily for their instances of marginalized hosts hosting marginalized guests. Joanna Burden hosts Joe Christmas, just as the women at Sutpen’s Hundred host the defeated, homeward bound Civil War soldiers. While Pohl’s observation may potentially enrich our understandings of these interactions, it is nonessential for classifying the interactions as hospitality, as there are obvious examples of hospitality which do not conform to this model—Sutpen hosting Charles Bon, for instance, or the Armstids hosting Lena Grove.

For that matter, consider Jesus' command, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14:13). Certainly he isn't addressing the impoverished, marginalized banquet-givers of the world, but those with the means to host others—the very people who might be tempted to exclude the marginalized. Thus, to be consistent with the Christian view of hospitality espoused by the South, this thesis will recognize Pohl's claim about the necessity of marginalized guests as definitional to hospitality, while clarifying that the host need not be marginalized, too.

Having specified that hospitality must be rooted in action rather than emotion, provision rather than entertainment, and need rather than frivolity, we may now revisit the Oxford Dictionary definition of "hospitality." At this point, it would be safe to render a working definition as, "The friendly and generous reception of guests, visitors, or strangers in need." While this is certainly an improvement on the original definition for the purposes of this thesis, it is still too broad. There is one area in particular that still begs clarity.

The idea of a physical home space may be suggested in the word "reception," but it is so essential to an understanding of Southern hospitality that it must not be ignored or brushed over. Indeed, the extension of the use of a particular space is at the very center of hospitality. Szczesiul picks up on the importance of the home-space in "Reconstructing Southern Hospitality." He writes, "The site of hospitality is the threshold between differences, the site at which boundaries are both crossed and maintained" (Szczesiul 149). That is, without a physical place, and without the idea of boundaries of belonging, hospitality ceases to be hospitality. "Host" and "guest" lose their meaning, or become unrecognizably skewed. Physical space is the stage on which the drama of hospitality must play out if it is to be hospitality at all, not snatches of lines murmured in the wings.

This is a relevant distinction, because it eliminates certain instances in Faulkner's novels that one might be tempted to classify as hospitality without this guideline. Specifically, one might be inclined to include instances of mere generosity that do not involve physical space or shelter. For instance, there is a scene in *Absalom, Absalom!* which might seem, at first glance, to conform to our working definition of hospitality. There is an encounter in which Quentin Compson's grandfather extends a simple kindness to the architect of Sutpen's Hundred. The architect is French, and his foreignness renders him an outsider in the exclusive, suspicious community of Jefferson. He attempts to run away from Thomas Sutpen, but is captured. Then, in a memorable exchange, Mr. Compson "Approach[es] the architect holding out [a] bottle of whiskey already uncorked" (Faulkner 207).

This meets several of the criteria for identifying hospitality: it is a definable action, not a feeling of goodwill. The recipient of the kindness is clearly marginalized and in need. It seems, by all accounts to qualify as hospitality. But it is lacking in that the kindness extended does not include the use of a physical space. It is the use of a physical good—the whiskey—but that must not be conflated or even compared to the use of another person's home. For this reason, this project will not include the encounter between Mr. Compson and the architect in the chapter on *Absalom, Absalom!*

That said, this project will, on occasion, reference an act of kindness or generosity that does not constitute hospitality in and of itself, but still holds some relevance or significance to the meaning of the chapter as a whole. This will include, for instance, the kindness of Rosa Coldfield's neighbors in *Absalom, Absalom!*, particularly in their provision of food for her. The inclusion of this is not because this generosity actually qualifies as hospitality, but because it reveals Rosa's attitude

toward living off of the benevolence of others. Understanding this attitude is essential to the subsequent discussion of the host-guest relationship between Rosa and Thomas Sutpen, which does qualify as hospitality for its involvement of physical space. Thus, it is an important detail to incorporate, not for its own sake, but for the complexity it adds to hospitality in that novel.

In other cases, I will examine instances of generosity that are ancillary to an instance of hospitality. For instance, in the chapter on *Light in August*, this project will consider Mrs. Armstid's generosity toward Lena in giving her money for the rest of her journey. Not that giving money in and of itself constitutes hospitality, but since it is coupled with the extension of the use of a physical space, it is an appropriate act to consider. In the same way that considering Rosa's reaction to generosity enriches the reader's understanding, considering Mrs. Armstid's exceeding of the expectations of a host also enriches and expands the conversation surrounding hospitality in that chapter.

This, then, is the clearest and most helpful definition of hospitality as it pertains to my analysis of Faulkner's novels: hospitality is "The friendly and generous reception into one's home of guests, visitors, or strangers in need." This reflects Pohl's insight about the necessity that guests be marginalized, as well as Szczesiul's insight about the necessity of physical space.

The frequency and variety with which hospitality of this kind appears in the novels of William Faulkner is staggering. He recognizes vast and variant needs, marginalization of all sorts: from a family made unclean by a dead body, to a pregnant young woman seeking shelter, to a mixed-race man seeking belonging, to an

illegitimate grandson in need of protection, ownership, and identity, Faulkner represents Southern culture's most despised and most displaced.

His works demonstrate a fascination with, even a fixation on, this idea of Southern hospitality. However, as suggested earlier, it is not the typical fascination that Southerners feel toward the traditions and identity of their region. If Faulkner, like so many others, bought into the myth of Southern hospitality, his pages would be colored with romanticized accounts of host and guest sitting around the dinner table, or talking cheerfully on the porch. Instead, his novels are full of outright failures of hospitality, or hospitality marked by uncomfortable, damning flaws. His obsession with the idea of Southern hospitality does not seem to be in memorializing its successes, but in pointing out its glaring failures. In drawing a distinction between the myth and the reality of Southern hospitality, he calls out the culture for its inconsistency.

First, I will consider *As I Lay Dying*, and how the Bundren family's harrowing odyssey to bury wife and mother Addie reveals Faulkner's stance on hospitality. In that novel, the members of the Bundren family are serial recipients of hospitality, and while their hosts are mostly receptive and generous, the Bundrens themselves are not. In the book's central episode, Darl Bundren burns down the barn of a host, representing a complete affront to hospitality. In that novel, hospitality is presented as a two-way street, with expectations placed on both host and guest. And, at every turn, the Bundrens reject their role as guests and undermine the hospitality of their hosts. Thus, Faulkner is critical of failed hospitality on the part of the recipients of hospitality, too, not just the givers.

Second, I will consider *Light in August*. I will argue that this novel emphasizes the conditionality of hospitality in the South. There are two main hospitality plots in this story: that of Lena Grove and that of Joe Christmas. And whereas the sweet, feminine Lena receives grace and generosity, Joe Christmas does not. I will argue that the difference in the treatment they receive is not because of anything they have done—in fact, Lena is guilty of violating a major tenant of Southern morality. Instead, the hospitality they receive is in accordance with the extent to which they conform to the expectations surrounding gender and race. For Lena, who has learned to play the docile Southern white woman, hospitality is extended in full measure, even in excess. But for Joe Christmas, who is of mixed race, hospitality seems in short supply. Indeed, because he cannot be easily classified by the white population of Jefferson, Christmas is rendered a perpetual outsider, taken in only by a fellow outsider. Christmas' ultimate murder of Joanna Burden, then, should not be read as a confirmation of Jefferson's fears about him, but as a warning about the desperation to which a lifetime of exclusion and rejection can lead a person.

Finally, I will consider *Absalom, Absalom!*. In this novel, physical space will feature prominently in my analysis of hospitality. One particular place, Sutpen's Hundred, serves as the centerpiece of this novel; it is the sun in the *Absalom, Absalom!* solar system, the point around which all the speculation and recollections orbit. Rosa Coldfield, for instance, becomes both guest and host at Sutpen's Hundred, complicating the host-guest relationship between Rosa and Thomas Sutpen, the Hundred's absent patriarch. I will consider the Hundred's resistance to welcoming the poor, the meek, and the outcast—indeed, the house itself takes on a kind of sentience in this novel, and it is not a hospitable one. In what serves as the novel's central event, Henry Sutpen murders Charles Bon on the very property where Bon was a guest.

This, I will argue, is Faulkner's rendering of the ultimate perversion of hospitality: for a host to kill a guest on the host's own property. In the concluding drama of the novel, Faulkner issues his pronouncement against this inhospitality: the house at Sutpen's Hundred burns down, suggesting that the inhospitality it represents cannot stand.

This is, I hope, especially relevant in today's political climate. With immigration and refugee policy at the center of so much public scrutiny and debate, it is more important than ever to understand what virtuous hospitality looks like, through the lens of literature. Faulkner's criticism of the South's hypocrisy and inhospitality rings as true today as it did ninety years ago. Hopefully, an understanding of Faulkner's condemnation of inhospitality can bring about a renewed emphasis on taking in the dejected and the despised, the refugee and the immigrant, and on loving our neighbors as ourselves.

CHAPTER TWO

Hospitality in *As I Lay Dying*

In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner presents the Bundren family as outsiders who have violated their community's typical burial protocol, rendering them ritually unclean. As outsiders, their relationship to hospitality is complex: it is marked by both staunch, principled opposition to accepting help, and dependence on it. I will also consider the community's hospitality towards the Bundrens, specifically the ways in which Tull, Armstid, and Gillespie function as hosts. Lastly, I will consider the Bundrens' response to the hospitality they are shown, and argue that Darl's barn-burning represents a serious perversion of hospitality: destruction of a host's property.

In this novel, Faulkner's indictment of the failure of Southern hospitality rests not on the hosts, but on the guests: the Bundren family. As guests, the Bundrens do not demonstrate the gratitude or deference expected of them, and this perversion of hospitality proves to be destructive.

The Bundrens render themselves outsiders by violating the social codes surrounding burial. Whereas the community expects solemnity and a sense of sacredness toward the dead, the Bundrens unintentionally desecrate Addie's body. The community's expectation of a quick burial is also flouted in the Bundrens' insistence on burying Addie in Jefferson. Almost immediately after her death, they begin violating these expectations and rendering themselves unclean. Before demonstrating their violation of these social expectations, I must first demonstrate that the expectations exist. This can be best seen at Addie's funeral.

The funeral itself is deeply ritualistic. In his article, “William Faulkner and the Southern Way of Death,” Charles Reagan Wilson writes, “A proper funeral, coffin, tombstone, and burial ground are essential for a proper Faulknerian death” (Wilson 274). Indeed, death and the ceremonies surrounding it are closely governed by social expectation. The funeral scene is narrated by Tull, who seems central to and emblematic of the community and its standards. He presents a function governed by tradition and expectation. He describes “walk[ing] up onto the porch and scrap[ing] our shoes, a little stiff in our Sunday clothes” (Faulkner 86). There is not only a dress code, but a code for virtually every aspect of the mourners’ behavior. Tull goes on to note that those attending the funeral were “Not looking full at [Anse] as he meets [them]” (Faulkner 86), indicating that even eye-contact is governed by the solemnity of the situation.

There are ritual recitations of Bible verses, as well. Specifically, the mourners greet each other with consolations of “The Lord giveth” (Faulkner 86). That isn’t the complete verse, and the part omitted is the relevant one: “The Lord taketh away.” But it is so well-known to the community, so deeply engraved in their unofficial funeral-lectionary, that they are able to abbreviate it without a second thought.

Tull goes on to state that “The women folks go on into the house,” and “the men stop on the porch” (Faulkner 87). The division of men and women here is clean, surgical, not marked by any natural intermingling. Even behavior within the groups is closely monitored with an expectation of solemnity. Tull notes that the men on the porch do not look at one another. In fact, he recounts the group’s reaction to a moment of humor. In response to a witty remark by Peabody, Tull says, “We laugh, suddenly loud, and then suddenly quiet again. We look a little aside at one another” (Faulkner 89). Here, we are afforded a view of a small violation of the community’s

code for the funeral. Laughter, strictly forbidden by the funeral's solemnity, elicits shock and guilt. The laughers fall quiet immediately and exchange awkward glances, acknowledging and repenting of their transgression.

The funeral itself is performed with all the regularity and predictability of a church service. Tull catalogs each part. The women sing. The men move toward the door, remove their hats, and spit out their tobacco, but do not enter. Whitfield speaks. The women sing again. Hats return to their heads and mourners return to their homes (Faulkner 91-92). None of it seems to require verbal prompting. The funeral progresses as it does because the hands of tradition and expectation force it to do so.

The Bundrens begin violating this sense of the sanctity of dead, almost as soon as Addie passes away. Darl narrates an interaction he does not witness between Anse and the just-deceased Addie. Anse "touches the quilt...trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead" (Faulkner 52). Darl calls his father's hand "awkward as a claw," evoking the image of a vulture hovering over a corpse. The interaction is not only "awkward," as Darl describes it, but moving from order to disorder; from the smooth, picturesque composure that is supposed to surround death, to the wrinkled, ruffled disarray that marks reality. This small interaction, so easy to overlook, suggests that the Bundren family's interaction with Addie's body will be marked by both insufficient reverence and an almost-ravenous selfishness.

Anse is not the only member of the family who contributes to this violation. Vardaman, too, in what is perhaps the most darkly comedic passage in the text, inadvertently bores holes into his mother's face. He has been so preoccupied with Addie being able to breathe once she is nailed up in the coffin, and the next morning, the others find him "Laying asleep on the floor...and the top of the box bored clean full of holes" (Faulkner 73). Vardaman has used Cash's auger to drill breathing holes

for his mother. However, his work is imprecise, as “two of them had bored on into her face” (Faulkner 73). Vardaman accidentally mutilates the corpse of his mother in his effort to allow her to live. Because he does not yet understand the significance of death, he cannot conform to the social codes governing the treatment of bodies, and thus contributes to the Bundren family’s status as outsiders.

The Bundren’s unusual placement of Addie in her coffin also speaks to their violation of the accepted burial ritual. Specifically, the direction she faces in her coffin is unorthodox. Tull narrates, “They had laid her in it reversed” (Faulkner 88). He goes on to explain that they placed her facing the wrong direction in order to prevent her wedding dress from being crushed. This is a stunning and disturbing image: Addie’s hole-ridden face rests where her feet ought to be in the interest of protecting a dress. This suggests the complete perversion of burial protocol in two ways: first, the physical backwardness of the burial suggests its figurative “backwardness.” And second, the inordinate value placed on the protection of the dress rather than the dignity of its wearer indicates that the Bundrens’ respect for the dead is not nearly as high as it should be. Their priorities are severely disordered, according to their community’s standards.

The process of transporting the coffin from the house to the wagon is also a comic inversion of normative funeral proceedings. Jewel, Cash, and Darl fail miserably as pallbearers. According to Darl, they all have a deep sense of the sacredness of their task. He narrates, “We move, balancing it as though it were something infinitely precious, our faces averted, breathing through our teeth to keep our nostrils closed” (Faulkner 98). While Darl senses the significance of the moment, the brothers do not work well together. Cash warns that the coffin “ain’t balanced,” but Jewel is dismissive and overeager. He carries the coffin so quickly that his

brothers are unable to keep up. Cash and Darl lose their grip on the coffin, and when Jewel nears the wagon, “He lets it overshoot him, swinging, and stops it and sloughs it into the wagon bed” (Faulkner 99). Addie’s coffin is gracelessly slung onto the wagon, contributing to the general sense of disrespect her family demonstrates toward her body, even when their intentions are good. This scene also suggests the disjointedness within the family itself. The Bundrens, who ought to be united in their grief for wife and mother, are instead in conflict with one another.

On their odyssey to Jefferson, one of the most significant obstacles they encounter is the river. The treatment of the coffin in the river-crossing continues to fall short of the ideal. When a log knocks the mule team off of the ford, the crossing is thrown into chaos. Vardaman notes, “Cash tried but she fell off” (Faulkner 150). That is, Addie’s coffin falls off of the wagon and into the current. Jewel manages to save it amid the clamor, but it still bears signs of the struggle. Darl says that “It lies profoundly, the long pale planks hushed a little with wetting” and he notes the “two long muddy smears” on the wood (Faulkner 157). The coffin containing Addie’s body has become waterlogged and muddy, when it ought to have been interred as cleanly and dryly as possible.

The physical condition of the coffin continues to deteriorate. By the time the Bundrens reach Armstid, buzzards have begun circling overhead and the body begins to smell. Armstid narrates, “As soon as I see [the buzzards] it was like I could smell it in the field a mile away from just watching them, and them circling and circling for everybody in the county to see what was in my barn” (Faulkner 187). The decay of Addie’s body, a process which should happen in the privacy of the earth, happens out in the open for everyone to see and smell. The smell is especially offensive to the Armstids. When it “got hot then, right, and the breeze had dropped or changed,” Mrs.

Armstid even calls the smell “a outrage” (Faulkner 187). It is senseless to call a natural process outrageous, so Mrs. Armstid must be referring to the Bundren family’s actions in light of the inevitability of that natural process. In delaying Addie’s burial, they have violated a deeply held community standard.

The Armstids aren’t the only ones who are put off by the smell of the corpse. In Mottson, the public reaction against the smell is heightened. Moseley, the druggist, describes, “Ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon” (Faulkner 203). The Bundrens elicit two reactions from the people of Mottson: some flee, and some gather. So offensive, so unprecedented is their behavior that many cannot stand to be around them. Even those who gather around the Bundrens are a testament to the family’s exclusion, not inclusion: they are rubberneckers at the wreck of their community standards. Moseley goes on to say that “It had been dead eight days” (Faulkner 203). In his mind, and by extension the collective mind of his community, Addie has been reduced to a mere “it;” a decaying animal, a clump of matter. The Bundrens refer to her as “ma,” and most people in the community up to this point have referred to Addie as “her.” But the people of Mottson see her as an “it.” Moseley even compares her body to “a piece of rotten cheese coming into an anthill” (Faulkner 203). This is telling, because it means that her family’s handling of her corpse has stripped her of her humanity more than death did.

In Mottson, it becomes clear that the smell does not just violate people’s preferences, but it violates a shared community standard. The marshal, a man of authority in the Mottson community, tells Anse that “he would have to move on” because “folks couldn’t stand it” (Faulkner 203). He speaks with legal authority,

indicating that while the Bundrens may not have broken the law, they have violated the next best thing: the community's collective sense of appropriate burial protocol.

The conversation after the Bundrens leave Mottson is also revealing. The smell lingers as a reminder of their sojourn in town, and Moseley notes, "When I went to supper it still seemed like I could smell it" (Faulkner 205). It is unlikely that he could actually smell the coffin, which had been gone for hours at that point. Instead, this speaks to how rattled the community is by the violation of its expectations. The offensive smell seems to linger as a reminder of the Bundrens' backwardness intruding in the townspeople's sanctuary. Indeed, it isn't until the next day that the smell seems to abate. Moseley speculates that by then, the Bundren family is probably "in jail," and he concludes, "Well, thank the Lord it's not our jail" (Faulkner 205). Again, we see this invocation of the law on a matter that is not necessarily legal. This goes to show just how cherished the community's code for burial is: it is so highly prized that it is confused for law, and what is really only a violation of community expectations is taken to be a severe and punishable offense.

What, then, did the community expect of the Bundren family? What could the family have done differently with respect to Addie's burial? The obvious solution would be to bury Addie at New Hope, the cemetery near their house. Many of the community members suggest doing so. At the funeral, for example, Armstid says, "[Anse] better go on and bury her at New Hope" (Faulkner 86). Samson echoes this when the bridge goes out, advising, "You better...get a early start for New Hope tomorrow morning" (Faulkner 114). However, the family insists on taking her to Jefferson, always citing Addie's wish to be buried there. Anse and Dewey Dell especially rely on this line. Anse says to Samson, "It's Addie I give the promise to...Her mind is set on it" (Faulkner 115). Dewey Dell echoes him, saying, "She

wouldn't go until you promised. She thought she could depend on you" (Faulkner 115). Ignoring the fact that both characters harbor ulterior motives, the reason they give for wanting to take the body to Jefferson (namely, honoring Addie's wish), ought to create a kind of conflict of interests in the community, because it does place such a high value on respecting the dead. On the one hand, the community prizes respecting the wishes of the dead, and on the other hand, it prizes a quick burial. Usually these two values are not in conflict with one another, but in this novel they are: the deceased wished to be buried far from home. This produces a fascinating tension in the family and the community as a whole.

Some neighbors are sympathetic to the family's plight. For instance, Samson seems to believe that Addie's wishes should be honored above the community's demand for a quick burial, saying, "What could he a done?...He gave her his promised word" (Faulkner 117). But he is almost unique in this sympathy for Addie's wishes. The Bundrens' neighbors and the townspeople in Mottson almost unanimously believe that the expectation of a quick burial ought to trump honoring Addie's wishes, and that the Bundrens' prioritization of her wishes is an "outrage." Thus, by choosing to bury Addie in Jefferson per her request, the Bundrens situate themselves against the public and defy the community's expectations. As such, they are six outsiders on their journey, made ritually unclean by the seventh.

I will now shift my focus from the Bundrens as outsiders to the hospitality they receive in light of their outsider-status. Specifically, this chapter will focus on Sampson, Armstid, and Gillespie, and the dynamics of their interactions with the Bundren Family. Each offers shelter to the Bundren family in a manner consistent with the South's expectation of hospitality. I will demonstrate that, at each of the three

houses, the breakdown of the host-guest relationship results primarily from the Bundren family's failure as guests, not the failure of their hosts.

The first community member to take the Bundren family in is Samson. The first comment that Samson makes about the Bundren family is negative. He refers to Anse as "lazy" and "proud," and thinks disdainfully about Anse's attitude toward adversity. However, he keeps all of these thoughts to himself. The first thing he says aloud to the family is, "You better stay here tonight and get a early start for New Hope tomorrow morning" (Faulkner 114). Samson is hospitable to the Bundrens, even in spite of his dislike toward Anse. He later reasons with his wife, Rachel, saying, "Well, would you have had me turn them away at dark, eight miles from home? What else could I do" (Faulkner 114). Samson's decision to extend shelter to the Bundrens is motivated by his awareness that it is what he ought to do, per the community's expectations. However, he places limits on the hospitality that he expects to extend to them. He says, "It wont be but one night, and they'll keep it in the barn, and they'll sholy get started by daylight" (Faulkner 115). This hints at his reservations, if not conditions, for hosting the Bundrens.

When the Bundrens arrive at Samson's, we see the first of many episodes in which the Bundrens' insistence on self-reliance is actually insulting, rather than convenient, for their host. Samson narrates, "So I told them...that supper was about ready. Only they didn't want to come in" (Faulkner 115). Anse explains their refusal by saying, "We wouldn't discommode you," failing to realize how deeply personally Rachel Samson takes the host-guest relationship (Faulkner 115). Samson replies, "When folks stops with us at meal time and wont come to the table, my wife takes it as a insult" (Faulkner 116). Perhaps the Bundrens do not understand the sincerity of

Samson's insistence, or perhaps they are paralyzed by their pride. Either way, they refuse to join their hosts for supper, rebuffing their generous offer.

We see the Bundren family pride rear its head in Jewel when he has to feed his horse. Samson offers food freely, saying, "Help yourself outen the loft. Feed him when you bait the mules" (Faulkner 116). But Jewel wants to pay Samson for the food. This, too, will become a pattern in the Bundrens' behavior as guests. They frequently attempt to convert the hospitality of their hosts to commerce. But Samson will have none of that. In fact, he stubbornly retorts, "If [the horse] can eat the loft clean, I'll help you load the barn onto the wagon in the morning" (Faulkner 116). This is an overwhelming display of hospitality. Despite any internal reservations Samson may have toward the Bundrens, his interactions with them are marked by a stunning openhandedness. Jewel, however, clenches his own fist, unwilling to accept what he has not bought.

Rachel is deeply hurt by the Bundrens' behavior. She pities Addie for the ordeal to which Anse subjects her, and she likely pities herself for the standoffishness of her guests. Samson describes the pitiful camp that the Bundrens set up for themselves on the floor around the wagon. He says, "They just squatted there...I reckon after four days they was used to it. But Rachel wasn't" (Faulkner 117). The eager hostess has been robbed of the opportunity to extend hospitality to her guests, and must suffer the outrage of hosting underfed guests, shivering out in her barn, while Southern hospitality demands that she properly feed and shelter them. In this, we see the one-sidedness of their relationship: the Samsons are giving of their space and sustenance, but the Bundrens withhold their acceptance of it. In this way, the Bundrens' refusal to accept help is almost a form of stinginess, because they do not offer their hosts the satisfaction they deserve for their efforts. Indeed, their failure as

guests moves Rachel to tears. Samson describes falling asleep, listening to “Rachel crying...even after she was asleep” (Faulkner 118).

Armstid also serves as an exemplary host to the Bundrens. When the family arrives at his house, they have just come from their harrowing river-crossing, and Cash is suffering from a broken leg. Before they even arrive, Jewel rides ahead to tell Armstid what has happened. Darl narrates the section in which they approach the Armstids’ house, and he observes as Jewel “came back on the horse, leading Armstid’s team” (Faulkner 180). This gives us a glimpse of the generosity and compassion that Armstid will demonstrate toward the Bundren family, even if loaning the mule team does not itself constitute hospitality. When the family nears his house, “Armstid was waiting at the gate” (Faulkner 181). He is ready to assist however he can. Although Darl doesn’t narrate any initial conversation at the gate, we know that Mr. and Mrs. Armstid are willing to host the Bundren family in their time of need, because when they carry Cash inside, “Mrs. Armstid had the bed ready” (Faulkner 181). This is a good indication that their hospitality is as marked by foresight as it is openhandedness.

Upon their arrival, Darl does not note any questions or reservations by Armstid; instead, he presents a host insistent on extending hospitality. In fact, the first words out of Armstid’s mouth are, “You’re welcome to the house” (Faulkner 181). He repeats this line three times, assuring them that they are welcome.

In response to this offer, Anse says, “I thank you...We’ll use in the shed yonder. I know it’s a imposition on you” (Faulkner 181). There is nothing inherently wrong with this response. In fact, it may even conform to the expected choreography of the hospitality two-step: humble refusal in response to a generous offer. But Anse is as persistent as Armstid is. Anse insists on staying in the shed rather than the house,

and Armstid replies, “It won’t rain under. But if you’d rather... You’re welcome to the house” (Faulkner 182). Instead of expressing gratitude and relenting to the repeated offer, as would be expected, Anse is as stubborn as ever. He does express his gratitude, saying “thank you,” but then he changes the subject and never explicitly accepts the offer.

It is much the same when Armstid offers the family food. He says, “Lula’ll have supper ready soon as she gets Cash comfortable” (Faulkner 182). But, according to Darl, “Pa wouldn’t come in the house” (Faulkner 182). Finally, after much persuasion by Armstid, Anse accepts the offer of food and drink, but in a way, it is not he who accepts it. The way he sees it, Addie accepts the Armstids’ hospitality vicariously through him. He explains, “It’s for her sake I am taking the food. I got no team, no nothing. But she will be grateful to ere a one of you” (Faulkner 182). Anse is unable to humble himself and be a grateful guest. Instead, he uses his dead wife as a sort of shield against the blow of admitting one’s weakness. Armstid sees through his façade, dismissing it with a “Sho.” (Faulkner 182).

In his article, “Faulkner’s Anse Bundren,” Robert W. Kirk offers an explanation for Anse’s stubbornness in these exchanges. He writes, “With Addie’s death Anse... ceases to be unimportant in his little clay-bound world” (Kirk 448). That is, he has acquired a strange new sense of self-importance that he is unwilling to relinquish, even in the name of being a gracious guest. In fact, for Kirk, the entire journey is marked by this struggle for honor or control. He writes, “The journey may be seen primarily as a struggle to regain some... prestige” (Kirk 450). And while Anse’s ostensible desire for headship over his family and control over his circumstances may explain his rebuffing of his hosts’ offers, it certainly doesn’t excuse it.

Armstid narrates the second half of the Bundrens' stay. During this section, tensions arise between host and guest, caused almost exclusively by Anse's pride rather than by any shortcoming of Armstid's. Specifically, Anse becomes frustrated that Armstid will not sell him his mule team. Armstid offers to loan the team to the Bundrens, saying, "Of course you're welcome to the use of mine" (Faulkner 185). This language is familiar. It is the same as his refrain about the house in the last section. Anse's response is similar as well. He says, "I thank you...She'll want to go in ourn" (Faulkner 185). We see a pattern emerging in Anse: he expresses empty thanks before refusing help in Addie's name. Once again, he hides behind Addie's wishes as an excuse for his rudeness. This is perhaps the greatest desecration done to Addie's body: Anse reduces his wife from body to barrier.

Not only does Anse refuse Armstid's offer to loan him the mule team, Anse faults him for not being willing to sell it. By saying, "She'll want to go in ourn," Anse means that Addie, for whom he becomes a kind of proxy, would only want to use a mule team that they own. The request is a proud and petty one, and yet Armstid honors it as best he can. He provides what information he has about who is looking to sell mule teams, saying, "You might try Snopes...He's got three-four span" (Faulkner 184). But it is not enough. Anse wants to buy Armstid's team, and is angry that Armstid is not willing to sell. Anse even attempts to guilt-trip his host, saying "A man'll always help a fellow in a tight, if he's got ere a drop of Christian blood in him" (Faulkner 185). The irony, of course, is that Armstid *is* helping Anse immensely. Anse's frustration is that Armstid is not helping him in the way that is most convenient for Anse. It must be understood that what Anse is asking far exceeds the South's expectations of a host: hospitality demands that a host temporarily extend the use of his property to his guest, not that he sell it.

Even when the coffin begins to smell and the buzzards circle overhead, Armstid maintains his sympathy towards his guests. When his wife complains, Armstid responds, “He’s getting her into the ground the best he can” (Faulkner 187). However, Armstid does indirectly suggest to Jewel that the smell is a nuisance. This is perhaps the closest he comes to “failing” as a host, but if it is a failure, it is a forgivable one. Armstid narrates, “I found Jewel and asked him if he didn’t want to take one of the mules and go over to the Bend and see about Anse” (Faulkner 187). In saying this, he communicates a sense of urgency about Anse’s return and the Bundren family’s progress on their journey to Jefferson.

Jewel understands this suggestion clearly, and he resents it. According to Armstid, “He just looked at me with his jaws going bone-white and them bone-white eyes of hisn” (Faulkner 187). This is an interesting change, because up to this point, Anse has been acting as the representative of the family. In Anse’s absence, Jewel fills his position. Jewel sees through Armstid’s veiled suggestion, and instead of doing as Armstid suggests, he does what Armstid wants: he moves the wagon farther away from the house. This gesture resembles Anse’s behavior. In both cases, the men make decisions ostensibly aimed at lessening their hosts’ discomfort, but really aimed at protecting their own pride. Armstid, ever the considerate host, protests, “I never meant nothing. You couldn’t help it” (Faulkner 187-188). But Jewel insists on moving the coffin away from the home, just as Anse did with the family the night before.

When Anse returns with the news that he has traded Jewel’s horse for a mule team, Armstid renews his offer to loan the Bundrens his own team, sensing the strife that the trade has caused among his guests. Anse not only refuses the offer once again, but resolves to leave Armstid’s property despite his host’s protests. The Bundrens stay on the wagon that night, about a mile away from Armstid’s house (Faulkner 191). It is

a small distance, so short that it will not make much of a difference in their arrival time in Jefferson. But for Anse, it is a great distance, because his pride is just out of hospitality's reach. He is willing to suffer cold, hunger and discomfort if it means his honor will remain intact, and he forces his family to do the same.

The Bundren family's interaction with Armstid is one-sided and dysfunctional. Armstid offers them every comfort that a host could reasonably be expected to offer, each of which the family either outright rejects, or grudgingly accepts on Addie's behalf. Despite their outsider-status, Armstid takes them in because there is "something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him" (Faulkner 192). He cites a sense of compulsion, perhaps springing from pity for the Bundren family. Faulkner elevates this sort of compassion toward the outcast as the proper response to their state. Unfortunately, his kindness is met with rejection and pride. Fittingly, Armstid says that a man feels he has to help a man like Anse, "even when he knows he'll be wanting to kick himself the next minute" (Faulkner 192). And, in all likelihood, Armstid does.

At Gillespie's house, we see the final and most striking breakdown of hospitality in the novel. Faulkner does not directly narrate an initial conversation between Gillespie and the Bundrens, but we can tell that Gillespie, like the two before him, fulfills his role as host well. And, strangely, the Bundrens accept his hospitality more than they accept that of the others. Darl, for instance, casually says, "After supper Cash begins to sweat a little," implying that supper was not only offered by Gillespie, but accepted by the Bundrens. Their resolve to be self-sufficient has broken, and they rely, at least in part, on Gillespie's hospitality.

We also learn indirectly that the sleeping arrangement has been changed. Whereas before, the Bundrens insisted on sleeping in the barn, it seems they have

compromised at last. Vardaman and Dewey Dell, for instance, “sleep on [a] pallet. It is on the back porch” (Faulkner 215). The back porch is a fascinating halfway-point between inside and outside. While it is technically out of doors, it is also under the same physical shelter as the rest of the house, suggesting enclosure, inclusiveness, and safety.

Not only do Vardaman and Dewey Dell sleep on the porch, but at Cash and Anse and most likely Jewel and Darl sleep inside the house itself. This is the ultimate acceptance of Gillespie’s hospitality. Although their conversations are never directly narrated, it is safe to assume that the Bundrens accepted after much mumbling by Anse about his aversion to being “beholden.” Reluctant or not, they have caved. The Bundrens, for once, fulfill their half of the host-guest relationship.

But their conformation to the community’s expectations is short-lived. In fact, it is juxtaposed with the most shocking violation of hospitality protocol in this novel: Darl’s burning of the barn. Darl narrates the chaos and destruction caused by his own actions. He describes Jewel’s heroism, in particular, saying, “He leaps toward the stall where the horse screams. It plunges and kicks, the sound of the crashing blows sucking up into the sound of the flames” (Faulkner 219). He also notes the panic in the host and his family, commenting, “Gillespie and Mack pass me, in knee-length nightshirts, shouting, their voices thin and high and meaningless and at the same time profoundly wild and sad” (Faulkner 219). Through his own actions, Darl has completely broken the man who so generously extended his home to a family in need.

This scene highlights the importance of property to the work as a whole. Faulkner chose to portray the violation of Gillespie’s hospitality through the destruction of property. This is fitting, because it is such a reversal of properly-ordered hospitality. Gillespie offers his property to the Bundrens for their temporary

use, and the Bundrens destroys his property, permanently rendering the barn unusable. Gillespie offers his own property, and the Bundrens destroy property not their own. For a community that values gracious acceptance of help and respect for another man's property, this is a complete perversion of hospitality.

Cash recognizes the depth of his brother's violation, reflecting after Darl's arrest, "I don't reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property"(Faulkner 233). Cash, the carpenter, knows the value of hard work and its fruits. He understands the sacredness of property, and it is understandable that he is especially offended by the destruction of a physical structure, namely a barn. He does not merely condemn Darl's actions as immoral, but as unstable. He comments, "That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he cant see eye to eye with other folks" (Faulkner 234). Here, Cash touches the very pulse of Faulkner's commentary about hospitality in this novel: the destruction of property, which represents a severe perversion of the host-guest relationship, renders a man in complete violation of the community's standards. Not only is such a man in violation of these standards, but he is unable to be reconciled to them because he cannot understand them, just as the community cannot understand him. To be so blithe in one's rejection of hospitality and disregard for property is to divorce oneself altogether from the standards of behavior that bind and instruct the community as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

Hospitality in *Light in August*

In *Light in August*, Faulkner juxtaposes the stories of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas, both of which are shaped by the hospitality they are shown in Jefferson. Lena Grove, whose pregnancy reveals her violation of the social code prohibiting premarital sex, is met with a stunning tolerance and openhandedness from the community. In the Jefferson residents' treatment of Lena, Faulkner presents a paradigm for navigating the codes that govern a community: the community manages to affirm and uphold its moral expectations while extending grace and hospitality to someone who is found to be in violation of those expectations. This exemplary handling of hospitality makes the community's interaction with Joe Christmas appear even more heinous by comparison. Unlike Lena, whose transgression is volitional, Christmas is rendered an outsider by his race. The community is cold and unwelcoming to him. In fact, the one woman who does extend hospitality to Christmas is rendered an outsider by mere association with him. Faulkner uses the successful handling of hospitality in the case of Lena's moral transgression to criticize the community's rejection of Joe Christmas for a non-moral transgression.

Early on, the community demonstrates the importance it places on marriage before pregnancy. When Armstid encounters Lena on the road, the first thing he notices is that she is "young, pregnant, and a stranger" (Faulkner 9). He knows very little about her, but he makes it a point to learn her marital status before he learns anything else. Faulkner writes, "Armstid has never once looked full at her. Yet he has

already seen that she wears no wedding ring” (Faulkner 12). Before he even learns her name, he investigates whether her pregnancy is a legitimate one. In response to Lena’s pensive remark “It’s a strange thing,” Armstid probes, “How folks can look at a strange young gal walking the road in your shape and know that her husband has left her?” (Faulkner 13).

Lena does not answer Armstid’s implied question. Instead, she “does not move,” confirming Armstid’s suspicions (Faulkner 13). The first words out of Armstid’s mouth to his wife are “Her name is Burch...At least that’s what she says the fellow’s name is that she is hunting for” (Faulkner 16). By suggesting that Lena shares the last name of her child’s father, Armstid strives to protect some semblance of the girl’s respectability. But the immediacy of his statement demonstrates how rigid the community’s expectation of marriage before pregnancy is, and how damning the community can be towards violators of that expectation.

Mrs. Armstid is less subtle than her husband. She questions Lena point-blank, “Is your name Burch yet?” (Faulkner 17). This is more than the small-talk of two newly-acquainted women. This is the establishment of whether Lena’s relationship adheres to the moral expectations which govern southern society. Faulkner writes, “The young woman does not answer at once” (Faulkner 17). Her hesitation alone is telling—she senses the gravity of the question she has been posed. Lena knows that her answer will render her either a cherished insider or an immoral outsider. Nonetheless, she is honest. She says, “My name is not Burch yet. It’s Lena Grove” (Faulkner 18).

Mrs. Armstid, much like her husband, becomes quick to salvage what respectability she can for Lena. She suggests, “And so you want to catch up with him so your name will be Burch in time. Is that it?” (Faulkner 18). Mrs. Armstid suggests

the “next best thing”: if not pregnancy within wedlock, then marriage after the fact. It falls short of the community’s ideal, certainly, but it would be considered the respectable thing to do, given Lena’s circumstances.

But Lena flouts even this expectation. She responds, “I don’t reckon I need any promise from Lucas” (Faulkner 18). This flies in the face of the community’s standards: not only is she in violation of them, but she also verbally challenges them. She continues, “I reckon a family ought to all be together when a chap comes” (Faulkner 21). While the community repeatedly stresses the importance of marriage and formal vows, Lena reveals that she has different priorities. She values togetherness, not weddedness.

The Armstids are not the only ones who reveal that Jefferson puts a premium on marriage before pregnancy. When Lena seeks Lucas at the planing mill, she meets Byron Bunch and tells him the name of the man for whom she is looking. He asks, “Are you Miz Burch?” (Faulkner 50). A pattern begins to emerge among the residents of Jefferson: before they learn much of anything about Lena, they feel compelled to establish her marital status in light of her pregnancy. While Byron certainly feels compassion for Lena, the community’s standards are so ingrained in him that he cannot help but identify her by her transgression. He describes Lena as “a young woman betrayed and deserted and not even aware that she has been deserted, and whose name is not yet Burch” (Faulkner 52). Her unmarried status is so contrary to Jefferson’s expectations that it has become a part of her identity.

Despite their fixation on Lena’s violation of their standards, the members of the Jefferson community receive her with an overwhelming hospitality. The Armstids are the first to do so. Although they suspect (and then learn for certain) that Lena is not married, they insist on hosting her in their home. After Armstid gives her a ride in

his wagon, Lena wants to continue on to Jefferson. She says, "I reckon I better get on" (Faulkner 14). But Armstid, despite his suspicions, insists, "You come on and stay the night at my house" (Faulkner 14). This is a genuine offer, not merely a formality, because Armstid persists in persuading her: he mentions the transportation he'll provide the next day, and the unlikelihood that one night will make a difference in her pursuit of Burch. Lena, in response, offers the standard show of reluctance. She protests that she "Wouldn't be beholden" and that she "wouldn't trouble" (Faulkner 14). But Armstid prevails, and Lena agrees to stay the night with them.

From there, Mrs. Armstid assumes the role of hostess with a fierce insistence. When Lena offers to help with the dishes, "Mrs. Armstid does not look around. She clashes the stove savagely" and she tells Lena, "You stay where you are. You keep off your feet now, and you'll keep off your back a while longer maybe" (Faulkner 17). Mrs. Armstid is a tough, almost violent character, but it would be a misreading of her to say that her anger is directed at Lena, or that she offers hospitality with a grudging, punishing attitude. Instead, her fierceness is channeled into her role as hostess. Her "savageness" is employed for Lena's wellbeing, not against it.

In fact, Mrs. Armstid reveals how deeply she cares about acting in Lena's best interest. She exceeds the demands of hospitality, smashing her own china container of coins and telling Armstid, "You give that to her" (Faulkner 22). Even then, she is not satisfied. She continues, "Come sunup you hitch up the team and take her away from here. Take her all the way to Jefferson" (Faulkner 22). She is insistent on meeting every need Lena may have. Mrs. Armstid's displays of anger are not in complaint against her station as hostess, but in a passionate fulfillment thereof.

Byron, too, extends hospitality to Lena despite his awareness of her unmarried status. He arranges for Lena to stay in Mrs. Beard's boarding house. His conversation

with Mrs. Beard warrants consideration, because it speaks to the adamancy and complexity of his protection of Lena. The first thing he says to Mrs. Beard is, “This here is Miz Burch...She is looking to meet her husband here” (Faulkner 84). Byron, aware of the stigma surrounding Lena’s illegitimate pregnancy, lies in order to protect her from the community’s judgment.

But there is more going on in this exchange than meets the eye. Typically, the offer of shelter is primarily a physical consideration—a bed to sleep in, a roof over one’s head. While that is certainly a factor in Byron’s provision of the boarding house room, there is another type of protection occurring. The community is abuzz with gossip surrounding the murder of Joanna Burden earlier that day. Joe Brown, the father of Lena’s child, is at the heart of the speculations and rumors, and Byron does not want Lena to find out what Brown has gotten himself involved in. While they wait for Mrs. Beard to open the door, “[Byron] seemed to hear a myriad sounds: voices, the hushed tense voices about the town, about the square through which he had hurried her, where men met among the safe and familiar lights, telling it” (Faulkner 84). Byron becomes impatient as he waits for Mrs. Beard to open the door, thinking repetitively, “Why don’t she come on. Why don’t she come on” (Faulkner 84). For Byron, the outside world presents a threat to Lena, not because of the physical elements, but because of the whispers floating in the air. The boarding house functions not merely as a shelter, but a sanctuary of silence.

Even so, it is only a temporary arrangement, and Byron is relentless in finding an acceptable place for Lena to stay. He says to Reverend Hightower, “She needs a place where it will be kind of home to her...a room where it will be quiet when her time comes, and not every darn horsetrader or courtjury that passes through the hallway” (Faulkner 300). He arranges for Lena to stay in the cabin behind Joanna

Burden's home—the same cabin that Joe Brown and Joe Christmas have been staying in. This is a complex instance of hospitality, because the cabin isn't really Byron's to offer. It isn't anybody's at the moment: its owner has just died, and neither of the cabin's old residents are around. Byron understands this ambiguity. He addresses Hightower's objections before he can make them, saying, "It aint any living man or woman in this country or state to say she cant use it" (Faulkner 314). He also says, "It was the nearest thing to a home [Brown] ever had...so I reckon she is entitled to use it, especially as its owner aint using it now" (Faulkner 314).

Although it could be argued that Joanna Burden or Joe Brown is Lena's "host" during her stay in the cabin, neither of these arguments are very convincing. Joanna, after all, is dead, so although the cabin was hers, she never willingly offered Lena its use. Brown, similarly, has no knowledge that Lena is in Jefferson, let alone in the cabin he stayed in. It is Byron who functions as Lena's host. He reports, "I took her out there this evening. I had already fixed up the cabin, cleaned it good. She is settled now" (Faulkner 314). He also arranges for help in case Lena goes into labor. He says, "There is a...woman, one old enough to be sensible, that don't live over two hundred yards away. She can call to her without getting up from the chair or the bed" (Faulkner 314). Byron has considered and provided for every need that Lena may have. It is because of his thorough provision, and his clean conscience regarding the propriety of Lena staying there, that this can rightfully be classified as hospitality.

Indeed, Lena is cared for when she goes into labor, and afterward. When Lena confronts Joe Brown and he flees, she follows, always accompanied by Byron Bunch. His constant protection follows her. In the course of their travels together, they meet a furniture repairer, and Byron reveals his priorities. He says, "I was wondering if they would have a tourist camp...with tents for hire" (Faulkner 497). While Lena is polite

and demure, Byron is adamant about securing shelter for her, well beyond the demands of southern hospitality.

It is evident, then, that the Jefferson community treats Lena with an outpouring of hospitality, even though she has violated their cherished expectation of marriage before pregnancy. She is met with shelter, both from the physical elements, and the harmful talk of the town at every turn. But why has she been extended this reprieve? Why has the community welcomed her so warmly?

While Lena is in violation of a major moral expectation of the Jefferson community, she is also in adherence to a more primal, deep-rooted expectation: she conforms to the community's expectation of a woman's demeanor. She is meek, gentle, and soft-spoken, acting at every turn as the emblematic Southern belle, demure and ironically chaste. In "Gender, Race, and Language in *Light in August*," Deborah Clarke argues that Lena's behavior, and Byron's love for her, "Allows him to recast her as the ideal woman, in other words, a virgin, despite the evidence of his own eyes" (Clarke 400).

While for Byron, the "ideal woman" may be an unmarried virgin, C. Hugh Holman notes in "The Unity of Faulkner's *Light in August*" that Lena's pregnancy is in itself a conformation to expectation, or an accomplishment of sex's natural end, rendering her "natural" and therefore acceptable. He writes, "The stories of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch...establish a norm for the other actions, a definition of the natural order against which the perversions and distortions of other stories are to be set" (Holman 163). Indeed, Lena's pregnancy, ironically coupled with her virginal innocence, render her in complete conformation to the South's expectations of a woman. Irene Visser refers to her as a "Mendicant Madonna" figure—Lena is meek and unassuming, qualities typically associated with virginity, but she is also pregnant

(Visser 38). In this way, she achieves the fulfillment of an otherwise-impossible double-standard consistently imposed on women: she is both celibate and sexual, modest and motherly.

Indeed, Lena's fertility commends her to the Jefferson community. It is against the backdrop of this fertility that Joe Christmas' infertility and castration are overlaid, rendering him the more unnatural and excluded by comparison.

It could be argued that Byron is the exception rather than the rule when it comes to the community's extension of hospitality to Lena in spite of her moral transgression. Such an argument would suggest that Byron's actions are motivated by his selfish desire for Lena rather than an interest in her wellbeing that transcends the community's condemnation of Lena for her actions. However, Faulkner is very clear that Byron is not to be viewed as a rogue do-gooder. Rather, he is to be viewed as a representative of the community and its values. Faulkner writes that Byron Bunch is, "chosen by circumstance to represent Jefferson to her who had come afoot and without money...He did not hope nor intend to avoid that responsibility" (Faulkner 83). He fulfills his duty well—he represents Jefferson as a welcoming, hospitable place.

In the community's interaction with Lena Grove, Faulkner establishes a paradigm for hospitality. Jefferson accepts and provides shelter for a woman, thus fulfilling the community's expectation of hospitality, even though they know the woman to be in violation of the community's moral expectations. The reader can deduce Faulkner's stance on this display of hospitality through its results: Lena is cared for through pregnancy and childbirth, and the novel ends with the image of Lena, her son, and Byron as a kind of family. Her story is one marked by new life and new hope. Faulkner, then, promotes such hospitality as good and admirable.

Faulkner juxtaposes this positive example of hospitality with the hospitality shown to Joe Christmas in order to comment on how terrible Christmas' treatment is. Whereas Lena is shown excessive kindness despite her moral transgression of the community's expectations, Christmas suffers mostly exclusion and hatred for the non-moral transgression of simply being born of mixed race. In his article, "God the Father and Motherless Child: Light in August," Franklin G. Burroughs notes the difference in Jefferson's reception of Lena and Christmas. He writes, "Lena hungers and is given meat, thirsts and is given drink, is a stranger and is taken in, while Joe, an equally hungry and thirsty stranger, is beaten, abused, and finally killed" (Burroughs 191). While Burroughs posits that this difference might be due to the manners in which Lena and Joe seek (or don't seek) hospitality, it is more complex than that. Indeed, race plays a central role in Christmas's lackluster welcome in Jefferson.

Christmas' race is a matter of great concern throughout the book. Because he is neither all-black nor all-white, the community finds him difficult to classify. In fact, long before he murders Joanna Burden, he is rendered an outsider, and the only person who really extends hospitality to him is herself an outsider, not a representative of the Jefferson community as a whole.

It is hardly a secret that Southern culture has used race to categorize and rank its members. In *Light in August*, Jefferson is emblematic of the segregation and discrimination imposed on African Americans in the south. This can be clearly seen in the different housing arrangements in Jefferson, which are divided along racial lines. For instance, when Joe Christmas arrives in Jefferson, he "came to the road and looked in both directions...He saw several negro cabins scattered here and there along it" (Faulkner 226). Housing is so strictly codified by race in the South at this time that

Christmas is able to identify the race of an entire street simply by their living arrangements.

Just as Christmas is able to identify those houses occupied by African Americans, he is able to identify the houses of white people, as well. He notices “a big house set in a grove of trees; obviously a place of some pretensions at one time” (Faulkner 226). When a boy reveals that Ms. Burden lives in the house, Christmas responds, “And she lives there by herself. Don’t she get scared?...Colored folks look after her?” He takes for granted that Ms. Burden is a white woman living in an otherwise all-black neighborhood, based solely on her house. Architecture and physical space are so closely tied to race relations in this novel: it becomes one of the primary ways in which Christmas processes his relationship with Joanna Burden, his status, and the extent of his inclusion in the Jefferson community.

The clear-cut dichotomy in housing based on race is reflective of the Jefferson community’s binary approach to race: either you are black, or you are white. However, as a mixed-race individual, Christmas finds himself unable to fully identify with either the black community or the white community. Christmas, though he appears to be white, is haunted by his African American heritage, and will not allow himself to fully assimilate into a white culture in the South. For example, Christmas chronicles his wanderings before coming to Jefferson, recalling that he used his race to avoid paying the prostitutes he slept with. Faulkner writes that Christmas, “Paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them that he was a negro” (Faulkner 224). In fact, there’s one instance in which a prostitute accepts Christmas in spite of his African American heritage, and he becomes angry and violent toward her for her acceptance. In the company of white people, Christmas clings to his black ancestry. In fact, he does not seem to be able to

stop himself from revealing that aspect of his identity. He reveals it to both of the white women with whom he develops serious relationships, never allowing himself to be accepted under the false pretense put forth by his appearance.

Just as he does not allow himself to be fully accepted by the white community, he finds he cannot completely assimilate into the African American community, either, though he tries. Faulkner writes that while Christmas once fought white men who called him black, he now fought “the negro who called him white” (Faulkner 225). There is a period of time in which Christmas “Lived as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving” (Faulkner 225). Specifically, he recalls lying next to her at night and “Trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being” (Faulkner 226). He wants so badly to be fully identified with the black community, but to his frustration, he cannot. This inability to purge himself of either part of his ancestry causes “His whole being to writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial” (Faulkner 226). He is not able to find community with either group, and in many cases rejects what opportunities arise.

In his article “Boundaries, Portals, and Pollution in *Light in August*,” Ralph Watkins closely associates this lack of identity and community with a lack of physical space. He identifies the central theme of the novel as “The placelessness of persons who have, either through their own efforts or some twist of fate, become located in the margins of society” (Watkins 11). Indeed, Christmas’ inability to establish a coherent identity for himself is paralleled with, and perhaps caused in part by, his status as wanderer throughout this novel.

But even when he finds a “place,” Christmas finds himself still confined to the margins. His inability to identify with either white or black people puts Christmas in an unusual position when he reaches Jefferson. The town is segregated along racial

lines, and there is no doubt that the white community treats the black community with discrimination and disdain. Take, for instance, the racist characterization of African Americans offered by Joanna Burden's grandfather, Calvin Burden. He claims that black people are "lowbuilt because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh" (Faulkner 247). And this comes from one of the more progressive characters in the novel—one who opposed slavery before the Civil War. So if someone as relatively progressive as Calvin Burden holds such a demeaning and dehumanizing view of black people, it is a good indication that Jefferson as a whole is extremely discriminatory and exclusive of the black community as well.

And yet, even in this discrimination and exclusion, there is a sense in which the African American community is still included because the white community thinks it knows what to make of them. Jefferson has a place reserved for African Americans in its hierarchy—it is a low place, but a place nonetheless. Joe Christmas is not afforded even this meager degree of inclusion. Calvin Burden, in his analysis of race relations in the south, grumbles, "We done freed them now, both black and white alike. They'll bleach out now. In a hundred years they will be white folks again. Then maybe we'll let them come back into America" (Faulkner 248). He has classifications for black people and white people, but anyone in between is a strange hybrid, a passing thought during the transition towards homogenization. To be mixed-race in Jefferson, and by extension, in the South, is to suffer from a crushing lack of belonging. Christmas is not even extended the luxury of solidarity with an oppressed group of people—he is an oppressed individual.

This is why Christmas is rendered in violation of Jefferson's social expectations: before he murders Joanna Burden, before he develops a sexual

relationship with her, before he does anything volitional in the town of Jefferson, Christmas is guilty of being impossible to racially classify. He unwittingly defies categorization, and this defiance renders him an outsider.

Jefferson, as a whole, does not welcome Christmas into its community. Joanna Burden is only person who treats Joe Christmas hospitably, and even she cannot be said to represent Jefferson and its standards. Indeed, Joanna is herself an outsider, and her extension of hospitality to Joe Christmas should be seen as subversive to Jefferson's expectations, not emblematic of them.

The first time Joe Christmas goes into Joanna Burden's house, he does so uninvited. After spying on the house all day, he makes his approach. Faulkner writes, "He could discern a door in the kitchen wall. He would have found it unlocked if he tried it...The window was even open, propped open with a stick" (Faulkner 229). At this point, Joanna has no knowledge of Christmas' presence, but already the unlocked door and the open window convey a sense of openness and welcome.

Not only does Christmas find easy access to the house, he also finds sustenance when he gets inside. In his hunger, Christmas "ate something from an invisible dish, with invisible fingers: invisible food. He did not care what it would be" (Faulkner 230). It is at this point that Joanna enters the kitchen and says, "If it is just food you want, you will find that" (Faulkner 231). The circumstances under which she extends this permission to Christmas are very telling: she does not offer Christmas food at his request, nor does she find Christmas on the street and invite him into her home. She encounters him already inside her kitchen, when he has already violated the sanctity of her home space. But in response to this home invasion, she does not call the police. She does not even ask the intruder to leave. She permits him to stay and eat. Joanna not only pardons his intrusion that night, but also continues to provide

for him. Christmas recalls visiting the house “For the food which she would prepare for him and leave upon the kitchen table” (Faulkner 233).

In addition to providing Joe Christmas with food, Joanna also develops a sexual relationship with him. This would not necessarily indicate her role as a host, except that Christmas views their affair much like he views her provision of food. When considering Joanna’s provision of food, Christmas thinks, “She couldn’t keep me out of here. I guess she knows that” (Faulkner 234). For Christmas, while Joanna’s willingness to provide food is convenient, it isn’t necessary to his acquisition of it. Her refusal would prove a mildly inconvenient barrier. He thinks about sex with her in the same terms. Faulkner writes, “When he entered the house at night it was as he had entered it that first night; he felt like a thief, a robber, even while he mounted to the bedroom where she waited” (Faulkner 234). In the cases of both food and sex, Christmas sees himself as a plunderer of a strangely-willing provider.

Interestingly, Christmas comes to sense a reversal of gender roles in their relationship. Christmas expects Joanna to lock him out after the first night that they spend together, and he is frustrated by her continued willingness to see him, even calling it “an insult” (Faulkner 237). He thinks to himself, “My God...it was like I was the woman and she was the man” (Faulkner 235). Joanna’s willingness to have sex with him is, in Christmas’ mind, a masculine quality, making him the reliant, feminine supplicant. Joanna is breadwinner, provider, and host in their relationship, and Christmas cannot stand it.

As suggested earlier, physical space plays an essential role in this novel, and it is especially important in the relationship between Joanna and Joe Christmas. Joanna allows her guest to stay in the cabin behind her property. Christmas only describes his accommodations in passing, mentioning “the cot which she had loaned him, in the

cabin which she had given him to live in” (Faulkner 235). Their arrangement is a complex one. At first glance, Joanna offering Christmas the use of a cabin apart from the house would seem to indicate her desire to impose distance and propriety on their relationship. The cabin is a liminal space, both a part of Joanna’s property and separate from the central structure of the house.

However, any boundaries implied by the separate living arrangements are often transgressed. For instance, Christmas mentions his frequent visits to the house, not only to Joanna’s kitchen, but also to “her dark bedroom” (Faulkner 257). Likewise, Joanna retains the right to visit the cabin. Christmas recalls that when he arrived at the cabin one evening “She was sitting on the cot, looking at him” (Faulkner 240). Any boundary suggested by the cabin’s distance from the house is violated regularly: both Joanna and Joe Christmas can and do move fluidly between the two spaces.

The hospitality Joanna Burden extends to Joe Christmas far exceeds what could reasonably be expected of her. She is bizarrely openhanded with her food, her property, her privacy, her body, and her time. However, her acceptance of Joe Christmas should not be read as an indication that Jefferson has by and large overcome its racial prejudices, or that the Jefferson community as a whole has greeted Christmas with open arms in spite of his outsider status. Joanna is not Jefferson’s delegate to Christmas. Joanna is not the face of Jefferson to Christmas in the way that Byron was the face of Jefferson to Lena.

Instead, Joanna is rendered an outsider by her friendliness toward the African American community. In the eyes of the Jefferson community, Joanna is “A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it” (Faulkner 46). Interestingly, much of the stigma

surrounding Joanna does not even stem from her own actions, but from the actions of her ancestors. The narrator admits that although it has been sixty years since her ancestors' antislavery position got them killed, "it still lingers about her and about the place: something dark and outlandish and threatening" (Faulkner 47). Even her remote association with supporters of racial equality is enough to render her an outsider.

That said, she is also an active supporter of the African American community herself. For instance, she spends most of her time "writing steadily...to the presidents and faculties and trustees...of a dozen negro schools and colleges from the south" (Faulkner 233). She is an advocate of education for African Americans, and she even arranges for Joe Christmas to attend college. She tells him, "They will take you. Any of them will. On my account...We won't even have to pay" (Faulkner 276). This is a woman who is held in high regard by the African American community for her support. When Joe Christmas sees the extent to which she is an advocate for the black community, he thinks to himself that he finally understands "the town's attitude toward her" (Faulkner 234). Her support of an excluded group excludes her from Jefferson's good graces.

In what becomes the novel's central event, Joe Christmas murders and nearly decapitates his hostess in her own bed. The murder is a complicated one, because Joanna seems to have requested it. In a previous episode, she tells Christmas, "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead" (Faulkner 278). This proves not to be merely a careless expression during a tense exchange, but an actual intention of Joanna's. She actually expects Christmas to kill them both. On the night of her death, Christmas finds her praying when he enters her room, as if she is putting her affairs in order (Faulkner 280). At the conclusion of her prayer, Joanna says, "Then there's just one other thing to do," referring to their joint death (Faulkner 281). Indeed, it was

intended to be a murder-suicide in which both Joanna and Christmas die. Christmas chants “For her and for me” after the half-accomplished massacre, indicating that he intended both of them to die (Faulkner 286). However, when his pistol fails, Christmas resorts to decapitation to kill Joanna.

Certainly the context does not excuse Christmas of his crime, but it is important to understand that this is not a malicious, random murder, or the impassioned murder of a lover. It is an expression of Christmas’ desperation, and in his mind, the murder seems to have been an act of mercy toward Joanna.

It is essential to note how the community’s attitude shifts with regard to both Joanna and Christmas in the wake of the murder. Whereas Joanna was once an outsider, rejected for her sympathy with African Americans, upon her murder she suddenly becomes the darling of Jefferson, the maiden aunt that everyone was fond of. In the unofficial vigil the town holds outside of her burning house, when the rumor spreads that a black man is responsible for her death, the Jefferson community suddenly expresses a great deal of righteous anger on Joanna’s behalf. The town as a whole “began to canvass about for someone to crucify,” as if it had lost one of its most beloved members (Faulkner 289).

The shift in the community’s view of Joanna, and more specifically the shift’s cause, is sinister. Joanna, a white woman excluded from the Jefferson community for fraternizing with African Americans, is suddenly the victim of a crime committed by an African American. Suddenly, she is posthumously welcomed back into the fold of the Jefferson community, because her murder fits the community’s narrative of race relations. She is no longer the white woman who supported the black community—she is now the white woman who was wronged by the black community. The white community’s portrayal of her is manipulative and revisionist.

The community's treatment of Christmas in light of the murder is especially disturbing. The conversation between Joe Brown and the Sherriff is an early indication of how heavily Christmas' race will factor into the investigation and ultimate meting of justice. When Joe Brown gives his account of the murder, the Sherriff is unaware of Christmas' black ancestry. As a result, the Sherriff tends to give Christmas the benefit of the doubt, and points out the inconsistencies in Brown's story (Faulkner 96). However, as soon as Brown reveals that Joe Christmas is mixed-race, the Sherriff's attitude changes completely. The marshal says, "I always thought there was something funny about that fellow" and the Sherriff concludes, "I believe you are telling the truth at last" (Faulkner 99). Despite the flaws in Brown's story, despite Brown's motive to win the case's thousand dollar reward, the Sherriff trusts his accusation of Christmas simply because Christmas is part black. It is as though his race is a greater crime than the murder.

Christmas, always excluded on account of his race, is now relentlessly and viciously pursued by the community that excluded him. It is as though, before the murder, the town was merely holding its breath, waiting for Christmas to justify their deep, irrational hatred of him. And then he does, and the community rejoices. At last, they can treat him with cruelty and call it justice. Faulkner writes that the white Jefferson community believed that the crime was "committed not by a negro but by Negro" (Faulkner 288). That is, they do not want this murder to be merely a reflection on an individual man's character, but a confirmation of their beliefs about an entire race. And, of course, they believe the worst: the Jefferson community "knew, believed, and hoped that [Joanna] had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (Faulkner 288). Their outrage is thinly-veiled delight at having their biases confirmed.

Jefferson's treatment of Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas after the murder suggests Faulkner's stance on the community's social standards and their enforcement thereof. Jefferson is irredeemably hypocritical in its dealings with Joanna and Christmas. Joanna, rendered an outsider by her moral decision to support the African American community, is rendered an insider by her skin color after her death. Joe Christmas, already rendered an outsider by the non-moral transgression of being born mixed-race, is persecuted outright, and the murder functions as little more than an excuse for the community to persecute him. In his exploration of Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas, and their relationships to the town, Faulkner presents and criticizes a culture in which race trumps moral choices in determining the extent of a person's inclusion in the community.

The cases of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden lend themselves to comparison since they are so dramatically linked, but it is also worth comparing Joe Christmas to Lena Grove. Christmas and Lena never really cross paths in this novel—they are narratively linked by a mutual acquaintance and little else. But Faulkner strategically formats this novel by opening and closing with Lena's story. That is, he uses an example of hospitality well-executed, hospitality that transcends Lena's moral transgression, as the first and last thing the reader sees. But between the two bookends of Lena's story is embedded Jefferson's complete exclusion of Christmas, their inability to transcend racial barriers with hospitality. The juxtaposition of these two stories is Faulkner's unapologetic critique of a culture that can manage to extend compassion to a woman in spite of her choices, but cannot extend compassion to a man because of his race.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hospitality in *Absalom, Absalom!*

In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* hospitality suffers its most extreme perversion: the host-guest relationship is repeatedly marked, not by graciousness and openhandedness, but by a punishing resentment by both host and guest. First, this perversion is evident in Rosa Coldfield's stay at Sutpen's Hundred, where she relies on the hospitality of a man she loathes. In this relationship, Thomas Sutpen's absence and his marriage to Rosa's sister further complicates his unwitting extension of hospitality. Next, when Judith and Clytie host Charles Bon's son, their reception of him is characterized by a cold stricture rather than a warm welcome. Third, Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon constitutes a blatant miscarriage of hospitality: for a host to kill a guest is unthinkable. Finally, the house itself takes on a sentience in this novel, becoming a kind of character in and of itself. The structure's resistance to hosting the lowly and the outcast represents a rejection of the very essence of Southern hospitality. As such, the house's ultimate demise is Faulkner's ruling against it: a rejection of the poor and needy supplicant, he suggests, is ultimately self-destructive and will not be abided.

Rosa Coldfield makes an interesting case study as a Faulknerian character. She is almost unique among Faulkner's guest characters, in that her resistance to hospitality is not merely a charade put on for the sake of social acceptability: she is headstrong, and genuinely opposed to the help that she is offered. In "Fantastic

Women and Notmothers: Absalom, Absalom!” Deborah Clarke recognizes Rosa’s uniqueness, and the difficulty that Jefferson has in classifying her. Clarke writes, “She appears as both familiar and fantastic because she is not a natural woman but an unmarried woman emitting the ‘rank’ smell of spinsterhood” (Clarke 128). Indeed, her decision to remain unmarried shunts her to the margins of society.

Before Rosa becomes heavily involved with the Sutpen drama, her relationship with her father functions as a kind of centerpiece in her life, and his death is pivotal for her. Near the end of her father’s life, Rosa assumes the role of caretaker for them both. Faulkner writes that “She would go to the store after dark with a basket and fetch back enough food to last for a day or two” (Faulkner 65). In this quote, the roles of parent and child are reversed: Rosa cares for her father as if he is her son and she is his mother. It could also be argued that the gender roles are reversed as well: Rosa functions as the breadwinner, the one primarily operating outside of the home, while her war-dodging father occupies the domestic space.

This does not result in a harmonious living situation, however. Faulkner writes that Rosa, “did this for three years, feeding in secret...the man whom she hated” (Faulkner 65). Rosa’s hateful hospitality towards her father is the first example of the perverse hospitality which characterizes this book.

Upon her father’s death, Rosa “was not only an orphan, but a pauper too” (Faulkner 66). The store from which she had drawn their sustenance “was now just a shell...vacated even by rats” (Faulkner 66). Although Rosa has been providing for her father for years, she is not necessarily capable of living on her own. She is only nineteen years old at the time of her father’s death, and she “had never been taught to do anything practical because [her] aunt had raised her to believe that she was not

only delicate but actually precious” (Faulkner 65). Rosa, then, is in dire need of hospitality: she has no resources, no skills, and no family beside the Sutpens.

It should be noted, however, that Rosa’s marginalization is unique in that she has a fair amount of agency in becoming marginalized. Whereas the Bundren family in *As I Lay Dying* is marginalized by an inevitable death, and Joe Christmas in *Light in August* is marginalized by his race, Rosa is marginalized primarily by her refusal to marry. In “The Symbolic Father in Yoknapatawpha County,” Robert Con Davis notes this agency of Rosa’s. He understands *Absalom, Absalom!* to be a “paternal novel,” structured around the father figure, Thomas Sutpen. But Rosa represents a counterforce to this paternal figure. Davis writes, “Rosa’s experience represents the design’s underside that [Thomas Sutpen] denies and tries to leave behind” (Davis 50). In remaining unmarried, Rosa undermines and resists the patriarchal expectations of the South. But it comes at the cost of her livelihood.

Because of Rosa’s great need and her familial ties to the Sutpens through her sister, Ellen, “the natural thing for her or any Southern woman, gentlewoman” would be for Rosa to go to Sutpen’s Hundred to live with her niece, Judith” (Faulkner 67). Due to their relationship and Rosa’s unmarried status, “she would not have needed to be asked; no one would expect her to wait to be. Because that’s what a Southern lady is” (Faulkner 68). Here, Faulkner intrudes very conspicuously in the text to clarify a nuance of the expectations surrounding hospitality: a single Southern lady, he states as if reading from a rulebook, does not have to be invited to live with family. In fact, Faulkner’s language suggests Rosa *was* invited. Faulkner writes, “Judith probably urged her to come out to Sutpen’s Hundred to live” (Faulkner 68).

However, despite the social acceptability of Rosa moving to Sutpen's Hundred upon her father's death, she does not. "Miss Rosa," Faulkner writes, "didn't go out there at once. Perhaps she never would have gone" (Faulkner 68). This is not the feigned resistance of someone struggling to appear polite. This is the outright refusal of one who resents receiving hospitality almost as much as she resents administering it.

In spite of this resentment, the community recognizes Rosa's need and caters to it generously. Rosa, in the absence of a reliable store of food, has turned to "gathering greens along garden fences, pulling them through the fence since she had no garden of her own, no seed to plant one with, no tools to work it with" (Faulkner 138). Once they notice her need, members of the community "would leave baskets of provisions on her front porch at night" (Faulkner 138). However badly she needed those provisions, Rosa "would not permit them" (Faulkner 138).

Rosa, who narrates this section, makes a fascinating comparison between the provisions left by her neighbors and her foraging habits that reveals her perspective on hospitality. She suggests that it is no wonder that she would not permit the neighbors' provisions because she "would not even use a stick to reach through the fence and draw the vegetables to where she could grasp them, the reach of her unaided arm being the limit" (Faulkner 138). In other words, she has invented this arbitrary rule for herself in the theft of the vegetables from neighboring gardens: she will only take what her hands can reach. It seems silly at first glance, and perhaps it is: theft is theft whether you use a stick or not. But it is also painfully telling about the state of Rosa's dignity. She establishes this arbitrary guideline in an attempt to cling to what's left of her pride.

While the rule itself is telling, its connection to her refusal of her neighbors' generosity is even more so. Rosa herself makes the logical link between her refusal of the neighbors' provisions and her refusal to use a stick while foraging. Her argument essentially is as follows: because she restrained her theft of the vegetables, it should be no surprise that she restrained her acceptance of the community's gifts. Consider the implications of that logical link: at its most literal, Rosa could mean that she considers accepting hospitality to be a form of theft. At its least literal, Rosa could mean that accepting hospitality would be equivalent to theft in its effect on her pride. In either case, Rosa reveals how poor an opinion she holds of hospitality: it is either morally wrong or completely humiliating.

Despite her initial resistance, Rosa does eventually move to Sutpen's Hundred after Henry Sutpen murders Charles Bon. However, her motivation is not that of the typical guest. Rosa says, "You will ask me why I stayed there. I could say, I do not know, could give ten thousand paltry reasons, all untrue, and be believed" (Faulkner 123). Rosa then auditions and dismisses different explanations for why she moved to Sutpen's Hundred. She claims she didn't need food, she didn't need shelter, and she didn't need company (though each of those claims are debatable). In her mind, she "stayed there and waited for Thomas Sutpen to come home" (Faulkner 124).

Rosa's obsessive expectation of Thomas Sutpen's return is not marked by the fondness of a lover or the impatience of a beggar. Instead, she becomes obsessed with his need, not her own. During her stay, Rosa, Judith and Clytie manage to run the household and provide for themselves just fine. Rosa says, "The first day of the life we were to lead together [showed] us that we did not need him, had not the need for any man" (Faulkner 124). The three women in the house are completely self-sufficient, but united in their compulsive desire to serve Sutpen's need when he

returns. Perhaps this is to be expected of Judith and Clytie, who are Thomas Sutpen's daughters, and who resided at Sutpen's Hundred before their father's departure. But it cannot be reasonably expected of Rosa, who did not live at the Hundred and owed Thomas Sutpen nothing. Rosa, in moving to Sutpen's Hundred, becomes a strange set of contradictions: she is a guest who longs to take care of the absent host she despises.

Thomas Sutpen's absence as a host is unusual, and it proves to be formative to the relationship between his daughters and sister-in-law. He is bodily absent, but in true gothic form, his essence seems to haunt the house he has left behind. Rosa reflects, "The shell of him was there, using the room which we had kept for him and eating the food which we produced... Yes. He wasn't there" (Faulkner 129). He is absent, but he also features so centrally in the house during his absence. He becomes the center of gravity in Sutpen's Hundred, the point around which Rosa, Clytie, and Judith orbit and collide.

Indeed, Rosa, Clytie and Judith take on a fascinating dynamic themselves during Rosa's stay. On the one hand, they form a sort of united front, bound by their shared interest in taking care of Thomas Sutpen upon his return. On the other hand, there is a great deal of isolation and disjointedness among them, even though they live together and share a common goal. Rosa says, "We were three strangers. I do not know what Clytie thought... but I expected that because she and I were open, ay honorable, enemies" (Faulkner 126). Rosa's inability to understand Clytie's inner life is surprising given their proximity and shared activities, but according to Rosa, it is not surprising at all, because they were nemeses.

Rosa goes on to claim that she does not even understand the inner life of Judith. She says, "We slept in the same room, the three of us... we waked and fulfilled

the endless tedious obligations which the sheer holding to life and breath entailed” (Faulkner 127). Typically, sharing a physical space as well as the harrowing task of staying alive despite hardship, would naturally forge bonds of friendship between the three women. Instead, their situation serves as a sort of crucible to them, forging a home-space that is marked by both cohesion and repulsion.

As stated earlier, the strongest cohesive force among the women is their compulsive desire to extend hospitality. Even before Thomas Sutpen returns, the women have the opportunity to take in homeward bound Civil War soldiers. Rosa describes them as “the stragglers, not all of them tramps, ruffians, but men who had risked and lost everything, suffered beyond endurance and had returned now to a ruined land” (Faulkner 126). Rosa’s words would suggest that the women cared for the men out of pity, but this doesn’t seem to be the case. Rosa goes on to say, “We fed them; we gave them what and all we had and we would have assumed their wounds and left them whole again if we could” (Faulkner 126). This too sounds so sacrificial and redemptive, as if their hospitality was motivated by compassion. This sentence is a picture of hospitality proper: the host, moved by the need of the lowly, welcomes them and deals generously with them.

But lest the reader think this is truly the case with Rosa and the soldiers, Rosa concludes, “But we were afraid of them” (Faulkner 127). The concluding sentence is jarring, a sharp note in a series of naturals. It is a revelation that cheapens her generosity. If fear is the primary motivation for the women’s extension of hospitality to the soldiers, then it is not compassion or even a sense of duty. In this, we see yet another example of the perversion of hospitality in this novel: just as Rosa’s receiving of hospitality is marked by resentment and pride, her administration of hospitality

toward the soldiers is marked not by goodwill or sympathy, but by fear for her own wellbeing.

Thus, Rosa's status at Sutpen's Hundred defies easy classification. On the one hand, she is clearly a guest herself. She was living alone and in great need, and so she moved into a house which was not her own, in the protection and company of her relatives. However, she contributes to her livelihood at Sutpen's Hundred in a capacity that far exceeds the expectations on a guest: she is doing hard manual labor and providing for Judith, Clytie, and herself. Her extension of hospitality to the soldiers clearly renders her the host, and, in what is perhaps the most complex host-guest relationship in this novel, Rosa longs to host Thomas Sutpen in his own house. Rosa's stay at Sutpen's Hundred absolutely blasphemes the formulaic expectations surrounding Southern hospitality.

This complexity also surrounds Charles Bon's son, Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon, during his stay at Sutpen's hundred with his mother. His situation is comparable to Rosa's in several ways: first, he bears a relationship to the Sutpen family. As the biological grandson of Thomas Sutpen, Charles E. V. Bon is even more closely related to the Suptens than Rosa is, and could conceivably hold even more of a claim to their hospitality. Second, in the same way that Rosa and her hosts harbor a kind of mutual resentment, Charles E. V. Bon is mistrustful of his hosts, and met with similar suspicion.

During Charles E. V. Bon's stay, Clytie in particular ministers to him with a strange violence. For example, when Clytie provides food for the boy, she "thrust it at him with restrained savageness" (Faulkner 158). She provides for his needs, but she does it in a fierce and punishing manner. Indeed, she cares for him with "that curious

blend of savageness and pity, of yearning and hatred, who dressed him and washed him, thrust him into tubs of water too hot or too cold... scrubbing at him with repressed fury” (Faulkner 161). Faulkner’s word choice here is crucial, because he incorporates the emotions that are typically associated with hospitality, and then undermines them with their opposites. Clytie’s experience of pity is standard for a hostess, but savageness is not. Yearning carries an almost maternal connotation, which could also be appropriate for a hostess to feel toward her young guest. But she also harbors hatred and fury toward him, and the picture of Southern hospitality is skewed.

For Clytie, Charles E. V. Bon’s racial background is extremely important, especially when combined with his French heritage and relative privilege. She resents “his four names and his sixteenth-part black blood and his expensive esoteric Fauntleroy clothing” (Faulkner 158). This passage is particularly telling, because it clarifies Clytie’s motive for disliking the boy so much. He is, after all, only a child when he comes to stay at Sutpen’s hundred, so it seems unlikely that she would resent him for anything he had done.

Instead, Clytie’s dislike for Charles E. V. Bon seems to be motivated by the fact that, while they are both mixed-race individuals, Charles E. V. Bon enjoys a life of relative ease and luxury, especially in comparison to the life that Clytie must live. Even though she is the daughter of Thomas Sutpen, she has lived as a slave in his household, not as a daughter. Indeed, Clytie is extremely sensitive to race as it relates to the young guest. She once “found him...playing with a negro boy about his own size in the road outside the gates” (Faulkner 158). One might expect her to support this interaction. After all, she is herself mixed-race, and could reasonably be expected to encourage the friendship between a black child and a child who is mixed-race.

Instead, Clytie, “cursed the negro child out of sight with level and deadly violence and sent him, the other, back to the house” with a voice that was “deadly and cold” for the absence of rage (Faulkner 158). Her reaction is unexpected, but upon further inspection, it makes sense: Clytie, deprived of the privilege conferred to another mixed-race descendent of her father, protects that privilege adamantly. What rage she harbors about their inequality, she channels into her upholding of that inequality, simply because she must.

In response to Clytie’s strangely violent protection of him, Charles E. V. Bon views his hosts with a paradoxical desire and fear. Faulkner describes the boy as, “A slight silent child who could not even speak English... held helpless and passive in a state which must have been some incredible compound of horror and trust” (Faulkner 160). Charles E. V. Bon serves as a sort of mirror to the internal conflict governing Clytie’s behavior as hostess: whereas Clytie acts in the tension between care and hatred, her young guest operates in the tension between fear and reliance on his host’s provision.

Judith, too, is involved in the complex host-guest relationship with Charles E. V. Bon. This is best demonstrated in their sleeping arrangement during the boy’s stay. Judith sleeps on the bed, Charles E. V. Bon sleeps on the trundle, and Clytie sleeps on the floor. The arrangement alone is fascinating, because all three of them are the direct descendants of Thomas Sutpen, and they are arranged in order of their legitimacy and “whiteness.” Judith, the white, legitimate daughter, gets the bed. Charles E. V. Bon, the visibly white son of Sutpen’s legitimate, but disowned son gets the trundle. And Clytie, Sutpen’s visibly black daughter, raised as a slave, sleeps on the floor. That Charles E. V. Bon is positioned between his two hostesses in this way

suggests the dysfunctional nature of their relationship, and the disturbing importance of race in determining status in their household.

Judith Sensibar notes the weight of this sleeping situation in “Reading Faulkner’s ‘Mothers.’” She writes that the sleeping arrangement is “a metaphor for the inseparability of racism, erotic desire, and sexism” (Sensibar 227). Indeed, the three of them are the perfect testament to this inseparability: there is Charles E. V. Bon, racially ambiguous and vaguely feminine, Clytie, who suffers for both her race and gender, and Judith, confined to a life of waiting because she is a woman. And uniting all of them is their father’s greedy, variant desire. The three of them in that bedroom are both close together and worlds apart, inseparable in their suffering and profoundly disjointed in the ways in which they suffer.

Charles E. V. Bon’s reflection on the two women beside him is equally telling. He prefers “the fierce ruthless constant guardianship of the negress” to the “cold unbending detached gentleness” that Judith shows him (Faulkner 160). Still, neither is ideal. Hospitality ought to be marked by some sense of compassion or at least willingness. Clytie’s cruelty and Judith’s detachedness are each uniquely dysfunctional.

Judith’s feelings toward Charles E. V. Bon and his mother are worth examining, too. Their stay is particularly painful for her, because they are the family of her betrothed, Charles Bon, with whom she was very much in love before his death. Judith had to suffer Charles Bon’s octoroon mistress staying a week at Sutpen’s Hundred “in the one remaining room in the house whose bed had linen sheets...[wearing] the new lace and silk and satin negligees subdued to the mauve and lilac of mourning” (Faulkner 158). Faulkner does not allow the reader to see much of

Judith's interiority during the stay of Charles Bon's mistress and son, but the reader can infer how agonizing and even insulting it must have been for Judith. She is forced to host the woman with whom her fiancé had a family. The details that Faulkner uses here are particularly powerful: the mistress is specifically described as having "lace and silk and satin negligees" which emphasizes the sexual relationship between the woman and Charles Bon. Furthermore, his suggestion that the mistress, too, was in mourning, draws attention to the fact that she loved him. This must have been a difficult thing for Judith to witness. So while Faulkner doesn't explicitly describe the emotional impact of their visit on Judith, the details he chooses make it reasonable to conclude that it caused her great distress. This distress most likely contributes to that "cold unbending detached gentleness" that Charles E. V. Bon senses in her character.

Thus, the stay of Charles Bon's octoroon mistress and his son, Charles E. V. Bon, at Sutpen's Hundred is marked by a great deal of conflict, both internal and interpersonal. While Clytie's inner turmoil about Charles E. V. Bon's mixed-race heritage and privilege contributes her aggressive administration of hospitality, Judith's pain over hosting the family of her late fiancé contributes to her own coldness toward her guests.

The most obvious and egregious example of the failure of hospitality in this novel is Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred. In some ways, this is the central event of the book: it is speculated about, argued about, and retold from various perspectives. The reason for the murder is shrouded in mystery: why would Henry Sutpen murder his best friend right before his marriage to Judith? Different narrators offer different solutions to this problem. Some point to bigamy, others to incest, and others still to race. This chapter will not focus on the motivation for the murder, but the murder itself, and its implications. Specifically, this

chapter will consider the ways in which the murder constitutes the ultimate affront to hospitality.

Before Charles Bon was engaged to Judith, he was friends with Henry. In one of his narrative chapters, Mr. Compson tells Quentin that after Henry and Bon met at college, Henry “brought Charles Bon home with him for Christmas and then again to spend a week or so of the summer vacation” (Faulkner 55). Bon was not only a friend to Henry, remote and faceless, but a guest who had actually visited the Hundred before. At Henry’s invitation, Bon stayed with the Sutpens, lived under their roof, and ate their food.

It may be objected that such an arrangement does not qualify as hospitality, due to Bon’s apparent lack of need. Although Bon enjoys a relatively privileged life, there can be little doubt that he had need of the Sutpen family—he needed a sense of rootedness and of normalcy. Besides Rosa, Charles Bon is perhaps the hardest character in this book to classify. As Elizabeth Steeby writes in “Almost Feminine, Almost Brother, Almost Southern,” Charles Bon is characterized by ambiguity in his race, gender, and sexuality. Steeby writes, “Bon alternately signifies French colonialism/revolution, New Orleans Creole, Black Haitian, feminized man, [and] seducer of men/women/brother/sister” (Steeby 160). He is an enigma to the rigid categories of Southern culture.

Henry’s friendship to Bon is strange and obsessive. In his narrative of the murder, Mr. Compson says, “[Henry] loved Bon” (Faulkner 72). Indeed, Henry’s relationship to Bon exceeds the usual bonds of friendship, just as his relationship to Judith exceeds the usual bonds of a brother and sister. Critics often argue that it is Henry’s sexual love for both Judith and Bon that leads him to support and desire their

marriage so passionately. But tied up in this bizarre love triangle is a hint of pending disaster. Mr. Compson notes that, from the very beginning, “[Henry] must have known...that he was doomed and destined to kill” (Faulkner 72).

The murder itself is as shrouded in mystery as its motive. The novel does not contain a direct narration of its central event, only speculation surrounding its causes and effects. For example, Faulkner writes, “A shot heard, faint and far away and even direction and source indeterminate” (Faulkner 108). This is just one example of the vague language surrounding the murder. He includes a sensory detail, the sound of the shot, but refuses to pin it down in time or place. In doing so, he frees the reader from preoccupation with trivial details: facial expressions, postures, who said what. Because Faulkner’s focus seems to be on the fact that the murder happened, and not on how it happened, this chapter will do the same.

Henry Sutpen’s murder of Charles Bon constitutes the ultimate perversion of hospitality in this novel. It is unique in that a host murders his guest on the host’s property. Henry, as Charles Bon’s friend and as the brother of Bon’s betrothed, ought to extend the use of Sutpen’s Hundred to Bon on the eve of the wedding. Instead, Henry shoots him on the very ground where he ought to have administered hospitality to him, as he had in the past. This reversal is an inexcusable violation of Southern hospitality, and perhaps the most obvious affront to its demands in any of the texts considered.

Certainly, the other texts contain examples of hospitality miscarried. In fact, for each text, it has been argued that one instance of hospitality stands out as particularly egregious or noteworthy. In *As I Lay Dying*, for instance, Darl’s burning of Gillespie’s barn represents a serious transgression on the part of the guest toward

the host. Recall that destroying one's host's property is a very serious crime, and not one to be taken lightly.

Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon, however, exceeds this crime greatly. Perhaps most obviously, the murder takes a life whereas the barn burning destroys property and endangers livestock. But it is also more complex than that: Henry Sutpen murders someone to whom he owes something. Bon was not only another human being occupying space at Sutpen's Hundred, but Henry's friend, soon-to-be brother-in-law, and half-brother. That same debt does not exist in *As I Lay Dying*.

Henry's murder of Bon also bears a resemblance to the central perversion of hospitality in *Light in August*. Both are murders, first of all. Joe Christmas kills Joanna Burden, just as Henry Sutpen kills Charles Bon. One could argue that Joe Christmas owed Joanna a kind of familial respect, since they lived together as husband and wife. One could even argue that that murder is the more egregious because of the cruelty and carnage with which it was committed.

However, the purpose of this chapter is not to identify the goriest murder, but to explain why Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon is a uniquely offensive violation of the expectations of Southern hospitality. While it's true that Joe Christmas probably owed Joanna Burden a kind of familial respect because of the nature of their relationship, the fact of the matter is that he was clearly the guest, and she was clearly the host. This is the crux of the matter: whereas Joe Christmas kills his host, Henry Sutpen murders his guest, the man who trusted him, who entered his home upon Henry's invitation, and who relied upon his friend's goodwill. This alone sets this murder apart. It is, in some ways, the perfect reversal of the murder in *Light in August*. Whereas Joanna was the host that asked to die and was granted her wish,

Charles Bon was the guest who wanted to live, who had a future to live for, and who was denied.

Thus, inhospitality absolutely pervades this novel. From Rosa's cold receiving and giving of help, to Clytie's vicious care for Charles E. V. Bon, to Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon, hospitality is marked by a strange duality: there is either provision in spite of hatred, or a refusal to provide in spite of love. All of the characters operate in a kind of tension between need and mistrust, desire and fear. The result in each case is that hospitality is made a sham: the kindness administered is unrecognizable as kindness, the generosity a mutant, distantly-related breed. Something sinister infects it all.

One unifying factor in the cases of Rosa, Clytie and Charles E. V. Bon, and Henry and Charles Bon is the space itself: the house built on Sutpen's Hundred. It functions as the geographical and narrative center of the story, no matter who narrates it. The house is inseparable from the drama that unfolds there, and this is intentional on Faulkner's part: he establishes the house as a sort of character in its own right, emblematic of the perversions of hospitality that have occurred within its walls.

Rosa is perhaps the most perceptive to the house's personhood, and even has the sense that the Sutpen house is haunted. She writes that she hears an echo in the hallway of "the lost irrevocable might-have-been which haunts all houses" (Faulkner 109). Already, we have the suggestion that the house bears a kind of character, if not a sentience. But Rosa goes one step farther than that: she personifies the house. She speaks of the "thunderous silence of that brooding house" (Faulkner 109). Having already attributed a kind of voice to the house, she now attributes a willful silence to it. The descriptor "brooding" is generally reserved for human characters.

If the house were only personified, one could still reasonably object that Rosa was merely being figurative in her descriptions. But she does not merely personify the house. She makes a direct claim that the house has some form of personhood. For her, this is closely associated with the character of Thomas Sutpen. She says that “[Thomas Sutpen’s] presence alone compelled that house to accept and retain human life” (Faulkner 67). Again, she personifies the house, giving it the agency to reject or accept the guests that sojourn within its walls.

But then she goes on to distance the house from its owner. She continues that it was “as though houses actually possess a sentience, a personality and character acquired not from the people who breathe...in them so much as rather inherent in the wood and brick” (Faulkner 67). Here, Rosa argues plainly that houses have a character in their own right, intrinsic to their structure, independent of their residents.

Rosa then moves away from her general reflection on houses and to a more specific reflection on the house at Sutpen’s Hundred. She says that there was in this particular house “an incontrovertible affirmation for emptiness, desertion; an insurmountable resistance to occupancy save when sanctioned and protected by the ruthless and the strong” (Faulkner 67). Sutpen’s house is essentially the distillation of all things Sutpen. Henry Sutpen’s murder of Charles Bon is a violation of the demands of hospitality, and the house’s unwillingness to host the poor and in need is an echo of that violation. The house symbolically takes on the Sutpen family’s inhospitality.

The house’s ultimate demise, then, has a weighty implication: it is Faulkner’s pronouncement against the failure of hospitality under Sutpen’s roof. If, in fact, the house is a kind of character embodying the coldness, the cruelty, and the betrayal

shown to guests at Sutpen's Hundred, then the destruction of that physical structure is Faulkner's verdict against it and all that it stands for.

Quentin recalls the dramatic night that the house went up in flames. He remembers "the monstrous tinder-dry rotten shell seeping smoke through the warped cracks in the weather-boarding as if it were made of gauze wire and filled with roaring" (Faulkner 300). He recalls a door "explod[ing] like powder among the flames as the whole lower hall vanished" (Faulkner 300). And finally, he recounts a "crimson reflection as the house collapsed and roared away" (Faulkner 301). In the end, Faulkner does not allow the house to stay standing. It goes down in a fiery spectacle, and by extension, the inhospitality espoused by the residents of Sutpen's Hundred meets its hellish demise.

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