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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Victoria M. Bryan entitled “Disrupted Constructions: Joe Christmas’s formation of race and sexuality in *Light in August*.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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**Disrupted Constructions:  
Joe Christmas's Formation of Race and Sexuality  
in *Light in August***

**Victoria M. Bryan**  
Master's Thesis

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## **Acknowledgements**

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**Abstract:**

William Faulkner intended Joe Christmas to be a tragic character who would constantly seek an identity. He combats any threat to his safety—be it physical, mental, or emotional safety—with violent reactions that generally manifest in outbursts toward women for threatening his conception of his sexuality by coercing him into an intimate relationship. At many points throughout the novel, Christmas associates himself with the black race and endures all of the ridicule that comes with it just to believe that he knows a little bit about his personal history and allows his racial confusion to influence his construction of his sexual identity throughout his adolescent and adult life. His overpowering drive to define himself as a victim of the American South's racial hostility leads to a tragic end—specifically, his castration and murder in Reverend Hightower's kitchen. Identity is not (and cannot be) something inherent in Joe Christmas's being—it is something he must actively construct through his experiences as a mixed-race child born in the Deep South and the interruption of his personal development in the early stages of his life. Though a discussion of this character necessitates a discussion of his perception of race, his construction of sexuality is integral to understanding his construction of his racial identity and, on a larger scale, of his identity as a whole.

A Freudian analysis of Christmas's construction of his racial identity, by way of Sigmund Freud's essay "Infantile Sexuality," is useful in exploring how Christmas's development was interrupted several times during the oral stage of his development and the ways in which these disruptions impacted his construction of his sexuality. Because Christmas is unable to relinquish the oral stage of his development completely, Freudian theory argues that his actions throughout the novel display signs of an oral fixation

throughout his adolescent and adult life. An examination of the role that food, or a lack of food, plays in Christmas's development, and the ways in which the corresponding scars continue to resurface throughout his life, provides an explanation for his unconventional relationships with the dietician in the orphanage, the McEacherns, Bobbie Allen, and Joanna Burden.

Inextricable from this study is the impact of his racial make-up on his development as a character and the theories published in Joane Nagel's book *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*, illustrate this point. The ambiguity of Christmas's background noted so often in criticism allows a study of the way in which Christmas constructs his racial identity but has also given way to a study of how sexuality and race become conflated in his construction of identity. Nagel argues that that sex often has the ability to shape ideas about race and ethnicity because sex allows racial differences to continue to be clearly divided or paves the way for racial lines to be blurred over time. Because an interracial sexual relationship created Joe Christmas in a time when this was still unacceptable, Nagel's theory that racial identity and sexuality are socially defined aspects of a person's identity helps to elucidate Christmas's character.

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## Chapter 1

### Joe Christmas's Construction of Identity

In an interview at the University of Virginia in 1957, William Faulkner said of his character, Joe Christmas:

He didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which [race] he was. That was his tragedy, that to me was the tragic central idea of the story—that he didn't know what he was, and there was no way possible in life for him to find out. Which to me is the most tragic condition a man could find himself in—not to know what he is and to know that he will never know.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation brings to the foreground of the conversation about Christmas's character the fact that he will continuously seek to find out what he is given the fact that he does not (and cannot) inherently know. Faulkner intended Christmas to be a character plagued both by questions of his own identity and by the overwhelming notion that he would never truly know who or what he was. To speak specifically of Christmas's situation, identity is not something intrinsic in his being—it is something he must actively construct. Though it can be argued that active construction is necessary for any formation of identity, the process is notably more difficult for Christmas as he battles with the jeering he endures as a mixed-race child born in the Deep South and the scars impressed on his psyche due to the loss of his mother and further interruptions of his development in the early stages of his life.

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<sup>1</sup> *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958*, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959). 72.



To make sense of these two obstacles in Christmas's search for identity one must examine his constructions of race and sexuality and the ways in which his violent and mistrusting nature grows out of these constructions causing him to unleash violence on those (especially women) who threaten the stability of the identity he has created. These aspects of his character have previously been explored in criticism of this novel, but the dual application of Freud's theory of infantile sexual development and Joane Nagel's theory of the social construction and conflation of race and sexuality is a productive way to better understand Christmas's battle with his lack of inherent identity. Though many have studied Faulkner's work through the lens of clinical psychology, the character of Joe Christmas lends itself particularly well to the Freudian theory mentioned above outlined in "Infantile Sexuality."

Despite Faulkner's continuous denial throughout his life of ever having read Freud's writing,<sup>2</sup> this theoretical application is particularly legitimate given the enormous popularity of Freud's theories at the time Faulkner was producing his work. Applying Joane Nagel's theories in conjunction with Freud's adds authority to such a study because, as Nagel argues, race and sexuality are so interconnected as to be inseparable in matters of constructing identity. A full discussion of Joe Christmas seems somewhat impossible without addressing his ambiguous racial background. Noel Polk writes that "race occupied [Faulkner] in only four of his nineteen novels...so that race, statistically at any rate, is a very minor part of his concerns, whereas sexual and sexualized relationships

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout his career, Faulkner denied the assumption that he took Freud's work under consideration when creating his characters and was quoted as having said, "...I have never read [Freud]. Neither did Shakespeare. I doubt if Melville did either, and I'm sure Moby Dick didn't" (William Faulkner, "Interview with Jean Stein van den Heuvel." *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962*. Eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate. New York: Random, 1968. 237-56, Interview 251), and "What little of psychology I know the characters I have invented and playing poker have taught me" (Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, eds. *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia. 1957-1958*. New York: Random House, 1965. 268).

are everywhere, on nearly every page, in one way or another”<sup>3</sup> and suggests that critics often play “the race card”<sup>4</sup> in hopes of avoiding discussing the “sexual and sexualized relationships” between Faulkner’s characters. With this kind of problem at hand, the dual application of Nagel’s and Freud’s theories offers something that criticism of this novel needs: the ability to look at the ways in which the construction of racial identity impacts a character’s formation of sexuality and vice versa.

Whether or not Faulkner consciously had Freud under consideration, the fact that Freud’s work was part of the cultural world out of which Faulkner’s writing grew helps to explain some of the most confounding events that take place in this novel. The link between Faulkner’s work and psychoanalysis has been well-established, as evidenced by the University of Mississippi’s annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha conference, which, in 1991, was themed “Faulkner and Psychology.” The published conference proceedings is made up of essays by established critics such as John T. Irwin, Doreen Fowler, and Don Kartiganer (among others) writing on a vast array of Faulkner’s work. This collection is not alone in the psychoanalytic trend of Faulknerian criticism. Journals such as *The Faulkner Journal* and *Mississippi Quarterly* are often scattered with criticism that reveals the link between Faulkner and psychoanalysis—a connection so pervasive that Faulknerian criticism has appeared in journals such as the *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*.<sup>5</sup> A critic would be hard-pressed, in fact, to find one of Faulkner’s characters that does not lend itself to a psychoanalytic interpretation. Quentin, Caddy, Benjy, and

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<sup>3</sup> Noel Polk, “Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy” *Faulkner Journal* 16.3 (2000/2001): 3.

<sup>4</sup> Polk, “Testing Masculinity,” 4.

<sup>5</sup> For criticism that reflects this claim, refer to the following publications: Scott Greer, “Joe Christmas and the ‘Social Self,’” *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture* 11 (1958): 160-166; Jay Watson, “Overdoing Masculinity in *Light in August*; or, Joe Christmas and the Gender Guard,” *The Faulkner Journal* 9 (1993): 149-77; Julie Gordon-Dueck, “Disrupted Attachment in Faulkner’s *Light in August*: Joe Christmas’s Search for a Secure Base.” *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 20 (1999): 170-9.

Jason Compson are the subjects of many psychological studies as critics attempt to discern the impact of Jason's relationship with his mother, the question of Quentin's alleged schizophrenia, Quentin and Caddy's incestuous bond, and the effects of Benjy's castration on his psyche.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Sutpen has been studied in relation to the archetypal hero while many other characters have been examined fully in light of their psychological development or any of several psychological ailments critics have detected in their characters.<sup>7</sup>

Joe Christmas is no exception as much recent criticism has used psychological theories to discern facets of his character. A great deal of this criticism, however, cites psychoanalysts who were not contemporaries of Faulkner – a useful approach to take, but one that situates Faulkner as a prophet of sorts rather than an artist responding to his culture. For instance, Julie Gordon-Dueck uses the work of Leopold Bellack, John Bowlby, Karen Roberts and Erik Erikson (among others) to elucidate Christmas's turbulent past and lack of consistent sources of loving affection.<sup>8</sup> Glenn Sandstrom also drew on the theories of Erikson to explain Faulkner's characterization, stating, "It should be noted that Faulkner's novels...preceded Erikson's [theories] by a quarter-century and thus embody...an almost prophetic psychological ordering and vision."<sup>9</sup> Lee Jenkins

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<sup>6</sup> Bockting, Ineke. "The Impossible World of the Schizophrenic: William Faulkner's Quentin Compson." *Style*. 24.3 (1990): 136-49; Brady, Patrick. "Birth Trauma, Infant Anality, and Castration Anxiety in *Germinal* and *The Sound and the Fury*." *Excavation: Emile Zola and Naturalism*. 1 (1992): 25-30; Feldstein, Richard. "Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*: The Incest Theme." *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*. 42.1 (1985): 85-98; Moore, Kathleen. "Jason Compson and the Mother Complex." *The Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture*. 53 (2000): 533-50; Weinstein, Philip M. "If I Could Say Mother': Construing the Unsavable about Faulknerian Maternity." *Faulkner's Discourse: An International Symposium*. Ed. Lothar Hönnighausen. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989. 3-15.

<sup>7</sup> Bernice Berger Miller, *William Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, Quentin Compson, Joe Christmas: A Study of the Hero Archetype*. Ph.D. Dissertation.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Gordon-Dueck, "Disrupted Attachment in Faulkner's *Light in August*: Joe Christmas's Search for a Secure Base." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 20 (1999): 170-9.

<sup>9</sup> Glenn Sandstrom. "Identity Diffusion: Joe Christmas and Quentin Compson." *American Quarterly* 19 (1967): 207-23.

explores similar routes by detecting signs of narcissism, obsessive-compulsive disorder and borderline personality disorder in various characters from *Light in August* through the theories of David Shapiro and Otto Kernberg, among others.<sup>10</sup> Exploring the development of the novel in this way allows an analysis of the characters in terms of widely-accepted modern psychology and shows that Faulkner succeeded in creating realistic characters that yield easily to realistic interpretations of their fears, motivations, etc. As mentioned above, however, this places Faulkner in a very different position than Freudian study does. By avoiding a Freudian analysis of Faulkner's work, criticism does not benefit from looking at the text through the lens of a theory that had a large impact on Faulkner's world and thus impacted the writing he produced regardless of his explicit denial of having read Freud's work.

This is not to say that Freudian criticism of Joe Christmas does not exist. Several critics, including Susanne Skubal and Donald Kartiganer, have applied Freudian theory to this particular character. Skubal does an exemplary job of applying Freudian ideas to Christmas's character by applying of broad ideas and conclusions from Freud's writing. Kartiganer, who often notes in his criticism the importance of relating Freud to Faulkner's writing, situates Freud and Faulkner as contemporaries in his article entitled "'What I Chose to Be': Freud, Faulkner, Joe Christmas and the Abandonment of Design." Here he presents similarities between Freud and the figure of Joe Christmas as they both abandon their original views of the world for a completely altered view.<sup>11</sup> Considering

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<sup>10</sup> Lee Jenkins. "Psychoanalytic Conceptualizations of Characterization, Or Nobody Laughs in *Light in August*." *Faulkner and Psycholog: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991. 189-218.

<sup>11</sup> Donald M. Kartiganer, "'What I Chose to Be': Freud, Faulkner, Joe Christmas, and the Abandonment of Design." *Faulkner and Psychology/ Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991. 288-314.

that Freud was the father of modern psychology, and that his theories yielded a considerable impact on the world of the modern author as his writing was translated into English around the turn of the century, Kartiganer does not exaggerate when he asserts that “the theory of psychoanalysis-according-to-Sigmund Freud...remains for literary critics...the indispensable body of thought” for a study of Faulkner’s work.<sup>12</sup>

If Freudian theory really is an “indispensable body of thought” in this discipline, then of particular use in studying the development of Joe Christmas is Freud’s aforementioned essay entitled “Infantile Sexuality.” This theory of infantile psychosexual development was originally published in Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1905. Here, Freud counters what he argues to be a common misconception about “sexual instinct”: that “it is absent in childhood and only awakens in the period of life described as puberty.”<sup>13</sup> He further argues that “this...is not merely a simple error but one that has had grave consequences, for it is mainly to this idea that we owe our present ignorance of the fundamental conditions of sexual life” (39). Freud contends that infants move through three stages—the oral, anal, and genital stages—on their ways to sexual maturity. According to this theory, the healthy adult relinquishes the first two stages in favor of the third, thus avoiding becoming sexually fixated in the process of development. By applying this theory to *Light in August*, it becomes obvious that Joe Christmas was unable, as a child, to move through the oral stage without enduring several psychologically scarring interruptions and thus grows into an orally fixated adult. While criticism has begun to consider Joe Christmas in light of the importance of the absent

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<sup>12</sup> Don Kartiganer, “Introduction,” *Faulkner and Psychology*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2000. 39. (All references to this work will hereafter be cited parenthetically.)

mother figure,<sup>14</sup> we can gain a more comprehensive view of his development by relating it directly to the essay that describes oral fixation and absent mother figures and their possible impact on a child's psychological growth.<sup>15</sup>

Freud observed in this essay that “there is no period at which the capacity for receiving and reproducing impressions is greater than precisely during the years of childhood” (41) and argues that the “germs of sexual impulses are already present in [a] new-born child...but are then overtaken by a progressive process of suppression,” (42) a period of time he refers to as “latency.” During this time, a child's sexuality forms beneath the surface of his or her observable actions and manifests in alternative ways as “their energy is diverted, wholly or in part, from their sexual use and directed to other ends” (44). The infant passes through two stages of sexual development while in the latency period which Freud called the oral stage—or “cannibalistic” (62) stage in which the infant connects with the world orally—and the anal stage—in which latent sexual fixation moves from the mouth to the movement of the bowel.

The former stage will be of the utmost importance to this study. Freud argues that during the oral stage, which lasts from birth to about eighteen months, the infant explores his surroundings by putting things in his mouth and builds a bond with his mother through breast-feeding. He claims that this bond will largely impact an infant's early

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<sup>14</sup> Critics such as Robert Gibb (who draws on the theories of Rollo May that early development is based on the biological tie with the mother) and Cleanth Brooks have written on the importance of the absent mother figure in Christmas's formation (Robert Gibb, “Joe Christmas: Faulkner's Savage Innocent.” *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 9 (1988): 331-340; Cleanth Brooks, “Faulkner's ‘Motherless’ Children,” in *William Faulkner: First Encounters*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1983), while critics such as Patrick Shaw have written on his oral fixation and its connection to sexuality in his adult life, (Patrick W. Shaw. “Joe Christmas and the Burden of Despair.” *Texas Review* 1 (1980): 89-97).

<sup>15</sup> Consider, also, the fact that this essay was written and published in 1905 while *Light in August* was published in 1932. Though later theorists may have produced writing that helps elucidate Christmas as a character, Freud's writing does the same while also elucidating Faulkner as a writer by giving the reader some insight into Faulkner's influences and motivations (though he would never admit to having such influences and motivations).

view of the world. The separation of sexual from non-sexual stimuli does not happen until later in the developmental process (which, if allowed to proceed uninterrupted, will produce a fully-functioning, well-adjusted adult) but at this point in its development, the infant has not yet distinguished between pleasure of a sexual and a non-sexual nature. For a child to retain the need to focus on pleasure felt during this stage is not uncommon. When this happens, the child may exhibit idiosyncrasies associated with eating, such as a need to eat in private or a strong sense of “disgust [or] shame” as eating seems to the fixated adult to be associated with a lack of morality (44-51).

That the relationship between food and Christmas’s psychosexual development is so pervasive makes it key to understanding his development throughout the novel. He is unable to relinquish the oral stage of his development completely and, according to Freudian theory, displays signs of an oral fixation throughout his pubescent and post-pubescent life. By examining the role that food, or lack of food, plays in Christmas’s turbulent childhood, we gain a logical explanation for the lasting impact his childhood relationships with the dietician and the McEacherns have on his subsequent sexual relationships as an adult with Bobbie Allen and Joanna Burden.

Though sexual motivation proves to be highly important in deciphering Joe Christmas’s character, one cannot discuss him without delving into the question of race and its role in constructing his identity. Because Freud does not consider the sexual implications of race, the application of Joane Nagel’s theory is necessary in elucidating this important facet of Christmas’s character. Viewed in connection with Freud, Nagel elucidates the connection between sexuality and race—an obvious driving force in Christmas’s motivation throughout his life. A study of Christmas would be lacking if the

impact of his racial make-up on his development (especially his sexual development) as a character was overlooked as there is an intentional ambiguity to Christmas's background which has been noted by several critics in discussions of this novel.<sup>16</sup>

In her book *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, Nagel argues that sex often has the ability to shape ideas about race and ethnicity, just as race and ethnicity have the ability to shape ideas about sex. "Ethnicity and sexuality join together," she writes, "to form a barrier to hold some people in and keep others out, to define who is pure and who is impure, to shape our view of ourselves and others...."<sup>17</sup> She argues that sexuality, like race, is a social construction and that they are inextricably linked because they are both socially defined. She writes that "ethnic differences are...sexually loaded"<sup>18</sup> because as different races and nationalities begin to intermingle, members of different national and racial boundaries begin to cultivate sexual attractions outside of their boundaries causing racial ambiguity to become more prevalent and to threaten traditional constructions of these two major elements of sexuality. In attempts to prevent this from happening, men and women tend to mate with members of their own race, staying on their side of what Nagel calls the "ethnosexual frontier."

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<sup>16</sup> For writing on this topic, see Laura L. Bush, "A Very American Power Struggle: The Color of Rape in *Light in August*," *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures* 51.3 (1998): 483-501; Michael Cobb, "Curing Time; Race and Religious Rhetoric in *Light in August*," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 32.3 (2005): 139-68; Heinz Ickstadt, "The Discourse of Race and the 'Passing' Text: Faulkner's *Light in August*," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 42.4 (1997): 529-36; Lisa K. Nelson, "Masculinity, Menace, and American Mythologies of Race in Faulkner's Anti-Heroes," *Faulkner Journal* 19.2 (2004): 49-68; Noel Polk, "Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy," *Faulkner Journal* 16.3 (200/2001): 3-22; George Potter, "Forced Domination: Intersections of Sex, Race, and Power in *Light in August* and *The Bluest Eye*," *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 21.2 (2004): 43-48; Michiho Sakai, "The Ambiguity of Christmas's Blood," *Kyushu American Literature* 28 (1987): 79-81; and Joseph Urgo, "Menstrual Blood and 'Nigger' Blood: Joe Christmas and the Ideology of Sex and Race," *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture* 41.3 (1988): 391-401 among others in this vast critical discussion.

<sup>17</sup> Joane Nagel. *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. New York: Oxford UP: 2003. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Nagel, 38



This is not meant to suggest that the crossing of ethnosexual lines does not take place. Nagel discusses instances of ethnosexual settlers and sojourners (who establish long-term relationships across ethnosexual boundaries) and ethnosexual adventurers and invaders (who cross these lines temporarily and haphazardly, usually to return to their side of this social divide). Joanna Burden, fitting most comfortably in the category of settlers and sojourners, is rumored to constantly seek out relationships with black men and pursues what she hopes to be a lasting relationship with Christmas, while Christmas crosses ethnosexual boundaries continuously (perhaps because he can never be sure on which side of the divide he belongs) allowing him to be placed in the category of adventurer and invader.

Freud and Nagel's theories applied simultaneously to *Light in August* show how sexuality and race become conflated in Christmas's formation of identity as early as his encounter with the dietician in her bedroom, the implications of which resonate throughout his life until he is murdered in Reverend Hightower's kitchen. Though this conflation of sexuality and race acts on Christmas's development from birth when his racial make-up causes his mother to be taken from him and then him to be taken from his grandmother (the first two interruptions of his oral stage), the scene in the dietician's bedroom provides a starting point for the discussions of these constructions as this is the point in which Christmas regresses to the oral stage with the sucking of the toothpaste off of his finger and, for the first time, becomes *aware* of his presence in the world as a human being bound to a body made of two races in a world intolerant of such a make-up (creating the third, less conventional, interruption of this stage). The impact of this encounter will be traced through his life in relation to his construction of race as he

develops as a character and continues to associate his assumed blackness with his sexuality.

Understanding how race is tightly bound to issues of sexuality allows the reader to understand how Christmas continues to jump from side to side of the racial divide in the Deep South and to alternate between both sides of the “ethnosexual frontier” and shows how his violent nature grew out of these disrupted constructions of identity as a defense mechanism meant to protect him from those who might threaten the safety of his own self-definition. Using Freud’s theory of infantile sexual development and the importance of the bond with the mother in relation to Nagel’s theories of racial construction as it is related to the development of sexuality elucidates Joe Christmas’s character though he has no inherent identity. Employing a discussion of the sexualization of Christmas’s race as a construction of identity calls for a Freudian understanding of his childhood development and a Nagelian understanding of how his mixed race background impacted his childhood development. While Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality allows us to understand how his disrupted oral stage caused a distrust of women, Nagel’s theory allows us to examine race in relation to sexuality in the formative as well as in the adult years of this character’s life, showing how these theories overlap and deserve to be studied in conjunction with each other. These conflated analyses allow a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind one of Faulkner’s most deplorable, but most tragic, characters.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Christmas's Construction of Sexuality**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when examining Joe Christmas's construction of identity in light of the construction of race and sexuality, the scene in which he encounters the dietician in her bedroom and interrupts her sexual encounter with the intern is a telling one. Here Christmas regresses to the oral stage of infantile sexual development, the first stage in a child's growth as it is laid out in "Infantile Sexuality." During this regression, his oral stage is violently interrupted for the third time in his life as he experiences his first taste of guilt associated with sex and race and demonstrates how they become conflated as he struggles to form a coherent identity. This regression would not take place, however, had his sexual development not been interrupted by the death of his mother and his kidnapping from his grandmother early in his life. For this reason, some attention must be given to the impact of these two incidents on Christmas's psychosexual development in order to show how these three interruptions of his oral stage cause him to construct his sexuality so that it necessitates violence and is often tied to the intake of food.

According to Freud's essay, an infant explores his surroundings with his mouth during the oral stage (which spans the first eighteen months of his or her life). (S)he puts things in his or her mouth and builds a bond with his or her mother through breast-feeding. The act of ingestion and the sucking performed by the infant (an action which Freud refers to as "sensual sucking") becomes the greatest pleasure the child has yet known and, as (s)he is now in a period of sexual latency, "sexual activity has not yet been

separated from the ingestion of food.”<sup>19</sup> Though the purpose of this sensual sucking is undoubtedly to seek nourishment, the pleasure that is associated with it is what inspires thumb-sucking or the sucking of any object accessible to the infant. Sexual activity in childhood is connected with activities that provide nourishment as the child still associates sucking and eating with the nurturing mother. The separation of sexual from non-sexual stimuli will not happen until later in the developmental process, which, if allowed to proceed uninterrupted, will produce a fully-functioning, well-adjusted adult (45). The infant will then move into the anal stage, in which his sexual fixation moves from the mouth to the anus (51-53). After the anal stage, the infant, now three or four years of age, will move out of the period of latency. In doing so, sexual impulses become observable and any perversions or abnormalities that have developed during the latency period begin to show. During this period, the child moves into the genital stage in which sexual fixation moves to the genital organs. Ideally the infant will have relinquished the fixations of the oral and anal stages completely in favor of those that arise during the genital stage. During this period the child separates sexual pleasure from the pleasure felt during the two earlier stages of development and by doing so transfers his attention from these orifices to the genital organs. (53-55) For a child to retain the need to focus on pleasure felt during previous stages is common. When this happens, it is often due to an interruption of some kind during the developmental process and the child thus exhibits signs of a corresponding fixation. A child who is orally fixated, for example, may exhibit idiosyncrasies associated with eating, such as a need to eat in private or a strong sense of “disgust [or] shame” as eating seems to the fixated adult to be associated with a lack of

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<sup>19</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2000. 62. (All references to this work will hereafter be cited parenthetically.)

morality due to a painful or scarring experience from the adult's early life. (44) As Freud argues, the first year and a half of a child's life—the time which makes up the oral stage of development—is when the child bonds with the mother, usually through breast-feeding. This bond will later allow the child to trust others and eventually embark upon intimate relationships. The absence of a constant mother figure and the resulting inability to form a lasting bond during this stage will cause a child to grow into an untrusting adult who is unable to form intimate relationships.

Unfortunately for Joe Christmas, his life is that of a child unable to form this necessary bond due to the first two interruptions of his oral development that cause him to follow the course predicted by Freud. Christmas's first interruption of the oral stage takes place at birth. We are told late in the novel that Joe Christmas was born a mixed-race child in the Deep South to a young, unwed girl named Milly. He is not able to bond with her as an infant normally bonds with his mother due to his grandfather's embarrassment over his daughter's promiscuous sexual relationship with a man he assumes to be black. He murders the man after he finds his daughter with him and later, when Milly goes into labor, he refuses her medical assistance, standing "outside the hall door where he could see Milly until she died."<sup>20</sup> Christmas is therefore not allowed a period of breast-feeding and is instead raised for the first few months of his life by his grandmother, Mrs. Hines. Though she is unable to offer the type of bond Freud's theory argues is ideal for infantile development, she immediately "built up the fire in the stove and heated some milk" (379) for her new grandchild rather than grieving over the loss of

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<sup>20</sup> William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Vintage, 1990): 379. (All references to the novel will hereafter be cited parenthetically.) The implications of this point deal very heavily with Christmas's construction of his race and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3. For the purposes of this chapter, this information is meant to focus on a scarring experience from Christmas's early life as the implications that arise related to his sexuality.

her own daughter, which suggests that Ms. Hines immediately takes on the “mother” role by providing him with nourishment despite her inability to breastfeed. In the absence of her husband, who leaves the house immediately after his daughter’s death and does not return for months, she is left as the sole provider for the baby and herself.

Just as Christmas’s oral stage was initially interrupted by the death of his mother, so it is again by the loss of his acting mother figure when his grandfather—Doc Hines—returns to take him to an orphanage in order to purge his family of the sin of producing a mixed-race child. As he tells his wife, Christmas is “the Lord God’s abomination, and I am the instrument of his will” (380). This has a monumental impact on his construction of race as his race has been the cause of that which has disrupted his development twice.<sup>21</sup> The effects of his grandfather’s actions, however, will stretch long beyond the implications this will have on his battle to construct the racial aspect of his identity. Freud would argue that these disruptions will disable Christmas from moving into the anal and genital stages of development and ultimately cause him to fixate on the oral stage. Because of his inability to breastfeed and bond with a natural mother, he came to be dependent on his grandmother for food. When he was taken from her, he again had to seek nourishment from another source. Freud’s theory suggests that these two interruptions are the types of events that cause an infant to fixate on the intake of food—specifically the process of using one’s mouth to attain nourishment and pleasure—and the connection of this function of survival to women for the rest of his or her life.

In the absence of a central mother figure in Christmas’s childhood, he attempts to assemble an idea of “mothering” by piecing together instances of nurturing that have

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<sup>21</sup> Again, the issue of race that this brings up will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. Its mention here is meant to briefly explain Doc Hines’s motivation in the kidnapping of his grandson.

come from various sources, indicating that he has not yet developed the need to avoid relationships of this nature. One such example of this is Christmas's relationship with a young girl named Alice who also lives in the orphanage for a time. He had become close to Alice in their shared time in the orphanage and "[h]e had liked her, enough to let her mother him a little; perhaps because of it" (136). In keeping with the pattern established by the death of his mother and his being taken from his grandmother early in his life, mother figures consistently either abandon him or otherwise threaten his safety. Alice, for example, was taken away from him when he was three years old as were other children in the orphanage who "vanished beyond the clashedto gates" (137). Such abandonment caused causing continuous disruptions of his attempts to establish an idea of a figure on which he could depend and whom he could trust.

Freud suggests that such disruptions of this crucial stage lead a person to "build up mental dams" that cause him or her to repress the impulse to seek a loving relationship, and that the results of these disruptions can manifest themselves in various ways—generally by causing a struggle with "morality" or by creating "disgust" and "shame" with which the subject will struggle in one form or another throughout his life. Faulkner creates a pattern in which Christmas becomes close to several comfort-providing figures—his grandmother who cared for him during the first few months of his life, Alice whom he liked enough to allow to mother him, the other children he sees taken through the gates of the orphanage, and, as we will soon discuss, Miss Atkins, the dietician—only to have them abandon him or threaten his sense of safety in the orphanage, leaving him to care for and defend himself. With Alice's departure from the orphanage, we begin to see that his repeated abandonment takes a toll on his ability to

cultivate lasting relationships, undoubtedly because of his age at the time of her departure. Though Christmas's violent nature does not develop as a direct result of Alice's removal from the orphanage or from the removal of other orphans during his stay, he develops an admiration for those able to leave—those not tied to their current situation. He says of Alice's departure that she had "grown heroic at the instant of vanishment beyond the clashed to gates, fading without diminution of size into something nameless and splendid" (136-7) indicating a sense of respect for this ability to depart. This respect for flight causes him later in life to leave his memory of Bobbie Allen behind, to travel for fifteen years aimlessly, and to kill Joanna Burden all in attempts to separate himself from intimate relationships and leave their influence on him behind.

While exploring the impact of the two initial disruptions of the oral stage that took place in his infancy is important, the third, which happens during a period of regression, causes more emotional damage for Christmas as he is now old enough to comprehend the situation and carry the scars of it with him into the subsequent stages of his life. Though the oral stage generally ends around eighteen months, Christmas's oral stage is prolonged by the traumatizing interruptions he experiences, as is demonstrated by the oral fixation he displays in childhood before he divides pleasure into sexualized and non-sexualized categories.

The dietician is of extreme importance to Christmas's development. When speaking of Alice, Christmas tells us that he saw her as being mature, like an adult, and that for this reason she was similar to "the adult women who ordered his eating and washing and sleeping" (136). Of the duties that he sees fit to attribute to an adult, the ordering of eating is listed first, and understandably so since Christmas's infancy was one



in which the process of eating and attaining nourishment did not proceed naturally and was peppered with interruptions and loss. He lives like a starving child who eats ravenously when food is present and, similarly, drinks up comfort and protection when it is available as if these things may never be available to him again. That the dietician would be an important figure in his life, then, stands to reason. Her primary job within the orphanage is to ensure that the children are properly nourished and is thus inextricably tied to the process of ingestion. For a child who experienced such turbulence during his oral stage of development and who will continue through his life with an oral fixation as a result, a woman so closely tied to ingestion will logically serve as a figure of paramount importance. That the dietician is described as being nothing more to him than “a mechanical adjunct to eating, food, [and] the diningroom” (120) does not diminish her importance to Christmas’s development; it merely indicates that her impact on him has an influence at such a fundamental level that he expects her presence without questioning it.

The scene mentioned at the beginning of his chapter in which Christmas has sneaked into the dietician’s bedroom to steal some toothpaste is particularly compelling because here Christmas regresses back to infancy during a period of “sensual sucking” and is ripped violently from that regression, first by vomiting up the toothpaste and then by the dietician’s angry reaction to discovering his presence. When the dietician comes into the room shortly after him, he is forced to hide behind the curtain of her closet with the toothpaste in hand to avoid being discovered. Ordinarily, he would have taken only that taste and then put the tube back exactly where he found it and left the room because “[e]ven at five, he knew that he must not take more than that. Perhaps it was the animal warning him that more would make him sick; perhaps the human being warning him that

if he took more than that, she would miss it” (Faulkner, 121-2). As the situation stands, however, he is forced to hide and finds himself in a sexualized environment in which he is surrounded by “delicate shoes and suspended soft womangarments” (120). Christmas is, however, too young to perceive this as a sexualized scene as he is still incapable of separating sexual pleasure from non-sexual pleasure. Trapped in the closet, Christmas “contemplate[s] the cool invisible worm as it coil[s] onto his finger and smear[s] sharp, automatonlike and sweet, into his mouth” (121). The preoccupation with the contrast of the pink color of the toothpaste as it coils “smooth and cool and slow onto his parchmentcolored finger” (120) continues to be a prevalent image in this scene as the pink of the toothpaste represents whiteness and the darker coloring of his finger represents his blackness of which he quickly learns to be ashamed.

Christmas’s habit of sneaking into the dietician’s bedroom to steal a taste of her toothpaste can be explained by a connection he feels to her inspired by her relationship to food. Faulkner writes of Christmas’s opinion of the dietician:

[She] was nothing to him yet, save a mechanical adjunct to eating, food, the diningroom, the ceremony of eating at the wooden forms, coming now and then into his vision without impacting at all except as something of pleasing association and pleasing in herself to look at—young, a little fullbodied, smooth, pink-and-white, making his mind think of the diningroom, making his mouth think of something sweet and sticky to eat, and also pinkcolored and surreptitious.

(120)

The dietician is, in Christmas’s mind, the toothpaste he takes from her that eventually makes him ill and threatens his safety and sense of security. The “pinkcolored” toothpaste

he squeezes onto his “parchmentcolored finger” creates a contrast of races in a sexualized environment—an image and preoccupation that will continue to impact his construction of sexuality and race.

Faulkner’s juxtaposition of Christmas’s surroundings with the sucking of the paste off of his finger is crucial in this analysis and demonstrates Christmas’s absorption in sensual sucking, as well as the introduction of racial guilt being bound to sexual guilt in his psyche. Because he is unable to distinguish between pleasure that is sexual and that which is not, the guilt that Christmas feels in this scene is related to his knowledge that he should not be taking the toothpaste and is therefore not directly tied to any knowledge of or identification with sexuality or racial division. The text tells us that he enjoys the sweetness and the coolness of the paste, but we can assume that he enjoys the sucking aspect as well as it absorbs his consciousness entirely in this scene. Freud writes that “[s]ensual sucking involves a complete absorption of the attention” (46), so it stands to reason that Christmas becomes so lost in this repeated action that he pays no attention to what the dietician and the intern may be doing. While it seems ghastly for a child of five to be so close to two people engaging in sexual intercourse, Faulkner makes it very clear that Christmas does not understand what is taking place beyond the curtain behind which he is hiding—he was simply “thinking without particular interest or attention that it was a strange hour to be going to bed” (121).

Despite his inability to consciously perceive this situation as a sexualized one, he does show signs of the latent infantile sexuality about which Freud writes which suggests that subconscious connections are being made between guilt elicited by seemingly insignificant things (like the stealing of toothpaste) and bigger, more substantial qualities

of identity (like sexuality and race). Christmas's sucking of the toothpaste off his finger provides a pleasure similar to that of breastfeeding and, because of Christmas's oral fixation, this regression to infancy is to be expected. Though he takes no nourishment from the activity, the pleasure is still present and, because he is still within the period of sexual latency, the separation of pleasure has not yet taken place. That he does not recognize that what the dietician and the intern are doing on the other side of the curtain is anything meaningful is indicative of the fact that he has yet to identify women as sexual beings. Because the separation of pleasure has yet to take place, the dietician is not yet a sexual being in his eyes. She is nothing more than "a mechanical adjunct to eating," much as a mother would be during the early years of a child's life. The male voice of the intern on the other side of the curtain, on the other hand, "had a ruthless sound as the voices of all men did to him yet since he was too young yet to escape from the world of women for that brief respite before he escaped back into it to remain until the hour of his death" (Faulkner, 121). Very briefly here we see a hint of an Oedipal urge. The dietician has become one of many mother figures to Christmas. Young children are bound to their mothers by their need for protection and nourishment in nursing and, while young boys may experience a period of development in which they do not require the comfort found in the opposite gender, men do eventually tend to seek the same comfort in women that they found in their mothers while developing during the first years of their lives. Christmas, though he does not consciously understand the actions taking place beyond the curtain behind which he is hiding, does sense that there is a closeness between the intern and the dietician. Due to this closeness, as ambiguous as it may be in Christmas's

eyes, a sense of competition arises. Such a relationship creates a sense of rivalry for Christmas, though the sense of rivalry is an unconscious one.

In this scene, we not only see the how the conflation of sexuality and race begins to form, we also see how Christmas begins to develop the type of relationships he will have with women (one of jealousy and distrust) versus that which he will have with men (one of rivalry and competition). Much of this is facilitated by the manner in which his presence is discovered by the dietician and the way in which she reacts to finding him in her closet. Due to his complete absorption, Christmas continues to ingest the toothpaste until he has ingested enough to make himself ill, thus revealing his hiding place and drawing the dietician's attention to his presence. He is then pulled from behind the curtain out of his own vomit, chastised, called a "nigger bastard" (122), and sent away. When he began the act of sensual sucking, Christmas regressed back to the oral stage of his infancy, a regression that allows that stage to be disrupted again as the dietician violently rips him from his hiding place. The initial disruptions Christmas experienced as an infant caused the oral fixation that is detectable in Christmas at five years old and this unusual third interruption during his fixated regression provides a situation during which Christmas is old enough to comprehend that the motivating factors behind the dietician's angry reaction are related to sexual guilt and racial difference.

The dietician's intense guilt and fear of exposure causes Christmas to be placed with the McEacherns where he inherits a life characterized by strict discipline, heavy chastisement and punishment that is often related to the withholding of food. The household is made up of a dominating husband and submissive wife who live a religious life that demands strict adherence to Christian doctrine. The dominance of Mr.

McEachern and the submissive nature of Mrs. McEachern color the ways in which they interact with Christmas separately. Mr. McEachern teaches Christmas to fear God as well as most of his innate impulses including not only those that are sexual, but also those that are self-preserving—such as the necessity to eat. Mr. McEachern regularly refuses to provide Christmas with meals if he proves himself unable or unwilling to memorize catechisms and, as a result, Christmas is taught to deny himself in order to demonstrate respect for his adoptive parents and for God and in the process becomes disgusted by food and finds shame in his shortcomings (cited by Mr. McEachern to be laziness and an inherently evil nature which he often ties to Christmas's racial difference).<sup>22</sup>

One such occurrence of this abusive denial of food takes place about three years after his adoption on a particularly stringent day of worship and punishment. Christmas and Mr. McEachern engage in several exchanges in which Mr. McEachern pushes him to memorize a Presbyterian catechism and Christmas responds by saying that he is unable to complete the task. Christmas does not respond to Mr. McEachern with the same innocence with which he responded to the chastisement from the dietician, indicating that he has begun reacting to his disrupted and threatening past. He no longer seeks out comfort in the nourishment found in a mother/son relationship and now resists the urge to trust and please others which existed in him during his years at the orphanage.<sup>23</sup> On this afternoon, Mr. McEachern strikes Christmas ten times for every hour that passes in which he fails to memorize the catechism he has been assigned. Christmas allows several hours to pass as he refuses to complete the task given to him. He is denied breakfast on this

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<sup>22</sup> Note here Freud's prediction in "Infantile Sexuality" that a child whose development is disrupted during the oral stage will most likely develop an extreme sense of disgust for food and will find shame and immorality in his/her need to eat.

<sup>23</sup> That he *resists* this urge does not indicate that it has left him completely, as we will see in his future sexual relationships with women.

morning but remains stubbornly defiant of Mr. McEachern, “not looking at the page at all” when questioned the final time as to his ability to complete the task of memorization before collapsing on the floor. (151) He is likened to his adoptive father in this passage in that there has come to exist a “kinship of stubbornness like a transmitted resemblance” (148) between the two, indicating that whatever innocence left in this boy after the interruptions and scarring experiences he endured early in life were soon lost when he was paired with a man so abusively stern.

Such a harsh denial of nourishment as a form of punishment causes Christmas to feel shameful in regard to the intake of food, as evidenced by the scene later that day when Mrs. McEachern brings Christmas’s dinner to his room after an entire day of forced fasting. When he refuses to eat, she tries to reassure him, saying, ““He never told me to bring it to you. It was me that thought to do it. He don’t know. It ain’t any food he sent you”” (154). Her goal is to prove to Christmas that Mr. McEachern is the one who poses a threat to his safety and she tries to convince him (by providing him with food) that she can be trusted to protect him from that which threatens him. Christmas views the McEacherns as a unit, however, and so Mrs. McEachern is unable to separate herself from her husband in Christmas’s mind. His safety has already been threatened by this environment and thus his trust has been broken. The complications predicted by Freud manifest themselves here in an aversion to food and a refusal of motherly comfort and loving intimacy.

The end of this scene in which Christmas “took the tray and carried it to the corner and turned it upside down dumping the dishes and food and all onto the floor” reflects the guilt that will continue to permeate Christmas’s ideas about the parallelism

between eating and intimacy as he returns to bed, “carrying the empty tray like it was a monstrosity and he the bearer” (155). After Mrs. McEachern has left, however, Christmas kneels above the food in the corner and “with his hands ate like a savage, like a dog” (155). He is hungry and must eat for fear of starving, but, as Freudian theory states, he cannot do this in the presence of a person whom he views as a threat to his personal well-being. For the rest of his adolescent life, Mrs. McEachern secretly prepares meals for him “and then insist(s) on his accepting and eating them in secret, when he did not want them and he knew that [Mr.] McEachern would not care anyway” (167). Food provided by a threatening source does not provide any amount of emotional security or satisfaction for Christmas and, instead, becomes something that elicits shame where it should foster security had his development been allowed to play out uninterrupted.

Because food is so closely tied to intimacy in a child’s oral stage of development, and because Christmas’s oral stage was disrupted so many times, his reaction to feeling threatened has necessarily evolved into a violent one meant for self-preservation. The first time that this violent reaction to blatant sexuality arises is during his encounter with the negro girl waiting in the shed for Christmas and his friends. Upon entering the shed, he immediately feels that he needs “to get out” and compares the feeling of urgency and discomfort to the way he felt “when he used to think of toothpaste” (156). Though this is his first encounter with sexuality that is manifested in a non-latent period of sexual development, Christmas demonstrates a sense of recognition. If he has come to associate toothpaste with a certain emotion so strongly that he remembers that event upon entering into this obviously sexualized environment, the fact that sexuality was a latent part of his being when the toothpaste incident occurred strengthens the applicability of Freud’s



theory here. In the dark of the shed, he describes a sense of feeling trapped and unable to move (an entrapment similar to that of his memory of being stuck in the dietician's closet) and, upon locating the young girl in the dark, kicks her repeatedly "through a choked wail of surprise and fear....clutching her by the arm, hitting at her with wide, wild blows, striking at the voice perhaps, feelings her flesh anyway, enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste" (157).

The references to her voice and her flesh indicate that Christmas's reaction is elicited by her femininity because it is reminiscent of the women who have proved to be the biggest threats to his overall safety in his life. Despite the abuse inflicted by Mr. McEachern, Joe reflects later that he felt they, as men, "could always count upon one another" but "that it was the woman [Mrs. McEachern] alone who was unpredictable" (159). Because of the interruptions he experienced as a child, and the numerous times that women have abandoned him or have been taken from him, Christmas cannot bring himself to trust the female gender. Though the men in his life consistently cause him physical harm, the women threaten his construction of his identity by acting and reacting in ways that he cannot predict and this unpredictability proves to be more threatening to him than physical pain. His violent reactions to women, therefore, are defensive in nature and show why the women with whom he seeks sexual relationships in his later adolescence and adulthood are fairly androgynous or even masculine in their appearance.

Christmas's relationship with Bobbie Allen, the waitress at the disreputable diner in town, represents the second instance of Christmas's reaction to his distrust of women. He initially visits the diner when he and Mr. McEachern stop to eat a quick lunch despite its seedy quality. After leaving, Mr. McEachern tells Joe that the diner is no place for

young boys, saying, “I’ll have you remember that place. There are places in this world where a man may go but a boy, a youth of your age, may not. That is one of them. Maybe you should never have gone there. But you must see such so you will know what to avoid and shun. Perhaps it was as well that you saw it with me present to explain and warn you” (175). The fact that Mr. McEachern describes the diner as a disreputable place unfit for respectable people to eat, coupled with the interruptions of Christmas’s development that have led him to associate ingestion with shame, Christmas’s second (secretive) visit to the diner is a predictable one, as is his burgeoning attraction to Bobbie Allen. When Christmas is unable to pay for the coffee and pie he has ordered, he allows Bobbie to cover the cost for him. That he would allow her to do this is significant in that he has refused nourishment from those who he feels have threatened his safety in the past – namely women. In this despicable atmosphere he allows her to help him in this regard, furthering the idea that food is closely related to intimacy for Christmas and foreshadowing a type of intimacy that he will rarely allow himself to feel as he grows older.

His attraction to the diner cannot be completely explained by his developing feelings for the waitress. That the restaurant is dirty, nestled in a back alley of the town, and serves disreputable figures makes his trips to the diner reminiscent of the first time Mrs. McEachern brought him food without Mr. McEachern’s knowledge. He goes in secrecy and, judging by the description of the restaurant, may as well be eating off the floor “with his hands...like a savage, like a dog” (155) as he did when he first refused to eat in front of Mrs. McEachern. The striking difference here is that, though Christmas seems unnerved by his feelings for the waitress, he eventually finds some comfort in the

diner and in her company. This evidence of comfort suggests that the disruption of Christmas's oral stage of development and the extreme amount of guilt he experienced during that stage have caused him to be so repelled by food that he now feels most comfortable when eating not only in secrecy but also in a sordid environment. The same is true of his intimate encounters, and his consistent association of food with hopes of intimacy causes him to be attracted to women who he is able to closely associate with eating.

Just as his attraction to the diner cannot be explained solely by his attraction to the waitress, his attraction to her cannot be explained exclusively by her relation to food. It is true that Christmas seeks relationships with women who can provide him with food unconsciously hoping that he will be able to find nourishment and intimacy in an unthreatening relationship. The guilt he associates with food because of his disrupted childhood and the violent punishment and secrecy at the hands of the McEacherns is so strong that this association cannot be overcome. His relationship with the McEacherns has also taught him, as was discussed above, that men, though they usually threaten his physical safety, are predictable in their violence, while women are unpredictable in their desire to nurture and their coinciding tendency to abandon or threaten him. He has grown to view any display of that which is feminine as a threat to his safety.

That Christmas is able to trust her enough to let her pay for his food (just as he trusts her enough later to become openly intimate with her) is due in large part to her sexless characteristics. On top of the obvious feature of her sexually androgynous name, Bobbie Allen is described as being "small....almost chillike" (172) with "eyes...like the button eyes of a toy animal: a quality beyond even hardness, without being hard" (173), a

face that is always “demure and downlooking” and “big, too big, hands” (176). The ambiguous nature of her name and body coupled with the submissive nature of her femininity expressed here help to explain Christmas’s willingness to pursue her in an intimate nature, indicating a need to dominate rather than an urge to trust.

In light of the fact that his first intended sexual encounter (with the negro girl) was interrupted by his own feeling of being trapped, as well as by his inability to react in any way that was not violent, it is important to note that his first *realized* sexual experience is with Bobbie. Despite the lack of sexual activity in his encounter with the negro girl, his reaction to situations of a similar nature continues to resonate the same fear and distrust. The violent nature he developed to defend himself against that which might threaten his safety appears again on his first date with Bobbie Allen when she tells him that she is menstruating. Upon his inability to understand what she means when she says “I’m sick tonight....I forgot about the day of the month when I told you Monday night,” she says “You haven’t ever had a sweetheart, yet. I’ll bet you haven’t” (188). He strikes Bobbie because her confession that she is menstruating threatens his mental and emotional sovereignty and because her speculation that he has not “ever had a sweetheart, yet” is threatening to his masculinity. Femininity is not something he readily understands because he was separated from the relationships with women which children usually have in their formative years. This reminder of that which is ultimately feminine causes him to feel that he must defend his initial belief that he could relate to Bobbie despite her femininity. The outrage he feels when she assumes that he is a virgin causes him to act defensively in order to save himself from humiliation and, in response, he pulls away from her touch and strikes her before running down the street away from her.

That Christmas continues to carry on late-night dates with Bobbie for which he must sneak away from the McEacherns' house reinforces the importance of his need for secrecy. On his second date, a week after he struck her, they depart from the path on which they have met to copulate in the nearby woods (190). The air of secrecy that surrounds his meetings with Bobbie continues for the duration of their relationship. It is with her and in the company that she keeps that he "[begins] to smoke...and...drink too" (199) activities that are disreputable and involve ingestion or fixation on oral action. Christmas's ability to find comfort in this type of situation is consistent with his attraction to Bobbie and resonates of his association of food with sexuality. The secrecy and shame he associates with each of these actions causes him to prolong actions and relationships of this sort.

Despite his violent and distrusting nature, Christmas does show indications that he still seeks the comfort of the nurturing relationship he was denied as an infant. One month after they consummated their physical relationship, Christmas visits Bobbie to bring her "a stale and flyspecked box of candy" he bought second-hand and "[gives] it to her as if no one had ever thought of giving her anything before" (191). After their copulation that night, he tells her about his experience with the negro girl in the shed "quietly and peacefully, lying beside her, touching her" (196) creating an atmosphere of trust and tranquility. During this scene of actual intimacy he chooses to tell her, "I think I got some nigger blood in me" (196). This is the first instance in which he openly addresses the possibility that he might be half black. This issue of his mixed race has caused so many interruptions in his life (a phenomenon to be discussed in the following chapter) that he has refused to address it until now, indicating that while with Bobbie he

feels safe and unthreatened. In keeping with the pattern his life has followed, however, this feeling of safety is quickly interrupted as Bobbie shows her disgust at his confession and refuses to believe it, causing this scene to be reminiscent of the scene in the dietician's bedroom. Later scenes, one in which he finds Bobbie in bed with another man and beats her for her infidelity and another in which she leaves him to be beaten by Max and a strange man after he has killed Mr. McEachern, show how sexuality has become conflated with violence and, because of his previous confession of his racial background, with his construction of his race.

Because Freud's theory of infantile psychosexual development suggests that a child's sexuality begins forming at birth, Joe Christmas's construction of sexuality can be examined from a point as early in his life as the loss of his mother. The latent nature of infantile sexuality does not diminish its importance in the development of a child's psyche and his resultant identity as an adult. Christmas's progression from a motherless child, to a family-less child, to a child subjected to abusive surroundings produces an adolescent boy who fears the nurturing nature of women but seeks the intimacy of the close relationship he was denied at birth. In contrast, his understanding of and preference for the violent nature of the men he has encountered reinforces in him the notion that violence is the only respectable (read: dependable) way to encounter feelings of doubt and vulnerability. As inherent in his sexual development as violence is his association of food and ingestion with sexuality that is based strongly in their shared correlation with guilt and shame, just as Freud's essay predicts. These early disruptions of Christmas's attempts to develop sexually have a clear lasting impact on his formation of identity as

his violent and food-obsessed sexual nature becomes conflated with what Joane Nagel will argue is a social construction of his racial identity.

### Chapter 3 Christmas's Construction of Race

Because of the intentionally ambiguous nature of Joe Christmas's race, a discussion of this character is not complete without attempting to explain how he constructs his racial identity and its relation to a Freudian understanding of his sexuality. Noel Polk has astutely argued that critics often examine race in relation to Joe Christmas in an attempt to avoid analyzing his sexual relationships.<sup>24</sup> Avoiding this discussion is particularly detrimental to Christmas's character because these two aspects of his identity are so inextricably linked in his development. Joane Nagel's theory of the social constructions of race and its close relation to sexuality, when applied to Joe Christmas's formation of racial identity, clarifies the Freudian theory of psychosexual development and illustrates how his formation of these two facets of identity come together to inform the psychological implications of the scene in the dietician's bedroom and later define his sexual relationships with Bobbie Allen in his adolescence and with Joanna Burden in his adulthood.

In her book, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, Joane Nagel argues that racial construction is inextricably linked to the construction of sexuality in that both are socially defined. She writes also that "ethnic differences are...sexually loaded"<sup>25</sup> because, historically, as different races and nationalities began to confront one another and intermingle, sexual attraction to members of other races became more prevalent resulting in racial ambiguity that threatened traditional constructions of race and sexuality. Nagel's theory allows us to examine race in relation to the formation of sexual identity—

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<sup>24</sup> Noel Polk, "Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy" *Faulkner Journal* 16.3 (2000/2001): 3.

<sup>25</sup> Joane Nagel. *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. New York: Oxford UP: 2003. 38. (All references to this work will hereafter be cited parenthetically.)



specifically in the formative years of sexuality—as sexual relationships are, after all, that which allows for procreation and therefore that which allows for racial distinction to become mixed and indistinct (as in the case of Joe Christmas).

Nagel’s claims that race is the result of “social constructionism” (5) is based on the observation that our racial identity depends more heavily on *society’s perception* of the color of our skin than on the actual color itself:

“Nothing is clear and nothing is simple about ethnicity. Like real estate, the meaning of ethnicity is a matter of location, location, location. Where are you, what is your “subject position,” what is the subject position of the person viewing and categorizing you?<sup>26</sup> By subject position, I mean what do you think you are ethnically and what perspective do you hold because of the skin you (think you) are in? And what about those whom you encounter as you move through the social world—what do they think you are, what perspective do they hold because of the skin (they think) you are in and the skin they (think they) are in?”

(40)

Of this social construction, Nagel argues that “ethnicity is not a fixed, unchanging feature of social landscapes or individual biographies” but is instead “the *extent* and *meaning* of ethnic differences are socially defined, historically and situationally changeable” and informed by the construction of sexuality (38). That which society believes makes up a certain race—ethnic background, skin color, nationality—are not actually qualities that divide mankind. In fact, Nagel notes that “no serious scholarship in the humanities, social

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<sup>26</sup> At this point in the text Nagel includes this footnote: “For a discussion of subject positions and standpoint theory, see Nancy C. M. Hartstock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).”

sciences, or natural sciences argues that races *exist*, have consistently measurable boundaries, or that humans reliably can be differentiated in any meaningful way on the basis of skin color, hair texture, physical characteristics, or other usual indicators commonly associated with Western notions of ‘race’” (43, italics mine). Our willingness to believe that these divisions are real is what creates this reality.

That we are traditionally inclined to believe that race and nationality are inherited features that are “both skin deep and deeper—in the blood” (Nagel, 38)—whether or not they actually are—heightens the significance of Christmas’s confession to Bobbie Allen that “I think I got some nigger blood in me” (196). This confession elucidates two major facets of Christmas’s consideration of his identity: first, that Christmas considers race to be something that resides in the blood, and second, that he can only “think” he is of black descent but cannot know this for sure. That he considers race to be something so inherent to his physical being that it resides in the blood is undoubtedly a construction of the world in which he lives. The history of the American South is wrought with abysmal and volatile relations between whites and blacks. As Nagel writes, “the importance and volatility of those differences change over time and depend on economic, political, and social patterns in the interaction between the two groups” (38-9). Blacks were thought to be of such lesser value than whites that they were ownable. This mindset was maintained for generations in this region, creating a sense that there was something physically inherent in these owned black people that made them subordinate to white people. This history causes Doc Hines to be overtaken by a mere suspicion of African descent in the man who fathered his grandchild, allows the dietitian enough leverage to expel Christmas from the orphanage, causes Mr. McEachern to view Christmas as a child touched by sin,

and allows Christmas to believe that he has “some nigger blood” in him—that this race of which he thinks he is a part is so ingrained in his character as to be mixed with his blood. To these characters, issues of race are not recognized as issues of perception, but rather issues of clear fact. According to Nagel, however, these perceptions are malleable based on the geographical and historical location of the society out of which the characters have grown.

As an infant, Christmas cannot consciously know that he is the product of an interracial sexual relationship, but it becomes clear that this fact hangs over his actions later in life. As early as his birth we are able to see the disruption of his oral stage and the conflation of race with sexuality in his imagination as Christmas’s racial background haunts him before he ever enters the world and proves to be the cause of his disrupted oral stage. Because Milly slept with a man Doc Hines believed to be black, he allows her to die, “stood outside the hall door where he could see [her] until she died,”<sup>27</sup> thus ripping Christmas from the bond he was to have with his mother. He then leaves, disrupting another bond a young child generally has to a family member, and his grandmother, Mrs. Hines, takes over as primary caregiver. A few months later while Mrs. Hines is in the yard chopping wood for the fire, Doc Hines returns and takes Joe to an orphanage to purge his family of the shame brought about by his daughter’s promiscuous interracial relationship, explaining himself only by saying “It’s the Lord God’s abomination, and I am the instrument of His will” (380). Christmas’s oral stage is interrupted twice because of his race and, during the third interruption, his encounter with the dietitian, the chastisement immediately following his discovery in her closet and during her later

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<sup>27</sup> William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Vintage, 1990): 379. (All references to the novel will hereafter be cited parenthetically.)

encounter with him when she offers him a dollar a week for his silence are heavily inundated with the phrases like “little nigger bastard” (122, 125).

The other aspect of Christmas’s statement about having “some nigger blood” in him that must be examined is the fact that he can only “think” he is of black descent. He cannot know for sure since his father was killed shortly after his conception and his mother, who may have been able to resolve this matter, was killed shortly after his birth. The race Christmas creates for himself is based solely on Doc Hines’s perception of the man’s race who fathered Christmas, a fact that Faulkner leaves intentionally ambiguous. Byron tells Reverend Hightower of the night Doc Hines killed Christmas’s father, saying,

It was a fellow with the circus....She told him that the man was a Mexican, the daughter told him when he caught her. Maybe that’s what the fellow told the gal. But he [Doc Hines]...knew somehow that the fellow had nigger blood. Maybe the circus folks told him. I don’t know. He aint never said how he found out, like that never made any difference.

(374)

Nagel writes that “the social definition of an individual’s race...is decided and given meaning through interactions with others” and further states that “an individual’s ethnicity is as much the property of others as it is the person’s making the ethnic claim.”

(42) One might believe that, had Christmas’s father been allowed to live, Christmas would have had a chance to know to which race he belonged. But Nagel argues that “an individual’s race or ethnicity is not biological in any social sense; it is a socially negotiated, constructed fact” (43). That his father’s skin color was so ambiguous that he could pass for either Mexican or black and the fact that Christmas came from a white

mother, coupled with Nagel's claims that race is not a biological trait, allows the conclusion that concrete knowledge of his father's race would not have helped settle the question of Christmas's racial identity. He would still be a child of mixed race forced to socially negotiate the category into which he should be placed by the society of the American Deep South.

To examine the extent of the impact of racial identity of Christmas's formation of sexuality, Nagel's theories of the conflation of racial and sexual construction are best studied initially in relation to Christmas's entrapment in the dietician's closet. His concentration on his efforts in squeezing the "pinkcolored" toothpaste onto his "parchmentcolored finger" gives rise to the idea that this unusual and traumatizing third disruption of the oral stage will cause Christmas to associate sex with his blackness rather than his whiteness throughout his life and will also cause him to conflate guilt of a sexual nature with racial guilt. In this scene, he encounters a sexual relationship for the first time, though he does not consciously know what is taking place on the other side of the curtain, and, upon being discovered, is called a "nigger bastard" and introduced to the notion of associating guilt with sexuality and race. Of course, the guilt he initially feels in this scene is connected to the fact that he knows he should not be taking the toothpaste. Miss Atkins's explosive reaction to discovering his presence in her room extends that emotion to these two facets of his identity. Furthermore, the guilt felt by the dietician over Christmas's knowledge of her sexual encounter with the intern is what causes her to use his race to have him removed from the orphanage and thrown into the grasps of the McEacherns. The concept of guilt as it relates to race and sexuality is introduced to Christmas very early in his life by a figure associated with eating and this association of

guilt with food has a great impact on his outlook toward nourishment and its connection to intimacy and the conflation of sexuality with race throughout his life.

His placement with the McEacherns is also arguably linked to his status as a mixed-race child. The dietician sought to have him removed from the orphanage as quickly as possible to eliminate him as a reminder of her guilt and did so by telling the matron of the orphanage that “that child, that Christmas boy, is a nigger” (132). Though she initially refuses to believe the dietitian’s claims, the fact that the other children “have been calling him Nigger for years” (133) and further convincing from the dietitian leads her to decide that they “must place him at once,” calling for any applications they may have on hand (135). Mr. McEachern demonstrates upon his introduction in the novel that he views Christmas as a child touched by sin. Though he does not directly state that Christmas’s race causes him to be so hard on Christmas throughout his remaining childhood and subsequent adolescence, he does say to the matron of the orphanage during the adoption process that under his roof Christmas will “grow up to fear God and abhor idleness and vanity despite his origin” (143). Christmas is nearby, taking in this declaration that his “origin” is something of which he should be ashamed, or something that he should at least strive to overcome, providing what is perhaps the second situation in which Christmas is able to consciously comprehend that his “parchmentcolored skin” makes him different and shameful in the eyes of others.

When Christmas begins to develop sexual relationships with women, the issue of his race becomes inextricable from the progression of their relationship, Christmas mentions his racial make-up to Bobbie Allen only once after intimacy. He also uses his blackness to avoid paying prostitutes during his fifteen years of wandering before finding

himself in Mississippi, and then begins a relationship with Joanna Burden after finding out that she is rumored to have carried on sexual relationships with black men. Throughout his adolescent and adult life, issues of race—specifically, issues of his possible/assumed blackness—continually arise in conjunction with his discomfort with sexuality and intimacy. While criticism abounds that suggests that Christmas is “affectless”<sup>28</sup> and unfeeling and rejects all offers from women to try to mother him or attempt to offer him some kind of comforting care, Christmas actually oscillates between rejection and fearful acceptance of such closeness. He allows himself to be drawn in by the charms of Bobbie Allen and her connection to food. During their relationship he shows evidence that he still seeks a close relationship with a woman who will make up for these losses. For example, Bobbie’s departure from his life causes him to wander aimlessly for fifteen years, seeking out fights and prostitutes before making it to Mississippi. We know that he hoped his relationship with Bobbie could have been a lasting one because of his honesty in relation to his past and supposed racial make-up and because of his desire to marry her after he killed Mr. McEachern. Their short relationship does not provide the nurturing he was denied as a child for which he secretly (and perhaps subconsciously) hopes, however, and though his inclination toward actual intimacy does not completely disappear, it becomes duller and harder to distinguish as his life progresses. In his later relationship with Joanna Burden he periodically shows signs of timidly embracing the relationship Joanna pursues with him. The propensity for flight introduced in the previous chapter that Christmas developed in relation to Alice’s departure from the orphanage influences his need for departure from each sexualized

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<sup>28</sup> Susanne Skubal, “Word of Mouth: Food and Fiction After Freud” (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23.

woman in his life. When Bobbie Allen allows him to be beaten and left behind barely conscious, he expresses no anger at her, but instead embarks on fifteen years of directionless travel. He leaves behind the family he has known and the memory of the first women he loved and spends his time seeking short and easily escapable relationships with prostitutes.

Christmas is, in fact, a character doomed to always wonder what exactly he is. To refer back to Faulkner's quote on Christmas's identity, he specifically said that Christmas "didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing"<sup>29</sup> Faulkner's concern for Christmas is based in the fact that he will never know who he is but also in the knowledge that he will never be able to know. Nagel argues, however, that this may be true of all humans. In many cases, a man may identify with a certain racial group but not have the skin color to match that group. In that case, Nagel asks, "does it matter what *you* think you are? Or does it matter what *they* (the social audiences you encounter, the people you meet) think you are?" (40) By looking at race in this way it becomes something pliable and ever-changing—a conclusion that may be much more easily grasped in today's society than in the society out of which Christmas grew.

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<sup>29</sup> *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958*, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959). 72.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Christmas's Relationship with Joanna Burden: The Conflation of Sexuality and Race**

As Chapter two illustrates, Christmas's sexual relationships certainly call for a discussion of how he constructs his sexuality; but, as demonstrated in chapter three, they also demand a detailed understanding of his conception of his race and his idea of how others conceptualize his race. Faulkner suggests through Christmas that enduring the tortures of belonging to the subordinated race in the American South is a better life for a character than wondering for a lifetime to which race he is supposed to belong, if he could identify with any group of people, and if he was doomed to live out his years in this state of limbo. While Nagel argues that we construct these racial categories to aid in our understanding of our social situation, she recognizes that this makes the categorizations no less real in the eyes of those who must live within them.

Nagel calls the interactions between sexuality and race "ethnosexual frontiers" describing these frontiers as "erotic locations and exotic destinations that are surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic Others across ethnic borders." (14) Though she argues that race determines our sexuality in that it demands that we reserve our sexual attraction for those who look like us, she also argues that race is a motivating factor for those who cross ethnosexual frontiers as do Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden. Nagel names four categories of people who cross these ethnosexual frontiers: ethnosexual settlers and sojourners (generally considered very similar and usually grouped together in her writing) and ethnosexual adventurers and invaders (also usually grouped together as similar categories).

Christmas's relationship with Joanna Burden is built on the same principle on which his relationship with Bobbie Allen is built in that Joanna Burden is able to provide him with food and is continuously described—at least at the beginning of their relationship—as a sexless character. When he initially encounters her in her kitchen, she is wearing “a faded dressing gown” and carrying a candle that shows “a face quiet, grave, utterly unalarmed” (231), and later, when Joanna tries to force him to pray with her, he describes her voice as being “still, monotonous, sexless” (281). This image is worlds different from the idea of femininity he developed from his interaction with Mrs. McEachern—a woman completely subordinate to her husband, somewhat nervous in his presence, and quick to yield to his will—who was the only stable female figure that he knew during his formative childhood years.

Joanna Burden falls easily into Nagel's category of ethnosexual settlers and sojourners. Specifically, settlers “establish long-term liaisons, join and/or form families, and become members of ethnic communities” across racial divides while sojourners “arrange for a brief or extended stay, enter into sexual liaisons, but eventually return to their home communities.”(14) Because Joanna was killed while still in a relationship with Christmas, we cannot know if she would have chosen to return to her own ethnic community were she given the choice; therefore, we cannot know which category to which she would have belonged. We do know, however, that she was rumored to have had relationships with black men in the past and this, perhaps more than anything else, was what drew Christmas to Joanna. While we cannot place her in one of these two categories over the other, we do know that she belongs in this grouping because the

nature of her sexual attraction to Christmas was not a violent one. She sought a loving, sexualized relationship across ethnic boundaries.

Christmas, on the other hand, would be placed in the latter category of ethnosexual adventurers and invaders. Nagel writes that adventurers “undertake expeditions across ethnic divides for recreational, casual, or ‘exotic’ sexual encounters, often more than once, but...return to their sexual home bases after each excursion” while invaders “launch sexual assaults across ethnic boundaries, inside alien ethnic territory, seducing, raping, and sexually enslaving ethnic Others as a means of domination and colonization.” (14) Faulkner describes Christmas as what Nagel would call “an ethnosexual adventurer.” He avoids Joanna for weeks at a time, only comes into her house to seek out sexual relations and bits of food he could steal, and shies away from anything that resembled a romantic relationship, etc. Though Christmas could fit into the category of ethnosexual adventurer, he cannot return to his “sexual home base” after his adventures because he cannot be sure to which side of the divide he belongs. His relationship with Joanna, then, makes him seem more like an invader. Though the possibility exists that he may not be black at all, he has constructed this racial identity for himself. Whereas during his relationship with Bobbie Allen he spoke of his racial background by saying “I think I got some nigger blood in me” (196), he refers to his racial background during his last few months with Joanna by speaking of “all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be” (265). Christmas has chosen to be black to an even greater degree than Nagel argues that we all formulate our racial identity based on social constructionism. He thinks he may be black but doesn’t allow it to define who he is until his race is used against him during the violent to his relationship with

Bobbie. We are told that he sleeps with a few black prostitutes after their relationship has ended, indicating that at this point in the narrative we might categorize him as an ethnosexual adventurer. Once he embarks on his relationship with Joanna, however, he qualifies as an ethnosexual invader. When he makes his way to Jefferson and hears the rumors that Joanna Burden has carried on relationships with black men, he seeks her out knowing that it is considered shameful for a white woman to engage in this type of relationship with a black man indicating that he has developed a compulsion to satisfy his sexuality in an atmosphere laced with shame.

His black ancestry and the emotional repercussions of that race enforced by the American South coupled with this craving for that which causes guilt and threatens his safety encourage him to pursue a relationship with Joanna. Because of his reasoning for pursuing a relationship with her, their relationship is riddled with guilt before it begins. Though Nagel's writing indicates that she intended the term "ethnosexual invader" to be used in reference to the white men who often took advantage of their enslaved black women sexually, or the black men who raped promiscuous white women known to keep the company of black people, it seems just as plausible that we may apply this characterization to Christmas as he developed a sexuality that became conflated with violence because of the fact that women have always posed a tremendous threat to him. His relationship with Joanna progresses as far as it does because he views her as an androgynous person. When her femininity (or what he perceives to be femininity) becomes more apparent, he retreats from the relationship and lashes out violently against her.

The town's reaction to Christmas's relationship with Joanna is what places Joanna and Christmas in these categories, and appropriately so since Nagel's theory, built on a model of "social constructionism," encourages readers to believe that race is nothing more than the way you are perceived by your community and how that perception influences your own perception of yourself. Nagel writes that "the inspection and regulation of sexuality can be used to forge and maintain ethnic solidarity" (21), a trend that has generally been well tended to in the American South. Nagel gives a full chapter of her book to discussing the sexualized relationship between blacks and whites in America, citing the work of Winthrop Jordan when she claims that "the European fascination with African Sexuality arose in their earliest encounters" (93) when white Europeans associated higher temperatures with more potent sexual appetites, allowing for African nations and darker-skinned populations to be tagged as more sexually potent races. This "view of Africa as a site of sensuality continued to engage the European imagination" (93) for generations so that "there remains in U.S. society today no ethnic boundary more sexualized or scrutinized than the color line dividing blacks and whites" (117).

As a result of Christmas's experiences with women during his development, Christmas's relationship with Joanna Burden demonstrates not only how he has come to relate intimate relationships with the intake of food, but also how intimate relationships have become something potentially threatening to the racial identity he has created for himself. That Christmas's first encounter with Joanna Burden is in her kitchen after he has come in through a window to steal food is an important clue to his motives. His taking from "an invisible dish, with invisible fingers: invisible food" with complete

disregard for what it may be is reminiscent of his most recent relationships with prostitutes and the memories elicited by the taste of the food take him “twentyfive years back down the street, past all the imperceptible corners of bitter defeats and more bitter victories, and five miles even beyond a corner where he used to wait in the terrible early time of love, for someone whose name he has forgot” (230). His encounter with food in Joanna’s kitchen is so sexualized that when she catches him standing in front of her refrigerator she says only “If it is just food you want, you will find that,” (231), suggesting that her initial interest in him is not substantial.

Because Christmas’s search for a relationship that will fill the hole left by mother figures who have been consistently absent from his childhood has become less easily detectable by this point, it seems that this sort of arrangement attracts Christmas as it allows him a place to eat nurturing foods in private. He has retained the need to consume food secretly, as Freud’s theory suggests he would, and this secrecy extends beyond the realms of intimate settings. While at work at the mill he consistently refuses food that is offered to him and does not “squat with [the other workers] in the pump house to eat at noon” (35), and later takes up the illegal production and sale of whiskey. His job as a bootlegger facilitates the shame he associates with eating, but shows that in his adult life this shame has extended to multiple types of consumption. That Christmas would profit from a job in which he illegally and secretly distributes a consumable product to others who must also consume their purchases in secrecy is not surprising. His residency in the slave quarters behind Joanna’s house allow for a covert place from which he could conduct his business and indicates another way in which his relationship with Joanna facilitated his reflex to conduct his affairs in private.

The relationship Christmas and Joanna develop is sexual but initially distant. Joanna is described in sexless terms as she stands in the doorway to the kitchen upon their first meeting in a “faded dressing gown” looking “to be not much past thirty” (231). Despite her vulnerable state in the middle of the night wearing only her undergarments, Christmas notices nothing physically or sexually attractive about her, and so she becomes a figure reminiscent of the dietician who, for so many years, was nothing to him but a reminder of his need to eat. Later, when reflecting on a sexual encounter with Joanna, Joe thinks “it was like I was the woman and she was the man” (235), characterizing her, not in sexless terms, but in masculine terms, unconsciously likening her to Bobbie Allen who was at various points also described in androgynous or masculine terms. For the first year they “[speak] very little, and that casually, even after he was the lover of her spinster’s bed...with speech that [tells] nothing at all” (232) and she leaves small amounts of food out for him and “now and then she [comes] to the kitchen, though she...never stay[s] while he [eats]” (233) thus satisfying his need to eat in secrecy. During the day he does not venture beyond the kitchen, sneaking into her bedroom only at night as if “there were two people: the one whom he saw now and then by day and looked at while they spoke...the other with whom he lay at night and didn’t even see, speak to, at all” (232-3). His relationship with Joanna, then, is characterized by the same qualities that characterize his fifteen years of wandering in which he kept the consistent company of prostitutes. Because he can gain the nourishment he needs from food and the satisfaction of sexual activity without the threatening feeling that arises for him in the company of women with whom he could become intimate, his relationship with Joanna fulfills the needs of his disrupted childhood fixations and fears that have resulted.

As Christmas's relationship with Joanna progresses it moves from being one that is purely physical to one characterized by Joanna's attempts to cultivate something akin to a marriage. Christmas's response to this, in light of his turbulent past, is necessarily a violent one. Their sexual encounters become less violent for her until, during one particular encounter, "she [does] not resist at all...as if she were helping him" (236). Joe immediately begins trying to escape from Joanna, to reject her before she kicks him out of her house and becomes increasingly violent toward her. He denies himself food on the same day that he denies himself a visit to see Joanna until later that night when he finally makes his way to her kitchen to find that, despite the violence he enacted upon her, she has still prepared food for him. In a scene reminiscent of that in which he smashed the dishes brought to him in secret by Mrs. McEachern on the floor, he does the same to the dishes set out by Joanna. Again Christmas's ability to regress to his troubled childhood shows as he picks up each dish and, talking only to himself, announces what it is before throwing it on the floor "in the preoccupied and oblivious tone of a child playing alone" (328).

Soon after this regressive scene, Joanna begins to cultivate an intimate relationship with Christmas, first by disclosing stories of her past and then by insisting that she tell him "in tedious detail the trivial matters of her day and [insists] on his telling her of his day in turn" (257). Because he fears a relationship that is based in intimacy, he characteristically reacts violently, beating her for trying to draw him in so closely and for forcing him to share in something that he has both wanted yet avoided from childhood. He begins to think "*This is not my life. I don't belong here*" (258, emphasis in the text) and begins the process of trying to create a safe distance between Joanna and himself.



This is not, however, until after Christmas's initial reaction to Joanna's long tale of her family's past in which the narrative moves from monologue (the telling of her past in a very removed, third-person voice) to dialogue (between Christmas and Joanna) in which he asks her questions about the story, says he would have reacted differently than her father had when Sartoris killed his father and his son, and answers her questions about his own parents. He responds to her attempts to familiarize herself with his past and him with her past, even if only momentarily. Though this proves to be one of the last inklings we are given that Christmas is still seeking this type of intimacy, it is significant in that it shows that this need is still present despite how hard he tries to repress it.

Over the next six months, Joanna continues to try to draw Christmas into the relationship she hopes to cultivate with him by insisting that they talk "in the fashion of lovers" (257). She begins to speak of her desire to bear a child as if "autumn was almost upon her" though she didn't yet know "the exact significance of autumn" (262-3). Christmas feels only fear and discomfort and, as has been the case in the past, reacts violently in defense. As she begins to insinuate that she would like to start a family and may, in fact, already be pregnant, Christmas begins to lose his androgynous (and sometimes masculinized) view of Joanna because pregnancy and the desire to start a family are things that he has come to view as being traditionally feminine. This, in turn, causes him to feel threatened by her closeness because women have abandoned him throughout his life.

Coupled with her forced intimacy are Joanna's attempts to make Christmas into a reputable black man by suggesting that he "take over all her business affairs—the correspondence and the periodical visits—with the negro schools....[S]he would be his

secretary, assistant: they would travel to the schools together, visit in the negro homes together” (268). As is to be expected, Christmas reacts negatively to this suggestion, “listening, even with his anger, he knew that the plan was mad” (268). Later in the text, Joanna takes these suggestions a bit further, suggesting that he go to school to become a lawyer, and then go to Memphis to read law in a black lawyer’s office, saying, “They [the school] will take you. Any of them will. On my account” (276). Joanna makes these suggestions in hopes of inspiring Christmas to contribute to his black community but she has made it clear that this opportunity would not be available to him without her. Were he to take this opportunity, he would be bound to her in obligation for all that she had made available for him. Further, though he has claimed the black race as his own, he is hesitant to allow anyone else to assign him this label. For instance, while he wanders for the fifteen years between his relationship with Bobbie Allen and his eventual arrival in Mississippi, he seeks out fights with men in bars who assume him to be white or black. Not only Joanna, but also anyone who attempts to put him into a category, threatens “all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be” (265). He believes he has constructed his race on his own—made sense of his ambiguous past out of a need to know what he was—but, as Nagel argues, even though Christmas rejects all of society’s outright attempts to assign him to a racial category, he still allows his race to be socially constructed in that the way he views himself is dictated by the way others view him, as evidenced here when he refuses to allow Joanna to encourage him to act on behalf of the race he has chosen for himself.

Christmas’s outward and obvious reaction to Joanna’s plans for the future is to flee, but underneath that obvious reaction is a clear indication that he still wants some

sort of lasting relationship. At several points in the narrative he begins to think “I better move. I better get away from here” (260) or “This will be a good time for you to run, if that’s what you want to do” (266). The operative phrase here is “if that’s what you want to do,” indicating that even these deliberate decisions to leave are not made wholeheartedly. For instance, after they fight about her desire to have a child, he tells himself “I’ll go tomorrow....I’ll go Sunday” (266), but soon thinks “If she aint anxious for me to clear out, no reason why I should be. I’ll go next Saturday,” (267). He does stay, living in the cabin as the weather gets colder and finds himself upset that Joanna does not venture out to bring him another blanket. This period, he notices, is marked by the fact that he moves “nearer to selfpity than he had ever been,” (267). Upon returning to the cabin one evening and finding a note from Joanna on his cot, he sits with the note in his hands thinking that, “he should have realised then the reason why he had not gone away. He should have seen that he was bound just as tightly by that small square of still undivulging paper as though it were a lock and chain. He did not think of that. He saw only himself once again on the verge of promise and delight” (272). This may be the strongest indication that though Christmas has learned to flee from relationships with women for fear of them being taken from or abandoning him, he has not yet stopped wishing for the nurturing relationship he has never been allowed to have.

When Christmas finds Joanna one evening in her room holding a pistol, he no longer sees her as merely a threat to the safety of his psychological self—she is now a threat to his physical safety. The reader is left to assume that Christmas disarms Joanna and slits her throat, leaving with the pistol in hand with “two loaded chambers: the one upon which the hammer had already fallen and which had not exploded, and the other

upon which no hammer had yet fallen but upon which a hammer had been planned to fall” (286). Christmas does not remember doing so, but it seems as if he unconsciously took the gun from her to protect both of their lives and then—still unconsciously—slit her throat in revenge for her attempt to murder him along with herself. In murdering Joanna, then, Christmas has finally been able to rid himself of that last effort to cling to a need for intimacy as he kills the woman with whom he came closest to cultivating a relationship in which he could function.

When word breaks in town about Christmas’s relationship with Joanna Burden, it is after he has killed her and left town to avoid prosecution. Initially we find out that Christmas has been killed through a conversation between Byron and a man from town when the man says “I thought maybe you hadn’t heard. About an hour ago. That nigger, Christmas. They killed him” (442). The usage of the word “they” here literally refers to the search party that tracks him down, castrates him, and shoots him, but figuratively “they” refers to the townspeople who condemned him upon finding out not only that he was black but that he was living with Joanna Burden and carrying on a sexual relationship. This sexual relationship is what causes the outrage among the townspeople, though the outrage would not have been as pronounced if Christmas were not assumed to be of African descent, as evidenced by Byron’s attempts to convince Reverend Hightower to offer an alibi for Christmas, saying that people in town “would rather believe that about you [that he was keeping the company of a black man] than to believe that [Christmas] lived with [Joanna Burden] like a husband and then killed her” (390).

A significant portion of the explanation Faulkner offers us about Christmas’s death is communicated through the voice of Gavin Stevens, the District Attorney and

Harvard graduate, as he explains why he thinks Christmas ran for refuge in Hightower's house, his assumptions about Mrs. Hines's mindset while Christmas was in jail, and his view that "his blood would not be quiet....It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself" (449). According to Steven's account of Christmas's last moments, his "nigger blood" (as Christmas has referred to his black background) would not allow him to save himself. Stevens describes Christmas's inner battle, saying, "the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin [that belonged to Joanna]. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it" (449). This explanation of the dichotomy between the good that is inherent in "white blood" and the bad that is inherent in "black blood" continues as Stevens explains his account of what happened and represents the view the town had taken of Christmas, his relationship with Joanna, and his eventual fate.

The time that Christmas spends on the run after murdering Joanna shows just how deeply he associates food with shame and how, once again, this denial of the necessity to eat meets with his socially constructed view of his race. Also, his eventual conquering of his need to eat mirrors his ability to rid himself of the need for intimacy discussed above. During this period, he is unable to buy food so he travels secretively by night and sleeps hidden away in the woods by day. The following passage illustrates the process he goes through on the way to complete denial of the necessity to eat while on the run from the law:

He began to say over and over to himself *I have not eaten since I have not eaten since* trying to remember how many days it had been since Friday in Jefferson, in the restaurant where he had eaten his supper, until after a while, in the lying still with waiting until the men should have

eaten and gone to the field, the name of the day of the week seemed more important than the food. Because when the men were gone at last and he descended, emerged, into the level jonquilcolored sun and went to the kitchen door, he didn't ask for food at all. He had intended to. He could feel the harsh words marshalling in his mind, just behind his mouth. And then the gaunt, leatherhard woman come to the door and looked at him and he could see shock and recognition and fear in her eyes and while he was thinking...he heard his mouth saying quietly: "Can you tell me what day this is? I just want to know what day this is."

(332, emphasis in the original, spacing meant to imitate text)

That the time that has elapsed since his last meal becomes more important than the need for the meal itself indicates his complete denial of the necessity for food. During the first few days on the run, "he had been hungry all the time" (334) eating anything he could gather that would nourish his body. When met with the opportunity to ask for food, he instead asks what day of the week it is, finding it more important to fit back into society than to serve the needs of his body. The narrative shows Christmas desperately gathering food from fields that wasn't quite ripe or eating rotten fruit to stay alive, but then abruptly shifts and tells us that "one day he was no longer hungry. It came sudden and peaceful. He felt cool, quiet" (334). He continues to eat the rotten fruit and unripe vegetables because "he knew that he had to eat" and becomes obsessed "not with the food...but with the necessity" of eating (334).

Upon having this epiphany, Christmas "smelled negro....negro dishes, negro food" (334-5), and relates food and consumption directly to the negro race. If Nagel's theory is employed here, that racial divisions are created so that one race may dominate another, we can assume that the shame Christmas associates with food and eating is now directly related to the racial construction he has adopted for himself. A few days later

when he finally declares to himself, “‘I dont have to bother about *having* to eat anymore’” (338, emphasis mine), it is as if he has declared himself above the black racial identity he has constructed for the past fifteen to twenty years since his relationship with Bobbie Allen and, as a result, walks “‘into a white barbershop like a white man,” (349). That a man running from the law for having committed murder would walk into a barbershop in the middle of the day may be a result of his obvious starvation from the denial of food, but “‘because he looked like a white man” and everyone was looking for a black man to arrest on charges of murder “‘they never suspected him” (349). Upon leaving the barbershop, he goes into a clothing store and buys “‘a new shirt and a tie and a straw hat” (349-50) as if he has adopted the white race and so deserves to dress as a white man would dress. He may be proud of the fact that he has finally been able to prove that he does not need food to survive and so spends his money on unnecessary decoration, but that unnecessary decoration was what the townspeople said made him into a preposterous imitation of a white man. His clean and well-kempt appearance insults the white members of the town, causing him to be not only recognized, but remembered and eventually caught. Though he is able to jump from one side of the racial divide to the other, the importance of the social construction of this aspect of identity is not an element that can be ignored or denied, as evidenced by Christmas’s inability to stay on the white side of racial construction in the eyes of the townspeople.

This combination of the shame that he harbors for the act of eating, his need for and rejection of an intimate relationship, and his need to construct a racial identity that would allow him to know who or what he was culminated to cause him to be chased into Reverend Hightower’s kitchen where he was cornered, castrated, and murdered. That he

is not only murdered, but castrated brings together the destruction of the two major aspects of the identity he has created for himself and bookends his life with the conflation of race and sexuality foregrounded by his need for food that he has been taught to view as shameful. He is remembered as a co-mingling of black and white blood rather than a man who chose to reside on one side of that division or the other and he is stripped of his genitalia—that which makes him a man in a world in which he could only trust men. Throughout his life he denied himself nourishment from food like he denied nourishment from intimate relationship with women, only to lapse back into recognizing his necessity for both periodically. He also tried to fit himself onto a single side of what Nagel would argue to be socially constructed racial divisions, though he jumped those dividing lines of race several times throughout his life.



## Chapter 5 Conclusions

From the earliest point in Joe Christmas's life, he struggles to form a coherent view of the world in light of his interrupted development and inability to form a bond with any woman who should have provided him with nourishment, comfort, and the ability to trust. According to Freud, we begin as early as birth constructing our sexuality out of that which we experience and the relationships we build. Unfortunately for Joe Christmas this construction is continuously interrupted, causing him to regress and then reform his outlook on those with whom he may build a relationship (especially women).

As evidenced by the quote that opened this study, Faulkner intended Christmas to be a tragic character who would constantly seek to know who or what he was. Joe Christmas's overpowering drive to define himself as a victim of the American South's racial hostility brings about Christmas's disturbing castration and murder. As Nagel argues, we all seek to develop our own identities based on social definitions of race and sexuality in order to know what we are and where we belong. Likewise, because Christmas is unable to relinquish the oral stage of his development completely, Freudian theory supports the argument that his actions throughout the novel display signs of an oral fixation throughout his adolescent and adult life. The role that food, or lack of food, plays in Christmas's development, and the ways in which his corresponding scars continue to resurface throughout his life explain his unconventional relationships with the dietician, the McEacherns, Bobbie Allen, and Joanna Burden. Though his relationship with food and his oral fixation are key to understanding his development throughout the novel, inextricable from this study is the impact of his racial make-up on his development

as a character. The ambiguity of Christmas's background noted so often in criticism<sup>30</sup> necessitates a study of the way in which Christmas constructs his racial identity but has also given way to a study of how sexuality and race become conflated in his formation of identity. Nagel argues that sex often has the ability to shape ideas about race and ethnicity because sex allows racial differences to continue to be clearly divided or paves the way for racial lines to be blurred over time. Because Christmas is the product of an interracial sexual relationship during a time when this was still an unacceptable form of procreation, we are able to look at Joe Christmas as an illustration of Nagel's theory that racial identity and sexuality are socially defined aspects of a person's identity.

This analysis of Joe Christmas's oral fixation and his battles with the relationship between food and his sexual identity, when viewed as a part of his overall development, allows a more comprehensive understanding of his character than either theory could provide alone. His violent nature grows out of his disrupted attempts at constructing identity as a defense mechanism intended to protect him from those who may threaten the safety of the identity he has created for himself. Though a discussion of this character necessitates a discussion of his perception of race, his construction of sexuality is integral to understanding his construction of his racial identity and, on a larger scale, of his overarching identification of a "self." He combats any threat to his safety—be it physical, mental, or emotional safety—with violent reactions that generally manifest in outbursts toward woman for threatening his conception of his sexuality by coercing him into an *intimate* relationship rather than a purely sexual one conducted publically rather than privately. Further, he is initially unable to lay claim to one side of the racial divide in America's Deep South, but towards the end of his life endures all of the ridicule and

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<sup>30</sup> Criticism cited in the introductory chapter. See footnote 14.

violence that comes with blackness just to believe that he knows a little bit about his personal history and allows his racial confusion to influence his construction of his sexual identity throughout his adolescent and adult life.

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## Curriculum Vita

### EDUCATION

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**Master of Arts**, English: Literature (*Expected: Dec, 2009*)  
**University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (Chattanooga, TN.)**

**Honors:**

- Master's Thesis: "Disrupted Constructions: Joe Christmas's Formation of Race and Sexuality in *Light in August*"
- 4.0 GPA
- Member, Sigma Tau Delta (August, 2008 – present)

**Bachelor of Arts**, English and American Language and Literature (*May, 2007*)  
**University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (Chattanooga, TN.)**

- Major – English: Literature
- Minor – Psychology
- 3.876 GPA (4.0 within major)

**Study Abroad**

- **National University of Ireland, Galway** (*June and July, 2007*)  
 Received A's in both courses taken (classes entitled Literature and Film and Gaelic Literature).
- **University College of Dublin** (*July, 2008*)  
 Received an A upon the completion of a publishable, scholarly paper.

### PUBLICATIONS

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“You’ll Never Find a Woman who is Worthy of You’: Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the Effects of Oedipal Impulses in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.” Paper chosen for inclusion in Southeast Missouri State University’s Faulkner and Chopin Conference Proceedings. To be published by Southeast Missouri State UP. Title and publication date, TBD.

### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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- “The Only *Truthful* Way to Tell a Sad Story’: The Humor Behind the “Life Writing” of Foer and Eggers” Paper to be presented at the North East Modern Language Association Convention. Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 7-11, 2010.
- “The Role of the Mother in William Faulkner’s *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury*.” Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Graduate and Undergraduate Student Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition. Chattanooga, TN, October 16 – 17, 2009.
- “Joe Christmas's Construction of Sexuality in *Light in August*.” Paper presented at The University of Mississippi’s Southern Writers, Southern Writing Graduate Conference. Oxford, MS, July 16 – 18, 2009.



- “‘Eat or Be Eaten’: Consumption and Death Denial in The Lestrygonians.” Paper presented at Eire on the Erie: North American James Joyce Conference. Buffalo, NY, June 12 – 17, 2009.
- “Ernest Becker and Death Denial in The Lestrygonians Episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses*” Paper presented as part of a panel at the Southern American Conference on Irish Studies. Chattanooga, TN, March 20 – 22, 2009.
- “Nationalism and Heroism in John Dos Passos’s *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel*.” Paper presented as part of a panel entitled “Nationalism in Modern American Literature” at The First Annual Graduate and Undergraduate Student Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition. Chattanooga, TN, March 27 – 28, 2009.
- “Addie Bundren’s Death Anxiety in *As I Lay Dying*.” Paper presented as part of a panel entitled “Exploring the Work of William Faulker” at The First Annual Graduate and Undergraduate Student Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition. Chattanooga, TN, March 27 – 28, 2009.
- “‘That Way the Fighting Lies, and I Long to Follow’: Alcott’s Autobiographical Bent in *Hospital Sketches* and *Little Women*.” Paper presented as part of a panel session entitled “Women Writer and the Civil War” at The Symposium on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Press, the Civil War and Free Expression. Chattanooga, TN, November 13 – 15, 2008.
- “William Faulkner’s Construction of Family in *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury*.” Paper presented as part of the American Literature post 1900 panel session at the 2008 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention. Louisville, KY, November 7 – 9, 2008.
- “What is a ‘Writer’s Writer?’: John Banville’s Benjamin Black Novels.” Paper presented as part of the Irish Literature panel session at the 2008 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention. Louisville, KY, November 7 – 9, 2008.
- “Avoiding the ‘Grotesque Easter-Egg Hunt’: Sigmund Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams and William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.” Paper presented at Southeast Missouri State University’s Faulkner and Chopin Conference. Cape Girardeau, MO, October 2 – 4, 2008.
- “‘You’ll Never Find a Woman who is Worthy of You’: Oedipal Impulse in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.” Paper presented at The University of Mississippi’s Southern Writers, Southern Writing Graduate Conference. Oxford, MS, July 17 – 19, 2008.
- “Jason Compson and Hamlet: A Freudian Reading of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.” Paper presented at Texas Southern University’s J. Marie McCleary Symposium – Sons of the South: Faulkner, Wright and Gaines. Houston, TX, April 4, 2008.

## SERVICE

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Chair of the Program Planning Committee for TCTE’s 2010 convention. November, 2009 – present.

Member of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Executive Board. November, 2009 – present.

Chair of the Irish Literature panel session entitled “Death in Modern to Contemporary Irish Literature” at the 2009 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention. Atlanta, GA, November 6 – 8, 2009.

Chair of a William Faulkner panel entitled “The Scrutiny of the Public Eye in the Works of William Faulkner” at the 2009 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention. Atlanta, GA, November 6 – 8, 2009.

President of the Graduate Student Association. August, 2009 – December, 2009.

Chair of the William Faulkner panel at The First Annual Graduate and Undergraduate Student Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition. Chattanooga, TN, March 27 – 28, 2009.

Chair of the Conference Organization Committee, Sigma Tau Delta – Xi Alpha chapter. September, 2008 – December, 2009.

English Department Liaison to the Graduate Student Association Advisory Board. August, 2008 – May, 2009.

Membership Officer, Sigma Tau Delta – Xi Alpha chapter. August, 2008 – December, 2009.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

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### **Awarded During Graduate Coursework:**

- Harper Travel Fund Award: Awarded annually by the South Atlantic Modern Language Association to a graduate student involved in the annual conference. Awarded on the basis of scholarly merit. Amount - \$100
- Sally B Young Award: Awarded yearly to an English student showing outstanding work in the field. Amount - \$720.

### **Awarded During Undergraduate Coursework:**

- Provost’s Scholarship: Awarded by UTC on the basis of student merit upon entering college. Second highest academic scholarship offered. (Forfeited upon transferring to Newberry College.)
- Hope Scholarship: Awarded by the state of Tennessee on the basis of need and student merit upon entering college. (Forfeited upon transferring to Newberry College, but regained upon transferring back to UTC.)
- Study Abroad Scholarship: Awarded by UTC on the basis of need, cost of program, and merit of work. Amount - \$400.

## WORK EXPERIENCE

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**Graduate Assistant to the Office of the West Chair of Excellence** (May, 2008 – April, 2009)

- Editorial Assistant for the *Journal of Applied Environmental Education and Communication*
- Helped to organize the 2008 Symposium on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Press, The Civil War, and Free Expression.
- Editorial Assistant while publishing the last two of three books in a series of conference proceedings from the above mentioned symposium.

- Involved in research and editing process of *Environment Reporting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and research on various topics of environmental journalism and communication.

**Student Assistant to Dr Christopher Stuart** (August, 2008 – July, 2009)

- Assisted in the formatting and editing of his edited volume entitled *New Essays on Life Writing and the Body* (published 2009)

**Student Assistant – Office of the West Chair of Excellence** (Oct., 2007 – May, 2008)

- Helped to oversee submissions and review process for the *Journal of Applied Environmental Education and Communication*
- Helped to organize the 2007 Symposium on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Press, The Civil War and Free Expression and acted as editorial assistant to Dr Sachsman while publishing the last two of three books in his series of conference proceedings from the above mentioned symposium

**Adjunct Professor** (August, 2008 – present)

- See “Teaching Experience.”

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Adjunct Professor**

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN (*August 2008- Present*)

- Fall, 2008 – 2 sections of English 121 (Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition I)
- Spring, 2009 – 2 sections of English 122 (Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition II)
- Fall, 2009 – 2 Sections of English 122 (Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition II)  
– 1 section of English 113 (Western Humanities I)
- Spring, 2010 – 2 Sections of English 122 (Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition II)  
– 1 section of English 113 (Western Humanities I)

**Adjunct Professor**

Chattanooga State Technical Community College, Chattanooga, TN (*August 2009- Present*)

- Fall, 2009 – 3 Sections of DSPW 0800 (Developmental Writing)