

UNDER CONSTRUCTION: POSITIVE-NEGATIVE SPACE IN FAULKNER AND  
BEYOND

by

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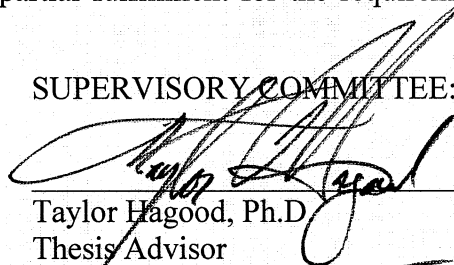
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Taylor Hagood, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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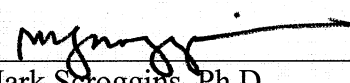
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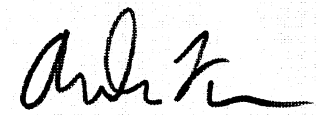
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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis probes the materiality of a text by focusing on elliptical matters. In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern introduces the term “positive-negative space” to describe the primacy of empty space as a formal subject matter in sculptures of the early twentieth century. With some caveats and distinctions, the thesis argues that Kern's theory of positive-negative space is crucial for reading Faulkner's cryptic and polyvalent production of space. Using a smorgasbord of approaches including psychoanalytic and reader-response criticism, feminist and critical race theories, post-structuralist and formalist notions of space, theories of the “hole” in fine arts sculpture, and the New Southern studies, my thesis reinvents the conception of positive-negative space, and asserts that “positive-negative space as an artistic principle” is the *modus operandi* of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*.

## DEDICATION

This project is for my mother, Anna, and father, Giuseppe, who have unflinchingly put the fruits of their labor into my ambitions.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: UNDER CONSTRUCTION

In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern introduces the term “positive-negative space” to describe the primacy of empty space as a formal subject matter in sculptures of the early twentieth century. Derived from art criticism, the concept of positive-negative space hinges on the possibility that what is perceived as empty might actually be paradoxically full. However, Kern expands the idea and applies it to a wide set of cultural and intellectual phenomena associated with modernism.

Kern makes use of “positive-negative space,” banding together a set of cultural phenomena in literature, art, religion, and science that reflect an incongruity in the experience of space at the end of the nineteenth century. He explains that in many fields much of what was previously perceived as “negative” or “empty” began to be understood as paradoxically also “positive” or “full.” With regard to prose fiction, Kern identifies “symbols of negation” such as the “empty stream” and the “impenetrable forest” from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as examples of positive-negative space.

With some caveats and distinctions, the thesis argues that Kern's theory of positive-negative space is crucial for reading Faulkner's cryptic and polyvalent production of space. The thesis brings positive-negative space to the arena of Faulkner studies, and in turn, reinvents the concept by studying Faulkner's particular production. Faulkner's fictive world is distinctively a spatial one, and his sense of narrative form is duly attuned to production of space. Positive-negative space allows for a reader to

theorize both polarities (form and content) with regard to each other. My treatment of positive-negative space combines Kern's phenomenology of literature and art with established theories of space and experience in Faulkner studies, whose dialectic has been a cornerstone of the field since its beginnings.

Moreover, using a smorgasbord of approaches including psychoanalytic and reader-response criticism, feminist and critical race theories, post-structuralist and formalist notions of space, theories of the “hole” in fine arts sculpture, and the New southern studies, my thesis redefines positive-negative space and asserts that “positive-negative space as an artistic principle” is the *modus operandi* of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*.

To begin, this thesis probes the materiality of a text by focusing on elliptical matters. Scholars in Faulkner studies have long used the following terms: unwritten, implicit, subtext, blank, gap, absence, ellipsis, and negation, to describe certain writings that have, intentionally or not, been excluded from a text. First, the unwritten is conceptually spatial. The very concept pressures the materiality of the written text. The “unwritten” is a narrative event or happening that is not written in the language of a work. Nevertheless, it is implied. The unwritten is implicit and occupies an immaterial space, as opposed to the “actual” written text that is explicit and printed on the page. However, I consider the terms “unwritten” and “implicit,” like most of the other terms previously mentioned, vague and interchangeable. Another example, the prefix “sub” of the “subtext” implies the position “below” which signifies solely a spatial relation. What does it actually mean for a text to exist below another text?



The common flaw of terms such as unwritten, subtext, and absence is that they solely denote negativity or obscurity; yet, some holes can be filled through context and thus are not completely negative. Nor do the aforementioned terms provide insight as to how plot holes function within the architectural structures of narrative time and space. Instead, the term “positive-negative space” accounts for the special attention Faulkner and others dedicate to descriptions and abstractions of “seemingly empty” or “in-between” spaces in narrative. Thus, the thesis redefines Stephen Kern's notion of positive-negative space by foregrounding liminality, encapsulation, and readerly response.

Liminality refers specifically to the hyphenation of the term. The hyphen between positive and negative suggests an interpretive paradigm inclusive of both polarities, rather than the “either/or” paradigm, which has been historically dominant. Positive-negative space pressures established boundaries and traditional binary oppositions of spatial experience. “Encapsulation” speaks to the concept's formal iterations in narrative. Encapsulation describes the surrounding of negative space with more positive elements, enough to create the impression of an enclosure. The result of this operation is a positive charging of that space's negativity. Positive elements limit negative spaces and paradoxically turn them positive. This is exemplified visually by many sculptors and painters of the modernism such as Henry Moore and Pablo Picasso, but is explicitly showcased in the head space of Alexander Archipenko's *Woman Combing Her Hair*. Finally, reader-response theory's emphases on ellipsis, blanks, gaps, and negations are analogous to the constitutive functions of positive-negative space and help to clarify how a seemingly negative space in literature would be interpreted.

In specific terms, Kern writes that “art critics describe the subject of a painting as positive space and the background as negative space” (153). “Positive-negative space,” he writes, “implies that the background itself is a positive element, of equal importance with all others” (153). The constitutive function of positive-negative space is a shift or redistribution of emphasis in terms of positivity and negativity in differing cultural art forms. Stephan Mallarmé (who Kern lauds as the positive-negative poet *par excellence*) exclaims that all art should “paint not the thing but the effect it produces” (qtd. in Kern 172). In addition, architect Frank Lloyd Wright endorsed “the original affirmative negation that showed 'the new sense of space within as reality'” (qtd. in Kern 157). The assertion of positive-negative space can be experienced as “a breakdown of absolute distinctions between the plenum of matter and the void of space in physics, between subject and background in painting, between figure and ground in perception and between the sacred and the profane space of religion” (Kern153).

While these are adequate parameters for architecture or the plastic arts, in literature and poetry positive-negative space takes conceptual form. For my purposes, literary positive-negative space is a space beyond the page that is paradoxically encapsulated by the suggestion of the printed word. It is “positive” in the sense that it is “there” through implication and negative in the sense that it is absent from explicit narration. Thus through implication, the reader (borrowing from Wolfgang Iser) takes action and fills the gap. Throughout the body of this thesis, this ancillary “hole-gazing and filling” process will be defined as it is, perhaps, a crucial operation of the reading experience in general, and certainly an operation often highlighted in critical conversations of modernist literature. The appearance of literary positive-negative space

coincides with the “death of the Author” concept, the emergent stylistic popularity of ellipses and dashes in punctuation, and the prominence of implication over explication in narrative composition.

Kern's approach to positive-negative space combines historical survey with Husserlian phenomenology and produces a wide-reaching cultural record. Although this study greatly benefits from Kern's work, *The Culture of Time and Space* does not provide sufficient textual analysis to clarify how positive-negative space affects written language and the reading experience. For example, when discussing the modernist novel's form, Kern's analysis ends with the suggestion that themes or symbols analogous with darkness, nothingness, and the void in works such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* create the impression of positive-negative space. Moreover, Kern leaves unaddressed central tenets of reader-response theory which discuss the transformative function of positive-negative space in terms of “blanks and gaps,” the “creative agency of empty space,” or the “play of negativity.” Kern's study does little formalist analysis of the novels which are mentioned, perhaps because he is a historian by discipline. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide close readings of positive-negative space in modernist works such as William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary* that reveal how this shift in the perception of space affects not only the thematic vector of a novel, as Kern often suggests, but also the most basic formal elements of plot, syntax, and punctuation. Furthermore, the thesis briefly suggests that the peculiarities of form that are actually more indicative of modernism than the seemingly “negative,” dark themes.

On the other hand, the interdisciplinarity of Kern's analysis is extremely valuable contribution to the study of modernism. His broader implication toward positive-negative

space as a widespread cultural phenomenon broaching the “sacred and the profane” in religion and the “empty” and the “full” in physics is effective. However, my task is to fill in his gaps with thorough close reading and literary critical analysis. I will achieve this task through the following steps: first, the thesis inquires into Kern's ideas of positive-negative space in literature using a variety of Faulkner critics, literary theorists and post-structuralist critical approaches. Second, the thesis develops readings of positive-negative space in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary* while employing reader response, psychoanalytic, feminist, and critical race theories to shed light on how these seemingly empty or liminal spaces might be interpreted. Finally, the thesis compares Faulkner's formal experimentation with positive-negative space in the novel to similar structures in Luigi Pirandello's famous drama, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in order to suggest a common transnational modernist fascination with the aesthetic of the “hole.” Throughout each chapter, close readings are grounded in the discourse of the graphic arts through comparisons with sculptures of the period including artists ranging from Alexander Archipenko to Henry Moore. All of these modernist works similarly manipulate through structure the constituent function of positive-negative space, despite the limits of their medium or discipline. I hope this interdisciplinary comparison sufficiently proves that positive-negative space as a “formal” shift is a phenomenon that could be considered a dominant of modernist art that transcends some medium-based and geographical distinctions.<sup>i</sup>

Throughout this introduction, a theoretical explanation of literary positive-negative space in terms of reader-response, aestheticism, and formalism is developed with the objective of addressing certain caveats and issues of form and communication

that Kern does not pursue. I will begin by considering positive space in terms of what Wolfgang Iser calls the “artistic pole of the text” that the author, for my purposes Faulkner, provides through the actual markings (1524). Inversely, we can consider negative space what Iser calls the “aesthetic pole,” (1524) which the reader provides to the text through their response, interpretation, and worldview. Even Iser's articulation seems to consider text in spatial terms—the space between two polarities. He explains, “Communication in literature... is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment” (1527). To Iser, all reading is set in motion through the sway between and interplay of positive and negative elements. Positive-negative space is the vector where that those elements coalesce with ebullience.

In a passage of the “Interaction Between Text and Reader,” Iser describes how negations and blanks function within a text.

There is another place in the textual system where text and reader converge, and that is marked by the various types of negation which arise in the course of the reading. Blanks and negations both control the process of communication in their own different ways: the blanks leave open the connection between the textual perspectives, and so spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives and patterns—in other words, they induce the reader to perform basic operations *within* the text. (1527)

To consider the concept of the implicit within a text, especially a modernist novel or particularly Faulkner's work, in which the conceptions of time and space are always under question and linearity clashes with the “make it new” aesthetic, a linear and

chronological reconstruction of the narrative must, nevertheless, be organized within the mind of the reader. This claim should resonate with anyone who has read the first two chapters of the *Sound and the Fury* or Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Plot holes are positioned, structured and encapsulated. This operation allows for coherence and creates the conceptual impression of positive-negative space, like a pop art Swiss cheese. This reconstruction is the kind of operation that Iser is referring to: "What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light" (1527). As it pertains to literature, this transformation is analogous to the constitutive function of positive-negative space in the arts, namely, sculpture.

Post-structuralist scholar, Russell West-Pavlov, argues "spacing denotes the active, productive character of space. Far from being a neutral void in which objects are placed and events happen, space/ing becomes a medium with its own consistency and, above all its own productive agency" (17). This theorizing of space echoes Iser's notion of "blanks and gaps" in the reading experience as well as Kern's positive-negative space. Narrative suggestions, negations, and blanks all work toward creating the impression of positive-negative space—a liminal threshold or what Owen Robinson calls "a virtual dimension,"(15) where readers get excited, have creative agency, and can develop various, even contradictory, meanings through their own associations spurred by their experiences outside the text. Borrowing directly from Iser, Robinson suggests that Faulkner's fictive canvas is "an environment constructed through the interaction between writers and readers" (4). While Faulkner's cryptic style lends itself freely to the critical

lens of reader-response literary criticism, the idea of positive-negative space is also intertwined with art criticism's spatial modes of interpretation.

This phenomenon is not relegated to text-based artwork. In the definitive text of aesthetic criticism, *The Renaissance*, Walter Pater explains:

Although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what the German critics term an *Anders-streben*—a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces. (110)

According to Pater, all art strives to be music, and empty space or negativity was first explored as a trope in the plastic arts. However, I am not concerned with the kind of “chicken or the egg” questions that occupy Pater’s attention. Many critics throughout the twentieth century have noted that literature does not happen in a vacuum; in other words, critics have long corroborated Pater's point that the graphic arts and literature intrinsically “lend each other new forces” (110). Following this notion further, if we consider Archipenko's *Woman Combing Her Hair*, the positive-negative space that makes up the head of the sculpture goes through a similar process of reader-response where the “viewer” (or reader) fills the gap (See Appendix, Figure 1). I could propose a feminist reading of the sculpture that suggests that the statue is condescending toward women because the head space is “empty” implying that women are intellectually vacuous. This

reading could be reversed; therefore, the statue itself could be feminist because it is a critique or pastiche of the masculinist notion that women in fact have an empty head space. I could disregard the feminist or anti-feminist reading of this space, and consider the empty space as an institutional reaction to the Western sculptural tradition of the “bust” that dominated through the 19<sup>th</sup> century where the definition of the face was the ultimate prize of artistic merit. I can look through the hole and see *nothing*. If I was a trained art historian, an expert of the canons and the historical movements of visual art, I could, no doubt, present additional interpretations.

In other words, the empty space is meaningful and multivalent regardless of the particular meaning a viewer assigns to it. This multivalence is analogous conceptually to the induction and imagination process readers engage when contemplating Quentin's suicide in *The Sound and the Fury* with their own associations and “left to their own devices.” But the sculpture's meaning can totally change and be transformed by the way a viewer interprets the hole, whereas a reader of the *Sound and the Fury* cannot totally transform, change or eradicate Quentin's suicide from their reading. As Robinson states, “the pointed, deliberate use of the reader, the demand that we read in a 'writerly' way as an explicit aspect of form and content, is achieved through high levels of authorial skill and manipulation” (19). To some degree, the meaning of plot hole is mediated through suggestion and selectively deployed by Faulkner to create literary enigma and the effect of suspense.

Due to the nature of the novel form, the experience of literary positive-negative space is removed from its counterpart in sculpture because unlike a sculpture or painting, the experience becomes intertwined with narrative time. Kern's explanation that



“positive-negative time is silence” (170) seems logical when theorizing music, but remains unclear when analyzing a novel. I will clarify the role of “silence” in creating the impression of positive-negative space, as it occurs in *The Sound and the Fury*, over the course of this thesis.

In contrast, my view of “positive-negative time” is that it is always already interdependent with positive-negative space. By the very nature of literature, words must be read sequentially, unlike a sculpture or painting, which a “reader” can view more or less completely in an instant. However, Patricia Drechsel Tobin explains that scholars, since Joseph Frank's *Spatial Form in the Modernist Novel*, have “noted that [modernists] have 'spatialized' time, halted its flow so that relations might be perceived as juxtaposed in space, thereby forcing us to read their novel, like poems, for the “reflexive reference” within simultaneity” (3). According to Frank and Tobin, modernist novels strive toward *Anders-streben*; they want to supplant the place of sculpture by creating a conceptual simultaneity. Regardless, Iser would suggest that all narrative whether temporally linear or spatially simultaneous is controlled by the interplay of negative and positive elements.

Furthermore, Sharon Spencer discusses that in the Modern period, “Time is regarded by physicists and mathematicians [namely Einstein] as a fourth dimension that is an interdependent and inseparable aspect of space dynamically conceived” (xviii). She writes, “The 'new' view of time makes time as an aspect of space” (xix). This thesis proposal follows this school of thought and treats time as “space-time.” Spencer also explains that “many [modernist] novels embody approximations of space-time fusions achieved by various ingenious structural procedures” (xx). She explains that while the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel paradigm operates under to the “principle of narration...a series of

logically connected events and incidents,” the modernist novel operates according the “principle of juxtaposition” where the “goal is the evocation of the illusion of a spatial entity, either representational or abstract, constructed from prose fragments of diverse types and lengths and arranged by means of ... juxtaposition” (Spencer xx-xxi). The “affirmatively negated space-time climactic moments,” or *plot holes*, are purposefully missing tiles in the ideal literary mosaic that has come to exemplify form in the modernist novel.

Another caveat of positive-negative space left unobserved by Kern is the finite distinction between “positive-negative space” and “negative space.” Not everything that is implicit in art is positive-negative space. For my purposes, encapsulation is the key. The sculptor uses stone or marble to encapsulate empty space, “uniting blocks of atmosphere with more concrete elements of reality” as Umberto Boccioni suggests (qtd. in Cooper 246). But the novelist uses the illusion of time and history to set spatial parameters for his/her project; the idea of time as propagated by “dates” creates the size of the canvas. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the earliest events are take place in 1898, and the latest on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1928. Therefore, the text creates a space-time fusion that juxtaposes events that take place between 1898 and 1928 in a non-linear order. When a reader spatializes the narrative into a time line of events, all the “blanks” and “gaps” or “holes” or “missing tiles” that are encapsulated in this space-time unit create the impression of positive-negative space.<sup>ii</sup> However, all other speculations that could be invented about what takes place before 1898, in the “pre-text past,” and after April 8<sup>th</sup> 1928, the “post-text future,” do not affirm the transvaluing function of positive-negative space—they are literary negative space. These imponderable moments are the all-encompassing negative

space that lies outside the parameters of the non-linear space-time canvas the text establishes itself within. Only through encapsulation can the sense of positive-negative space or a re-distribution of emphasis between positive and negative elements be affirmed.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I substantiate the formal features of positive-negative space through readings of two novels by William Faulkner. The first two chapters are organized by novel: Chapter 1 deals with *The Sound and the Fury* and Chapter 2 with *Sanctuary*. Although the constituent function of positive-negative space is exemplified to varying degrees in most of Faulkner's work, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary* each exhibit particular thematic, structural and most importantly, formal qualities worth mentioning. It is also worth reiterating that many Faulkner critics such as Matthews, Mortimer, and Robinson have explored absence, negation, suggestion, and ellipsis, separately, but have not considered how they amalgamate to evoke the impression of positive-negative space.

Also, since the earliest commentators, the role of “space” has been a node of discussion in Faulkner studies. Issues of “space” have been discussed and meditated upon at length by Faulkner's critics. Many critics challenge the doctrine proposed in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoon*, that positions literature as an art of time and painting as an art of space, and suggest as Joseph Frank does, that the modernist novel is paradoxically a spatial art form. Currently, dominant approaches to “space” in Faulkner studies are those with regard to “space and place” that with varying degrees deconstruct, complicate, and redefine the traditional view of setting. For example, William T. Ruzicka and Taylor Hagood discuss the meaning of place and fictive architecture in Yoknapatawpha County. Ruzicka uses a Heideggerian approach and positions the “Classical tradition as the *genius*

*loci* of Southern architecture” (6). He suggests that Faulkner's “sensitivity” to architecture is a “natural” part of his “symbolism” (6). Moreover, Hagood positions “Faulkner's relationship with and deception of space by reconsidering myth and place in his cosmos as fictional elements that...serve imperial impulse” and the “subversive narratives of empire” (3). Hagood articulately clarifies the theoretical framework of the “space and place” approach as follows: “space signals an abstraction, while place denotes a particularity” (201). This assertion is an important gear in the clockwork of the thesis. Most recently, proponents of the New Southern studies such as Micheal Kreyling, Martyn Bone and Thadious Davis have been also thinking about space through a post-colonial lens: how literature, often Faulkner's, defines geo-political boundaries southern spaces as well as the social practices and prejudices associated with those boundaries. My approach to space takes a bit from all of them but is focused on the use seemingly empty spaces and liminal constructions in both Pirandello and Faulkner's work. This thesis builds upon Hagood's notion of “space as abstraction” but centrally attuned to the spatializing of emptiness in narrative through plot holes and elliptical language. In this study, literary positive-negative space denotes “hole-ness” and the interpretive.

Furthermore, my framework rests upon Gail L. Mortimor's *Faulkner's Rhetoric of Loss* and John T. Matthew's *The Play of Faulkner's Language*. Both studies discuss and theorize absence and negativity comprehensively. The thesis does the work of bringing spatial terms that Mortimor and Matthews use in passing, to center stage. In addition, Marylin R. Chandler's “The Space-Makers: Passive Power in Faulkner's Fiction” and Carolyn Wynne's “Aspects of Space: John Marin and William Faulkner” use a “time and space” approach and at times discusses the role of absence and silence, yet consider both

as “negative” space. Thus far, the application of the term “positive-negative space” to Faulkner's work is uniquely manifest in this thesis.<sup>iii</sup> As I have been outlining throughout, *The Sound and the Fury's* encapsulation of “missing” climactic moments such as Quentin's suicide produces the impression of positive-negative space. To corroborate the positive-negative space thesis and to suggest that issues of positive-negative space have been of import to Faulkner scholars all along, I highlight the connection that Donald Kartiganer establishes between the Faulknerian prose style in *Sound and the Fury* and Mallarmé's Symbolist poetics. Again, Mallarmé is Kern's reference point with regard to a poetics of positive-negative space.

Similarly, *Sanctuary's* infamous implicit “corncob” rape is an instance where a climactic moment is affirmatively negated. This narrative fissure is a positive-negative space that becomes active and allows the reader to develop their own impression of the rape through their sensory perceptions as they correlate with the symbol of the bloody corn cob. In “The Elliptical Nature of Sanctuary,” Matthews uses a deconstructionist and reader response approach to explain the participatory function of the negated rape scene. However, the conception of “positive-negative space” considers the structuring of a narrative beyond its linkages to writing; it connects the structuring of plot holes in a story to a disturbed and shifting perception of experience *in* space physically occurring throughout the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Through a formalist approach, *Sanctuary's* syntax alone is an exhibition of positive-negative space. The impression of positive-negative space is crystallized through the consistent use of dash and ellipsis in the textual fabric of the novel's dialogue. Without having to count the hundreds of dashes and ellipses that obscure the speaking in

*Sanctuary*, it is safe to say that they are a dominant feature. If the reader were to consider the composition of a sentence a conglomerate of materials comparable to a sculpture, then the affirmative negation of those materials through extended ellipsis or dash resembles the function of positive-negative space in those sculptures like *Woman Combing Her Hair*. This resemblance is based on the erasure of those words that were traditionally crucial in the conveyance of an author's meaning and the prevalence of cracks and fissures in the language which a reader leaps. These peculiarities of syntax and punctuation within *Sanctuary* have not yet been addressed with regard to positive-negative space.

Returning to the discussion of silence, while both novels allow for certain important narrative actions (rape, suicide) to exist through suggestion and implication, Faulkner explicitly and thematically depicts immaterial concepts such as shadow and silence as counterpoint.<sup>iv</sup> Kern explains that literature which creates the impression of positive-negative space transforms the subject; it “lose[s] its former prominence” (172). “Mallarmé diminished” writes Kern, “[the subject's] authority by leaving it out of the poems and creating verbal compositions out of its shadows and effects” (172). While Faulkner leaves much unsaid, the explicit narration in both novels focuses largely on a paradoxical materializing of the immaterial. For example, in *Sanctuary*, Faulkner describes a trembling Temple, trapped and awaiting Popeye: “Beneath the bed the dogs made no sound. Temple moved slightly; the dry complaint of mattress and springs died into the terrific silence in which they crouched” (Sanct. 286). Upon first reading, one is inclined to think that the “silence in which they crouched” is a description of Temple and the dogs simply sitting quietly. However, if one reads the sentence more concretely, both

the dogs and Temple occupy the space of silence, or a seemingly empty space. Like a plenum of matter, silence becomes spatialized and tangible and thus becomes something that can be occupied—something that can be crouched in.

The introduction and chapters of the thesis are dedicated to the strategic usage of positive-negative space as manifested in novel architectonics. However, the conclusion is be dedicated to explaining how positive-negative space can also be fruitful in describing early 20<sup>th</sup> century drama's emphasis on off-stage antics, as opposed to the traditional exposition of dialogue on a seeming fixed stage space. Correspondingly, if we consider the stage a positive space and “off-stage” a negative space, then reliance on off-stage events to communicate meanings central to the narrative incites a transvaluation of traditional spaces. The classic Italian Modernist drama, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello presents a story that takes place on a fragmented stage and relies on audience participation and response. The drama unfolds as a family of characters walks upon the stage and propose that their story should be the plot of the drama currently being read. Through suggestion, the audience comes to the realization that the tragedy of the family's story is spurred by the possible incest that takes place between the father and daughter. However, it is unclear whether an audience member should trust the family's story because the supposed incest takes place off-stage. Whether the audience members sympathize with the drama's subject, the father, becomes inextricably linked to whether incest takes place or not. The impression of positive-negative space lies in the inability to explicitly know, because the suggested action transgresses the fixity of the stage space, forcing its positivity to “lose its former prominence” (Kern 172). Pirandello's structure functions and makes meaning through

negation. “Mallarmé held that the most important part of the poem,” writes Kern, “may be what the poet has left out” (173). Faulkner's novels and Pirandello's drama all operate with degrees of difference according to this principle. Through the formal lens of positive-negative space, this thesis exposes the middle ground between two modernists who were both for some time considered Regionalist writers. Perhaps, this formal approach can delineate another avenue of exploration in the New Southern studies. These authors' shared enthusiasm for formal affirmative negation reveals a connection that transcends linguistic difference (the difference between American English and Italian).

In this conclusive coda, I consider a multitude of philosophical, psycho-analytic, and scientific developments that are connected to the appearance of positive-negative space in all art. All art, no matter the medium, has always already had an implicit polarity but artists and writers, prominently in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, begin to manipulate and encapsulate “holes” or “emptiness” or “voids” structurally. This notion recalls Freud's subconscious in psychology as well as the nihilistic fetishization of “the nothing” in perception. Scholars since J.H. Miller have interpreted modernism as the intellectual saturation of Nietzschean philosophy. Following J.H. Miller's *Poets of Reality* thesis, Kern suggests that Nietzsche is the link between positive-negative space and the “death of God [that] has forced man to feel 'the breath of empty space...blurring the distinction between the sacred space of the temple and the profane space outside” (Kern 179). Undoubtedly, *Sanctuary*, *Sound and the Fury*, and *Six Characters* all show concern for the profanation of sacred spaces thematically, and their emphasis on positive-negative space as a structural tool in their conceptual framework underscores this concern.



However, my study also makes connections between psychoanalysis and holes, an area of theory that Kern leaves totally and purposefully unaddressed. Kern “became dissatisfied with the interpretive confines of psychoanalytic concepts and terminology that were formulated within the context of an overriding medical model” (x). According to Kern, psychoanalysis does not “constitute a broad enough range of human experience to provide a suitable classificatory scheme for the rich possibilities of the entire cultural record” (x). Yet in my view, psychoanalytic concepts are crucial for understanding positive-negative and its constituents. In fact, Jean Paul Sartre suggests that “a good part of our life is passed in plugging up holes, in filling empty places, in realizing and symbolically establishing a plenitude” (“The Hole” 85). Developing a theory of ontology, Sartre declares that holes provoke “one of the most fundamental tendencies of human reality—the tendency to fill” (85). Paralleling concepts from reader-response criticism, Sartre theorizes holes and the filling of holes, and suggests that such work is definitive to the experience of space and what he calls the “psycho-analytic existentialism.”

Sartre defines a psychoanalytic theory of the hole that is too relevant to be overlooked, especially with his documented interest in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Sartre muses,

One can see at once, however, that the hole is originally presented as a nothingness 'to be filled' with my own flesh; the child can not restrain himself from putting his finger or his whole arm into the hole. It presents itself to me as the empty image of myself. I have only to crawl into it in order to make myself exist in the world which awaits me. The ideal of the hole is then an excavation which can be carefully moulded about my flesh

in such a manner that by squeezing myself into it and fitting myself tightly inside it, I shall contribute to making of fullness of being exist in the world. Thus, to plug up a hole means originally to make a sacrifice of my body in order that the plentitude of being may exist. ("The Hole" 84)

Although this passage has a masculinist, phallogo-centric slant, it perhaps exposes a particular ontological viewpoint that positions the hole as sort of portal between existence and non-existence; again, holes are characterized as liminal thresholds and are suggestive of positive-negative space. Sartre's characterization of the "hole" from within the womb, a pre-symbolic, prenatal vantage point, is similar to that of Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*; yet, Quentin's desire is to unplug the hole, destroy the plentitude of his being, and finally "return to the caves and grottoes of the sea." Perhaps Sartre's conception of holes is implied when he describes as what he calls "innumerable silent masses" ("Time in the Works of Faulkner" 90) surrounding Quentin's suicide in the *Sound and the Fury*.

Although psycho-analytic readings of positive-negative space are figured into my argument, Kern's scientific and phenomenological perspective also leads to similar conclusions. As thinkers of the period became suspicious of the traditional morality and its effects on perception, many turned to the physical sciences to explain experience.

Kern explains,

From the time of Democritus, scientists had believed that the stuff of the world was composed of solid bits of matter. In 1897, J.J. Thompson announced his discovery of some even more basic "corpuscles" out of which the elements were built, and developed a model of the atom with these corpuscles (eventually called electrons) orbiting around the nucleus.

The Thompson atom was...largely empty space...it wiped out the distinction between the plenum of matter and the void of space. (153)

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century spatial experience becomes mediated by new discoveries in sub-atomic chemistry. Physics and chemistry begin to replace old hierarchies of knowledge as they simultaneously establish themselves as the new dominant ideology. Prominent philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn explains that “the unexpected discovery is not simply factual in its import...the scientist's world is qualitatively transformed as well as quantitatively enriched by fundamental novelties of either fact or theory” (7). It is not only “the scientist's world” that is transformed by a new scientific discovery. There is no such thing as the “scientist's world;” scientists live and experiment on Earth and base their knowledge on “material truths” in what they perceive as the “real.” Science’s claim to “reality,” is a powerful ideological force. Thus, a radical breakthrough such as Thompson's affects fundamentally our perceptions and experience of space as well as our traditional sense of morality.

The breadth of the concept 'positive-negative space' lies in its ability to communicate a linkage between a novelist's formal sense for what “not to write” or “not to plot” and strategic removal of certain hard, tangible materials in other media such as sculpture and architecture—while suggesting a simultaneous connection with developments in psycho-analysis and early sub-atomic physics that begin to destabilize the experience of fullness or emptiness in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>i</sup>In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian Mchale defines “dominant” as a focusing component of a work of art [that] rules, determines and transforms the remaining components”(6). Art is “dominated by its period's dominant as a document of a particular moment in cultural history...it [also] possesses its own unique dominant” (6). “In short” writes Mchale, “different dominants emerge depending upon which questions we

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ask of the text, and the position from which we interrogate it” (6). In this sense, I propose that the principle of positive-negative space is a dominant of both Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and *The Sound and the Fury*.

<sup>ii</sup> I have been using the idea of a pop art or cartoon Swiss cheese wedge to conceptualize positive-negative space.

<sup>iii</sup>For further reading on the “space and place” approach, consult Hagood's “Labor, Place and Faulkner's Rincon” or Hortense J. Spiller's “Topographical Topics: Faulknerian Space.” For broader cultural readings of space, refer to Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, Joseph Frank's *The Idea of Spatial Form* or Yi Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience*.

<sup>iv</sup>Throughout the body of the thesis, I use the term “negative-positive space” when referring to this counterpoint.

## CHAPTER 1: A FINE DEAD SOUND

For an author who wrote such ornate, overwhelming fiction, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary* show that Faulkner, at least as an author, knew what was better left unsaid. Beyond this colloquial inference, these radically different texts are representative of distinct moments in Faulkner's career. *The Sound and the Fury* has received a insurmountable tidal-wave of critical attention and is lauded by scholars as an exemplary novel of American Modernism. *Sanctuary*, in contrast, was initially dismissed, deemed sensational, referred to as a “potboiler” by its own creator, and has only recently been reconsidered favorably by scholars. Faulkner's critics have thoroughly discussed the confusion and difficulty that readers face when confronted with the cryptic, fragmentary and porous plot of *The Sound and the Fury*. To their own disadvantage, fewer readers have been keen on the formal and narratological complexities of *Sanctuary*.

Despite their differences, both novels foreground the decay of older southern moral values and illustrate the disintegrating “social fabric” of the New South of 1920s United States (Broughton 6). The sexual activities of young women (Caddy Compson, Quentin Compson II, and Temple Drake) are primary issues of moral controversy for Faulkner's male protagonists. Each of the novels features male characters (Quentin Compson, Jason Compson, and Horace Benbow) who feel obligated to uphold virtues of times past but become disillusioned by the chaos of a thoroughly modernized New South

struggling with new scientific, philosophical, economic, and racial ideologies at play in the United States.

These moral, economic, and ideological quandaries have already been commented upon by Faulkner's critics; however, my study begins by linking these two texts formally through the notion of positive-negative space. *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary* can seem anti-climactic because pivotal scenes in their respective plots have been affirmatively excluded from narration. In the former, neither Quentin's suicide nor Caddy's first sexual encounter are explicitly narrated. The same is true of Temple's Drake "infamous" corn-cob rape in the latter. However, through suggestion these "holes" are encapsulated within the text and become Iser calls "gaps" in the reading experience. Why might Faulkner leaves these central moments untold?

John T. Matthews suggests that "we should not be surprised to find Faulkner organizing narrative by breaks and disruptions" and that "whatever thematic repetition, narrative technique, or verbal patterns we may detect from section to section of *The Sound and the Fury*, no one can deny that fragmentation remains its dominant effect" (*Lost Cause* 45, 114). To further this Iserian reading with more specificity, Gail T. Mortimer adds,

Faulkner's elaborate narrative structuring offers him control of the presences, absences, and the symbols that unite them, which reality never allows. His concern with spaces is reflected as he defines and then fills the space of his universe, Yoknapatawpha County, peopling the country with successive generations...as he stylistically fills in gaps by selectively releasing new information to his readers; and as he creates ultimately

spatial concepts, objects and patterns which he fills or defines, but rarely completely so that there is still a sense space which the reader helps imaginatively to complete. (*Significant Absences* 250)

Mortimor's analysis suggests that Faulkner "fills the gap" at least partially, which implies that most of the gaps are actually not in the text. Instead the narrative holds off explanations strategically as part of its cryptic storytelling mode. But the "sense space" that Mortimor refers to is the concept I want to interrogate further. First, Mortimor's notions of "absence and presence" can be understood as different descriptions of "positive and negative" space. Positive-negative space is distinct because the term implies the paradoxical simultaneity, reversibility, or liminality of positive and negative spaces. Second, when "new information" within the narrative universe of the work is released to reader, it is not "Faulkner" releasing it. The various narrators Faulkner hides behind release information to the readers that often contradicts, attacks, or compromises already established motivations and events at play in the narrative. This is how the multiplicity of "positive-negative space" as form intertwines with thematic content of a work.

Through the lens of positive-negative space, the nuanced way a reader fills these gaps—both positive and negative, sacred and profane—can color the moral and sociological commentaries each of the novels puts forth in an ambiguous, compromising, and often paradoxical light. In this way, rather than fragmentation, I consider positive-negative space the focusing component of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*.

To complicate this reading, each of the novels focuses the bulk of explicit narration on the poetics of suggestion (à la Mallarmé or Joyce) or abstractions of creative

silence and shadow. Donald Kartiganer suggests that Faulkner was “particularly impressed with Symon's discussion of Mallarmé, which emphasized his commitment to the suggestiveness of allusion rather than to the detailed, realistic account of scene or situation” (4). Much of what the reader understands about plot of *The Sound and the Fury* is deduced by certain hints that characters utter retrospectively. Through these utterances and suggestions, plotoles are encapsulated—Faulkner also problematizes these matters by creating narrators whose points of view are often markedly biased and unreliable. Thus, how the reader deduces meaning becomes based on which narrator/s s/he does or does not trust, essentially with whom they sympathize. Following reader response theory, a reader's approach to filling the plothole becomes multivalent and mediates how the broader social implications of the entire text are perceived. Faulkner too is reading and writing from a liminal place in history: a transitional period between the Christian, agrarian Old South and the impoverished and morally ambiguous “new southern” space.

As for the literary abstractions of silence and shadow, it seems that Faulkner pits these positive-negative spaces or holes against poetic descriptions of silence and shadow as a sort of musical counterpoint that defamiliarizes the reader's conception of “being in” or “occupying” space. He accomplishes this by allowing readers to occupy silence and shadow spatially through often paradoxical or absurd verbal abstractions. Faulkner focuses shadows as the subjects of entire passages. “I got off and stood in my shadow” Quentin thinks (105). Quentin constantly muses on his desire to supplant the space of his shadow and become his own shade. At the site of his final moments, Quentin thinks, “my shadow leaning flat upon the water, at least fifty feet it was, so easily had I tricked it that it would not quit me. At least fifty feet it was, and if I only had something to blot it into



the water, holding it until it was drowned” (90). Quentin wants to blot out his existence on the surface of the water like a “leaf in water...[that] after a while...will be gone...delicate fibers waving slow as the motion of sleep” (116; ellipsis added). Shadow becomes spatialized and tangible in Faulkner's language—voids that can be occupied. In *Sanctuary*, the Old Frenchman's place and its surrounding are covered by the “bulky shadow[s] of felled trees” (193). “The azure shadow of the cedars” broaches the porch at Old Frenchman's place as if it were the tide breaking onto the shoreline.

Returning to positive-negative space, Mortimor similarly explains that “absences are not simply signifiers of nonexistence for Faulkner; they are presences in their own right. As a consequence, they are manageable and can even be negated or superseded by other, more negative things” (*Significant Absences* 243). Both novels often organize these absences or “positive-negative spaces” in juxtaposition to creative silences and shadows which are not just symbolic of death but “other more negative things” such as the looming moral decay of an entire value system or the passing of a “good” and older order of things. These abstractions lead to a revelation about “the South's moral and spiritual dreams and the actuality of its history” (Matthews 17). Acting as a phantasm of white southern aristocracy, Quentin's morals and virtues exist in the shadows of his reality.

This chapter thus understands positive-negative space as form by considering the multiplicity of modes through which both Faulkner's meaning-making agents (narrators or even the dust jacket) condition how readers see the plot holes. I will consider how these plot holes might be read by interrogating the perspectives on morality at play with specific regard for chastity and suicide. While Faulkner leaves many scenes unwritten in both novels, it seems that the centrality of Quentin's suicide, Caddy's deflowering, and

Temple's rape constitutes them as positive-negative spaces. Other moments like Benjy's castration, the death of Damuddy, and the death of Jason Compson III, are also left untold as either symptoms of or pillars to Quentin's suicide and Caddy's deflowering. Those two events that arise in silence are what the entire tragedy of *The Sound and the Fury* rest upon.

I have organized the following chapters into what I will call “fillings” of positive-negative space. The first filling will consider how one might read Quentin's suicide and its grand absence from the narrative. Quentin's suicide is the narrative's anti-climax and metaphorically the dominant hole in the text's structure. I will follow with a reading of the reversible, enigmatic gender politics and perspectives that focus on Caddy's promiscuity. All sexual behavior seems to exist in the silence of the narrative. This chapter concludes with some observations of the *The Sound and the Fury's* original dust jacket. Through a book studies and paratextual approach, the cover artwork provides a visual node where literary and graphic positive-negative spaces converge.

Analogously to Quentin's suicide, Temple Drake's rape is *Sanctuary's* anti-climax and metaphorically the dominant hole in the novel's structure. Interrogating the motivations and perspectives at play that mediate a reader's sense of the rape in discourse reveals, similarly to *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner's seemingly conflicted view of woman's propriety and related issues of gender politics. In *Sanctuary*, positive-negative space and place intertwine in the courthouse at Jefferson. Faulkner seems skeptical of the American legal system and idealized notions of justice as well. The novel exposes the “profaning” a once sacred space through Temple's perjury in the courthouse. Her perjury tarnishes Faulkner's depiction of the “New Belle” and can make him seem rather

conservative in terms of women's liberation. *Sanctuary*'s narrative implies that the liberation of women is disturbing an "older order of things," justice and the law. Perhaps, Faulkner is not affirming this view, but instead creating a rhetorical scenario that allows for debate about gender politics among readers.

Returning to the book studies/paratextual approach, the illustration of *Sanctuary*'s original dust jacket depicts a white space encapsulated by blue and black borders. The white space, perhaps, signifies an ever shrinking sacred space, constantly parceled, profaned, and encroached upon by more negative elements. Through the lens of positive-negative space, the cover art's minimalism suggests that everything which had long been considered sacred is becoming profane, and that everything which had been considered profane is instead, paradoxically sacred.

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How does a reader come to understand that Quentin Compson's suicide happened? It arises in silence: in the absence of sound but in the presence of fury. Quentin's suicide is a "fine dead sound" (174). Its explicit descriptions are muted to a reader's utterance. The impression of positive-negative space is inspired formally by the climactic narrative omission or "anti-climax:" the missing suicide scene. Adding to this, Quentin's entire chapter is in the past and a temporal "hole" in the time-line of events. If a reader treats the positive-negative plot hole as a formal "focusing component," then arise various analogous thematic structures that play with the semiotic forces of positive-negativity: Quentin's retreat to the "caves and grottoes;" the moral enigma of the Old South, sacred and also paradoxically profane; Caddy's virginity, purity in a "negative state," promiscuity in silence; and the defamiliarizing verbal play of shadow, are thematic

discourses within the intersections of the positive and the negative, or as Faulkner would have imagined it, “between darkness and light.”

A comprehensive study of positive-negative space might first be framed in a formal analysis of the entire narrative chronology of a work, for my purposes, observing the positioning of the June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1910 chapter in context to the three other chapters of the *Sound and the Fury*. The chapter titles suggest for readers to situate the novel's “present” as the narrative that takes place from April 6<sup>th</sup> 1928 to April 8<sup>th</sup> 1928, then the June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1910 chapter or “Quentin's section” is its “past” and metaphorically, a hole in the chronology. Although completely removed from the present chronology of the novel, Quentin's section contains the pivotal moment (the suicide) which the rest of the narrative revolves around or reacts to. This formal reading is complicated by some incongruities of time in Benjy's chapter and the fragmentary manner in which the majority the story is told.

Moreover, the complexities of Faulknerian time are hinted through the use of dates as chapter titles. I argue each date indicates the “present” time of each chapter. The novel begins “April 7<sup>th</sup> 1928” with Benjy's stream-of-consciousness narration. Benjy's perspective blurs a reader's sense of time through continuous flashback and reverie, but the chapter's title and indicators such as Luster, establish April 7<sup>th</sup> 1928 as the present time. As the second chapter begins, a reader is thrust into Quentin's perspective and “June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1910.” Similarly to Benjy's, Quentin's narrative is cryptic and challenges constructs of time through flashbacks and stream-of-consciousness narration. Upon first reading, the chapter's title is the only hint that June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1910 is the present time. Throughout

secondary readings, a reader can then piece together the various hints and retrospectives Jason provides in the following chapter.

As a reader reaches the third chapter, “April 6<sup>th</sup> 1928,” Jason's narrative settles into a linear mode of storytelling and reveals much to the reader about Quentin's suicide. Jason provides the reader another perspective from which to view the “hole.” The Jason section ends without extensive narrative bending or negation. A reader enters the fourth chapter “April 8<sup>th</sup> 1928,” “fast forwarding” over the events of April 7<sup>th</sup> that had already been alluded to in Benjy's chapter. The important point is that Quentin's chapter creates a positive-negative time-space-text unit. Quentin's chapter is in the “past” or “negative” and is encapsulated between Benjy and Jason's “positive” chapters where the presence of the “present time” is established. Yet, Quentin's section contains the thrust of the novel—its central conflict and its tragedy. The shift from a cryptic narrative mode to an apocalyptic narrative mode culminates with Quentin's suicide: the work's anti-climax is implied by a fiery tinnitus, the sound of fury.

Beyond this formal reading of the novel's chronology, Quentin's motivations toward suicide help to explain how positive-negative space as a formal feature underscores certain thematic structures in the work. It is a well-established position that Caddy's promiscuity and deflowering are possibly motivating Quentin's suicide. Matthews explains that “the indulged tyranny of his obsession with the past, his notorious clock phobia, his preoccupation with virginity and imaginary incest, and his eventual suicide may all, of course, be read as gambits to deny Caddy's loss and to re-appropriate her presence” (*Play of Language* 78). Quentin is destroyed by his own deeply patriarchal world view. Quentin's suicide and his purported incestuous desires serve as attempts to

save Caddy from her “disgrace.” Quentin wants to overshadow what he perceives to be his sister's sins: “It was to isolate her out the of the loud world so that it would have to flee us from necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it never been,” he tells his father (177). Quentin's lies and eventual suicide are failed attempts at getting Caddy “off the hook” and thus, metaphorically returning her to some imaginary a “pre-lapsarian” space. He, quite literally, loves his sister to death (his own). The question is: “why does Caddy need saving?”

Mortimor furthers this reading by pointing out that “Quentin's death...his trip through the secret waters to 'the caverns and the grottoes of the sea' is reminiscent of [a]...womb-like place...a state of uncreation represented when he and Caddy were in the dungeon of their mother” (*Rhetoric of Loss* 68). Reading the suicide as Quentin's retreat into this womb-like place is thus underscored by the implicit nature of its telling. While Quentin's believes he and Caddy will return to an un-profaned place, out of space and time, the narrative itself, analogously recedes into a plot hole. Faulkner is suggestive but negates readers from totally experiencing the suicide in narrative. He forces readers to retreat into the caverns of their own psyche, providing only hits such as “the last note sounded” (178) or “And then I'll not be” (174). The presence of Faulkner's language recedes and allows access to “primitive regions of the imagination that are present in everyone” (*Rhetoric of Loss* 2). The inherent connection to positive-negative space is Quentin's suggestion of retreat to “the caverns and grottoes.” When creating holes in his sculptures, “Henry Moore thought of caves, with their attendant connotations of shelter, darkness, hibernation, hideouts and ancient dwellings” (*Holey Structures* 3). Quentin's

suicide is encapsulated within a positive-negative space that acts as a cavernous opening for the narrative and evokes the primordial, creation, and thus, the interpretive.

Similarly, Kartiganer uses a post-structuralist rhetoric to interpret the use of suggestion in written literature and focuses on the connection between Mallarmé's and Faulkner's respective styles. Kartiganer's discussion helps to define how I use the term "interpretive." He explains that "by means of suggestion rather than precise naming, literature recovers for language a thickness of being that it had sacrificed to its representational function" (6). Similarly to Mallarmé's poetry, Kartiganer suggests that through a poetics of suggestion and implication, Faulkner's writings open the possibility for a dynamic interpretation. "Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva continue to regard the Symbolists—especially Mallarmé—as responsible for...a revolution in poetic language...that allows [language] to resist its role as a transparent vehicle of external meaning" writes Kartiganer (4). The post-structuralists are comrades in a philosophical revolution that attacks the singularity of meaning, in order to reveal its "pluralization" (7). According to Kartiganer, Foucault and Kristeva position the French Symbolist poets as their literary counter-parts. He extends their discussion by considering Faulkner as analogously influential in this shift and a removed American Symbolist.<sup>v</sup>

For Foucault, this revolution is framed through the lens of literary history: "the reappearance of the living being of language,' an unexpected reversal of the principle of representation that dominates ideas of language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (qtd. in Kartiganer 6). As for Kristeva, "the Symbolist revolution focuses on Mallarmé's use of language so as to reveal more fully what she calls its semiotic force. The semiotic, an energy linked to the Freudian primary process and which exists prior to

formation of the subject” (qtd. in Kartiganer 6). Kristeva's description of a semiotic force “that exists prior to the formation of a subject” correlates with Moore's spatial sense of “ancient dwelling” evoked when piercing a sculpture. In a character such as Quentin, this energy is evoked when a reader considers a correspondence between the negated suicide scene and his “primary processes:” cultural codes that emanate from his perception and sense of the Old South. *The Sound and the Fury's* playful mimicry of positive-negative space, its absence-conscious narrative mode, and absent suicide scene all serve as Faulkner's contributions to this revolution in language. Faulkner's experiments rely on notions of dynamic interpretation and reader-response intrinsically—rejecting traditional, Aristotelian principles of representation in language.

Furthermore, what Kristeva calls “semiotic force” is transmuted through Faulkner's enigmatic interrogations of traditional morality as they play out in Quentin's existential crisis. Faulkner continuously reveals that which is perceived “sacred to be also paradoxically profane.” The primordial and seemingly un-profane space that Quentin wants to retreat to is defined by his illusions of a “moral” Old South. Faulkner and his characters share an ancestral past: a time-space unit defined by the myths of honorable men like Quentin's grandfather, a brigadier general in the Confederate Army, or Colonel John Sartoris, both men who, he imagines, did courageous deeds in the name of southern value with a chivalric sense of duty. Quentin wants to uphold his “blundering sense of noblesse oblige by getting [himself] born below the Mason and Dixon” (91). However, Quentin's grand gesture of suicide fails; it fixes or alters nothing, considering that the “Caddy narrative,” one centered on his sister's promiscuity and social disgrace, repeats itself in Jason and the narrative of Quentin II in 1928.



In aesthetic terms, a reader might interpret the Old South as an implied space that is “positive” because its codes, rituals, and social stigmas are still a dominant cultural presence in the characters' perceptions, motivations, actions, and language, most obviously Quentin's:

It used to be I thought death as a man something like Grandfather a friend of his a kind of private and particular friend...I always thought of them being together somewhere all the time waiting for old Colonel Sartoris to come down and sit with them waiting on a high place beyond cedar trees Colonel Sartoris was on a still higher place looking across at something and they were waiting for him to get done looking at it and come down Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were talking and Grandfather was always right. (176)

Notice the image: old men sitting on a high place “beyond.” This is both Quentin's dream and illusion of southern heaven. His grandfather wears a Confederate uniform in heaven: a symbol of older, southern ideals. Quentin wishes he could understand things like his grandfather did, who was “always right” both in the logical and moral sense. He can still “hear the murmur of their voices;” their ideas and values still reverberate in Quentin's times, but all he hears is an echo.

Mrs. Compson's voice adds to the cultural “presence” of the Old South. Much like the hush-hush prudishness of southern culture, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* keeps sexual acts in silence and “behind closed doors.” A reader only hears the gossip. Quentin remembers an argument between his parents where Mrs. Compson is glorifying Jason and

the “Bascomb” legacy. She is reluctant to say anything about her own daughter's promiscuity. She says, “I can look at her eyes and tell you may think she'd tell you but she doesn't tell things she is secretive you dont know her, I know things she's done that I'd die before I'd have you know” (103). To Mrs. Compson, one of the few remaining southern Belles, Caddy's sexual freedom is the “unspeakable” or “silent” yet always at the center of conversation. Faulkner uses this positive-negative discourse technique as he defines Mrs. Compson's prudish disposition. Mrs. Compson reinforces the idea that no “good” Southern women would “speak” of such lewd behavior. But it is her duty to most certainly imply it. Diane Roberts writes, “The state of ladyhood is a site of contention in southern novels, documenting the struggle between the free play of sexuality and the social discourse demanding containment of the female body” (*Southern Womanhood* 109). “Caroline Compson,” suggests Roberts, “speaks for tradition” (109). Yet, from a reader's removed perspective, Mrs. Compson's language seems sacred through its subtleties and profaned by its implications.

Thus, a reader might also be inclined to interpret the Old South as paradoxically negative space, because in the narrative universe of *The Sound and the Fury*, it exists in temporal absence—in tradition and retrospection through a discourse of implication, and often with disdain. This suggests pastiche too; by 1929, Faulkner is aware of the fraught moral assumptions based in Old South mythology. However, he makes Quentin obsessed with upholding the honor of his genealogy for the reasons of history and tradition, suggesting that such ideals might ultimately lead a man or woman to their denigration. In philosophical terms, Faulkner can seem frightfully aware in a Nietzschean sense, as is represented in the voice of Quentin's father. Mr. Compson's declaration that “the field

only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools” sounds a tone that evokes the bitter disillusionment present in the poetry of Faulkner's contemporaries, such as Owen's “Dulce et Decorum Est” or Eliot's *Waste Land* (76).

Mr. Compson metaphorically opens Quentin's eyes and makes him aware of his own moralist assumptions. Quentin muses on the memory of an argument he has with his father about virginity. His father explains that his hang-up on Caddy's virginity is based in his own inexperience, exclaiming “because you are a virgin: dont you see?” (116). The father suggests that virginity is just a word and not a definitive state of being. We understand that “on the instant when we come to realize that tragedy is second-hand” (116) suggests Mr. Compson. Quentin's father attempts to provide his him with a healthy dose of skepticism, explaining that the “tragedy of deflowering” is second-hand, and thus, should not be devastatingly tragic. Virginity is just a word, its power only constituted in language—specifically aggrandized by and sacrosanct to men in the traditional, patriarchal discourse of morality. Yet, the father can be a bit heavy-handed as he effectively destroys Quentin's vision of southern heaven and suggests that the sum of humanity is “a problem in impure properties carried tediously to an unvarying nil: stalemate of dust and desire” (124). The father's skepticism is nihilistic hard medicine that proves too much to swallow. Quentin wishes to retreat to what he perceived as a moral or “positive” space but his disillusionment suggests the discovery of a “positive-negative” moral space—a space this is perceived as moral but is also paradoxically profane. Recreating the Old South as semi-historical time-space unit both sacred and profane in Quentin's suicidal imagination is the perfect “place trope” for the language's

playful mimicry of positive-negative space that in plastic arts is presented and evoked through physical measures.

Thus far, I have explained how the negated suicide scene creates the impression of positive-negative space formally and have described the tensions between the reader and the implied force of language or the author—where a reader is induced by the characters to participate in a certain way, or sometimes interpret, evoke, and be allowed to fill the gap. However, an analysis of positive-negative space and suicide would not be complete without considering the correlation between Quentin's shadow and his death. “The dissolution of Quentin's world is also suggested in the precariousness of his sense of self, especially evident in his relationship with his own shadow” explains Mortimor (*Rhetoric of Loss* 64). Whereas Kern explains that Mallarmé created positive-negative space in his poetry through the construction not of a subject but instead its “shadows and effects,” my analysis links the two considering shadow not positive-negative space but instead the opposite, “negative-positive space.” Shadow creates the impression of “negative-positive space,” where through explicit verbal abstractions Faulkner can materialize the immaterial in language, reversing its constitutive function.

This creates a musical counterpoint where the implicit and the explicit respond to each other, taking on each other's characteristics. Mortimor adds by explaining that through shadow, “Faulkner creates the effect of blurred experience by using synesthetic devices, either combining sound, smell and sight or time and space or using one to describe the other” (*Rhetoric of Loss* 65). The constitutive function of positive-negative space and its counterpoint “negative-positive space” are driven by a desire to destabilize the reader's experience of primary and secondary space in the phenomenological sense.

Through Quentin's stream-of-consciousness narrative, Faulkner describes many differing experiences of shadow. For example, consider the sentence: Quentin "walked into the shadow" (92). While shadow is generally thought to be experienced through sight, Faulkner's language allows for a reader to understand the sentence as if Quentin was occupying the space of shadow. "I stepped on my shadow" (96) or "I walked upon my shadow, trampling it into the dappled shade of trees" he narrates (120). Quentin's repeated occupation of his shadow space, his "trampling," implies a sort of psychological sado-masochism. This sado-masochism is linked to his suicide and the self inflicted pain he is willing to undergo as an attempt to absolve his sister of her "sins."

As Quentin falls deeper into his psychosis, his desire for violence toward his shadow analogously increases. Quentin's shadow becomes his secondary embodiment in the haze of poetic descriptions, repetition, and stream-of-consciousness narration. "Trampling [his] shadow's bones into the concrete with hard heels" and walking upon its "belly" (96) are growing desires as Quentin approaches suicide. It is as if Quentin watches his shadow strive to become a body as he destroys it forever through violence upon himself. In Faulkner's universe, shadows are not just descriptions of light meant to be seen; they have "bones," and are physical entities that occupy space and can also themselves be occupied. Suggesting that Faulkner's descriptions of shadow create the impression of negative-positive space in language specifically addresses his desire for readers to experience shadow spatially and physically, instead of visually.

Returning to my first question: How is Quentin's suicide revealed? As previously discussed, Quentin reveals some of his motivations and seems resigned to death throughout his stream-of-consciousness narrative. The shadowy descriptions are also

suggestive of signals his death. Most revealing, a reader is given Jason Compson's apocalyptic perspective. Jason Compson is what I will refer to as Faulkner's "encapsulating agent" because his narration which takes place in 1928 (ten years after the incident) provides the novel's clearest evidence of Quentin's suicide and descriptions of its happening. Overall, Faulkner retains his Mallarméian poetics of suggestion, considering Jason only mentions Quentin's suicide once explicitly in the narrative; and even then, the line between the implicit and the explicit is blurred. Jason describes his siblings: "one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself" (233). A reader's suspicions are confirmed and the plot hole becomes encapsulated and the suicide inextricable from the text—although, Jason never explicitly says "Quentin drowned himself."

Yet Jason makes a mockery of his brother's death. He suggests that "at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim" (196). Jason can seem humorous and at the source of that humor is Faulkner's dark irony. He also suggests that the family would "all been a dam sight better off if he'd [Quentin] sold that sideboard and bought himself a one-armed strait jacket with part of the money" (197). To Jason, all of Quentin's deep "Faulknerian" philosophical inquiries and his existential crisis are the rantings and actions of a raging lunatic. The irony is that Faulkner is the puppet master and controls both Quentin and Jason. Jason gives the reader another perspective to view the positive-negative space or "hole" from, and, quite frankly, he sees right through it.

But most importantly, Caddy's grand exclusion from narration is the novel's most assertive evocation of positive-negative space. Rather than the "hole," Kristeva's "abject"

is an interpretive paradigm useful for thinking about this assertion of positive-negative space. In *Powers of Horror*, she explains that “what is *abject*,...the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). Caddy is given no voice; her dialogue is mouth-pieced by her brothers: Benjy, Quentin, and Jason. Thus, Caddy's actions cannot be rectified as part of the novel's plot. Some critics suggest that the “muddy underpants” symbolize Caddy’s sexuality or “promiscuity;” nonetheless, for that to be so, a reader must “read” deeply into symbolism, and thus, fill some interpretive gap. Instead, unlike Quentin's suicide, Caddy's first sexual encounter is not a necessarily a plothole in the narrative of *Sound and the Fury*, for it is totally outside the novel's narrative happenings. Instead, Caddy is an abject embodiment of positive-negative space, central to the desires and imaginations of all three of her brothers but never “there” as a narrator or subject. Caddy is solely the object of her brothers' projections and moral judgments but not a novelistic “subject” in her own rite. Again, she is abject: both central and excluded, both positive and negative. The connections between the abject and positive-negative space are the terms' shared emphases on centrality and exclusion. According to Kristeva, the abject “lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (2). From formalist perspective, the abject, like positive-negative space, does not fit neatly into the categories of either internal/external or central/peripheral. Not giving Caddy a unique narrative voice creates the effect of formal abjection and positive-negative space, by directing the reader's attention toward absence “where meaning collapses.” From a feminist perspective, Caddy, like Temple Drake, is also abject because she does not conform to the value

system of white bourgeois womanhood. For this reason, Caddy undergoes a sort of banishment. She is excommunicated from the Compson family and separated from her daughter, Quentin II. In this way, perhaps, Caddy's abjection—her silencing—is a sound in the howling tinnitus of fury.

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American sculptor, Henry Moore declared 1932 the “Year of the Hole.” “The first hole made through a piece of stone,” writes Moore “is a revelation” (qtd. in Eckett 1). Jane Eckett explains that “from the late nineteenth century onwards, holes, openings, slits and punctures were increasingly introduced to sculptural forms, with Rodin, Bourdelle, Matisse and Rosso all rejecting the ideal of the smooth and wholesome neoclassical figure, instead favoring pitted and pock-marked surfaces that bore witness to the processes of wax modeling and bronze casting” (1). Eckett suggest that these “aberrations” lead to more “radical reconstructions” in the twenties and thirties, mentioning artists such as Picasso and of course, Archipenko (1). “Holes represent,” writes Eckett, “the dispersal of subatomic particles into airy circulation, the effective destruction of form” (1). Although, Eckett describes holes as “negative space” (1) what she perceives is positive-negative space. Her term, “effective destruction” is parallel to Kern’s notion of “affirmative negation” (157). Kern appropriates the phrase “affirmative negation” from architect Frank Lloyd Wright who championed the constitutive presence of empty space in his designs of Unity Temple in 1906 (157) and the Guggenheim Museum later in the forties. Claude Debussy’s rests and pauses tie into this early twentieth century fascination with holes as they are gaps in the temporal continuum of music.<sup>vi</sup> “Just as Mallarmé was inspired by music, so Claude Debussy was inspired by



Mallarmé's poetry," suggests Kern. Debussy "intended pauses or the suggestion of them to be as essential to overall musical effect as the blank spaces were in the poem" (*Culture of Time and Space* 175). Both Kern and Eckett show that a rising fascination with holes or positive-negative space is an international current in the multicultural milieu of transatlantic modernism.

What does all this have to do with Faulkner? In a Contemporary American Fiction class, Frederick Gwynn turned to Faulkner and said, "Speaking of symbolism, on the dust jacket of first edition of *The Sound and the Fury* two figures seem to be wrestling: a black one is pinning down a whiter one. Do you recall who the artist was and whether anything particular was intended?" Faulkner replied, "No I don't. I don't know who did that. Of course the—the—the symbolism was simply the powers of—of darkness and of light wrestling, struggling. I don't know whose idea that jacket was or who did it" (*Faulkner at Virginia*). Whether Faulkner knew it or not, the cover art's symbolism is complex for various reasons.

It is my claim that Faulkner's writing is intertwined with this vogue fascination for positive-negative space. Faulkner's novels strive toward Pater's notion of "anders-streben" where separate arts through "partial alienation...lend each other new forces." Following this further, Gerard Genette's "Publisher's Peritext" is useful in explaining how the dust jacket of *The Sound and the Fury* positions the text within a broader context with visual artists also fascinated with holes. Genette explains that "the dust jacket functions as an epigraph...both fleeting and monumental" (29). *The Sound and the Fury*'s original dusk jacket, designed by Arthur Hawkins, suggests for readers to consider the novel in the context of abstractions of positive-negative space prevalent in sculpture

of the period. As suggested on [betweenthecovers.com](http://betweenthecovers.com), Hawkins's adapted Kathe Kollwitz's powerful 1910 illustration, *Tod und Frau*, for the dust jacket cover art. With a cursory glance, the jacket shows the illustration of a white sculpture, comparable to that of Archipenko's *Woman Combing Her Hair* grappling with a shadowy figure (See Appendix, Figure 3). It can be suggestive of Quentin's own struggle with existence, or as Faulkner suggests, the struggle between darkness and light. The shadowy figure could also be seen as masculine and in sexual intercourse with the feminine body of the sculpture, "pinning it down" as Gwynn mentioned. In this gendered sense, it is suggestive of Caddy's promiscuity which exists in the cracks and fissures of the narrative, in the positive-negative spaces. Or it may be considered in context to Quentin II, who Jason suspects is having sex with a black man (or at least a man of questionable race) from the music show moving through town. To Jason, this is a repetition and legacy of the vile immoral behavior, spawned in the Compson bloodline by Caddy, and passed down to be reincarnate in Quentin II.

Genette explains that readers should also be suspicious of idiosyncrasies of typeface (32). Looking closely at the only "O" in the title as presented on the dust jacket, I realized that it was larger than the rest of the letters and a different typeface. Reading the "O" visually rather than symbolically, the "O" mimics a "hole" and makes reference to the popularity of holes in early 20th century art culture. The "O" like holes in other forms of art also suggests the interpretive and the participatory. The dust jacket's illustrations, undoubtedly the "O," function as visual epigraphs that suggest to the reader that this is a literature that has supplanted characteristics from sculpture by mimicking and creating the impression of holes, as I argue, through negation and creative absence in

narrative. The dusk jacket's subtle fascination with holes implies Quentin's sexual tension and obsession with Caddy's virginity—defined and glorified by its absence and as Mortimor explains “irretrievable once it has been lost” (*Significant Absences* 246)

Perhaps, the dust jacket of what Faulkner called his “heart's darling” (*Lost Cause* 20) should be read in a fine art context. Faulkner himself explains its linkages to “Art” with a capital A. In an introduction which was meant for the 1933 reissue, Faulkner writes, “When I finished *The Sound and the Fury* I discovered that there is actually something to which the shabby term Art not only can, but must be applied” (qtd. in *Lost Cause* 20). Whether Faulkner was aware of the term “positive-negative space” or not is of secondary importance. Faulkner was most certainly aware that the aesthetic principle of positive-negative space as it was espoused and exemplified in holey structures throughout the arts of the period. Both the narrative and the dust jacket illustration imply that this principle molded the composition of the work that Faulkner was most proud to have created. Through this lens, the cover art begs the reader to consider “creating the impression of positive-negative space” as the dominant formal effect of *The Sound and the Fury*.

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<sup>v</sup> Perhaps, consult Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* and Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Another discussion node that needs attention would begin with a foregrounding of the connections between Kristeva's “abject,” Foucault's treatment of the repressive hypothesis, and the aesthetics of positive-negative space. The exposition of Caddy's sexual politics seems to fuse all three concepts.

<sup>vi</sup> I will return to the correlation of “rests” in music, and I will also explore the analogous function of ellipsis in language in my discussion of punctuation in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. Both are marked absences that give the performer and the reader certain positive-negative cues.

## CHAPTER II: THE NARROW IMPRINT OF THE MISSING FRAME

Disgust is a common reaction to Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. The novel is “graphic:” violent, abrasive, horrific, morbid, macabre, and at times, outright tacky. Yet passages such as the following, while revolting, reveal Faulkner's perception of space and image as well as an acute attention to holes.

When they raised the corpse the wreath came too, attached to him by a hidden end of wire driven into his cheek. He had worn a cap which, tumbling off, exposed a small blue hole in the center of his forehead. It had been neatly plugged with wax and was painted, but the wax had been jarred out and lost. They couldn't find it, but by fastening the snap in the peak, they could draw the cap down to his eyes. (351)

Visualizing this passage as a painting, a reader is likely to imagine the “blue” bullet-hole in Red's forehead occupying a positive-negative space, due to its import and centrality. In other words, this passage describes a hole in center of a structure. The bullet-hole is a site where negative space can be presented as positive space. The thematic absurdity of the entire passage, however, speaks to Faulkner's often-termed “difficult to understand” style and credo. Faulkner's writings provoke the mental sensation of a continuous plugging of holes—made all the more horrifying by the experience of those plugs being “jarred out” through violence. A reader of Faulkner's fiction often encounters troublesome plotholes as well as ellipses in discourse. These holes, or what Iser might call “blanks and gaps” in

the reading experience, can be filled. But like the wax in the bullet-hole, the filling can also be nestled out and lost. Attempting in vain to scan for the original “wax plug” or meaning, a reader gives up, “draws the cap down to his eyes,” and inevitably affirms the presence of absence.

Soon after its publication, Faulkner openly denounced *Sanctuary*, declaring it was “a potboiler and written just for money.” To this day, many critics interpret his statement in a literal and straightforward fashion, but I believe it was facetious and rabble-rousing humor. Actually, *Sanctuary* showcases Faulkner's diversity of style—after formally “sophisticated” and epistemologically unsettling novels such as *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Sanctuary* is an anomalous production of horrifying, fist-clenching, action-packed pulp. And unlike these other early novels where structures of time and space are always pressured and under question, *Sanctuary's* story progresses with respect to traditional operations of narrative time. Although its story might be considered temporally linear, close readings of the *Sanctuary's* discourse reveal holes and elliptical language games that generate the impression of positive-negative space in literature.

This chapter is organized into different literary instantiations or “fillings” of positive-negative space in *Sanctuary*. Similarly to *The Sound and the Fury*, these instantiations are embedded within formal structures and thematic devices. For example, many critics such as Matthews and Olga Vickory consider Temple Drake's rape a “pivotal” occurrence in the novel's plot. However, the rape is also a “textual hole” in discourse and remains un-narrated. Furthermore, I have highlighted particular passages to discuss the use of elliptical structures of punctuation that trouble the absence/presence

binary. These markings function as Iserian blanks, gaps, and interruptions that a reader attempts to fill or bridge through context. To elucidate the above mentioned arguments, I am returning to, reconsidering and updating John T. Matthew's "The Elliptical Nature of *Sanctuary*" as well as bringing to the discussion the conception of positive-negative space in literature.

Adding to these claims in the context of identity politics, Popeye's obscure and liminal "race" serves as an analog for positive-negative space. Popeye is a figure between spaces; he is perceived as "black" by certain characters and "white" by others. *Sanctuary's* exposes certain inextricable antebellum social codes still persistent in early twentieth century and the historical pretenses of segregation in the South. A reader is confronted with a racial segregation manifested in aesthetic terms: black/negative space and white/positive space. Popeye occupies a liminal space, both positive and negative, that defies the racial hierarchy as his multivalent identity shifts according to the position from which it is observed.

In the earliest descriptions of Popeye, he is described as multifaceted: a literary embodiment of cubist painting or sculpture. "The cigarette wreathed its faint plume across Popeye's face, one side of his face squinted against the smoke like a mask carved into two simultaneous expressions" describes the narrator of *Sanctuary* (182). Thinking of art, the description of Popeye's face is a likely allusion to positive-negative space. The image evoked is of a face, an ovular construction, divided into two distinct vectors, dare I say it, one "positive," the other "negative." The positive vector is unaffected by smoke, and the other, the negative, "squinted," both existing in the simultaneity of one face: an absurdity, a paradox, an inhuman physiognomy, in fact, "a mask." The narrator alludes to

the multi-perspectivism of cubist art and in turn foreshadows the play of perspectives that intertwine to construct both Popeye's identity and his fate. "Popeye walked, his tight suit and stiff hat all angles, like a modernist lamp" (183) describes the narrator of *Sanctuary*. Pater would describe this sort of operation as "Anders-streben," in which a literary author writes playful structures of narrative to dabble in or transpose facets of other art-forms.

Moreover, Temple's perjury and the novel's deconstruction of absolute truth recapitulate principles of positive-negative space as observed in the material arts. Temple's unquestioned perjury and the subsequent chain of events complicate the boundary between truth and falsity. The connection is that Faulkner's conceptions of truth and positive-negative space similarly complicate a dualist paradigm. In Faulkner's world, neither truth nor space is conceptualized simply in "black and white" terms. From the perspective of main characters such as Temple, Horace Benbow, Ruby Lemar, Lee Goodwin, and some other inhabitants and frequenters of Old Frenchman's place, most of whom were at the scene of the crime and know the Truth, Popeye is Tommy's murderer and thus a presence. However, when Temple is interrogated under oath, she perjures and implicates Goodwin as the culprit. Popeye becomes an absence—not at all suspected for the crimes he has committed. Similarly to positive-negative space as evoked by manipulations of subject and ground in painting, Popeye is paradoxically "there" and "not there." According to the people of Yoknapatawpha County and the American legal system, Goodwin is perceived as the murderer. In the end, whether "actually" true or not, Goodwin is executed for Popeye's crime. Faulkner's commentary on the nature of truth positions "truth" as a positive-negative space: a liminal concept that can occupy one polarity (positive, true, meaningful) and the other (negative, false, meaningless) in

tandem. “Truth as positive-negative space” helps to position the philosophical core of Faulkner's political critique of the American legal system, one that operates under a more rigid, stable conception of “Reality” and absolute truth.

Even *Sanctuary's* broader conceptions of morality and critiques of justice correlate with positive-negative space in the material arts. In his discussion of positive-negative space, Kern posits a connection between the seemingly empty space in certain plastic arts and a perceptual shift in traditional spirituality. He explains that a “sanctuary” is a sacred or “positive” space, and that during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a post-Nietzschean stupor, many began to perceive the space within the sanctuary as also paradoxically profaned. The space within the courthouse is *Sanctuary's* sanctuary: a symbol of “law, justice, and civilization” (270). Its narrative is the continuous defilement of a space that only once might have been; it is the depiction of a sanctuary in ruins. Horace, the idealistic lawyer, confronts the unsavory and is nauseated with Truth—his perspective is purified of illusion yet contaminated with hypocrisy. The novel's socio-political commentary lies in Horace's discovery of a corrupt and inaccurate legal system. Like Quentin who realizes the possible “falseness” of traditional morality, Horace comes to the realization that the United States legal system is not as perfectly ethical and just as he believed it to be, but rather fraught with immeasurable inequalities. *Sanctuary* suggests these inequalities are primarily based on race, class, and religion. However, the socio-political commentary presented in *Sanctuary* is underwritten by lofty philosophical concerns: the holes in truth and knowledge, the chaos of multiple perspectives, and the realization that the comfortable, sacrosanct space within the sanctuary is actually, paradoxically profaned.



Similarly to *The Sound and the Fury*, *Sanctuary* also contains an ongoing narrative about the encroaching grip of an amorphous shadow space. The effect of this “shadow-work,” as I claim in the previous chapter, is the sense of negative-positive space: an inversion of the original term that flip-flops the constitutive function. As Mortimor notes, creative shadow-making can hypnotize readers and inspire literary synesthesia. She explains that “Faulkner creates the effect of blurred experience by using synesthetic devices, either combining sound, smell, and sight or time and space or using one to describe the other” (*Rhetoric of Loss* 65). Arriving at a similar constitutive effect as positive-negative space displayed in the plastic arts, synesthesia brought on by shadow-work “blurs” the experience of primary and secondary spaces through abstraction in literary representation. As I discussed in Chapter 1, shadows in Faulkner's novels work as “*negative-positive spaces*” where seemingly secondary and inconsequential aspects of the “background” are developed explicitly as their own primary and complex narratives. This trope recalls Mallarmé's declaration to write not about the subject but about its shadows and effects. *Sanctuary's* shadow spaces parallel the narrative of Quentin's struggle with shadow and the liminal space between lightness and dark that exemplifies *The Sound and the Fury*; however, *Sanctuary's* shadows less ambiguously encroach upon all of its characters and subjects.

Finally, combining the approaches of book studies and art history/criticism, the cover artwork of the novel's original dust jacket provides paratextual evidence that supports the positive-negative space thesis. The front cover depicts a small white space encapsulated by blue and black borders. The white or “positive” space seems to symbolize a sacred space while the outlying blue and black borders correlate with the

work's various renderings of profanity. However, white also being the absence of color duly suggests the presence of an always already internal "lack-of," emptiness, or void. The original front cover artworks for both *Sanctuary* and *The Sound and the Fury* were designed by the Arthur Hawkins. With degrees of difference, each cover proposes to the reader that positive-negative space is its dominant formal component.

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In the previous chapter, I posit a question about *The Sound and the Fury*: "How does a reader realize that Quentin has committed suicide? I would like to follow this line of thought through *Sanctuary*. How does a reader find out about Temple's rape? Following it further, what conclusions are to be made from the inference that the rape is not narrated? Feminist Faulkner critic, Diane Roberts "baldly" suggests that "*Sanctuary* is about rape" (*Southern Womanhood* 123). A few pages later with poetic repetition, Roberts writes: "*Temple Drake is raped over and over again*. I state this point so baldly to emphasize its centrality" (129). To Roberts, rape is the novel's subject. The theme of rape occupies a primary or "positive" narrative space. However, Roberts does not consider that all the instances of rape are only suggested in discourse, and to some degree, obscured by ellipses. Descriptions of rape do not appear in text, only the narrator's suggestions and allusions to it do: "He gripped the top of the gown" or "His hand clapped over her mouth" (*Sanctuary* 286). Moreover, Matthews explains that "the story of *Sanctuary* revolves around the sensationalistic episode in which Popeye rapes Temple Drake with a corn cob, [and] this central incident itself never fully appears in the novel" ("Elliptical Nature of *Sanctuary*" 246). Matthews' analysis is focused on ellipsis, particularly how "Temple and the narrator all but elide the central action of the story"

(246). For Matthews, those scenes occupy instead a “negative” narrative space. Both critics note the “centrality” of rape in *Sanctuary* but Matthews highlights specifically how the rest of the story “revolves around” or “encapsulates” the infamous corncob scene. Thus, a thematic analysis of rape suggests positive space: the novel's subject and its “centrality.” Yet at the level of both discourse and plot, rape occupies a negative space: “ellipsis” or “blanks and gaps.” Indicating that both readings exist simultaneously, the idea of the positive-negative space reconciles and combines these two perspectives.

To reiterate, Temple's rape or rapes take place in scenes that are only hinted to the reader, not fully disclosed. Similarly to the positive-negative head space in Archipenko's *Woman Combing Her Hair*, the omitted corncob rape scene emerges as the impression of a portentous hole at the center of *Sanctuary*'s narrative structure. The last paragraph of Chapter XVIII contains some of the novel's most direct allusions to Temple's rape. It begins: “When he put his hand on her she began to whimper. 'No, no,' she whispered, ‘he said I cant now he said.....’” (289). Right away, the discourse is interrupted; the main action “elided” as Matthews notes. Faulkner enters into a digression of descriptions, whereby a process of negation the reader infers that Temple is raped. Rather than the central action, Faulkner describes what is “beyond the wall:” “a harsh chocking uproar of obscene cursing” or “the saliva drooling between [Popeye's] fingers” (289). The presence of sexual violence is “as obvious as daylight” (*Southern Womanhood* 123). However, inferring the rape takes place requires a reader to fill the gap and interpret it as a “positive space.” The subtlety of descriptions such as “she saw him crouching beside the bed” or the “twitch and jerk” of Popeye's face (289) opens a positive-negative space and allows for the possibility that Popeye is instead masturbating or possibly sexually taunting

Temple, not necessarily raping her. Popeye's impotence also confuses readers and allows for the possibility of such alternatives. In fact, the District Attorney ignorantly presents to the jury a corn cob that “appeared to dipped in dark brownish paint” (376) as evidence to defile Goodwin's moral character, not Popeye's. The ambiguity of the rape scene and later, Goodwin's indictment, both point to the positive-negative quality of truth and the power of suggestion in mediating what is perceived as “true” or “real.” The rape scene unfurls “between the lines” and occupies a positive-negative space—a strange uncomfortable vector that straddles the line between darkness and light, between empty and full, between the imagined and the real.

In an interesting caveat and extension, Roberts suggests that Temple is actually raped many times before and after corn cob incident (124). These multiple plot holes instead evoke the impression of a completely porous structure, or a pop art image of Swiss cheese, comparable to sculptures such as Henry Moore's *Two Large Forms*, where multiple holes, varying in dimension, reveal each other as a viewer looks from one hole into another (See Appendix, Figure 2). Gazing through holes is the defining aspect of the aesthetic experience—negative space presented as positive space. Faulkner's elusive narratological approach to plot and discourse gives rise to a parallel aesthetic experience. Faulkner's language ripens a reading experience focused on negation: a literary enterprise that affirms negativity in both form and content.

Furthermore, *Sanctuary*'s manipulations of positive-negative space are not limited to the negated and elliptical rape episodes. Matthews suggests that in *Sanctuary* the form of ellipsis is “not eccentric, but paradigmatic” (“Elliptical Nature of *Sanctuary*” 246). The dialogue reveals Matthew's claim consistently. For example, consider Clarence Snopes:

“Because a friend is a friend, and whether he can do anything for me or not.....”  
(*Sanctuary* 300); from a formalist perspective, ellipses often pervade the discourse of the novel's characters. An ellipsis is not a “hole” because its presence is signified by a trail of “periods” or little “dots.” Yet, those “dots” demarcate absence; they set limits to the presence of absence. Throughout the novel, enough of the sentences are generally presented for a reader to fill in the “blanks and gaps.” However, over-extended ellipses can also alter meaning, as in the Snopes example, in which they imbue irony. Regardless of his selfless rhetoric, readers know Clarence Snopes to be a shrewd and conniving opportunist. The over-extended ellipsis emphasizes and suggests an unwritten meaning: the reader's truths within a positive-negative space. In aforementioned example, Clarence Snopes's disloyalty is hinted at through formal negation and marked absence.

Another example, Van's fistfight with Gowan Stevens, acts as microcosm of how the novel's primary action is continuously stifled in discourse:

“I never meant—” Van said.

“Dont say it, then,” Goodwin said.

Gowan said something. That durn feller, Tommy thought. Cant even talk no more.

“Shut up, you,” Goodwin said.

“Think talk bout my—” Gowan said. He moved, swayed against the chair. It fell over.

Gowan blundered into the wall.

“By God, I'll—” Van said.

“—ginia gentleman; I dont give a—” Gowan said.

Goodwin flung him aside with a backhanded blow of his arm, and grasped  
Van. Gowan fell against the wall. (225)

This brawl scene is atypical for Faulkner who did not write many “action-packed” novels, and instead seems like a moment out of Hemingway's *To Have and To Have Not*. The primary subject matter in this scene is physical action and movement: the not-so-friendly horse-play between Gowan, Van and Goodwin. Yet in discourse, the narrator is employed only for minimal description of action. Faulkner focuses rather on dialogue. He frequently mutes his characters with dashes to suggest the presence of physical action. Absence in language becomes the presence of experience language cannot communicate: suicide, rape or violence, for example. Faulkner uses ellipses and dashes in language to reveal those experiences as Moore did when piercing holes into his sculptures. “Every hole, a revelation” would Moore suggest (qtd. in Eckett 1). On one hand, ellipses/dashes and literary positive-negative space have similar functions: ideas, experiences in language that are not on the printed page but indicated to be. Elliptical markings are instantiations of positive-negative space in discourse or at the textual level. On the other hand, while “ellipsis” focuses solely on language, positive-negative space doubly corresponds with the evocation of image: holes in the imagined spatial experience and the kaleidoscopic spectrum of shades in-between darkness and light.

Although the elliptical nature of *Sanctuary* is an instantiation of positive-negative space in literature, other avenues of exploration abound. Rather than thinking of positive-negative space solely as the result of creative hole making, I prefer to refocus my interpretation on liminality or the often absent in-between space. Describing the concept, Kern suggests: “One effect of this transvaluation was a leveling of former distinctions

between what was thought to be a primary and secondary experience of space” (153). Here, positive-negative space takes on a revolutionary function, one that “levels” an established spatial hierarchy: primary/secondary. The appearance of positive-negative space corresponds with social upheavals that work to breakdown sedimentized and essentialist perceptions of race from Faulkner's time. For example, Popeye's liminal identity “levels” comparable race and class hierarchies that permeate the novel's structure. Positive-negative space offers a working model for Faulkner's construction of racial spaces and politics in *Sanctuary*.

Accordingly, Thadious Davis asserts that race is a defining factor in the “configuration of the South as a space” (*Southscapes* 1). The novel's setting is mostly divided between two particular places: Jefferson and Old Frenchman's Place. Jefferson (and its courthouse) is a rendering of primary space: a space of privilege, law and order; a township with “sanctified streets” (305) inhabited by affluent moral crusaders such as Miss Jenny, Narcissa Benbow and the “honorable” Judge Drake; a space that harbors “white” society and the “free Democratico-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha county” (267). In contrast, Old Frenchman's Place implies a secondary space: a shadowy, rural pandemonium for bootleggers, boozers, and criminals. Narcissa morally reprimands her brother, Horace Benbow, for going to Old Frenchman's Place, “mixing himself up with moonshiners and streetwalkers” and “walking out like a nigger” on his wife, Belle (260). When Benbow benevolently offers Goodwin's wife, Ruby Lemar, a few nights room and board at his childhood home in Jefferson, Narcissa “wont have it” (260). Declaring, “These people are not your people” (261), Narcissa reinforces the racial/spatial hierarchy. The construction of these two settings derives from historical

segregation in the South. *Sanctuary's* conflict unfolds within two distinct but abstract social spaces, each with its own set of cultural codes and racialized governing order.

However, Popeye's identity eludes this racial/spatial hierarchy. His liminality shakes the foundation of the established white, Christian sanctuary of privilege. The narrator does not explicitly assert Popeye's race, therefore a reader can only rely on the other characters' descriptions. Both Temple and Benbow describe Popeye as a "black man" (212-255). Gowan Stevens likens Popeye to an "ape" (212) and later, Benbow hatefully calls him a "gorilla" (267). The overtly racist slurs and the direct description undeniably suggest that Popeye is "black." Yet, Temple, Benbow, and Gowan are all occupants of the primary or "positive" space. They are "white" characters whose perceptions of race are bound to their shared cultural habitus. This is made evident when Tommy, the farm hand at Old Frenchman's place, explains that he would "be dog if he [Popeye] aint the skeeriest durn *white* man I ever seen"(192). Tommy, in contrast, occupies the secondary space yet perceives Popeye as a "white" man. In fact, the italicizing of the "white" provides evidence that Faulkner wants his readers to "see" that word. He emphasizes "white" because its revelation "levels" preconceptions of race the novel had thus far developed. This revelation functions as an analogy for the force with which positive-negative space levels traditional preconceptions of space in the graphic arts. Faulkner provides irreconcilable perspectives which create a gap in-between these two social spheres: a positive-negative space.<sup>vii</sup> The discrepancy of Popeye's race also suggests a non-essentialist theory of "race." *Sanctuary's* conception defines race as a social construction that denotes a position within the parameters of space and place.



Occupying a paradoxical position, neither black nor white, neither negative nor positive, Popeye threatens the functionality of the governing structure.

Like Popeye's identity, the novel's critiques of absolute truth and ideal justice both undermine established sanctuaries of privilege. Kern writes, "Few of the developments we have surveyed had a direct relation to major political, social, or religious change. But the affirmation of positive-negative space, [...] had one feature in common with the progress of democracy, the breakdown of aristocratic privilege, and the secularization of life at this time: they all leveled hierarchies" (177). Kern focuses on European culture, referencing writers such as Joseph Conrad and Stephan Mallarmé. Similarly, Faulkner's *Sanctuary* is an artistic development which directly combines formal positive-negative spaces in plot and discourse with social commentaries that attack, satirize, and defame sanctuaries of racial, civil, and religious privilege in the United States. For example, on the day that Temple perjures in court, the bailiff opens the hearing in compliance with the usual protocol: "The honorable Circuit Court of Yoknapatawpha country is now open according to law....." (375). Yet, Faulkner uses ellipsis to imbue the sentence with sarcasm and satire. On one hand, the sentence suggests that the court operates "according to law." The courthouse is a spatial embodiment of the "law," which relies on particular ethical and moral ideals to exist. On the other hand, focusing on the ellipsis, that which is missing from the sentence is the very presence of "law," and the ideals it represents (truth, justice, civilization) from the space within the courthouse. The sanctuary still exists because the society recognizes it as such: the court still retains its agency and authority over the United States. However, the space within the symbolic sanctuary is no

longer sacrosanct. It has been defiled by continued perjury and injustice. All that remains is the empty structure, a positive-negative space.

A similar defamation occurs when the reader examines the moral character of Temple's father, Judge Drake. The reader's assumption is that a judge is an extension of the civil law. The judge represents a human constituent of the court: a person who upholds ethical values that make the courthouse and the legal system at large, meaningful and democratic institutions. Hence, the esteemed title of "honorable" that accompanies any judge's introduction. Faulkner destroys this assumption by showing readers the murderous, violent thug Judge Drake actually is. Temple reveals to Ruby Lemar that Judge Drake brutally murders Frank, an ex-boyfriend, in cold blood with a shotgun because she dated him without his consent (218). This episode evidences the type of unethical fibers that are wound together in the character of one of the United States legal system's esteemed and honorable human constituents. Judge Drake does not respect nor uphold the "law" as he has been called upon to do by United States society, rather he transgresses it without hesitation if he so desires. *Sanctuary* reveals hypocrisy and questions the institution of the Judge, indirectly asking: "Who are they to judge? Do they not have their own human corruptions, prejudices, and biases?"

Temple even remembers her father, "sitting on the veranda, in a linen suit, a palm leaf fan in his hand, watching the negro mow the lawn" (215). Not only is Judge Drake a violent sociopath, he is also a legal authority who believes in the inherent superiority of the southern white male. And the novel suggests that this sort of racial prejudice is not isolated to Judge Drake, but instead deeply ingrained in the Deep South's regions social fabric. Racism creates double standards that corrupt the legal system, as is implied by the

resigned “negro murderer” on death row, who sits at his cell window and sings, “One day mo! Aint no place fer you in heavum! Aint no place fer you in hell! Aint no place fer you in whitefolks' jail! Nigger, whar you gwine to? Whar you gwine to, nigger?” (266). The irony is that while black men are convicted and executed for crimes they may or may not have committed, white men in power such as Judge Drake abuse the law they pretend to uphold with absolutely no consequence. This hypocrisy is further evidenced when the District Attorney, Eustace Graham, meets with Narcissa and explains that Benbow “hasn't a chance in the world” in proving Goodwin innocent, begging her to convince her brother, a “brother-in-arms,” to abandon the case (362). Goodwin does not get a fair trial. The “jury was out in eight minutes” (381) with a guilty verdict and the irony is that the reader knows Goodwin to be innocent. This scenario suggests to the reader the possibility that many if not most court cases involving blacks in the South occur this way. Goodwin's guilt is predetermined by Eustace Graham as well as Jefferson's Baptist minister who “took him for a text” (267) in order to rouse the spirit of his congregation. Public opinion moves Goodwin's trial along, not due process.

The reader is revealed inferences of racial injustice; meanwhile, Horace Benbow has his own existential crisis. He even entertains the ex-patriot myth of escaping to Europe in order to start a more meaningful “old world” life, as Ezra Pound or Hemingway had. Days before the Goodwin's trial, he muses over coffee, “I'll finish this business and then I'll go to Europe. I am sick. I am too old for this. I was born too old for it” (360). Benbow is of what he perceives to be an “older” order, an order meant to defend what was traditionally “right” and just” for humankind. “I cannot stand idly by and see injustice—” exclaims Benbow (261). A reader might fill the gap and infer that he

cannot stand idly by and see injustice “*reign*.” In other words, Benbow makes it his personal responsibility to uphold what has been deemed just by the society. But Faulkner, the composer of the dialogue, interrupts his grand declaration and implicitly suggests that his task is a flawed one: a task that like the sentence itself is bound to be negated. Thus, Miss Jenny's punishing retort, “You wont ever catch up with injustice, Horace” (261). Knowing Popeye to be the murderer, Benbow continuously discovers that injustice can, in fact, reign and that it might have reigned all along. His ego destroyed and perspective disillusioned, Benbow hears the crackling of the pyre that consumes Goodwin's body: “a voice of fury like in a dream, roaring silently out of a peaceful void” (384). *Sanctuary* leaves reader's with a “new sense of emptiness” and “faced with the realization that there [is] no longer a temple to return to” (Kern 178-179). While the novel is pitted with formal holes and liminal constructions, its critiques of traditional morality, absolute truth, and ideal justice force readers to “feel the breath of empty space” (Kern 179).

\* \* \*

Did you ever notice those “splotchy” shadows in *Sanctuary*? Due to its spine-tingling content and baroque narrative linearity, the novel has been traditionally categorized by critics as derivative of Southern Gothic fiction. Almost a Faulknerian hyperbole of itself, so much of this gothic fiction is “in the shadows,” that shadow itself becomes its own constitutive entity. In other words, shadow transgresses its familiar status as an element of the background, asserting itself as both subject and background. The construction of shadow space in *Sanctuary* is an affirmation of “negative-positive space,” where the “subject—the thing—los[es] its former prominence” (Kern 172).<sup>viii</sup> Kern argues, providing examples of painting and poetry from the early twentieth century

that the traditional subject's authority was under attack. He explains, "As Braque toppled [the subject's] pictorial authority by rendering the space around it with substance, Mallarmé diminished its literary authority by creating verbal compositions out of its shadows and effects" (172). The idea of negative-positive space as a principle of drawing, yet applied to literary composition, reveals itself in Faulkner's abstractions of shadow.

Similarly to Mallarmé, Faulkner diminishes the literary authority of his subjects—his characters—by telling the story through their shadows and effects. Abstractions of shadow including imagery, symbolism, figurative language, and Mortimer's term's "literary synesthesia" engulf *Sanctuary*. At times, shadows are embodied, almost personified. Often transforming into wholly spatial objects, shadows have depth and can themselves be occupied. Representing the presence of death, pure evil, and the profane, the lurking shadow is also the story's unifying symbol of negativity. The characters' "voices [are] like shadows upon two close blank walls" (220). Antagonists and protagonists alike are shadow-puppets of themselves: hallowed silhouettes that oscillate wildly between opaque and translucent darkness. The story is not told directly, instead Faulkner immerses readers into a "shadowy world...lurking with new disasters" (283). Through the lens of color and drawing fundamentals, the significant, "splotchy" darkspots on Faulkner's literary canvas are evidence of negative-positive space. In the phenomenological sense, shadow is a liminal space, un-clearly defined by "interactions of light and darkness": an ambiguous gray matter that blurs "boundaries" by crystallizing their "various degrees of tangibility" (*Rhetoric of Loss* 64-65). Like holes, these negative-positive spaces are traces of the indeterminate, and at times, curiously

paradoxical symbolism that the author constructs—an almost Socratic language game that inspires readers, wading a shadowy and collapsed sanctuary of authorial intention, to determine answers for the “big” questions of philosophy on their own.

My first observation is that Faulkner tends not to communicate movement itself: the discourse is playful, “communicating a shadow of movement” (230). He extols hidden minutia of the background and continuously utilizes shadows as dominant storytelling and allegorical devices. When a scuffle breaks out at Old Frenchman's Place between Goodwin and Van, the narrator describes the wrestling of shadows instead of the grapple itself. Goodwin and Van are “a single shadow, locked and hushed and furious” (228). In this example, Faulkner captures the dancing of shapes, leaving the action at hand unseen. Precise details of the actual event in obscurity, readers experience the narrative at a remove as if they were gazing at shadows on a wall. Pushed to the forefront of the narrative, shadow-making seems a likely allusion to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. *Sanctuary's* attention to “shadows on the wall” foregrounds the limits of human perception. Faulkner reminds readers, as Plato did, that human perception is bound by the senses to the phenomenal. Although Plato allows for the possibility of a philosopher to “break the chains” of perception and see the absolute truth, Faulkner seems resigned to humanity's perceptual gyve. Temple's perjury is the novel's grand “shadow on the wall” metaphor. Ultimately, Benbow's inability save Goodwin in lieu of his innocence is probable evidence of Faulkner's resignation. Though much has changed, much abides, this ancient limitation is still the crux of a thoroughly “new” and modern human experience.

More importantly, main characters such as Popeye and Temple are repeatedly synthesized with their shadows through Faulkner's absurd, obtuse, and comic poetics. Instead of a description of Popeye not wearing a hat, "the shadow wore no hat" (207). In metaphor, Popeye and his shadow are fused into a negative-positive spatial figure. Often inspiring a nightmarish Peter Pan-like imagery, the "shadow-body" is a reoccurring gesture of *Sanctuary's* figurative language. Perhaps this shadow-body symbolizes Popeye's essential lack of moral substance as shadows themselves have essentially no material substance. Indeed, Popeye is possibly Temple's rapist and certainly a homicidal maniac. Yet, this "shadow equals evil" interpretation seems too simple, even for the novel Faulkner said was "written just for money." On the other hand, the conflation of body and shadow might be a hint to the reader that Popeye is not the villain he is set up to be, but instead another cryptic "shadow on the wall." In fact, Popeye's villainy is negated in the final chapter in which the narrator recounts his traumatic childhood. A victim of brutal disfiguring burns in a horrific fire, Popeye "had no hair at all until he was five years old, by which time he was already a kind of day pupil at an institution: an undersized, weak child" (392). From his earliest moments, he is ostracized by the community and perceived as an invalid or freak. As a result, a disturbed, teenage Popeye lashes out by violently maiming lovebirds and kittens (393). Eventually "sent to a home for incorrigible children" (393), Popeye is spurred into a sordid life cycle of institutionalization and criminality. This cycle runs steady in its course and ends with irony. Like Goodwin, Popeye is wrongfully convicted and hung for a murder he does not commit. Popeye's origin story is a humanizing and compassionate narrative of trauma and

disability which suggests, perhaps, that he is the product of a harsh and profaned culture, rather than an essential incarnation of evil.

In addition, Temple's ultimate fusion with shadow, "a pale shadow moving the uttermost profundity of shadow" (281) engages the concept of "transgression" and puts into question the boundaries associated with white womanhood. Temple Drake lives in a fiction "where there are strict, articulated, traditional parameters for white bourgeois female behavior" (Roberts 139). Roberts posits that the "spectacular lynchings in 1918, 1920, 1925, and so on in Mississippi, mostly carried out to protect 'that most sacred thing in life,' white womanhood, is the symbolic underpinning of *Sanctuary*" (*Southern Womanhood* 139). Yet taking on the characteristics of a shadow, Temple plays with gender "boundaries" and their "various degrees of tangibility." An obvious expression of negative-positive space, her body becomes the site where darkness and light meet. On one hand, considering the moral institution of old-time white womanhood as "positive" or the "light," Temple's shadow-body is perhaps a symbol of "light" taken over by its opposite, darkness or the negative: "the final dismantling of the Southern Belle" (Roberts 125) and the appearance of the New Belle. In this interpretive paradigm, darkness is symbolic of female sexuality while light, symbolic of purity or chastity. However, considering her shadow-body a negative-positive "interaction of darkness and light" rather than an embodiment of sheer darkness or negativity, the metaphor becomes indeterminate and a site for readerly debate about gender politics.

Historically, Temple has been read, like Popeye, as a literary incarnation of "pure darkness" or metaphysical evil. Esteemed critics such as Cleanth Brooks, Olga Victory, and David Williams would all suggest that in Faulkner's world and with specific regard to



Temple Drake, “evil is equivalent to the true nature of women” (*Southern Womanhood* 124). With this in mind, it would be easy for the “shadow as evil” interpretation to rear its ugly head. Yet, Temple is neither heroine nor foe, neither good nor evil, neither positive nor negative. Like a shadow, her characterization “evades definition and management” (*Rhetoric of Loss* 64). Bringing Robert's social constructivist view to the discussion, perhaps, Temple's shadow-body is a trope that allows for an examination of “the true sexual politics of the South:” a culture where “all sexual relationships are violent; all family relationships are both violent and sexual” (130). In this view, the shadow, which follows her every footstep, “anticking her movements” (227) and ultimately consuming her, is suggestive of the violence she encounters as a female in a thoroughly aggressive patriarchal culture. Although Temple's final perjury results with Goodwin's death, it is still the assertion of female agency; nevertheless, her assertion of agency is misdirected. “Good” does not prevail because neither good nor evil exist in this world, which like the woman's body, is continuously assaulted and raped by culture.

Yet at times, descriptions of shadow do hint at the presence of a dark and brooding metaphysical force. Faulkner creates a symbolic dissonance that again preys on readers' interpretation of the phenomenal world. At Popeye and Benbow's first meeting, they come into contact with a trace of otherworldly.

Then something, a shadow shaped with speed, stooped at them and on, leaving a rush of air upon their very faces, on a soundless feathering of taut wings, and Benbow felt Popeye's whole body spring against him and his hand clawing at his coat. 'It's just an owl,' Benbow said. It's nothing but an owl.' Then he said: 'They call that Carolina wren a fishing-bird. That's

what it is. What I couldn't think of back there,' with Popeye crouching against him, clawing at his pocket and hissing through his teeth like a cat. He smells black, Benbow thought; he smells like that black stuff that ran out of Bovary's mouth and down upon her bridal veil when they raised her head. (184)

The narrator describes the shadow as “something” suggesting the presence, the something-ness of an unknown entity. To pacify Popeye, Benbow explains, “it's nothing but an owl” suggesting inversely the absence of the unknown and the presence of the knowable, the rational—an “owl.” While Benbow rationalizes the active presence of the shadow, spouting off a likely hypothesis, and convincing himself by saying “just an owl” or “that's what it is,” Popeye “smells black.” He detects and fears the presence of pure evil. “Evil has been read as a code word for female sexuality” explains Roberts (*Southern Womanhood* 124). Thus, the direct allusion to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, another classic modernist narrative that interrogates the appearance of the new woman, foreshadows Temple's pivotal role in *Sanctuary*. Perhaps, the “black stuff” is the innate evil that runs through both Temple Drake and Emma Bovary's veins. Yet, while many critics have positioned these views as Faulkner's, they are actually Benbow's constructed thoughts and should not be rectified as the views of *Sanctuary*'s artist. In this case, Faulkner produces the tension of multiple perspectives within the negative-positive spaces, lurking in shadows. The point of these musings on “shadow” is to prove that understanding the spatial dynamics of art is crucial to explaining Faulkner's cryptic symbolism and view of metaphysics. In most cases, renderings of shadow suggests that evil is form of culture, yet these final readings of shadow imply duly the trace of a dark metaphysical force,

perhaps, incarnate in female promiscuity. Although the metaphysical seems have been emptied out of the universe (Nietzsche's "breath of empty space" concept), within the realm of interpretation exists the possibility that what *we perceive to be empty is actually, paradoxically, quite full*. If the later is to be endorsed, Faulkner's cynicism shines through like a light at the end of the tunnel, suggesting that if the metaphysical does, in fact, present itself within the phenomenal world, it does so in the form of innately evil woman.

I would like to conclude by comparing the composition of the front cover art with the composition of the *Sanctuary* as a whole (See Appendix, Figure 4). There is an open door at the end of the dark hallway. A person, the viewer, stands at the foot of the hall, looking forward at it. The doorway leads into a well-lit room. All the person can see is the light shining through the doorway and the shadows its casting on the corridor walls. The person has been walking down this corridor and toward the light for some time. This person cannot seem to reach it. The open door is a kind of hole, and thus a negative space. Yet, the doorway's prominence in the composition of the entire piece and its white brilliance and centrality also impresses paradoxically a sense of positive space. The cover art's minimalistic rendering of space and color imply to the reader that the contained work itself is focused on creating the impression of space and color, rather than a traditional figure. This emphasis on abstract space and color seems to correlate with the work's particular commentaries on place and race in which whiteness and purity are central but also distant and almost intangible concepts. In this paradigm, perhaps Popeye is the person that stands at the foot of the corridor. And the narrow white strip can duly represent the space of white womanhood that has been parceled and shrunk by various degradations of darkness or profanity. The doorway provides access to a sanctuary of

privilege but Temple, stuck in “shadowy world lurking with new disasters,” is first denied entry by violence. In the end, sipping coffee in Paris, perhaps, white bourgeois womanhood is the bright light that pierced through the dark and unpredictable tunnel for Temple Drake.

Prominent holes and darkness within the novel problematize the legitimacy of reality by suggesting that the empty and the obscure can also paradoxically be the full and the clarified. Perhaps, *Sanctuary* implies our inability to experience reality beyond the sanctuary of the human senses. Thus, the integration of meaningful holes and shadows in a narrative test a reader's ability to “break the chains of perception” and see the world for what it really is—or might be. Positive-negative space is an ideal of beauty in the modern period because its appearance invites an experience of art beyond the rational and the sensory.

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<sup>vii</sup>Some critics have speculated that Popeye is “passing.” I refute this interpretation because the text does not suggest that Popeye is “black” and wants to be seen at “white.” The construction of Popeye refuses both heredity and race; his construction absentees them.

<sup>viii</sup>The theoretical quotations I have harvested from Kern's *Culture of Time and Space* for the “shadow” section are in reference to positive-negative space. Yet, I have re-appropriated these specific quotations to introduce a counter- part term: Negative-positive space. Positive-negative space and negative-positive space have essentially the same constituent function: a phenomenological transvaluation, a change in our experience of space in a given object of study. However, while positive-negative space signifies instances of centrality or positivity being omitted or negated, as in plot holes or material holes, negative-positive space might be an easier term to signify inversely instances of periphery, background, or negativity, explicitly being included, as in the example of shadow or *Chiaroscuro*.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD A NEW SOUTHERN POSITIVE-NEGATIVE SPACE

Throughout the course of this project, which interrogates positive-negative spatialities, various conclusions have emerged. Though my studies are greatly indebted to the inventive definition of “positive-negative space” developed in Kern's *Culture of Time and Space*, this particular project refines the concept by plugging it into a set of different interpretive paradigms. For example, the thesis adds positive-negative space and its constituents to the polyglot of approaches that have pondered, explained and deconstructed matters of space in Faulkner studies since its beginnings. The many moments, in which critics (Matthews and Mortimer to name a couple) observe prominent absences, liminal “grey” areas, and what Sartre magisterially called “innumerable silent masses” in Faulkner's work, suggest that the constitutive functions of positive-negative space have been integral to discussions surrounding Faulkner's writing all along. This exegesis of positive-negative space within the paradigm of Faulkner studies, in turn, unhinges the term from the historical and geographical confines that Kern defines it within.

Working within its limitations as all studies must, Kern's *Culture of Time and Space* deftly discusses modernism with a prominent regard for European culture, analyzing the classic works of Bergson, Proust, Joyce, and Picasso. With this in mind, *Culture of Time and Space* operates under a fundamentally traditionalist scheme to the arts and literature of the period. My knowledge of and intermingling with Faulkner

studies has accomplished, at least partially, a filling of the gap from the “other side of the pond.” This accomplishment is a crucial scholarly endeavor because it furthers the legitimacy and ideological agenda of trans-Atlantic modernism studies, a field that views art as unbound from the geographical distinctions that have defined and continue to define our methods of literary interpretation and comparison.

Thus, the thesis comes full circle by recognizing the attack on spatial hierarchies foregrounded in Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, an Italian drama that prefers implication over explication and subverts the primacy of traditional stage space. Though writing and living in two distinct cultural contexts, positive-negative space in principle allows for this unlikely comparison between Faulkner and Pirandello's respective crafts. Perhaps such a far-reaching comparison will reinforce Kern's idea that a shift in the perception of space was taking place at the beginning of the twentieth century, not only across the pond but across genres as well. Yet, the fruit of the comparison lies in the realization that positive-negative space is a “modernism:” a common tick of a modernist's form, idiom and aesthetic. In this very formal and aesthetic sense, the term is unhinged from the strict historical paradigm in which it was developed. In fact, Faulkner's novels and Pirandello's drama, works which I argue evoke the impression of positive-negative space, come onto the literary scene in the ten years after the period Kern worked within.<sup>ix</sup> Instead of locking the term down into a distinct time-period, I prefer to study this modernism as one of many “modernisms” that define the genre, as is common, for example, in the study of various brands of European Renaissance.

Before beginning my reading of the seemingly vapid spaces incorporated into Pirandello's architecture of drama, I must admit that some literary connections, both

symbolic and formal, between Pirandello and Faulkner have already been made. In an essay titled “Faulkner in Italy,” which explains Faulkner's reception *nel paese*, Agostino Lombardo declares that Faulkner has offered Italian writers “a supreme linguistic lesson capable of expanding and enriching that offered by modern writers such as Verga or...Pirandello—those writers whose relationship, social and linguistic, with their region is extremely similar to that of Faulkner with Mississippi; Southern writers whose Sicily (an one can the same of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Colombia), in spite of all differences, in not very far from Yoknapatawpha” (130). Pirandello's imagined Sicily is itself another Yoknapatawpha; Palermo in the twenties and thirties, evincing a familiar air of centrality, authority, history and tradition, filled with the ruins of an aristocratic culture overtaken and re-utilized by a new bourgeois class, draws obvious connections to none other than Jefferson, the capital city of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county. Sicily's provinces, its rural landscapes, rich dialects, rustic, wise but often uneducated characters, seem Mediterranean transmutations of the culture and personages Faulkner readers confront as they accompany the Bundrens through Yoknapatawpha's countryside in *As I Lay Dying*.

In addition to these cross-cultural connections, Lombardo notes a similarity of style between the two writers. He suggests that Faulkner was not as popular in Italy because his writing did not fit into Italian critical preconceptions of American literature. These Italian preconceptions were based on the “simplicity, naturalness, and realism” of Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Fitzgerald's classic novels (Lombardo 123). In fact, Lombardo hilariously evokes Italian literary critic, Mario Praz, who writes “Hemingway has not read Pirandello, and his pugilists do not suffer from metaphysical languors” (24). One could argue whether Hemingway's boxers do ask the big questions of existence *ad*

*absurdum*; however, Lombardo does point out the Italian assumption that equates American literature with aesthetic nominalism, a war-time artistic school-of-thought that, unlike Hemingway, both Faulkner and Pirandello rejected. Defining aesthetic nominalism, Panthea Reid Broughton explains “art aims not at transcendence but rather at immediacy, not at imagining but rather at presenting” (16). Instead of falling into what Broughton calls the “lost generation's wholesale rejection of abstraction,” (21) Faulkner and Pirandello embrace it. Accordingly, Matthews suggests that Faulkner's *modernismo* is “a fashionable embrace of international aesthetic modernism” (*Lost Cause* 16). Although both Faulkner and Pirandello are deeply invested in their respective regional cultures, their texts are simultaneously indicative of their expansive and global view of literature and art. Thus, the affirmation of positive-negative space and its constituents is, perhaps, a result of their worldly embrace of literary abstraction.

For example, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is a drama that destabilizes viewers' and readers' sensory experience of space by simply asking “What is the stage?” (21). The premise of the absurdist play is an interruption, which functions as both a negation and a gap. A family of six characters, “real” people with “real” problems, walks upon a stage and interrupt a rehearsal for another of Pirandello's plays, *Mixing It Up*. The family, headed by a Father with a sordid past, urges the Manager to abandon his current endeavor and base the production instead on their story: “The drama is in us and we are the drama” (6) says the father. Thus, the action of *Six Characters* creates a fissure within another show, *Mixing It Up*, becoming larger and larger until the fissure itself is the central focus of the play at hand—evoking the impression of a crack running through the center of a structure. Accordingly, literary critics have called the work “teatro nel



teatro,” or “the theater within the theater,” which corroborates the notion that the work itself, like positive-negative space, imbues the experience of encapsulation. And the play never actually takes place; the play itself is the implication of a play. It is the dramatic narrative of what might happen in a play, if the “inner passion” (6) of these six characters were to be ironically “given life” (4) on the stage.

Thus, returning to the question asked by the Step-daughter, “What is the stage?” The question is perhaps a rhetorical ploy meant to echo Jacques’ famous monologue in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*: “All the worlds a stage. And all the men and women merely players.” In other words, I am implying the six characters are symbolic of “all the men and women” and the happenings of humanity in the dreaded reality of the modern world. At the core of this symbolism is Pirandello’s attempt to re-appropriate “reality” as the ultimate abstraction. By bringing a cast of “living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes” (5) to the stage as well as the Manager himself, Pirandello destroys the primacy of traditional stage space by blurring the boundary between reality and the space on stage. If a viewer entertains this illusion, any and all venues can be a stage which negates the need of a traditional stage and renders it vapid and useless. This is duly implied at the end of the first act when the six characters follow the Manager into his off-stage office and literary leave the stage empty for twenty minutes (20). Forcing viewers to confront emptiness, the direction to keep the curtains up (20) is Pirandello’s prank, his mockery, of traditional stage space. On the other hand, a viewer can choose not to be fooled by Pirandello’s meta-theatrics and recognize that, of course, the entire show is “just pretending.” These characters are literary constructions pretending to be “real” and the breaking of, or better yet, the demolishing of the fourth wall is simply a theatrical

hoax. In this critical and less imaginative sense, the primacy and privilege of traditional stage space remains safe and untouched. With regard to both perspectives, the stage is paradoxically “there and not there,” tottering the line as in the narrative of Quentin Compson, between the imagined and the real.

Another craft in *Six Characters* that points in the direction of positive-negative space is the construction of its six main characters, who are all, forgive me, “in search of an author.” The characters are metaphorical holes that beg to be filled. They perceive themselves as incomplete: partially empty vessels that desire to be filled and realized into being by a supreme author. Coaxing the Manager, the Father provides an absurd rationale for the family's existence. He explains “the author who created us alive no longer wished, or was no longer able, materially to put us into a work of art. And this was a real crime, sir” (6). The Father's existential malaise no doubt echoes Barthe's “death of the Author” concept by bringing to light an author's inability to ever complete or finish the fantasy s/he started. The Father's condemnation of the author puts Pirandello's drama in direct conversation with the central tenet of all reader-response theory—the death of the author and the birth of the reader—a concept intimately linked to the readerly filling of holes (or what Iser calls “blanks and gaps”) in the interpretive experience. In this sense, the ideal reader must interpret the six characters as embodiments of empty or negative space. Viewing them as positive-negative space suggests rather that they are paradoxically complete in their “incompleteness,” or at least as complete as any characters can be. Considering the characters as embodiments of positive-negative space suggests that incompleteness is in itself a constitutive entity that, to quote Sartre on holes, “realizes the plenitude of being” (*The Hole* 85).

Furthermore, Pirandello creates the impression of positive-negative space thematically by presenting viewers and readers with a world where, referencing Nietzsche, “nothing is sacred.” Pirandello's makes viewers and readers feel “the breath of empty space” thematically, and his emphasis on suspended pauses and interruptions underscore that feeling formally. Throughout the course of the play, viewers are told of the Father's profanity: his abandonment of the family, his general sexual promiscuity, and his attempts to pander sex from his Step-daughter. Urging the Manager to “Stage this drama for us at once!” (7), the Step-daughter emphatically narrates their drama. It turns out that the character “Father,” which readers and viewers have thus far been acquainted with, is actually the Mother's first husband. The Father, a vile womanizer, suggests that he had to abandon his family because of the Mother's stupidity or “mental deafness” had ruined his libido. “She has plenty of feeling. Oh yes, a good heart for the children; but the brain—deaf, to the point of desperation—!” explains the Father to the Manager (11). The Step-daughter's blood father was Mother's second husband but unfortunately, he is dead. Continuously tortured and tormented by her bitter half-brother, the Step-daughter runs away and submits to the care of Madame Pace, a local stewardess.

Some years having passed, the Father does not know the Step-daughter when he supposedly panders her for sex at Madame Pace's. Nevertheless, the Step-daughter exclaims that “after what has taken place between him and me (*indicates the Father with a horrible wink*), I can't remain any longer in this society” (7). The dialogue is elusive but the “horrible wink” implies the sexual and the lewd. This is also an example of Pirandello's dark humor, a type of tragic comedy where “nothing is sacred.” This profanation is what the Step-daughter considers to be the ultimate drama, yet the Father,

an intellectual rationalist, suggests that “we believe this conscience to be a single thing, but it is many-sided. There is one for this person, and another for that. Diverse consciences.” (16). In order to dismiss some of his guilt, he explains that the Step-daughter “surprised [him] in a place, where she ought not to have known me, just as I could not exist for her; and now she seeks to attach to me a reality such as I could never suppose” (16). This recalls Oedipus Rex, where the protagonist unknowingly stages his tragedy. Although the Father pleads ignorance, readers can still distrust him on the basis of his terrible track record. Yet in this particular instance, the play remains open ended and the drama lies in a reader's interpretation of the Father's intentions: a hole filling game that asks a reader or viewer to be the author these six characters are in search of. Perhaps, the play sees the world as a negative space where nothing is sacred; however, the Step-daughter's boisterous voice and narrative could also paradoxically be read as her empowerment, something constituent, positive, and sacred in its own rite.

As I have navigated throughout, Faulkner and Pirandello interrogate some Nietzschean notions of empty space in their works. Kern posits that Nietzsche metaphorically links “positive-negative space and the profanation of religious space by suggesting that the death of God had forced man to feel the breath of empty space” (179). Yet, the fundamental flaw with that argument is that perceiving space as “empty” falls into the trap of perceiving it still as “negative space.” Positive-negative space would suggest that space is both positive and negative, or both paradoxically sacred and profane. Within the realm of implication doubly lies the possibility of an “infinite something” rather than an infinite nothing. Perhaps, the fascination with voids, holes, and

absences is the modernist's invitation to such questions of metaphysics, questions that by their very nature call a reader to action.

As to the arena of Faulkner studies, a succinct but definitive quotation from Mortimer's *Rhetoric of Loss*: "Faulkner's fictive world is a distinctly spatial one, in which the location and movements of characters are important both to the plot and symbolically in terms of the characters' progress through life" (36). To adequately describe his spatial world or any other, the jargon of the graphic arts, including terms such as positive-negative space, must enter the discussion.

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<sup>ix</sup>The same could be concluded about the pre-twentieth century or proto-modernist literature (the darkness and absence in Poe's tales or the formal experimentation with black space in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* are worth examination, for example). However, Positive-negative space before modernism is another thesis topic for another life.

## APPENDIX

Figure 1: Alexander Archipenko's Woman Combing Her Hair



Figure 2: Henry Moore's *Two Large Forms*





Figure 3: Arthur Hawkins's cover art: *The Sound and the Fury*

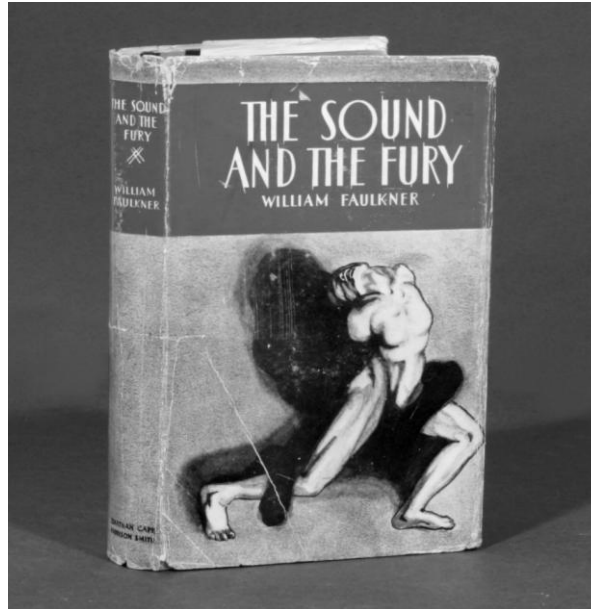


Figure 4: Arthur Hawkins's cover art: *Sanctuary*



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