

## ABSTRACT

PAGE, SUMMERLIN LEIGH. "Stubborn Back-looking Ghosts": Mourning as a Control Mechanism in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*. (Under the direction of Dr. Nick Halpern.)

In these two novels that involve the Civil War, Faulkner presents varying responses to loss. Rosa Coldfield of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*'s Drusilla Hawk are women out of place in their society, without clearly defined roles. Both women attempt to gain control despite their lack of autonomy and refuse to accept their losses. Rosa Coldfield falls into a perpetual state of mourning, and Drusilla Hawk undertakes a series of actions in order to ignore her losses. Rosa's grief consumes and infuriates her, and Drusilla's coping mechanisms fail to help her come to terms with her fiancé's death and her difficulties as a Southern woman who cannot live up to societal expectations. Drusilla's failure to cope effectively with her losses is emphasized by her cousin Bayard's ability to recover from the deaths of the two most important people in his life and create an existence without them. Bayard's responses to loss exhibit how opportunities for mourning work and availability of new roles can help the grieving process be successful. Further, the women's use of mourning as a method of attempting to gain control over their lives and surroundings is especially significant in light of the memorial movement after the Civil War. In the post-bellum South, women were proponents of memorialization and commemoration; these activities were also used to keep the "Lost Cause" alive. Through Rosa Coldfield and Drusilla Hawk, Faulkner expresses how grief can cripple those who cannot move on to new roles or find new purposes in life after a significant loss.

“Stubborn Back-looking Ghosts”: Mourning as a Control Mechanism in William Faulkner’s  
*Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*

by  
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## DEDICATION

To my family: especially my parents, Ken and Tammie Page, who have been very supportive as I have continued my education, and to my grandparents, especially Edna Page and Elam Ray Summerlin, who have shown me the importance of the past and family history

## BIOGRAPHY

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## Introduction: Gender and Mourning in the Post-Bellum South

William Faulkner frequently wrote about losses ranging from the concrete to the abstract, and notable among these privations are his portrayals of people's attempts to cope with a lack of significant interpersonal relationships. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*, two of Faulkner's novels that address the difficulty of handling loss, involve the Civil War and female characters who are unable to adjust to the post-war environment. These women, Rosa Coldfield and Drusilla Hawk, respectively, are unable to mourn their losses thoroughly and move on with their lives. Rosa's life is a continuous series of losses culminating with an insult that ends her engagement, and Drusilla's fiancé's death in the war provokes several attempts to create a new role for herself, all of which lead Drusilla to experience further losses and repress pain. An examination of the South's culture of mourning which stretched on for years after the Civil War reveals how mourning can serve as a method of deferring acceptance of loss or of denying loss altogether. Further, mourning may involve retelling and thus restructuring past events, making the past more acceptable to both the mourner and the society surrounding the mourner. These principles are pertinent to the struggles Rosa and Drusilla face, as women who lack opportunities and not only can not move on, but have no defined role in life to fill. Rosa and Drusilla cope with their lack of autonomy by refusing to accept their losses and hold on to the past as a means of gaining control over their lives, an attempt that proves futile.

Death and loss are universal, but the ways in which they are handled vary according to place, culture, and era, and the universality of death renders mourning ubiquitous as well. Several scholars who discuss death in literature and art note that a person's account of death

is always one remove from death, as it is one experience no one can have and then discuss. While we may discuss death while we live, we are conversing about an experience of death from the outside, watching another person leave life, and we are left with the work of mourning. While perhaps some people live such solitary or fortunate lives that they have not yet grieved for a loved one, losses of so many other kinds befall us so that everyone has most certainly experienced loss on some level. With any passage of time come changes and new life phases; even those who have not experienced the severing of some connection have at least moved out of one way of life and into another. Loss is something that everyone can understand in some capacity, and losses lead to grief and mourning, though the emotion of grief and the accompanying actions of mourning are often indirect and invisible.

Even though grief is technically an emotional response, it can also produce physical manifestations. David and Dorothy Counts cite “cases where ‘grieving individuals withdraw socially, are lethargic, lose their appetites, experience sleep disturbance and depression’” (in Almeida 41). While these physical responses to grief can also occur with other life disturbances, they are very commonly associated with loss of a loved one or with a similarly traumatic experience. If the mourning process drags on, so too can the effects of grief. Rosa Coldfield is certainly socially withdrawn throughout her loss-shadowed life, and Drusilla stops sleeping and becomes very thin. Both women bear the physical and mental damage of extensive mourning.

While grief is a feeling, mourning is both an action and a state of mind. Jacques Derrida refers to “mourning work,” and the term is fitting. In Freud’s 1895 “Studies on Hysteria,” he discussed “working through” an emotional trauma, and Paul C. Rosenblatt,

Patricia Walsh, and Douglas Jackson pick up this concept. Rosenblatt et al. include in the working-through process “acceptance..., extinction of no longer adaptive behavioral dispositions, acquisition of new behavioral dispositions and relationships, and dissipation of guilt, anger, and other disruptive emotions” (in Almeida 45). Clichés about dealing with losses abound, and when a death occurs, survivors often hear that time will ease the pain. While the passage of time is one factor in overcoming loss, it is passive and one must couple it with an active strategy. Just as people perform funerary rituals at the time of a death, they also go through other processes, both actively and mentally. While no readily presentable twelve-step program of grieving exists, one experiences certain stages after a loss and at times, they are predictable. Each culture, society, and even person has certain ways of handling loss, and some of these methods are healthier than others. People use coping mechanisms to handle difficulties that change lives in often unpleasant ways. However, if a person does not do whatever is necessary to complete the mourning process, he or she can drift into denial or perpetual grief. Neither state is optimal and either can be disastrous. Almeida writes about this dilemma in *The Politics of Mourning*, discussing Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s “stages of grief” and William Worden’s “tasks of mourning.” Worden lists “accept[ing] reality of the loss....work[ing] through the pain of grief.... adjust[ing] to an environment in which the deceased is missing.... [and] emotionally relocat[ing] the deceased and mov[ing] on with life” (in Almeida 85-95). Without some action toward healing, the passage of time is not enough to end the pain of loss.

Mourning is not just a personal phenomenon, but can be experienced by an entire society. One example was the mourning that took place in the United States after the death of

John F. Kennedy. Similarly, an intriguing and often disturbing bereavement came for the South after the Civil War. The South's culture of mourning following the Civil War is significant for Faulkner's fiction in terms of the longevity of mourning, its numerous purposes, and the difference in mourning between the genders.

While both North and South had deaths to mourn after the war, the South had additional losses to face. The Southern way of life was forever changed after the war, and the South experienced a complex and varied mourning process in absorbing these changes, the vast loss of life, and coping with being the losing side. Mourning not only helps one to come to terms with a loss, but commemorating and retelling the story of a loss can change perception of the loss, both for the observer and the mourner. Retelling's effects on perception were evident in the postwar years, and went on well into the twentieth century. Soon after the war, ladies' memorial associations sprang up, and not just to remember the Civil War dead. They waved the banner for the Lost Cause, romanticizing the antebellum Southern way of life and the nobility of the South's fighting. This movement did not occur in a brief mourning period, but perpetuated the atmosphere of grief and nostalgia that lasted for years.

Some would even argue that the South's grieving over the war persisted decades after Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*. One reason that the process lasted so long was that many people refused to accept the loss of the war. Accepting defeat would have required Southerners to acknowledge the fallibility of their position. Rather than travel this route, they developed a culture of mourning that revolved around the Lost Cause. They erected monuments to fallen soldiers, but the monuments did not merely commemorate

lost lives. These monuments also represented the South's stance in a way acceptable to the rest of the nation, for one has difficulty arguing with honoring fallen soldiers. However, Sanford Levinson notes that most would not view the Germans who fought in World War II in a positive light, and the public's negative reaction to President Ronald Reagan's 1985 visit to the cemetery in Bitburg where S.S. officers were buried shows how problematic commemorating the deaths of those on the losing side can be to those left standing on the winning, and therefore right, side once the battles are over. While the culture of mourning developed in the South, Southerners were simultaneously rewriting the history of the war. Gaines M. Foster notes that "memorial ventures were virtually the only cultural expression concerned with the meaning of the war. To the extent that the movement accurately reflected Southern sentiment and commanded broad popular support, it offers significant insight into the way the South began to come to terms with defeat" (Foster 43-44). However, most Southerners were not exactly accommodating defeat, but redefining their loss of the war. Southerners considered their defeat unjust, temporary, and misunderstood. Erecting monuments to the Old South, the Lost Cause, and even the Civil War dead allowed Southerners to reconcile their defeat to a degree, but they were doing so on their own terms and in their own terms, as evident in their renaming of the defeat and their memorializing and retelling of the story in a romanticized fashion.

One reason that cemeteries and memorial events were a vehicle for Confederate propaganda is that Southerners could get away with such displays in no other places due to federal restrictions on such behavior (Blair 84). The cemetery was a safe haven for displays of Southern allegiance. Emotionally charged speeches could be delivered under the guise of

grief, and military processions were often allowed by the government as a ceremonial remembrance. While memorial ceremonies were frequently regulated, the veil (and often, guise) of grieving allowed the spirit of Southern rebellion to live on.

Further, drawing out the mourning process had additional purposes beyond delaying acceptance of losses. According to Wade Newhouse, Southerners' revision of the war's story "into a narrative that could commemorate the past as well as direct the future took place in the arts and in the rituals of community life, and these discourses focused on the emotional meanings of the conflict that the legend created, rather than on enshrining the facts of the conflict" (8). In a sense, the South's mourning was about retelling a story with large changes to suit both the narrator and the audience. Emotions were far easier to invoke and manipulate without the realities of the war's causes and resulting death and destruction. Encouraging people never to forget what had taken place was not a mere cautionary tale, but Southerners were also encouraged by proponents of the Lost Cause to continue working to uphold the standards of the Old South. This insistence that people refuse to accept the changes and keep living in the past let people continue to fight their war. Rather than healing, Southerners concentrated on their reworked memories. Instead of grieving and moving on, Gaines Foster argues, "the emphasis remained on the process of bereavement: the creation of cemeteries, the erection of funereal monuments, and the springtime decoration of the graves" (43). As a culture, the South was caught in a process of perpetual mourning, a process that encourages living in the past and discourages progress and healing. As Foster notes, it was not enough to memorialize the dead in cemeteries and statuary, but graves had to be decorated yearly, reminding all of the war. William Blair points out that many historians (including Foster)

disagree about whether this decoration was a means of political resistance, and some view it as a method of reconciliation (212). However, many of the speeches delivered at decoration and memorial events suggest a different story, and some of the engravings on statues erected during the postwar period imply that they honor more than the fallen. Sanford Levinson discusses the Memorial to the Confederate Dead on the state capitol grounds in Austin, Texas. The monument reads:

DIED FOR STATE RIGHTS GUARANTEED UNDER THE CONSTITUTION  
THE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH, ANIMATED BY THE SPIRIT OF 1776, TO PRESERVE THEIR  
RIGHTS, WITHDREW FROM THE FEDERAL COMPACT IN 1861. THE NORTH RESORTED TO  
COERCION. THE SOUTH, AGAINST OVERWHELMING NUMBERS AND RESOURCES, FOUGHT  
UNTIL EXHAUSTED. (55)

To reinforce this message, at the statue's dedication in 1903, Governor Lubbock said he "was 'delighted to see the grand work of perpetuating the Confederacy.... He declared one thing which grates on his ear is to hear someone say that we fought for what we considered was right. 'We fought for what we know was right,' declared the speaker" (57). Governor Lanham also spoke and said "that, if he ever heard anyone abusing President Davis or the noble cause he championed, he would first remonstrate with him, and if that did not suffice, he would feel sorely tempted to strike the offenders with a shillalah" (58). Almost forty years after the war, politicians still championed the Lost Cause under the guise of commemoration, and exercises such as the one in Austin went beyond commemoration and perpetuated bitterness.

Southern women played a large role in this memorialization need. While the men

were off at war, women had taken over the responsibilities for heading households and farms. When men returned home, women were displaced from these authority positions. Beginning after the war, Ladies' Memorial Associations may have filled a void for these women, as well as restoring the social order to some degree. Having been outside the fighting and no longer performing the duties they assumed while their fathers, sons, and husbands were away, many women of the middle and upper classes focused a great deal of energy on the task of commemoration. The Lost Cause was immensely important to these women, and these memorial societies were the beginnings of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (Mills xvi). Cynthia Mills notes that

White women took on these chores and by diligent organization and fund-raising became the most important keepers of war memory in the coming decades. When the emphasis moved from mourning the dead to promoting the positive values of the Civil War effort at the end of the century, they persevered via changing organizational structures. (xvi)

Mills's account also supports Blair's argument that these organizations were not purely striving to remember the dead. While men fought the war and certainly supported the idea of the Lost Cause, women were the active emotional proponents and certainly the more visible mourners and advocates of memorialization. According to Foster

Southern males believed that memorial projects belonged to the realm of sentiment in which women had innate abilities and over which they had prime responsibility. Men therefore helped organize the societies and donated money to them but left the leadership of the groups and most of the work to the women. (38)

Thus, women could at once have an influence outside the home, through an outlet deemed appropriate for the weaker sex. Men made the organizations possible, but the women ran them. Blair notes that Northern news publications “suggested that the [Confederate Decoration Days] served as thinly disguised political rallies for the Democratic Party and that men let their women organize a ritual that allowed the rebel spirit to thrive within a mourning cloak,” as well as “identifying women as the purveyors of Confederate sentiment who helped prevent the wounds of disunion from healing” (77). The publications not only attacked the Southern cult of mourning, but admonished men for allowing the women to perpetuate the rebel spirit. Further, “perhaps because federal officials meddled in their affairs, the women believed that they protected the memory of the Confederacy from oblivion. Their efforts earned them the recognition of many Southerners – and not a few Northerners – as providing the occasions that kept the Confederate past alive” (78). The women were in a far better position than the men because of the perception that these ladies were non-threatening and emotional. The pedestal men had put them on made the women ideal for these tasks, but obviously the cemeteries did not veil the political purposes of the extended mourning well enough for those purposes not to be noticed.

While the memorial associations were designed to appear commemorative or emotional, they had clear goals and a mentality that suggested ulterior motives. The associations were well-organized and the women in charge were often wives or widows of officials or Confederate officers. Blair writes that the women of the associations even “developed what corporations today would call mission statements” and that “now and then words appeared in these statements that showed the women understood that their work had a

quasi-official status with a greater significance than fulfilling their capacity as guardians of sentiment” (80). These associations were businesses, and their business was not merely emotional. Again, this provided a cover, at times unintentionally and at times very pointedly. Through memorial associations, the women could secure funding and organize ceremonies with political significance. Further, such work outside the home had to be rationalized for the public, and “the women justified their activity...based on what they called the ‘instincts of nature,’ or the belief that women were more sentimental and innately suited to handle funeral customs” (80). Women received help from men with financial tasks and physical labor, but still made the decisions for the most part, and this leadership by women was socially acceptable because it was seen “as compatible with their duty as caregivers and as people whose sex suited them for work involving sentiment...and were viewed as partners with men in efforts to preserve the Confederate past” (84). Being involved in a business or other civic organization would not appear appropriate for a Southern lady, but the memorial associations were an acceptable venture. In contrast, black women were not typically socially perceived as sentimental partners to black men, and displayed their allegiance to the Union by their presence “in public spaces where many white women did not tread, and they helped shape public policy beyond the ceremonial. They also associated themselves with the role of defense that was typically a man’s domain” (Blair 104). Black women assumed a more active role than white women did. Rather than stand off and let men handle public and physical activities, black women participated in them. Having no desirable past social structure to cling to, they set out to make their own while white upper- and middle-class women still deferred to men and tried to maintain their status as ladies.

In addition to preserving the past, Blair notes that “by performing their job as caretakers of men, alive or dead, Southern women also helped fashion public rituals that sorted out new ideas about men and women,” and this sorting was no simple task when one considers how war does not leave the sexes with clearly defined roles, especially the Civil War, which took away much of the class and gender role distinction that slavery had helped maintain (78). Southern ladies had as much to lose as the men by letting go of the past and accepting defeat. The former social order was gone, and there was no immediate way to cope. The associations created tasks for women to organize and put them in charge of overseeing people, giving them purpose and maintaining the impression of a class hierarchy. Blair even argues that women’s need for men’s labor in creating cemeteries and erecting monuments let the men reclaim the masculinity they felt they lacked following the war (85). Even without their weapons, the men could still fight for the Confederacy, albeit in a more private, sentimental manner. The women’s memorial endeavors also kept the memory vivid and painful for the men. A newspaper editor even begged women to “come back out of the feminine war-path,” telling them to let the dead be (94). However, the fact that women propelled, and for the most part, shielded the memorial movement that perpetuated the Lost Cause, would be one more way that history would be rewritten, “when the movement toward reconciliation fondly remembered only the gentle hand that decorated graves instead of rituals that helped forge a consensus on resistance during difficult political times” (97). Not only did the extended mourning process recast the history and motives for the war in a better light, but this would be remembered more as a process of mourning and commemoration than as a fight to perpetuate the Lost Cause.

Beyond mourning the deaths of more than 250,000 men, the way of life in the postwar South changed and the survivors had to absorb this loss, one that is difficult both to define and accept. Such a mourning process takes years, even generations. In the mid-1930s, when Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*, the United States was coping with social changes due to the Great Depression, and gender roles were changing. Both the novels address the times of the Civil War and the years that follow, another time in history when major changes were occurring, some of which parallel the changes happening in society at the time Faulkner was writing. In both eras, roles were disrupted, families lost loved ones, war was a possibility, and millions of people were recreating their lives due to financial difficulty and technological changes. While each person's experiences of loss and the grief to follow are unique, Faulkner addresses how women and men, faced with similar losses, mourn differently, due largely to their opportunities and expectations, or lack thereof. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Rosa Coldfield mourns perpetually, a victim of circumstance, rehashing events for which she can find no closure. *The Unvanquished's* Drusilla Hawk represses her grief and acts in a variety of ways to handle her losses, while her cousin Bayard grieves in what seems to be the most appropriate manner, especially in comparison to Drusilla and when considered by today's values. While these characters mourn differently, the central reason they do so is the variation in their circumstances. Socially, women were expected to mourn losses indefinitely, their already oppressed lives on hold. Men were expected immediately to move on, and most significantly, they had the opportunity to move on to other activities and roles. In *The Unvanquished*, Louisa and Drusilla are expected to wear black and mourn the deaths of husband and fiancé, respectively. However, a man who

lost his wife would not be required to mourn publicly and acquaintances would not have thought less of him if he found a new wife in a relatively short time. Faulkner's examples of mourning express not only the focus on coming to terms with loss in the post-bellum South, but that women at the time did not have the opportunity to engage in effective "mourning work," or opportunities to do much of anything outside the expected domestic realm. Rosa and Drusilla seize mourning in an attempt to grasp control over something, because they otherwise have little control over their lives. This control is imaginary, however. Bayard illustrates that a man can take control of a death or a loss, avenging death and handling emotions in a masculine, "healthy" manner. Rosa Coldfield and Drusilla Hawk exhibit the lack of options available for women and the emotional trauma their paralysis can cause.

*Absalom, Absalom!* addresses the retelling and refiguring of history to a great extent, and one of the narrators of this history is a woman stuck in the past who has suffered many losses and not fully mourned them. Rosa Coldfield is trying to make sense of a past that cannot be made sense of, and this is another reason she cannot move on. Unable to work through her grief, she is doomed to live in the past, consumed by anger and disbelief. When Drusilla is left without ways to deflect her grief, she must run away. Drusilla and Rosa illustrate how helplessness can propel a person to defer closure and internalize grief, making mourning an endless state with tremendously detrimental effects.

“Impotent and Indomitable Frustration”: Mourning as Power and Purpose for Rosa Coldfield

Words of grief and anger fill *Absalom, Absalom!*, and deathlike images are especially prevalent when readers first meet Rosa Coldfield. She is one of the narrators of the story of Sutpen, a man who appeared seemingly out of nowhere and, according to Rosa, ruined her life as well as the lives of her family members. Rosa’s storytelling reveals her to be a woman deeply hurt and unable to recover from the losses she suffers. Her liminal existence as an orphan, an aunt younger than her niece and nephew, and a spinster once engaged contribute to her need to mourn continually. *Absalom, Absalom!* portrays the retelling and refiguring of history to a great extent, and it is appropriate that one of the narrators be a woman mired in the past. As previously discussed, women were often forces behind post-Civil War memorialization and commemoration, so Rosa is a fitting first vehicle through which readers receive a version of Sutpen’s story. Her delivery of the story clearly demonstrates that she has not let go of the past, let alone Sutpen. While she cannot deny that the events have occurred (after all, she tells the story), her treatment of the past exhibits something of a refusal. Since the events of her life have thrust her into a seemingly permanent intermediate position, her desire to fight against these events is understandable. While Sutpen’s white daughter, Judith, and his black daughter, Clytie, are “tight-lipped, ditiful, and resigned to their purchase on life, [and] they become coconspirators in Sutpen’s design” (Kinney 9), Rosa does not express this grim acceptance of fate. Once Sutpen insults her, she has no allies. Rosa is essentially alone in the world, and stubbornly furious. Rehashing her version of events allows her to keep the past alive, therefore delaying her handling of events. In addition

to continuing her mourning, this fixation allows her a sense of control over the version of events others hear, giving her a feeling of power which she has always lacked.

In order to understand Rosa's inability to complete the mourning process, consideration of Rosa Coldfield's inability to recover from the traumatic events in her life must begin with an evaluation of her childhood. Her mother died giving birth to her, and her only surrogate mother figure left her early in life. John T. Matthews writes, "Her life, bought with her mother's, initiates an unending chain of debts" (128), and "Rosa guiltily tries to deny her own presence by living in an imagined world" (123). This burden of guilt leads Rosa to question the necessity of her existence, as her birth killed her mother, a woman needed by her father and her sister, Ellen. Further, Rosa receives no love or nurturing in her childhood. Matthews notes that these circumstances require that Rosa's life "may only continue by being profoundly disfigured" (128). From the beginning of her life, Rosa feels she is inadequate, even as she steps in to act as a housewife when her aunt leaves and as she tries to "protect" Judith according to her sister's wishes. Rosa is predestined to emotional damage when she enters the world.

Rosa's family continues to damage her emotionally as she grows up. Goodhue Coldfield, her father, was a very strange man who could have provided nothing resembling normality for a child, and he further harms Rosa's psyche. As a child, Rosa was forced to act far too mature for her age, being thrust into the position of woman of the house. Furthermore, Ellen's request that she protect Judith highlights the fact that Rosa is pushed into roles for which she is not prepared. While Judith is Rosa's niece, she is older than Rosa due to the large age gap between Ellen and Rosa. In every station of life, Rosa is impotent. She cannot

run her household, because her father will not provide her with the necessary resources, even though he is a store owner. She cannot act as an aunt because she is younger than the children over whom she would have a position of authority. When her father starves himself to death in the attic where he has quite literally shut himself off from her, she is finally alone, though she has been an isolated person for her entire life. The break in her solitude occurs when she goes to Sutpen's Hundred after Henry, her nephew, kills Charles Bon, Henry and Judith's half-brother and Judith's fiancé. Rosa lives there with Judith and Clytie, but after Sutpen insults her, she sees no other choice but to return to her father's house and live alone there, surviving off the kindness of others. Rosa's perception of the world may be skewed, but her perception is not difficult to understand due to her seclusion and her being thrown into difficult circumstances. Rosa has been powerless for much of her life as a result of the patriarchal society and she seeks control wherever she can find the possibility. While her attempts to exert control over others and over the past and passage of time through her perpetual mourning are not fruitful, they reflect her need to repress and transfer emotions, as well as the lack of opportunities available to her.

In addition to her family's influence, Rosa is also an outsider due to her unusual responsibility and the fact she remains unmarried. When Rosa is born, she is already an aunt, and her niece and nephew are older than she is. The title "aunt" implies authority and membership in a generation preceding those who address her with that signifier. When she is ten years old at the Sutpen family's table, she is a "bound maidservant to flesh and blood waiting even now to escape it by writing a schoolgirl's poetry about the also dead" (51). Indeed she is a bound servant, as her sister's dying instruction is for Rosa to care for Judith.

Forced to act as an adult when she is a child, then stuck in a strange limbo between childhood and adulthood, Rosa is a woman frozen in time. She is “the spinster doomed for life at sixteen” (59). She is not just “doomed” to be unmarried, but also in the sense that her fate seems already laid out for her regardless of any action on her part. Due to her position, however, hardly any action on her part is possible. Even the poetry she writes, both to memorialize the dead and passively protest against her father, focus on the dead, and thus the past. The two main decisions she has the opportunity to make are whether to move to Sutpen’s Hundred and whether or not to marry Thomas Sutpen. Neither of these really seems like a decision to her, but rather a duty she must fulfill due to family and gender obligations, until Sutpen insults her.

Rosa’s limbo is not due to her spinsterhood, but being unmarried exacerbates her liminality. In Rosa’s era, marriage is not a choice but a rite of passage for a female. Judith’s adolescence, for example, is a “transition stage between childhood and womanhood, that state where, though still visible, young girls appear as though seen through glass... in nebulous suspension held, strange and unpredictable” (53). Judith will also be stopped here due to the violation of her engagement by Charles Bon’s death, but she will be released by her own early death. Rosa survives, and without marriage, she becomes held in this stage. Rosa is constantly caught between roles that are difficult to describe and therefore hard to name. To Ellen and Judith, “Miss Rosa must not have been anything at all now: not the child who had been the object of the vanished aunt’s ...attention, and not even the woman which her office as housekeeper would indicate, and certainly not the factual aunt herself” (55). Rosa is described here in terms of what she is not rather than what she is, because her

existence is so strange it can not be accurately related.

In addition to the difficulty of stating Rosa's role exactly, her appearance also reflects her position as a person stuck mid-journey between life stages. When Quentin is sitting in her office, Rosa sits "bolt upright" with her legs "straight and rigid," and she wears "the eternal black" (3). Her stiffness not only represents her rage, but it connotes the *rigor mortis* of a corpse. Her feet do not reach the floor, and she "resemble[s] a crucified child," yet simultaneously Faulkner describes the "rank smell of female old flesh" with a "wan haggard face" (4). Rosa is so absorbed by mourning that she even resembles a corpse. More disturbing than a woman who is caught between being a child and an adult, Rosa looks at once like a child and like death personified as long as she lives. She has never freed herself of the death that shadowed her birth, just as she never frees herself of her other losses.

Early on, Rosa's solitude and the oppression she experiences under her father's authority push her to find a method of control. Her father will not even teach her to count change or allow her to take money with her when she shops for necessities, instead going behind her and paying for her purchases later (60). Goodhue's control over her access to money and unwillingness to teach Rosa to handle money do not just keep her under his thumb, but also signify that she will be unable to take care of herself when she is older and will have to rely on someone else. Minrose Gwin writes that even "decades after his death Goodhue Coldfield retains the power of the Word. It is he who has named the 'dim hot airless room' which still encases his daughter as an old woman" (81). Rosa still calls the room "the office" and keeps everything shut up tight, a security (and air conditioning) measure she learned from a man who insisted upon overseeing his store himself and who

could watch people from any point in it, a man who would securely nail himself into his attic. The oppression Rosa feels at the hands of her father leads to repression of her emotions of anger, guilt, and grief, a pattern of emotional turmoil she will follow for her entire life. Rosa projects onto her father the anger and guilt she feels toward herself, an action she will repeat later with Sutpen. Rosa blames her father for her mother's death, and in grieving for the mother she never got to have, Rosa stops at the anger stage of the mourning process. Also, Rosa's loss of her mother occurred without her actually experiencing it, as she is a product of that loss. Goodhue is "the father whom she hated without knowing it" (47), and this hatred Rosa feels toward her father comes out in quiet ways. While he is in the attic refusing to fight in the war, she is downstairs writing odes to the dead soldiers, and she steals materials from him to attempt making a trousseau for Judith. In both of these instances she is defying him and creating something in the process, giving her a small space in which to exercise some autonomy. Sadly, even her creative endeavors are not for herself, and for lost causes. She eulogizes the dead, and she tries to make a trousseau for another bride, a bride who will not have a wedding.

Later, Sutpen takes Goodhue's place as the object of Rosa's anger and sorrow, continuing her mournful state. Rosa grows up fearing Sutpen, whom she imagines as an ogre when she is a child, and she feels pushed into the situation that leads to her insult. Her status as "an orphan a woman and a pauper" (12-13) leads her to be "thrown into daily and hourly contact" (13) with Sutpen. Charles Bon's murder is the catalyst that finally motivates Rosa to come to Sutpen's Hundred, and her poverty and solitude keep her there. She and Clytie and Judith can split labor, and some resources are available there. Once Sutpen returns, she stays

on, and Mr. Compson points out that Rosa would have been expected to go live at Sutpen's Hundred after her father died, as the Sutpens were her remaining kin. Sutpen decides to marry Rosa, and rather than asking her, he tells her. Rosa says she made that decision consciously, but as she is "an orphan a woman and a pauper" in the South immediately following the Civil War, with no means to support herself, it is not really a decision but a necessity. Ogre or not, he offers her a position in a family and a station in society, and this is not a chance she can afford to decline. However, she confirms her previous suspicions about Sutpen when he proposes that they first see if she has a male child before he will marry her. Rosa cannot bear this affront and must leave. She has certainly known what his intentions were, but to have them vocalized so crudely is too much. Rosa comes into contact with Sutpen due to a series of events over which she has no control and she tries to act as honorably as she can. Then, she is presented with the opportunity of marriage, a rite of passage she had stopped expecting, and then this hope is snatched away in an atrocious manner. Although Rosa grieves for many losses, this is the trauma upon which she will fixate for the rest of her life. Sutpen's insult and the violation of her engagement will be the final object of her anger, and those emotions will stay fresh as long as she lives. The only ways Rosa can seize power after this loss are by returning to her father's house to live without support from Sutpen and by refusing to move past the insult.

Rosa cannot obtain closure concerning her losses, and a lack of closure after trauma is especially evident when she finds that Sutpen has died. Her anger only continues to grow, as she will never have the opportunity to confront him or understand why he treated her in the manner he did. However, this opportunity likely would never have come, due both to her

inability to act and to the fact that Sutpen lived by an entirely different set of values. His death forecloses possibility for action and serves only to fuel the flames of her wrath for decades to come. John T. Matthews writes that “Sutpen’s death, like Bon’s, dispels the illusion of vicarious or deferred possession... and converts hope into mourning” (128). Sutpen’s death is the point at which reality should set in for Rosa, when she must accept that the opportunity for marriage or revenge is past. Rosa’s anger over a situation she cannot change alludes to the South’s memorializing process after the war. As the South’s acceptance of defeat would force Southerners to examine history’s truth, Rosa letting Sutpen fade into the past would force her to create a new existence for herself. Just as Rosa’s obsession is not active mourning work, the South’s mourning was not merely a coping mechanism for the loss of the war and numerous lives; it also offered an opportunity to recast the war in a different light. Southerners were attempting to control history and affect public perception. Rosa is also trying to exercise control over perception and memory of events as she strives to keep her version of the past alive.

Rosa’s relationship with her memory of Sutpen is one of the most paradoxical expressions both of her assertion of control and her lack of power. In her narrative, she calls into existence the “ghost of the man she could neither forgive nor avenge herself upon,” and this ghost “began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence” (8). While Rosa has the power to invoke him and make him real, her inability to forgive or take vengeance allows him to continue existing and still to be what seems a tangible presence in her life. For Rosa, Sutpen must continue to live. Paradoxically, she has control over whether he lives on, but his presence controls her and drives her mad. Rosa’s dilemma is a reversal of men’s traditional

oppression of women in the South, in which the women became dominant from their pedestals. Being oppressed leads the oppressed one to become as oppressive as the oppressors. Truly to end Sutpen's existence, Rosa would have to let him go, but her life has no purpose without someone to hate and blame for her predicament. The most permanent mark Rosa makes, and the closest she comes to blotting Sutpen from history, occurs when she has Judith's headstone engraved without mentioning Sutpen upon it, even omitting "Sutpen" from Ellen's name: "*Judith Coldfield Sutpen. Daughter of Ellen Coldfield. Born October 3, 1841. Suffered the Indignities and Travails of this World for 42 Years, 4 Months, 9 Days, and went to Rest at Last February 12, 1884. Pause, Mortal; Remember Vanity and Folly and Beware*" (171). Arthur Kinney states, "Rosa alone in *Absalom, Absalom!* uses a concrete, material marker to voice a more abstracted sense of suffering, betrayal and justice" (10). Rosa numbers the days Judith lived, but she erases Thomas Sutpen from the record. But, this public statement does not carry over into her day-to-day living. She tries to remove him from Judith's eternal resting place, but Rosa installs his memory at the center of her existence.

Rosa insists on preserving Sutpen's presence, but it is an imitation she invokes and curses, not a real human being against whom she can truly lash out to attain closure or even catharsis. Matthews reminds readers that, similar to what the characters in *The Sound and the Fury* portray and what Drusilla expresses in *The Unvanquished*, "no substitutes can fully replace the allegedly lost 'thing itself'" (117). Like Quentin's constant thoughts about Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*, Rosa's fixation on Sutpen does not help her move forward. Though Quentin is male, he is as inept as Rosa. Quentin cannot defend Caddy's honor and

receives no help in that matter from his father. Furthermore, his parents send him to Harvard, not by his own desire, but theirs. He too is an inactive observer until he decides to remove himself from turmoil through death. Rosa meets a similar end, as the result of her decision finally to take action in going to Sutpen's Hundred leads her to fall into a coma (yet another liminal state, this time between life and death) and ultimately expire. Matthews notes that Quentin and Rosa both devote themselves to remembering their central losses, Caddy and Sutpen respectively (118). Rosa and Quentin are both powerless individuals who obsess about these losses, and this allows them to fill their lives which seem otherwise empty to themselves. While this fixation on memory ruins them, they feel as though they cannot survive without it.

During Rosa Coldfield's lifetime, options for any woman were quite limited, and it is doubtful her quality of life would have been better in a higher social class or if she had taken Sutpen's insult and stayed. Her appraisal of Ellen's end highlights the lack of possibilities for a fulfilling life for Southern women of their era. Ellen "lay dying in that house for which she had exchanged pride and peace both and nobody there but the daughter who was already the same as a widow without ever having been a bride and was, three years later, to be a widow sure enough without having been anything at all" (10). Rosa keeps her pride but has been "dead" for four decades in a house with no peace. Further, like Judith, Rosa is a widow without ever having married. While Rosa makes a different choice between grim options, she still meets a fate similar to Ellen's, metaphorically dead and without peace.

Rosa utilizes two methods of coping with her dilemma – refusing to accept her circumstances, and exerting control in the small ways she can find. She displays her limited

authority as a Southern woman when she asks Quentin to come see her. As Quentin is a gentleman, he will have to be polite and do what she asks and listen to her. He bears this responsibility as a Southern gentleman, a relative of Sutpen's only friend, and a descendant of those "in the South [who] made [their] women into ladies" and therefore assume responsibility for these ladies' postwar conversion "into ghosts" (7). Quentin receives his order to visit her, "the quaint, stiffly formal request which was actually a summons" (5). Once Quentin is in her presence, she can relay her version of Sutpen's story as well as the story of her sad life, and in this telling, she determines what he hears. Even though Quentin is familiar with the story, he does not know all of it, and he has not heard Rosa's version. While she has clearly been replaying all the events in her head for decades, she now has a chance to relive the story vocally and relate it to another person. She also wants Quentin to accompany her to Sutpen's house, but she wants to leave her mark on this history to which he has been exposed, and this attempt is effective. When she begins to tell him the story, her emphasis is parenthetical in Quentin's mind – "(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)...(Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) – until Miss Rosa Coldfield works her way right into the narrative without being set apart: "Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says" (5). Her additions to the narrative become integral parts of the story. Even though Quentin fades in and out of paying attention and cannot get past Henry and Judith, Rosa influences Quentin's thinking about the story, and he wonders about her motives enough to talk to his father about Rosa and her reasons for telling him the story.

Further, Rosa's narration sparks the discussions that happen between Quentin and Mr. Compson and between Quentin and Shreve, indicating she has some power through

storytelling. Minrose Gwin argues that Rosa “is shut up, shot down and shut out by men” and that the male-dominated second half of the novel silences her (104). However, Rosa’s summons to Quentin provoked these conversations and she leaves her impression on them, even when Quentin, Mr. Compson, or Shreve is not talking about her directly. Gwin also asserts that “these male voices speak from the position of the subject-presumed-to-know. They seize the narrative and they speak with authority” (105). Conversely, none of these men clearly has the answers, save what Quentin learns in his conversation with Henry. Quentin and Shreve discuss the events to synthesize them, not with a claim of knowing the absolute truth. While they have access to information Rosa lacks, they are combining the information that came from her with data from other sources and answering the questions she could not, and the questions she would not.

Even though Rosa is furious at the patriarchal society that has made her life miserable, she cannot turn her back upon her society, because while she is a victim of her culture, she is also a product of it. When she lashes out at Clytie, Gwin observes, “she embraces the realm of the proper, which similarly has denied *her* humanity [and] she becomes one of the boys” (86). In Clytie, Rosa refuses to see an ally, but strikes out at her because Clytie is a person even more powerless than Rosa. Here, Rosa is acting like her oppressors. Her imitation of her oppressors is also evident in her need to have at all times the keys to every opening in her house. She takes them all with her when she goes to Sutpen’s Hundred. In exerting control of her possession, Rosa is exhibiting behavior she learned from her father. No one would go into Rosa’s house but she needs to know that no one would have the ability. Gwin states that in her narrative, Rosa “speaks from that feminine space which

disrupts culture; yet she cannot help but speak her culture as well, with its voices of racial and sexual repressiveness” (92). No matter how she hates her past and her surroundings, they have left an inescapable effect on her, coloring her words and actions. Still, Gwin notes, “we, of course, are reading her reading” (83). The story comes to us first through Rosa’s experience, and while the characters are people Quentin knows existed, she creates them before him, and even “the seductive power of [Sutpen]...is Rosa’s creation and her question” (Gwin 83). Her narrative is a series of events seasoned with the surrounding culture and her pain.

As previously stated, no set method for handling grief exists, and John Archer asserts “in answer to the question of what the resolution of grief involves, we can refer to returning to a normal level of functioning in everyday tasks, the absence of the distress associated with grief (memories of the deceased no longer being painful), and a change in identity to accommodate the new reality” (111). Part of Rosa’s problem, according to these standards for what constitutes resolving the loss, is that she has no new reality to come to terms with. She has lost people and status she has never quite known, and losses are an integral part of her life. Her mother’s death shadows her entire life and she is left without a true mother figure. The aunt who helps look after her is not very maternal, and Rosa loses her in a routine Faulknerian window escape. Rosa never has a husband or even a love, but she tries to experience romance vicariously through Judith in attempting to stitch items for Judith’s trousseau. Rosa even develops affection for Charles, whom she never actually sees.

Rosa’s obsession with the past at once sustains and depletes her. Quentin has a similar problem, as he is “filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering...from the

fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness looking... into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free from the disease” (7). For Rosa, submitting to mourning would be like falling prey to the fever that would cure her disease of guilt and anger. If she would willingly experience the painful process of coming to terms with reality and the traumatic events of her life, she could heal. This would necessitate accepting and working through the emotions and letting the questions be answered, saying what Sutpen had done, and admitting she was not angry just at her father, but also with herself. That “fever” would bring closure. All the what-ifs and questionings in the world could not change the events. Facing the fever of full-on acceptance and grief would allow her to heal, but this would mean acceptance of a life without defined roles, and without the meaning she has been giving it for decades. Matthews writes, “Rosa conjures a life for herself and her subjects through her words; she may tell us something about the writer’s consecration to desire, bereavement, and memory” (123). Rosa does exhibit how writing can be an action of desire, bereavement, and memory, and she also shows the reader how a person unable to come to terms with loss still needs to express it. Reliving the past with all its anger gives her life purpose, and rewriting the past gives her life meaning.

## Taking it like a Man: Drusilla's Refusals and Replacements

Over half a million Americans died in the Civil War, and many Southerners returning home had to start over as many homes and farms in the South were lost to fighting and destruction. These are among the obstacles addressed in *The Unvanquished*, a novel that tells a saga of myriad losses – of life, property, and societal and familial roles. This array of changes provoked a variety of reactions to loss, including grief, anger, vengeance, and attempts to escape a life that is lacking. The juxtaposition of Drusilla and Bayard illuminates the difference between male and female responses to mourning. Drusilla's losses, beginning with her fiancé and culminating in her loss of influence over Bayard, serve only to damage her, while Bayard is empowered by the new roles available to him because of the deaths of his grandmother and father.

Faulkner originally wrote *The Unvanquished* as a set of individual stories for the magazine market, to which he added the final story and published the collection as a novel. He started the writing the saga while he was working on *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Unvanquished* tells the story of the Sartoris family during and after the Civil War as witnessed by young Bayard Sartoris. Bayard's grandmother, Rosa Millard, steals Union livestock and distributes some of the animals and profits of the sale of other animals among families in the community. She is killed, and Bayard avenges her death. Bayard's cousin Drusilla loses her fiancé in the war and goes off to fight with John, her sister's widower and Bayard's father. Upon their return from the war, Drusilla's mother, Louisa, and other women of the community force Drusilla to marry John in a half-hearted effort to preserve the family's structure and reputation. Finally, John is killed by a business rival he has repeatedly

provoked, and Bayard decides to face his father's killer unarmed. Drusilla is devastated by Bayard's refusal to murder his father's killer, and leaves the family home.

Bayard suffers the deaths of two of the most important people in his life, and these deaths empower him. When his grandmother is killed, Bayard avenges her death, an appropriate response for the oldest man in the household. With his father off at war and Uncle Buck too old to accomplish justice alone, Bayard experiences a rite of passage. He must be the one to kill Grumby and adorn his grandmother's grave. This task is successful mourning work, as it directly hurts the people who led his grandmother to her demise, and it absolves Bayard of his guilt for having let her go into what he knew was an unsafe situation. While Rosa Millard is a very stubborn woman who will do anything she sets her mind to, Bayard realizes he was strong enough to hold her in the wagon the night they were at the compress, and that he should have done so in order to save her life. After the fact, killing those who actually took her life is the best he can do, and the action effectively addresses two stages of grief, those being guilt and anger. Further, the time he is on his journey chasing Ab and Grumby allows him to adjust to a life without Rosa Millard. He is on this journey with Ringo as his companion, and does not have to think about Rosa's absence as much as he would if he were at home. It is not merely an escape from grief, a tactic Drusilla will employ, but a trip with a purpose. When Bayard returns to his grandmother's grave, reality sinks in as the dirt on her grave has done in the weeks during which they have been gone. At this time he is finally able to cry and complete his mourning process. The shock of her death has worn off, and faced again with her grave, he can now absorb the finality of her death. Further, as Bayard openly grieves at her graveside, he is not only mourning her loss but also expressing

his relief that the act of vengeance is complete. With no more left to do, he can return home and start rebuilding his life without his grandmother.

While Drusilla also turns to violence as a means of grieving, she does not gain positive results. Bayard's revenge against Ab and Grumby is appropriate for his role, but violent retribution is not a suitable venture for Drusilla. Bayard's responsibility to his grandmother as well as his position as head of household while his father is off at war make him the one to carry out the task with Ringo's help. Also, men are allowed, even expected, to kill; this expectation is due to the Southern code of honor in place before the Civil War and lasting for several decades following. *The Unvanquished* emphasizes this code of honor, as Bayard's father teaches him early on that killing is not a moral dilemma, but a task to be completed. His experiences will lead him to feel otherwise later, but due to the circumstances of Rosa Millard's murder, Bayard sees no choice but to avenge her death for his own sake as well as for the sake of his family. Further, Grumby and his men are ruffians without scruples who have terrified people in the area. While Bayard's primary reason for tracking and killing Grumby is his grandmother's murder, he also steps into the role his father would have performed as a community protector. Additionally, Rosa has been protecting the community through her stealing and reselling of Union livestock, providing money and animals to people to aid them in tending their land and enabling them to take care of their families. Bayard assumes both these roles when he goes on the trail after Ab Snopes and Grumby. Rosa's death and Bayard's journey to catch Snopes and Grumby mark the end of an era in the South, and also represent Bayard's passage into adulthood. Her death is not merely something to mourn, but comes with tasks for him to carry out, tasks that allow him to prove himself. A

female at his age, in his position, would not be expected to take on such a mission, but instead would stay home and scrape by, or possibly depend on relatives to take care of her (not unlike Rosa Coldfield). The work of mourning should be entirely different, not a task involving an outlet for anger and guilt.

Bayard finishes laying his grandmother to rest in a violent and masculine way. His adornment of her grave with Grumby's severed hand completes her burial. In the three months since she has died, closure has not been possible because those responsible for her death have not been punished, and because Bayard shares guilt. Bringing his grandmother the hand does not just show that he killed the murderer, but also figuratively gives the final vengeance not to Bayard, but to Rosa Millard. Murder is simply not enough for one who stepped out of bounds and caused the death of a Southern matriarch. They must be shamed, disgraced, disfigured, and displayed, and Rosa Millard must be the one to possess the hand that killed her, though she is no longer in the world when she receives it. Further, the hand serves as a warning to others that immoral actions result in consequences. While Rosa's stealing of the mules was not moral, she carried out these thefts in order to help the Southern cause and to care for others. Rosa did not intentionally ever hurt anyone in the process, except the enemy, financially. Damaging the enemy's finances was considered a good thing by those who mattered, those being the members of the community, and for Rosa Millard's purposes, God.

Similarly, when Redmond kills John Sartoris, everyone expects that Bayard will avenge his father's death. He comes to the decision that more violence is not a solution and creates his own way of reconciling the Southern code with his idea of an appropriate

confrontation. Facing Redmond unarmed, Bayard exhibits bravery and still intimidates Redmond so much that he flees. In fact, rather than dueling with Redmond, entering his office weaponless and allowing him to fire is a more courageous act than attempting to kill him. Though Bayard's response to his father's death is different from his action to avenge his grandmother's murder, the result is the same afterward: he can sleep. The action allows him to work out anger, absorb the reality of the murder, and clear his conscience enough to rest easily. When he first returns home after John's murder, he will not look at his father's corpse because he knows he will lose control over his emotions (235). However, in looking at Simon, his father's servant, as he sits by the coffin, Bayard begins to experience "the regret and grief, the despair" (241). He stays awake all night and goes to face Redmond the next morning without looking at his father again. After Redmond leaves, Bayard can sleep, and he sleeps through his father's funeral. Bayard realizes he did not need to see his father; he concentrates on completing tasks of mourning and understands that no material representation of his father – his corpse, his likeness in a photograph – can replace him (253). Instead of his father's memory, he focuses on John's "dream" and believes that his presence will always be in the house. Bayard can adjust to his father's absence without a substitute or a means to defer grief because he has a new role in life to fill as head of the household. Furthermore, Bayard is different enough from his father that he will not try to be just like him. He accepts that John's dream is pervasive, but his treatment of Redmond is evidence that his philosophy of living is quite different from that which his father originally taught him. Bayard confronts his grief and executes his tasks of mourning as immediately as possible and then assumes the new roles available to him due to the loss.

Alternatively, Faulkner's characters who perpetually mourn or continually try to escape their grief are people in liminal states in other aspects of their lives, and these characters are typically women, reflecting the lack of options available to females both after the Civil War and at the time Faulkner writes. While times had changed, and with them, expectations for women, roles were still limited. Not only do women reflect this lack, but they also express dissatisfaction and refuse to accept their circumstances. Drusilla Hawk is a woman in limbo. Like Rosa Coldfield, she misses a rite of passage via her fiancé, Gavin's, death in battle. Losing Gavin makes her a widow of the Lost Cause, the "highest destiny of a Southern woman" (191), but puts her in a place where she does not know what to do. While this is a new role for her, it does not come with action or upward mobility. If anything, it is a step back. Drusilla no longer has the future she had looked forward to. Etiquette dictates that she should wear black and mourn and have no life as she grieves over the husband she had not yet even married. In a sense, she is liberated from the obligations marriage would place upon her, but liberated into what freedom? A young unmarried woman enjoyed few options in the Civil War-era South. Drusilla temporarily escapes grief and an oppressive, emotional mother by running off to fight in the war, but she cannot truly escape societal and familial expectations. Once the fighting is over, she experiences more loss; she loses the war, she loses the soldier's life that she loved, and she loses her autonomy when her mother forces her to marry John. This is a partially accurate portrait of some women in the post-bellum South, women who had to head households and do men's work while men were off at war, then had to step back into their previous domestic roles, an adjustment that was not always easy or enjoyed.

Drusilla also reflects the precarious position of women at the time when Faulkner wrote. In the 1930's, some women were moving far from the Victorian ideal, working outside the home and beginning to have options besides the life Drusilla describes, in which "one settle[s] down forever more...stupid, you see" (101). While these changes to a more modern lifestyle were positive for women who had been frustrated with their previous roles, many people were hesitant and experienced nostalgia for the former ways of life. Neither Drusilla nor women in the 1930s could easily move into a more modern existence or maintain the more traditional lifestyle without considering the other possibility. This limbo is one of the reasons Faulkner creates Drusilla as a character who does not mourn. In order to cope with losses, Drusilla must act, and she creates avenues in which to do so, a major difference between her and Rosa Coldfield. Still, Drusilla, like Rosa Coldfield, cannot let go of the past even though she tries to move beyond it. Rather than wearing it out as Rosa does, Drusilla attempts to diffuse her emotions through escape and violence, replacing loss with more losses. She tries to escape womanhood by masculinizing her appearance and her behavior, and she escapes her familial role by running away to war. When fighting in an actual war is no longer an option, Drusilla faces a psychological war with her mother and society, a war that defeats her once more. This loss puts her back in the position she was in when she lost Gavin, and still leaves her a woman in limbo. She is forced into a marriage that is likely never consummated, and she still has her battle experiences in mind years after the war. In a final attempt at violent vengeance for John's death, in a symbolic gesture, she hands Bayard the guns to avenge his father's murder. Upon her realization this strategy will not work, she finally breaks down hysterically. Having no course of action, no violent outlet, and

realizing Bayard is not of the violent mindset she previously thought, Drusilla attempts to outrun grief, a lost woman once more. She is lost in a variety of definitions: lost to Bayard, lost to traditional womanhood, and lost to herself. Drusilla's mourning work is ineffective, because she does not face her losses, but diffuses her emotion by at once ignoring her losses and searching for substitutes. She tries acting like the sweetheart who died, and she tries to engage in violence; neither strategy truly avenges or confronts her losses. Drusilla's problem is that she is held in the past, but that she lacks an appropriate role. Ineffective mourning is her only course of action.

The first indication of an inappropriate response to loss is Drusilla's masculine appearance. Bayard sees Drusilla at the house and notices her hair cut short, looking like his "Father's would when he would tell Granny about him and the men cutting each other's hair with a bayonet" (91). Hair is an indicator of gender, and short hair is unacceptable for a young woman at the time of the story. It is obviously cut hurriedly and crudely with uneven ends, most likely in hasty reaction to her fiancé's death. It looks as if it was cut with a bayonet, by a soldier – cut with a weapon for killing, by a killer, in a fit of violence or rage. Also, Drusilla carries the evidence of hard outdoor labor. Women performing masculine duties while men were off in battle (or in Drusilla's case, not returning from battle) was not unusual, but having this man's work to do is also a way that Drusilla copes with Gavin's death. She has to keep herself busy and cannot handle life otherwise. Not only does she need to engage in activity, but part of her mourning strategy (or strategy to prevent mourning) is to become manlike, as if she is trying to keep her fiancé alive by acting his part. The night that Denny wakes Bayard up to see the freed slaves pass, he notices the uneven hair and that

Drusilla is dressed in “the man’s shirt and pants” (100). “The” indicates they are a shirt and pants belonging to a specific man, likely Gavin or her father, or that they are “the” shirt and pants she had on earlier, as she had not undressed. The use of a definite article here indicates that she is dressing like a particular man in an attempt to take the place of her dead fiancé and possibly her father.

On this night, Drusilla tells Bayard she does not sleep anymore because she’s “keeping a dog quiet” and delivers a monologue about how now is the time to be awake because life used to be “dull and stupid” (100). That Drusilla does not want a traditional married life becomes evident later, but her speech is also a eulogy for the traditional way, and sounds like sour grapes. She had been engaged and was going to enjoy all the aspects of the old way of life – house, husband, likely children – but once she loses the opportunity, she looks at ways the new life can be better. If the new life is not better, she creates it in her mind to be a better life than the one she would have lived without the war and without the death of her sweetheart.

Like Rosa Coldfield, Drusilla’s liminal existence and her inability to mourn feed on each other. In Drusilla’s monologue, a particular phrase expresses her entrapment in limbo as well as her ambivalence. One can interpret the statement “Thank God for nothing” in several ways. One is that she is blaming God for nothing, for her having no future. Another is that she is thankful now that she has nothing to look forward to, that she does not have to go through the drudgery and pain of a normal woman’s life. Yet another interpretation is that she has no reason to thank God: perhaps God has forsaken them or perhaps no God exists. A loss of faith on her part is understandable. All of these meanings are possible, and all of them

can exist simultaneously, as they do for Drusilla. Also in the speech is the core of the mourning issue. She says, “you don’t even have to sleep alone, you don’t even have to sleep at all” (101). Rather than facing the issue at hand, she does something else. She does not confront sleeping alone, she stops sleeping. Her insomnia is not only a manifestation of grief, but it is an attempt to create an option that should not be possible. She has already tried acting like a man instead of a woman; now, she tries to act like she is not even human, that she does not require sleep. Living without sleep and living as a man are not plausible solutions to her problem, but she attempts them rather than addressing her losses.

Drusilla’s changing appearance and activities are a response to Gavin’s death and the changes caused by the war, but her mother sees them as a refusal to grieve, and in a sense they are. However, her behavior is still a manifestation of grief, though a refusal to mourn. When Drusilla is missing, Bayard says, “it was like the Yankees... had not only taken with them all living men...but even one young girl who had happened to try to look and act like a man after her sweetheart was killed” (189). Bayard’s observation is softer than Louisa’s analysis that “Drusilla had deliberately tried to unsex herself by refusing to feel any natural grief at the death in battle not only of her affianced husband but of her own father” (189). Louisa’s appraisal of her behavior makes Drusilla sound evil (not the echo of Lady Macbeth), and Bayard does not see her actions as deliberate, but as merely a reaction, if that; perhaps they are just what she “happened” to do. It is too difficult for Drusilla to be a woman in a place where being a woman of a certain class means being a lady, and what being a lady has been about is no longer clear; for the most part, it is no longer possible. Drusilla can more easily start over and remember the past in a negative light than continue living in the

previous ways and have to think over what has been lost. Instead of acknowledging that her fiancé is gone, she can try to be like him and try to live the life he lost. Further, Drusilla is very alone as a woman. She has her mother, but everyone else close to her is male – a brother and cousins. She has no model for what to do under these circumstances, does not want to confront what has happened, and moves on to start as fresh as she can. Of course, she carried baggage and reality will catch up with her, but she can stay ahead of it for awhile.

The excitement and violence of fighting the war only provide Drusilla with a short-term answer for her dilemma, though they let her attempt to take the place of her fiancé. In this way, she can continue to surround herself with men, living, riding, and fighting like them. Moreover, violence gives her the opportunity to avenge the deaths visited upon her family, and a chance to work out her anger and grief. Fighting is also work with visible outcomes in the form of body counts. She can say she has done something. The grieving process is an inner, emotional event with outward signs such as tears, but usually no tangible, visual accomplishments. Fighting diffuses Drusilla's emotions and gives her a goal and a new community. Not only can she fight Yankees, but she can fight the roles and expectations for women. She can physically act out her internal battles.

When a war is no longer available for her to fight, Drusilla experiences loss all over again. She is all right until the neighborhood women and her mother accuse her of having improper relations with John and conspire to marry her off to him and force her back into acting as a lady. Drusilla cannot actually be a lady, so she is truly acting. She can wear the dress, but she cannot play the part well. Once restored to dresses, she becomes sad and withdrawn. John tells her that the dress does not make any difference, but it makes all the

difference. No more does she share space with the men, and Bayard says he sees her only at mealtimes. She can no longer work outdoors, but must stay in the house, relegated to the domestic sphere. Louisa asks John point blank to marry Drusilla, and this confrontation finally causes her first visible breakdown. She is back in the position which she was in before her fiancé was killed, and having experienced a somewhat autonomous life and living as a man among men instead of merely as a woman to take care of men, she cannot readjust. Further, being back in the dresses and back in the domesticity she knew before the war no doubt causes her to think about the loss of her father and her fiancé.

Drusilla's problem, in mourning and life in general, is her refusal to accept and fill the role appropriate for her. This stubbornness is understandable, but it causes her much difficulty. While Rosa Millard steps into a masculine role for the duration of the war, she clearly plans to resume her place as a Southern lady afterward. Also, she engages in masculine endeavors, but remains ladylike in her appearance and manners. Her ladylike qualities work to her advantage when she is in contact with Yankees, and they also reinforce the fact she is only temporarily engaging in men's work. Of course, Rosa Millard dies before she has a chance to revert to her role as the woman of the house, so no one witnesses her full return to the domestic sphere. Drusilla does not intend to act manly for only a short time, but wants a masculine lifestyle.

While she has a very different mindset from Rosa Millard, Drusilla's position between roles is similar to Rosa Coldfield's. Both Drusilla and Rosa Coldfield have few opportunities. Unlike Rosa, however, Drusilla has no problem with doing things she is not supposed to do, stepping outside of the roles proscribed to her gender and class. One of the largest problems

for Drusilla is that her new roles run out and she is unable and unwilling to assimilate to her previous lifestyle. She has masculinized herself, left the home, been widowed without being married, and she is between generations, as she and Bayard are close in age but she marries Bayard's father. Similar to Rosa Coldfield's existence as an aunt younger than her niece, betrothed to her sister's widower who is decades older, Drusilla is cousin and wife, cousin and sister. The clearest illustration of her straddling roles is the scene in which she is standing between the men and women facing off in the Sartoris yard. The opening paragraph of "Skirmish at Sartoris" describes the day John took over the election, and Bayard remembers the men and women "facing one another like they were both waiting for a bugle to sound the charge" (187). Bayard says that the reason the women are pitted against the men in this scene is that the men have surrendered to the United States, but the women refuse to surrender. Here again is an example of inability to let go of the past, and how this reluctance was more prevalent among women. Drusilla is in the middle, a woman who does not want to return to the old way of being a lady, but unable to move into a fully masculine role. Drusilla stands by John with the ballot box, and she has been considered as one of the men until Louisa's arrival. Drusilla is literally between the men and the women, wearing both a wedding dress and a man's riding cloak. She is also trying to do what John has told her to do, and her mother is insisting she stop and do what she says. Drusilla has grown accustomed to living like a soldier, and she is devastated when her mother shows up with her dresses and attempts to refeminize her into the Southern lady she almost was before the war ended her marriage before it began. Louisa lives up to the old expectations for women and the Southern ideal of femininity, and propriety and stability of the family are of utmost importance to her,

as they were to women trying to maintain the old way of life after the Civil War.

Drusilla's existence in the space between Louisa's world and modernity is relevant beyond the Civil War. Diane Roberts notes, "From the late twenties through the thirties, Faulkner's fiction deals with the dangerous spaces between ladies and women and the means by which ladies might degenerate into women" (237). Drusilla is certainly living in this dangerous space; she has gone beyond "woman," but no label exists for her beyond "woman." Drusilla's independence and efforts in the war mean nothing good to Louisa, who sees her as a girl who "tried to unsex herself by refusing to feel any natural grief" (189) and "deliberately cast away" the "heritage of courageous men and spotless women" for which Drusilla's father (according to Louisa) has died (190). Drusilla certainly does feel grief over these deaths, but rather than wear mourning attire and emote, she acts as one might expect a man to act; she actively seeks revenge against the killers of her father and her fiancé. Drusilla sees acting courageously as more of a solution than staying home and playing the role of the heartbroken widow, grieving over her lost men. "Unsexed" may be an apt term for Drusilla, though the difficulty in labeling her only emphasizes the fact that she is a woman out of place.

Allison Berg agrees that Drusilla is a woman caught in the middle, and notes that Faulkner's portrayal of her as unable to continue living as a soldier or reassume her role as a Southern woman is sympathetic (449). While she is standing beside John in the scene described above, she is not exactly aligned with either the men or the women. She can not dress as a man, but dresses are inappropriate for her now. Even her mother, bent on a marriage and re-establishing the family order, makes her cover the wedding dress and veil

when she leaves with John to go to town. Drusilla “cloaks” her femininity and “dresses” her masculinity, remaining between the sexes.

Traditional womanhood was an integral part of the Lost Cause, and Berg points out that the traditional woman is even more important in the South after the Civil War because she can provide stability by preserving the family structure (449). Louisa, Mrs. Compson, and Mrs. Habersham take restructuring the family upon themselves, collecting a spare (and in their eyes, sullied) woman, widower, and motherless child and making them a family, at least superficially. Louisa is convinced that John and Drusilla are living in sin and that marriage is the only way to repair the damage done to the family and their reputation. Louisa feels that the marriage is restoring order within chaos. In the 1930’s, the Depression was on, one war was less than two decades behind and another was on the horizon. Stability was certainly a concern when Faulkner wrote *The Unvanquished*, and the family is historically an institution of which stability and tradition are expected.

Drusilla can not truly be a lady, and even after she marries she still relives her days of being a soldier. John makes her continue wearing dresses after the wedding, but Bayard says that despite her clothing, she “even now, even four years after it was over, still seemed to exist, breathe, in that last year of it while she had ridden in man’s clothes and with her hair cut short like any other member of Father’s troop, across Georgia and both Carolinas in front of Sherman’s army” (220). Drusilla does not want to stop utilizing mourning as a strategy to fight change. All that has changed about her is her marital status and her clothing. She still has the short hair and mindset of a soldier. Further, she is still waging a war. While she must

be married and dress as a lady, she is fighting being a lady, and she is fighting coming to terms with her losses.

One reason that Drusilla tries the coping mechanisms she does is that she is active, in contrast to Rosa Coldfield, who is passive. While both women are victims of their era, Rosa simply puts up with her circumstances while Drusilla takes on roles considered inappropriate for her. A significant aspect of Drusilla's freedom is that a man gave it to her. Just as Gavin gave her the horse, Bobolink, his death also gave her some freedom to be mobile. However, this freedom is limited. Drusilla cannot stay alone forever, lest she end up like Rosa Coldfield, or disgraced. Besides, Louisa simply will not allow her to remain unmarried. Sadly for Drusilla, her freedom turns out to be more limbo than freedom. Even though she leaves her house, she rides with a troop and takes orders. After the war, she lives under John's roof, and once her mother forces their marriage, John is telling her what to do. Bayard realizes her subordinate position when he notices that his father will not allow Drusilla to wear pants. Even her attempts to influence Bayard end in disaster. She receives the kiss she requests, but only after she pulls back and makes him be the aggressor. When she presents him with the pistols, she realizes he is not going to carry out the violence she regards as necessary to avenge John's death. Once again, she feels oppression and depression setting in, and she cracks, leaving the home rather than staying in her emotionally unsettling domestic situation.

Faulkner gives readers a character more complex than a merely rebellious woman. He presents Drusilla as a woman out of place who is unable to re-adapt to her previous lifestyle, and expresses the disapproval of others and the conflicts, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that this

can cause. Once women receive the opportunity to participate in an active life outside the home and family, they can not act as though they have never had this experience. However, urges deeply ingrained by a lifetime in the traditional manner cannot be removed. While Drusilla does not seem to have motherly or traditional feminine urges, she still tries to uphold parts of the Southern code involving violence and chivalry. Faulkner's illustration of a woman caught between two eras' differing visions of womanhood is pertinent both to Southern history and the audience he writes to in the 1930s, and the melding of roles is an issue that many women still struggle with today. While that may not always be the case, Faulkner's writing takes up a battle that will always exist and be understood by readers – the battle between the past and the present.

## Conclusion

Faulkner clearly understood the significance of the past and that it can often be difficult to come to terms with. Rosa Coldfield and Drusilla express his realization that a person must accept and move on from the past, both historic and personal, in order to live a tolerable existence. Both women suffer greatly, not only due to the tragedies that befell them, but also because of their inability to cope with those events. While knowledge of the past is useful and comforting, ruminating on it incessantly prevents a person from utilizing the present. Similarly, mourning is necessary after a loss, but a person cannot survive emotionally if it consumes his or her life. Grief is valid following the loss of a loved one or a major life change, but eventually, grief must be worked through. Rosa proves that simply waiting will not dispel emotional trauma, and Drusilla shows that ignoring the problem and replacing the loss will only lead to more grief, and that what is repressed will resurface later. The truth of a loss must be realized and addressed in order for a person to heal.

Rosa and Drusilla's limited options and their inability to cope with their grief form a cycle difficult to break. Bayard has the opportunity to grow from the loss of his grandmother and father and assume a new position in the family and community, but the women only lose opportunities through their broken engagements. While Drusilla and Rosa handle their grief poorly, they are not to blame. Even though they are out of place in their society, they are also products of their culture. Once they can not marry, their lives do not have the clearly defined purpose of a life like Bayard's. One who experiences a loss needs a future to move into, and Faulkner demonstrates that this is not always available. One must be willing to move on from grief, but there must be a way to create a new existence, a world not defined by the loss.

Drusilla and Rosa do not have this opportunity. Drusilla tries her best, but there is no appropriate role for her, as she is a woman in a position that can not be easily defined.

Faulkner relates that to truly move on, a person (or in the case of the South, a society) must have new goals and opportunities to move toward, as well as willingness to move forward. Possibility can lead to willingness, but with neither, healing and progress can not occur. With no readily available way to take control of one's life, a person will hold on to the past and the familiar in an attempt to maintain stability. Left without recourse, Rosa holds on to the past and calls up her memory of Sutpen. Drusilla acts like a man and fights in the war, a battle she continues to fight mentally after it is over, focusing on courage and violence in order to ignore her grief. Controlling grief and the past is the only power these women can find, and without autonomy and opportunity, they refuse to relinquish the past and fight the present.

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