# The Expropriated Voice: Sonority, Intertextuality, Flesh

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There is no voice for the disappearance of voice.
—Giorgio Agamben

William Faulkner's avowed artistic purpose was to "bind into a whole the world which for some reason I believe should not pass utterly out of the memory of man."[1] He was determined to capture in prose the voices and ways of talking that have since passed away, no longer audible to us except through the indices of writing. Keenly aware of the phonograph and its indexical power, Faulkner once said, "I put down the voices, and it's right."[2]

The companion of Faulkner's project may be articulated through a question once posed by Saidiya Hartman in her memoir of traveling along the old slave routes of Ghana: "What was the afterlife of slavery and when might it be eradicated?"[3] It is as if some inscription, a cut, won't dissipate with time. Faulkner's voices and sounds are to be included among the artifacts that Hartman names "afterlives," where what had once been a "horizon of hope"—first the dream of Emancipation, then the dream of Reconstruction—becomes for the present a "historical debris," not easily relinquished.[4]

I have described elsewhere how the air of Yoknapatawpha is continually imagined by Faulkner as a kind of storage and transmission system of social feeling, "like the air was worn out with carrying sounds so long," as Quentin Compson remarks in *The Sound and the Fury*.[5] Everything, even breath as the carrier of sound and voice, has already happened. Sounds, like the "the echo of a shot" that kills Charles Bon just after the Civil War in *Absalom, Absalom!*, hang in air for four and half decades, into 1909 and the novel's diegetic present. Such sounds are historical debris. Quentin reminds us in *Absalom* that a physical property of sound is to resonate outward from the sounding or vibrating body, but also from an event itself. "*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished*," he thinks. "*Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, . . . that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple space, to the old ineradicable rhythm*."[6] Faulkner's extraordinarily sensitive ear found in sounds a way to present a temporality that is nonlinear, recurrent, and above all durative: sounds in Yoknapatawpha linger long after their rightful moment has passed, Faulkner gleaning much from the sound recording technology he often claimed to resent in public and social life.[7]

Yet something of sound in Yoknapatawpha is premised in its first instance upon a delay between hearing and understanding. A voicing or a sounding requires later generations for its sense. We are quite far from the Derridean sentiment in *Speech and Phenomena* or *Of Grammatology* that sound relates to a desire for presence or life, or "hearing (understanding) oneself speak," where signifiers of the spoken word seem not to "fall into the world" but to be retained by the interiority of conception, untouched by time and space.[8] Faulkner heard and understood well the rift upon which the metaphysics of presence is premised. *Absalom*, in its approach to voicing the fact that "*happen is never once*," essentially takes a mallet to metaphysics to disclose its reverberation.

We think of the voice as a personal property, intimately ours, resonating from inwardness. But sounds and voices move across space and time in Faulkner, transgressing boundaries between moments and selves. The sexual, racial, and gendered dimension of that transgression of sound is acutely related to what I will call in this essay the *expropriated voice*, or a voice that loses its sanctified dimension of personal property. This expropriation, while first and foremost a theft of person, its usurpation and conversion into property, moves in the reverse direction: expropriation extends or stretches sounds, such that they do not and cannot be said to "belong" to any individual or a particular moment. They vibrate from a past that was not fully experienced in its first instance to carry a future that has not yet been disclosed.

Consider, for example, that when Joe Christmas is lynched by Percy Grimm in *Light in August*, the event is never explicitly seen by a focalizer. It takes place "off screen," as it were, indexed by a sound that is quickly separated from the scene in both its audibility and visibility. Faulkner does not allow the scream to linger long in the narrative space. The corporeal scream quickly ascends and bleeds into the metaphoric "scream" of a police siren. In the recitation of Joe's scream by narrative, it is displaced, hushed. The “scream” of the siren, as the hegemonic sound of law, does not simply drown out the corporeal scream, but reverses its political valence as sound. Had the scream been heard and indexed by narrative, rather than sliding metonymically into the siren, it would have implicated Grimm and the white violence in whose name he acts. The siren implicates Joe as the emergency, the outrage against the white order from which, in this moment, the narrative cannot fully separate itself.

It is not the narrative’s focalizer that mutes Joe’s scream, however, but rather whiteness as such: the narrative forces us to “hear” its violently muting effect. Joe’s scream is indexed just before it is occluded by the narrative, Faulkner blending the sounds such that the scream cannot be eradicated by the reader’s thoughts. As the chapter concludes, Joe’s scream persists, cited under erasure, sounded in silencing. In the beginning of the very next chapter, it lingers in Reverend Hightower’s nostalgic memory of an older Jefferson whose “fading copper light would seem almost audible, like . . . an interval of silence and waiting” out of which a sound rises.[9] To some extent, then, the narrative’s mode of listening abandons the scream of Joe, which is waiting not only to be heard but to be socially and politically recognized. Afterlives involve us in sounds whose meanings are not disclosed on time, nor in their proper space—Joe’s scream, though muted, resounds. We encounter a gap or interval in perception, one determined or subtended by the absence of adjudication. There is an “unbelievable crescendo” of the siren’s scream, “passing out of the realm of hearing” (465).

This realm of hearing is, as Judith Butler writes in relation to the visual field, “hegemonic and forceful,” race determining the field of the audible.[10] Jennifer Stoever names such a determination “the sonic color line.”[11] Where Hightower has perhaps not heard the scream, he has heard the siren on the other side of the color line that organizes Joe as the outrage. In the moment of Joe’s lynching, the failure of his scream to be indexed draws a direct line from the kitchen space where Joe is murdered to the hallway where Hightower stands; through sound, these spaces bleed into one. The sound and its afterlife in “the beginning of thunder not yet louder than a whisper” implicates Hightower in the refusal to listen (466). This moment of literary acoustics—positing a supersensible space—is defined by the refusal to recognize historical debris on the part of collective memory.

How are such sounds to be typologized and located in Yoknapatawpha? Joe’s scream is the sound of becoming an object, an undifferentiated thing to be possessed. At the same time, the almost immediate muting of the scream from the realm of hearing mandates by Faulkner’s logic a return, one whose resonance I will follow in this essay: it gives shape to Yoknapatawpha itself.

In relation to music and storytelling voices, the sound of Yoknapatawpha is defined by a wide spectrum of sounds racialized as Black ("A dog's voice carries further than a train. . . . And some people's. Niggers," Quentin says in *The Sound and the Fury* [114]).[12] Such sounds are not environmental per se, yet no less function as an indelible sound of place. These literary sounds, at times heard at an uncanny spatial and/or temporal distance, have the capacity to make and define Faulkner's fictional spaces. Within literary sound studies, it is increasingly common to speak of the "soundscape" in the way one would a landscape. However, the term "soundscape," as it originated in R. Murray Shaffer's *The Tuning of the World*, perpetuates imperial conceptions of space derived from ethnology and field recording, but also conceptions about the value of so-called natural sound over something like noise. "Soundscape" is a false locution when applied to spaces structured by violence. As a concept, it cannot accommodate the sounds of colonial and imperial ruination or the afterlives of slavery—these are sounds that, if attended to, attack the subject position of the auditor who wishes to organize them.[13]

Despite the air that carries all sounds in Yoknapatawpha, "acoustic ecology" also seems not the right term for the way that violence often ties sounds to each other, there being a connective tissue between them.[14] What would it mean to suggest that the scream is the sound of what Hortense J. Spillers calls "the flesh"? While the sonic color line organizes, surveils, and controls bodies, it is inseparable from the sounding "flesh" that ontologically precedes both the social and the body. For Spillers, the flesh is "that zero degree of social conceptualization" and the site of the wounding of the person of African males and females that is engendered and re-engendered transhistorically by "the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, and the bullet."[15] In *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander Weheliye returns to Spillers anew to argue that where the body is the site of legal personhood, the flesh is "human life cleared."[16] In other words, before the sonic color line that both ties and severs the scream of Joe and the scream of the siren in the *social* realm of hearing, there is the sounding flesh transmitted through the transhistorical sonic matrix of slavery. In sounding out, however, Joe also bears witness to what cannot be narrated, Faulkner making a space in narrative for flesh as it opens, for Weheliye, the liberatory possibility of a future not determined by the human/inhuman distinction.[17]

When it emanates from the flesh, then, sound is not characterological. Rather, flesh "is transmitted historically so as to become affixed to certain bodies,"[18] a transmission that, Weheliye suggests, exceeds the very logic that would claim to organize it as a spectrum of value. Joe's scream is the sound of the flesh, one in which a primal scene of slavery studies resounds: the scream of Frederick Douglass's Aunt Hester, whose "extreme texture of noise," Fred Moten writes after Édouard Glissant, ought to be considered the origin of a Black radical sonic tradition.[19] Among the primary objections of this tradition is to the humanist logic that deems bodies discrete, separate, and autonomous units. The scream, for Moten, radically "embodies the critique of value, of private property."[20] Such critique has bearing on Joe's sound as a matrix of radical historical transmission.

When Joe cries out in the twentieth century, physically and aurally his death ceases to be singular. Such plural resonance of the extreme texture of noise revises Roland Barthes's famous sentiment that "[t]he text is a tissue of quotations [un tissue de citations] drawn from the innumerable centers of culture."[21] Though Barthes invokes the origin of text in Latin *texere* or "to weave," one must ask what kind of tissue is at stake when Hester resounds from Douglass's *Narrative* into *Light in August*, or how Faulkner, in describing the "unbelievable crescendo" of the siren, had already used this same phrase in relation to the amplitude of the cry of another character, Benjy Compson, in *The Sound and the Fury* (320). The connective tissue of these sounds, between Aunt Hester, Benjy, and Joe, is the flesh, through which a captured flesh is torturously brought into being as subject, discrete and autonomous.

In following the transgenerational transmission of sonorous flesh in Faulkner, whose Yoknapatawpha he understood fundamentally as a single and contained landscape, we necessarily engage the problem of sexual difference in its most general sense: where one body can be said to end and another to begin. "The loss of the indigenous name/land provides a metaphor of displacement for other human and cultural relations," Spillers writes of the slave ship, "including the displacement of the genitalia, the female's and the male's desire that engenders the future."[22] Beginning with the name Yoknapatawpha itself, Faulkner meditates on the loss of indigenous name and land, and with it, the future-engendering desire. Sexual difference itself cannot be thought through outside of the Middle Passage: it begins as a violent construction, the New World being, Spillers writes, "written in blood."[23]

The castration of Joe (like Benjy) is a reinjury, a (re)instantiation of the larger and original wound to futurity. It would seem that even temporality itself in Yoknapatawpha falls under the sign of native expropriation and, on a deeper and more unconscious level, the slave body, the expropriative event of the slave trade such that everything has already happened. As we will find, however, sonic excrescences in Faulkner also register—over and against Faulkner's own master plan as author—what Weheliye posits as alternative temporalities, including in sexual difference itself. The transmission of a sonorous substance assumes different corporeal and characterological manifestations and implications across different historical moments in Faulkner, but each returns us to a "grammar" or tense premised upon the flesh. For Weheliye, the crucial dimension of Spillers's grammar—"the liberation in the future anterior of the now"—is primarily opened by Black women.[24]

The remainder of this essay takes the sonic measure of enslaved women like Clytie and her mother in *Absalom*, and Jim Crowed women like Dilsey and Nancy, but also the characters these women care for across different moments, figures like Jim Bond and Benjy, and their counterpart (on the other side of the color line) in figures like Rosa Coldfield, old enough to remember slavery, and Quentin Compson, both speaking and listening through a transhistorical memory of the flesh. While the sonic color line is differently inflected by these different instances, the fleshly substance ties and severs them into a single "ontological totality."[25] Weheliye's invocation of totality is precise: "the concentration camp, the colonial outpost, and slave plantation suggest three of many relay points in the weave of modern politics, which are neither exceptional nor comparable, but simply relational" (*Habeas Viscus*, 37). This totality requires that we move between textual moments by way of their connective tissue, transgressing both textual and personal boundaries in ways not fully circumscribed by Barthes's theory of the intertext.[26] Faulkner's tendency to return to sounds across the corpus—also a "viscus," as Weheliye might say—becomes one such imaginative site where beings relate across time and space in a tissue not simply of quotations but of corporeal sounds.

## The Possessive Grammar of Listening

In the Oxford English Dictionary, under "genitive," we find the following citation from 1955: "W. L. Westermann Slave Syst. Greek & Rom. Antiq. xiv. 92/1 The names of their owners appear in the genitive case after the slave names." The slave name is not the name of the father, but names a possession, being in the possessive case. The genitive case: "n. (in inflected languages) a case of nouns and pronouns, and of words in grammatical agreement with them, the typical function of which is to indicate that the person or thing denoted by the word is related to another as source, possessor, or the like; (also in uninflected languages) a word or word form having a similar possessive function." The genitive is thus conditioned by an ontological and biological meaning of "source" but quickly rerouted through a logic of property, the proper, and possession. The genitive rests on the possibility that things might belong to each other, that one might possess another. We say that a sound is "of" a particular object, or we can be confused as to a sound's "source"—the scream sounds out the fleshly dilemma of the genitive as the possessive case.

A comment by Faulkner is revelatory of this defining tension of the textual corpus. In his sessions at the University of Virginia, Faulkner was asked about the apparent resurrection of Nancy, a Black woman, in *Requiem for a Nun*, her death having been seemingly imminent in the earlier story, "That Evening Sun." Faulkner responded by saying that Nancy was, in both texts, "the same person, actually." He added, "These people I figure belong to me and I have the right to move them about in time when I need them."[27] When he narrates to us from the vantage point of 1915 his childhood memories of Nancy, Quentin Compson, a young white man, seems to have survived his 1910 suicide as posited by *The Sound and the Fury*. To say that the two Nancys or Quentins are the same person, as Faulkner suggests we do, we must do a bit of mental work or figuring. This work hinges *a priori* upon two conceptions: that the personhood of the character is constant, so constant that it unifies something that might be called a literary corpus; and that in this corpus, characters, across works, take on personality, but a special kind of personality that defies the absolute death sentence of mortal life. This is life that in the end so thoroughly belongs to the author as property that it can be resurrected at will.[28] Faulkner is with "right" to Nancy in time as intellectual property. But the first proposition, that Nancy is a person, a kind of life with enduring characteristics over time, is only negated by the second remark if we bypass the specter of slavery wherein it becomes possible for personhood to be expropriated, that is, to be owned by someone else.[29]

The concept of "person" relates not only to "personhood," but to "personification" and "impersonation," such that the legal and the poetic are folded into one another, the former continually requiring the latter for its sense in what Stephen Best names "the poetics of possession."[30] It is through the poetic, as the linguistic work of transformation, that the legal may turn the ephemeral or otherwise abstract into concrete things, quantifiable.[31] The phonograph made possible the storage of sound not only after death, but after the sound's own vanishing instance—the poetics of possession, in other words, is intimately tied to its acoustics. In Faulkner's moment of writing, the age of Edison, the recording of sound also turned the fugitive phenomenon of sound into a thing, making it possible to possess and exchange sounds in ways that borrowed from the poetics of slavery. Listeners to the new machine grappled not only with the metaphysical meaning of the technology but with the laws that might describe and circumscribe its use and application.[32] From the beginning, Best shows, not only the laws governing the circulation of recorded sound but the desire to control the ephemerality of sound waves in recording were shot through with the poetics of possession and the echoes of the Fugitive Slave Act.

At the same time, early respondents to sound recording found the phonograph to be co-extensive with a “feminization of person” (the violent androgyny of a horned mouth that both devours the sound for an inscribing needle and plays the sound back): the phonograph takes “me” without my consent.[33] To the extent that the phonograph is entangled with the metaphysics of property, it is entangled with the metaphysics of liberal personhood and its foundational notion of consent to be found in social contract theories. It is also entangled with the ancient remonstrance of written marks, bastard to their “legitimate brother” the voice, leaving written words without the protection of the “father” (a filial poetics that will prove central to sounding flesh in Faulkner).[34]

The poetics of possession is haunted by the specter of the slave, and with it, the distinctly modern sensibility that my *person* is something that I own like property, that is inalienable and cannot be exchanged.[35] A series of propositions follows from this notion when it comes to recording what I take to be *my* voice. Property, Hegel argues in *The Philosophy of Right*, is the expression of the self, all right beginning with the image of property or the ability to say “this is mine.” In order for the marks inscribed on the phonograph record to be counted as *mine*, the inscription must be understood as an indexical sign.[36] That mark is a trace not only of my voice but of my very person; so to take a recording of my voice without my consent or to infringe upon the copyright of my recording is to dispossess me. Copyright law, in other words, must do quite a bit of figural and poetic work to find in this otherwise ephemeral and fugitive expulsion of air the concretion of thingliness that we associate with property, whose original model is land.[37] If sounds can be poetically transformed, Best writes, “from forms exchanged between persons . . . to properties circulated between things,” then this circulation involves not simply forms and their genitive case (corporeal, poetic) but events and their tense.[38] A phonograph record is an event that, having once been in time, achieves new status as a thing.[39] Such phonography—the discrete phonographic form that contains previously unbound sound—bears significantly on Faulknerian literary form as a record of events. Persons are less agents than sites of mediation. That (re)articulative relation defines sonic afterlives, which both animate and dispossess Faulkner's characters such that phrases, voices, and sounds move between them in iterative ways.

The specter of slavery and the specter of the phonograph were there in Yoknapatawpha from the beginning in Faulkner's ambivalent thinking of the relation between character, body, person, voice, and authorial identity. Faulkner declares his proprietorship in print for the first time on the map in the endpapers of *Absalom*, his greatest novel of slavery. Yet at the same time, Faulkner understood that if the novel is to critique the proprietary and paternalistic logic upon which family, declension, and genealogy are founded, then novelistic form could not be linearly conceived.[40] The visualist logic not only of the map but of the flashback is shattered by the novel's approach to voices in voices, inward selves being possessed and animated by voices from the exterior. These include the penumbra of shorter texts, from "That Evening Sun" to the unpublished "Evangeline," that surround *Absalom* with variations. The body of the novel's protagonist, Quentin, is said to be "an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names" (7). These resonances exceed the insignia of the map to move across the Faulknerian corpus to repeat across bodies, selves, and their condition in flesh: sounds circulate within and between works in at times transatlantic and diasporic ways that also hybridize spaces and temporalities, exceeding Faulkner's claim to ownership.

The corpus, then, has two intertwined meanings: the body of works by which we recognize an author and his written belongings, and the "recalcitrant" body, as Jay Watson might say, that gives shape to actions, memories, and sentiments at the level of character and form. But there is perhaps also a third meaning: the flesh that shapes the gendered and raced distinction between captured and liberated positions, flesh being prior to both the body and the subject for Spillers. In the Faulknerian corpus/viscus, there is a transferability of sounds and voices that demands consideration of the poetics of possession and, with it, of fungible personhood. At the core of Faulkner's oeuvre is not only the generative problem of the voice, but with it a generative anxiety about the person. These issues are generative because, as Weheliye argues of the flesh, their temporality is not fully reducible to what can already be described through the human/not quite human/nonhuman distinction.

## Iterative Sonorities

We know of Faulkner's fraught relationship to technology, particularly sound technology like the jukebox, radio, and phonograph, which Faulkner allowed into his hearing space in highly circumscribed ways, particularly as technology expanded to include sound cinema.[41] The slave poetics haunts the realm of hearing—a slave acoustics—through the invasion of the right to privacy. One cannot close one's ears, making one, to some extent, not one, but rather vulnerable, open, and supine. A second problem unfolds from the first. If technology could so easily rend voice and body, what had held them together? This transformation of sound into a form of exchange between persons animates the expropriative and relational movement of sounds and voices in Faulkner, which move across works in ways that, while haunted by dispossession, also underscore a radically antiliberal philosophy. Faulkner understood that liberalism, the same thinking that gave us the individual who cannot be expropriated from himself (even when recorded), gave us the institution of slavery.

*The Sound and the Fury* is the moment in which Faulkner, turning away from "publishers' addresses," returns to a series of childhood memories to develop a newly experimental form defined by a pessimistic vision of family and family declension. It is the moment and form through which Faulkner also discovers his "voice."[42] Does not part of his pursuit of a "voice" involve an omission or repression of the slave body? Jason Compson briefly notes that his family had once owned slaves, but if the slave past is largely occluded from *The Sound and the Fury*, the slave sound is not. In interviews, Faulkner avows the image of Caddy as the origin of a novel whose title directs us to its neglected beginnings in sound. Situated at the threshold of the Compson estate, the moan of Benjy Compson, Caddy's severely mentally disabled brother, punctuates the opening of Faulkner's first great experiment in form. "Hush up that moaning," Luster tells Benjy within the first paragraph of the novel's first draft, "Twilight." Perhaps his bellow cannot be properly credited as the origin of a form because it is the expurgation of form—Benjy's cry knows no limits, no shape, no restraint, but only loss, lack, and rebuke. But it is not simply a sound of dispossession: it participates in a critical tradition. To the extent that Benjy is a displaced slave body, his cry resounds its fleshly freedom drive: in writing the cry, Faulkner bears witness to what is difficult to narrate.

It is a sound that Faulkner returned to many times across his fiction. The Compson saga closes in *Absalom* with Jim Bond, the so-called "idiot" mixed-race descendent of Thomas Sutpen, crying out at the conflagration of the Sutpen plantation house. In this moment, the reader of the Faulknerian corpus cannot help but recall how Benjy's cry "*hammered back and forth between the walls in waves . . . as though there were no place for it in silence*" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 124). Such a cry pushes out from the novel, the silent inscription, that would seem to contain it, but also from the logic of plot (the novelistic term sharing an origin with the territorial one):

> —and he, Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race, seeing it too now and howling with human reason now since now even he could have known what he was howling about. . . . [Quentin] could see . . . one last wild crimson reflection as the house collapsed and roared away and there was only the sound of the idiot negro left. (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 300–1)

This sound is not ephemeral; it is a remainder; it persists like a thing.[43] Here, Faulkner ends the novel, and the image of the southern plantation dynasty itself, Sutpen's Hundred, in a single sound. And yet it is plural. It is a sonorous and tenuous bond to a long, drawn-out history of barbarism, the circumambience of sound its history, propelling it in time such that it becomes possible to say that Benjy and Bond sound out an ontological totality.

This sound ends the Sutpen narrative (to the extent that it is held by the novel). Yet the sound of Quentin's voice—denying and negating—ends the text proper when he shouts or cries aloud that he does not hate the South. Faulkner crafts the 1909 (Sutpen) and 1910 (Compson) narratives to end, within a page of each other, upon human voicings. Recall, too, that within the first chapter of the novel, Rosa remembers Sutpen's slaves who spoke to the carriage's team of horses "without words . . . in that tongue in which they slept in the mud . . . the carriage whirling up to the church door while women and children scattered and screamed" (17). Rosa then remembers "the sound, the screaming" of Henry Sutpen before the spectacle of Sutpen wrestling with slaves, a spectator conjecturing "'It's a horse' then 'It's a woman' then 'My God, it's a child'" (21). In some precise sense, we confront in these soundings the limits of grammatical "voice" as the subject of the verb's mode of action. It moves to and fro along a spectrum of humanity. While Quentin's shout mounts toward a cry, it is one that still clings to this side of color line and language itself. Nevertheless, Faulkner had already written its conclusion in *The Sound and the Fury* and Quentin's act of suicide; Quentin would perhaps rather die than scream.

When Bond cries out at the conflagration, the narrator repeats the word "now," bringing the grammatical tense of the sentence to its knees. The present, Weheliye might say, is "in brackets."[44] It is quite literally so, for Faulkner frequently places the name "Quentin" in parenthesis such that the subject of certain sentences, their grammatical "voice," is unclear. The "now," Weheliye writes, "transmutes" the simple present such that what is heard is what "will have [been] actualized."[45] But the "now" also names the transmutation of the first-person voice that guarantees it grammatically: if the "now" is what is imagined but not yet described, then it is not localized in any actualized subject. Bond sounds out from the infrarational dimension of the present. Confronting that sound of the flesh and with it the limits of liberal reason, Quentin can only put the period on the long sentence that is the novel and end his life. In death, he preserves himself for liberal logic upon sensing the extent to which he, too, might be flesh. The map that ends *Absalom* as a printed artifact doubles down on this effect, plunging us back into the silence of cartography. To the extent that the other side of the image of the map is unprintable, an extreme texture of noise, we must leave the frame of the single work to realize its texture.

There is a genealogy that leads, compositionally, from Benjy's moaning in 1929 to Jim Bond's howling in 1936, the latter explicitly traceable to slavery and the flesh. There is also a genealogy that, in the history of Yoknapatawpha itself, leads from Bond (1909) to Benjy (1928), thus inscribing Benjy's already Hester-like sounds in the lineage of slavery. The task is not simply to rightfully instate Benjy's cry as the origin of Yoknapatawpha, but rather to confront what in this sound is difficult to transcribe and localize. When Faulkner introduced this cry from an ostensibly white body circa 1929, it would have been radically decentering for readers accustomed to the screams of slaves in American literary fiction to encounter such a sound from a white body. But Benjy is only ostensibly white: if he has been castrated, his name has been taken from him, and he is spatially confined to the Compson "estate," then there is something of his body that is already on loan to the poetics of the slave and the flesh.

By what means can we link these sounds between Benjy and Bond? Who cries first, and what does it mean to say that the sound is shared by their bodies? The fact that Faulkner thought it possible to write and rewrite these bodies and selves, but also to assign them a fleshly sonority, means that he thought it possible to defy the grammar of the simple past (Faulkner's language continually invokes non-grammaticalities). The fleshly sonority moves between Benjy and Bond, but also between Dilsey and Nancy—Benjy is the only white term in that movement, and perhaps Quentin, to the extent that his closing shout in *Absalom* mounts toward a cry. Quentin thus does not stay dead long; risen from the dead in "That Evening Sun," he remembers the cry of his caregiver, Nancy:

> One night we waked up, hearing the sound. It was not singing and it was not crying, coming up the dark stairs. . . . Our toes curled away from [the floor] while we listened to the sound. It was like singing and it wasn't like singing, like the sounds that Negroes make.[46]

In this story, Quentin begins his recitation of the past from the vantage point of adulthood, an age that (if we are to believe he is the same person who commits suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*) he could not possibly have reached. Remembering Nancy, the narrative voice falls away from the linguistic mastery of the adult and into that of a child. The voice no longer correctly conjugates its memories ("we waked up"). In some precise sense, the voice no longer recites; the narrative ceases to be a *récit*, which depends upon the simple fact that something has happened. Such ungrammaticalities are the only way to put into language what is neither past nor present. This conjugation—in the face of Nancy's moan—makes a space in narrative for what Christina Sharpe would call "being in the wake," a protracted mourning that attenuates Black being.[47] The toes curl away because the sound is of what precedes the body: the flesh. Something more than mere racism coming into itself frames Quentin's young listening. Nancy does not make a racially differentiated sound (a "Negro" sound), but rather the sound registers something like the violent differentiation upon which race, but also grammar itself, is premised. That is to say, the sound of Nancy's cry is racialized in Quentin's memory, but only tenuously. It is "like" the sounds that Negroes make; it is "like" singing and therefore also like crying. It is in the midst of transmutation, neither substantive nor essentially identical to itself. It is the sound of transposition itself, such that it becomes difficult to say what its rightful place is.

Benjy Compson does not appear in this story; he is either missing or not yet conceived by Faulkner.[48] If Blackness is supposedly "absent" in Benjy's cry, it is "present" in Nancy's. But if we follow the sounds, Blackness is no longer defensible as a mythos of blood but is instead an aural grammar of race: Blackness is produced by the sound; the sound is not produced by Blackness. At the level of compositional history, there is a sonic movement—we are in the presence not of a metonymic connection but of a physical and sonorous bond between bodies, a bond that subtends the individuation of the body itself. The sound resounds between them: Benjy and Nancy, Benjy and Bond, Nancy and Bond.

Compositionally, the short stories appear as negated possibilities of events that are, as it were, "fleshed out" in *Absalom* to become more comprehensive and encompassing in their scope. As evidenced by the shifting fates of recurring characters, these events were not, however, necessarily anticipated by Faulkner as having taken place in a single way, since characters share experiences, trading destinies. In one of the earliest drafts of *Absalom*, "Evangeline," Henry Sutpen returns to Sutpen's Hundred, then simply named the "dark house," to die. The house burns down in a fire set by Raby (later renamed Clytie). In this version, however, the unnamed narrator, who strikes us as an early register or preformation of Quentin, is there to witness this event principally through hearing "farcarrying negro voices":[49]

> The negroes came up, the three generations of them, their eyeballs white, their open mouths pinkly cavernous. . . . I could hear the negroes. They were making a long, concerted, wild, measured wailing, in harmonic pitch from the treble of the children to the soprano of the oldest woman, the daughter of the woman in the burning house; they might have rehearsed it for years, waiting for this irrevocable moment out of all time. . . . I think I said that the sound had now passed beyond the outraged and surfeited ear.[50]

Such rehearsal extends to or "farcarries" from the beginnings of slavery. The ear of the narrator attunes itself to a violence that determines the possibility of listening, but also of the American family itself. In this matrilineal sound (from oldest woman to daughter), what the narrator hears is the flesh. The legal condition of enslavement travels matrilineally (according to the Roman-law principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*, the status of the child follows from the mother; it is the mother who renders her child enslaved). For Spillers, enfleshment precedes such a legal frame: both paternal and maternal rights are nullified within the American grammar book of slavery. As the daughter in the burning house, Raby/Clytie both is and is not Henry's "sister," because she is and is not Sutpen's "daughter." As the sound of this alienation, what the narrator hears is thus not diminished by transmission across generations but chorally compounded by it.

It becomes impossible to say who or what is acting and with what force to hand down such sounds, but also to hand them across within a tissue of citations. In *Light in August*, Faulkner uses nearly the same language that will recount Jim Bond's howl five years later when he writes of Hightower, "[i]t seems to him that he can see, feel . . . the presence of fecund [Black] women . . . and the big house again, noisy, loud with the treble shouts of the generations" (*Light in August*, 407). Recall that Hightower's aural consciousness will, not long after this passage, prove to repress Joe's scream; here he revives the slave past rather than confront the Jim Crowed present. The reader registers what the character cannot. If the realm of hearing out of which Joe's scream passes is, as we have found, determined by the sonic color line, then the "outraged and surfeited ear" of "Evangeline" is also fully within that realm and it is attached to Raby/Clytie: with historical insight, the young daughter of a slave hears and relays in her turn an "irrevocable moment out of all time." It is just on the verge of adopting such an ear that Quentin decides he can hear no more.

Does Faulkner merely repeat himself from "Evangeline" to *Absalom*, from "That Evening Sun" to *The Sound and the Fury*, and back again—or does the sound of flesh mix and hybridize characters and events such that it is no longer possible to say, with any certainty, who is descended from whom, which text from which, as the logic of property and social status would require? "Property is individual," Best writes, "i.e. indivisible (Latin, sixth century, *individuus*, from Greek *atmos*, not cuttable, not divisible)—'not divisible,' incapable of possession by any other than that 'one' who bears 'title.' Property is in this instance the ground of autonomy."[51] If Faulkner were to subvert this ground, then he could no longer put faith in the voice as a kind of property. In fact, the moment the voice exceeds its status as property, it becomes "sound," moveable and transposable. In the movement of sounds across the works, and across bodies, Faulkner incites anxieties of dispossession, yet at the same time the sound of the flesh opens autonomy's tight embrace.[52]

In the Compson saga, Quentin is continually subject to the chastising voices of fathers that enter his ears unbidden, a direct route to his inner life. Yet to the extent that listening renders him vulnerable, his autonomy gives way. In that giving way, sound becomes a site not only of subjectification but of its excess. In listening, one can become flesh, and in becoming flesh, one becomes more than one. Thus as Quentin listens to Shreve tell the story and Shreve to Quentin, they are said to become their forebears, two half (not) brothers, one white and the other Black, Henry and Bon, each of them two and so together four. In listening, they exceed "*the irrevocable repudiation of the old heredity*" (277). Similarly, the monovoice of *Absalom* seems to pick up on the language of characters and to overhear them, to absorb them into its system such that they cannot be absolutely differentiated from each other. But if "these people belong to me," what were the limits of Faulkner's critique of personhood and ownership? As if in answer to this question, Rosa announces "*the citadel of the central I-Am's private own*" (112) to declare that it is "*the touch of flesh with flesh*" that "*cuts*" the private own, defiles the sanctity and containment of the person in both love and enmity (111). The sound, lyric sensibility, and hypnotic action of Rosa's voice—her sonority—renounce the understanding of flesh that she articulates. Through the act of speaking, she continually lives out fantasies of touching across race. She did not "spy" upon Judith and Bon, Rosa says, but rather became a part of

> *'that slow and mutual rhythm wherein the heart, the mind, does not need to watch the docile (ay, the willing) feet'; [I] would think 'What suspiration*

> *of the twinning souls have the murmurous myriad ears of this secluded vine or shrub listened to? what vow, what promise, what rapt biding fire has the lilac rain of this wistaria, this heavy rose's dissolution, crowned?'* (119)

Rosa's lyric voice exceeds grammar—which insists upon the separation between things, between past and present—to open a series of alternative potentials, "*a might-have-been which is more true than truth*" (115). If by Western logic, the voice is internal to me cannot be taken from me, and is intimately defined as my inmost self, Rosa defies this logic in practice during her soliloquy in chapter 5. Her sonority, though not a howl, is within the howl's sonic realm and cuts across fleshly boundaries and privacies. Joined with or twinned by Clytie, who grasps her white arm, Rosa remembers, "*I had instinctively cried . . . perhaps not aloud, not with words*" (112). Such effects underscore chapter 5 as among the most enigmatic voices in the history of literature. Situated between Rosa and Quentin who listens to her, its voice exists somewhere *between* entities: a "twinned" yet also fundamentally expropriated voice resonating between two people who have been deindividuated. The voice belongs to both of them and neither of them. The result is text that literally vibrates on the page.[53] It is not so much verbal as sonic, an event of speech, no longer bound to the image of property, as Quentin is affectively receiving it from Rosa.

In Rosa's sonority, but also her act of listening to the echo of the shot that reverberates the event of Bon's death, Faulkner seeks another and temporalizing logic for the voice beyond property, beyond the object that is supposed to guarantee identity and unity in time. Against this background is the emergence of Clytie, the slave daughter, as the remainder and (un)rightful residue of the voice of the father. Clytie speaks in perhaps the most authoritative voice in *Absalom*—a voice "*quiet*" and "*still*" (111)—when she grasps the arm of Rosa and calls her by her first name. Touching flesh with flesh, Clytie says (in one of her few moments of speech), "*Dont you go up there, Rosa.*" The voice is also authorial, but what does it author? The plantation had been torn "violently out of the soundless Nothing" by Sutpen's fiat (4), "the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light.*" Though Clytie to some extent identifies with the father when she grasps Rosa, a father she will ultimately protect with her final act of conflagration, the grammar of the command, like the language of genesis, is not meant for her: it is a radical usurpation of paternal speech.

To amplify this subtle radicality, we might consider the various speech situations that define narrative transmission in *Absalom* as well as its margin. There are forms of address, for instance, that shape not only the

Sutpen clan, determining who may and may not have a rightful place in the family, but also the Compson men, for whom the story of Sutpen acts as a patrimony, sounds handed from father to son like a name (in a reverse corollary, Shreve postulates that the sound of Bond haunts Quentin). In a different listening situation from those of the sons, Rosa is without right to speak because everything she knows she learned by listening at closed doors. When Rosa does speak, that is, she does so thanks to fugitive sounds, sounds capable of escaping closed doors. Clytie's command, however, is fleshly and emanates from a different situation, that of the slave mother. Not only is Clytie more profoundly without right than Rosa, but her imperative utterance, though it has the trappings of normative grammar, is absolutely outside the realm of such grammar: it is as if the silence beneath all voice suddenly could speak. In Spillers's terms, Clytie is mama's baby, but mama herself was a maybe, a slave and quasi-person. It is from this maternal line that she inherits her silence, her radical nonright to speak.

This slave mother—whose name we never learn—was without the sanctity of the body. Thus the story of her arrival in town, the story of Clytie's birth, is actually not a story at all. It is at the limits of the novel's modes of recitation, which convert event into narrative. It is somewhere between recitation and silence when Mr. Compson says to Quentin, "Miss Rosa didn't tell you that two of the niggers in the wagon that day were women?" (48). Clytie's mama could be one of two unspeaking women. Isn't the unnamed slave woman, the zero degree of the expropriated voice, the origin of the novel's claim to discourse? To some extent, it is she who determines the beginning of the story (its voicing) and the dynasty, because she gives their end in Clytie.

There is a distinction, then, between the voices that Faulkner does not allow us to hear, voices that, like Joe's, are alluded to and unrecorded, and the voices that we are allowed to hear, like Benjy's, Nancy's, Dilsey's, Rosa's, and even Clytie's. But beneath these two possibilities, the recorded and the unrecorded, is a third, what Giorgio Agamben, in the epigraph to this essay, calls "the disappearance of voice" for which "there is no voice." Faulkner understood that he must write toward that voice, an asymptote that could not be heard or transcribed.

## NOTES

1. William Faulkner quoted in Joseph Blotner, "William Faulkner's Essay on the Composition of *Sartoris*," *Yale University Library Gazette* 47, no. 3 (January 1973): 124.

2. William Faulkner quoted in Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944–1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 114.

3. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 45.

4. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 39.

5. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, rev. ed. (1929; repr., New York: Vintage International, 1990), 114. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

6. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, rev. ed. (1936; repr., New York: Vintage International, 1990), 210. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

7. For a discussion of air as a recording medium in Faulkner, see Julie Beth Napolin, "The Fact of Resonance: An Acoustics of Determination in Faulkner and Benjamin," *Symploke* 24, no. 1 (2016): 171–86. For a related discussion of sound recording as an absent presence in Faulkner, see Sarah Gleeson-White, "Auditory Exposures: Faulkner, Eisenstein, and Film Sound," *PMLA* 128 (2013): 87–100. Also see Julian Murphet, *Faulkner's Media Romance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

8. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, rev. ed. (1967; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 166.

9. William Faulkner, *Light in August*, rev. ed. (1932; repr., New York: Vintage International, 1991), 466. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

10. See Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 17.

11. See Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). For Stoever, this color line, while traceable to slavery and its modes of listening, continues to control and surveil Black bodies in the present.

12. Several scholars have shown Yoknapatawpha to be populated by Black musical forms in racially amalgamating ways. See Thadious Davis, "Lingering in the Black: Faulkner's Illegible Modernist Sound Melding," in *Faulkner and the Black Literatures of the Americas: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2013*, ed. Jay Watson and James G. Thomas, Jr. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 36–58. Also see Erich Nunn, *Sounding the Color Line: Music and Race in the Southern Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 154–72; and Charles A. Peek, "'That Evening Sun(g)': Blues Inscribing Black Space in White Stories," *Southern Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 130–50.

13. I discuss this issue at length in my book, *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

14. The phrase "acoustic ecology" was coined by composer Francisco Lopez as a critique of Shafer's tendency to value some sounds above others.

15. Spillers quoted in Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 39.

16. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 39.

17. Also see Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). Silverman argues for an alternative Western lineage descended not from Descartes's insistence on the individual but from Ovid's notion "that everything derives from the same flesh," promoting transformation and equality rather than stasis and hierarchy (2).

18. Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh*, 38.

19. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 7.

20. Moten, *In the Break*, 12.

21. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

22. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer, 1987): 73.

23. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

24. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 39.

25. Weheliye underscores how "specific instances of the relations that compose political violence realize articulations of an ontological totality" (13).

26. The flesh for Weheliye serves as a site for new ways of being and thinking that cannot be reduced to humanism and its comparative template of human/not quite human /nonhuman.

27. Frederick Landis Gwynn and Joseph Leo Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), 49.

28. Daina Ramey Berry has shown how enslavement persists beyond death, enslavers receiving value from slave mortality through a variety of legal and financial instruments, including speculation and insurance. See Berry, "'Broad is de Road dat Leads ter Death': Human Capital and Enslaved Mortality," in *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, ed. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 146–62. In that analogy between authorial proprietorship and slaveholding, the author too derives value, if not from mortality, then from the claim to own characters as a kind of fungible "life."

29. Stephen Best, *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 53.

30. Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*. Best also describes how nonhuman entities such as corporations are personified by law.

31. For Best, the *sine qua non* of this transformation is to be found in the paradox of the recorded voice. In "The Phonograph and Its Future," for example, Thomas Edison remarks on "the almost universal application of the foundation principle [of the phonograph], namely, the gathering up and retaining of sounds hitherto fugitive, and their reproduction at will." See Thomas A. Edison, "The Phonograph and Its Future," *North American Review* 126, no. 262 (1878): 527.

32. In this way, Best shows, both copyright law and the constitutional right to privacy act to delimit how sounds can move in public space; where property, law, and the person intertwine, we immediately confront the specter of the slave.

33. For a discussion of feminization in relation to early European responses to phonography, see Charles Grivel, "The Phonograph's Horned Mouth," in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 31–62. In this same vein, Michael Taussig shows how phonography was quickly adopted to imperial forms of capturing the curious life of the primitive other, life thought to be elastic, more susceptible to mimesis—in other words, without propriety. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 230–31.

34. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 81 (lines 275e–276a). This section of the *Phaedrus* is at the core of Derrida's critique of Plato's metaphysics of voice in *Dissemination*.

35. Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*, 60–62.

36. Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*, 62.

37. To some extent, Faulkner repeats such a gesture in deeming Yoknapatawpha "my own little postage stamp of native soil," a metaphor haunted by the gesture of primitive accumulation that erects its most famous plantation, Sutpen's Hundred. See James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926–1962* (1968; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 255.

38. Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*, 56.

39. That sonic events may be circulated and exchanged as things is one condition of the nineteenth century's spectacular acts of violence and crimes against the flesh. For a related discussion of the staged recording of the 1893 lynching of Henry Smith in Paris, Texas, that made the rounds at festivals, see Gustavus Stadler, "'Never Heard Such a Thing': Lynching and Phonographic Modernity," *Social Text* 28, no. 1 (March 2010): 87–105.

40. Similarly, Weheliye describes his theoretical project in *Habeas Viscus* as a task for the formal possibilities of writing. Also see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). Sharpe describes her project, after the work of Maurice Blanchot, as a "writing of the disaster." The Middle Passage is *the* disaster on which modernity pivots, yielding an alternative approach to the book form.

41. With cinema, the imaginative problem became one of "synching" voice and body. See, for example, Jay Watson, "The Unsynchable William Faulkner: Faulknerian Voice and Early Sound Film," in *William Faulkner in the Media Ecology*, ed. Julian Murphet and Stefan Solomon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 93–114.

42. See Philip M. Weinstein, "Crisis and Childhood," in *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11–65.

43. Also see Barbara Ladd, "'The Direction of the Howling': Nationalism and the Color Line in *Absalom, Absalom!*," *American Literature* 66, no. 3 (1994): 525–51.

44. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 138.

45. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 138.

46. William Faulkner, "That Evening Sun," *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (1950; repr., New York: Vintage, 1995), 296.

47. See Sharpe, *In the Wake*. Such being includes the work of living within the aftermath of what the slave ship's passage leaves behind.

48. While the handwriting of the first draft of "That Evening Sun" is similar to that of "Twilight," the Benjy section of the manuscript of *The Sound and the Fury*, the paper is similar to that used for the revised opening of Quentin's chapter. See Gail M. Morrison, "The Composition of *The Sound and the Fury*," in *William Faulkner's* The Sound and the Fury, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008), 13.

49. William Faulkner, "Evangeline," in Joseph Blotner, ed., *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner* (1979; repr., New York: Vintage International, 1997), 606.

50. Faulkner, "Evangeline," 607.

51. Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*, 326n91.

52. Weheliye similarly describes the flesh in relation to an "expansive spatiality of the chorus" (*Habeas Viscus*, 138).

53. Chapter 5 is the only chapter of the novel printed completely, but for a few lines over its final two pages, in italics. I understand the technique to be a graphicization of vibration, a kind of phonographic imprint of the sound waves of Rosa's voice reaching Quentin's ear.