William Faulkner’s *The Town*, Psychoanalysis and the Reassessment of Lack

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Dae Jung

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Thesis written by
Daae Jung
B.A., Chonbuk National University, 2009
M.A., Kent State University, 2011

Approved by

________Tammy Clewell___________, Advisor

________Ron Corthwell___________, Chair, Department of English

________John R.D. Stalvey__________, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Jefferson’s History as the History of Trauma

One way of characterizing William Faulkner’s literary texts is that his way is a narrative of loss and mourning. Andre Bleikasten argues, “[m]ourning, then, is not only a possible key to the process of Faulkner’s creation but also a motif readily traced in the novels themselves” (Bleikasten 47). According to Bleikasten, Faulkner’s novels, especially *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* “have sprung out of a deep sense of lack and loss—texts spun around a primal gap” (Bleikasten 47).

Whereas Bleikasten focuses on loss and lack represented on a personal and existential level in Faulkner’s texts, Richard C. Moreland is keen on collective and historical loss. Collective and historical loss in Faulkner’s work is frequently disguised as the white and usually aristocratic male’s individual loss. But Faulkner does not reduce the white aristocratic male’s loss to a purely existential and structural one; rather, he makes it explicit that individual loss has historical and communal significance. A reader may face the white male character’s loss of sister or daughter’s female purity as represented in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*. However, what underlies this loss are the internalized experiences of the hierarchical distinctions of gender and sexuality. In relation to the loss represented in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*, Moreland points out:

This modernist representation of that loss has tended in many ways to leave that society’s underlying distinctions of sexuality and gender uncritically in
place. These distinctions, that is, have been represented under the metamysical, ahistorical threat of horrifying or ironically inevitable collapse, to the exclusion of other (Moreland 194).

To a certain extent, the modernist representation of loss tends to transform historical loss into structural or existential loss since it does not explicitly describe the historical origin in which the male character’s loss originates. But by critically portraying how the white male characters internalize the given politics of gender, race and class of the time, Faulkner reveals the historical and ideological roots of private crisis and individual loss. That is, Faulkner shows that the white male character’s obsession with loss and anxiety are a regressive attempt to create a false image of the old South as something ideal in order to deny the historical changes of the South. For instance, Quentin Compson III, the eldest son of Compson’s family in *The Sound and the Fury* is protective of his sister Candace and traumatized by her loss of virginity. This reveals his obsession with the Southern ideals of female chastity. Unable to cope with his sister’s love affairs, Quentin continuously regresses into his childhood memories and fantasies. His suicide is thus the culmination of his denial of the distressing reality that threatens his symbolic ideals.

Sigmund Freud tells in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* his famous example of repetition compulsion, a child’s game of *fort* (“gone”) and *da* (“here”). Freud observes that a young child at the age of one and a half plays with small objects, getting hold of and throwing them away into a corner. When he did this, he uttered “o-o-o-o,” meaning “gone,” then took the object back and uttered “a-a-a-a,” “here” with joy and satisfaction. Freud’s interpretation of the child game is that “the child is reenacting the
departure and return of his mother, which he had just recently been forced to confront” (Caruth 65). His mother’s disappearance for a couple of hours is so painful for the child that this game for him is compensation for the sense of loss. Freud sees this game as “the child’s great cultural achievement which he made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting (“Beyond the Pleasure” 9). Freud’s analysis of the child’s game demonstrates the interconnectedness of trauma, loss and the need of compensation for a lost object. In analyzing Freud’s texts, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as follows:

[I]n Freud’s text, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what it seems to be suggested by Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event but rather an event that, like Tancred’s first infliction of a mortal wound on the disguised Clorinda in the duel, is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor (Caruth 3-4).

Here Caruth implies three essential characteristics of trauma: (1) physical or external violence that intrudes into the psyche (2) belatedness or temporal gap between “knowing” and “not-knowing” and (3) reverberation of the past traumatic event.

Faulkner represents Southern history as the history of trauma. In so doing, Faulkner invokes these three characteristics of trauma in his texts.

Trauma in Faulkner’s texts is primarily represented as physical violence such
as rape, murder and suicide. For instance, in *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin Compson III commits suicide as the tragic culmination of his obsession with his sister and traumatic memories of her promiscuity. Faulkner further explores the forms of traumatic violence in *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*. *Sanctuary* illustrates a series of traumatic events that continuously haunt Temple Drake in *Requiem for a Nun*. After a car crash near the Old Frenchman place where Gowan and Temple encounter the bootleggers Popeye, Goodwin and Tommy, Gowan Stevens is offered alcohol and becomes quite inebriated. As she is neglected and abandoned by her escort Gowan, Temple is brutally raped by the impotent Popeye at night and taken to a brothel. In the brothel, Temple is sexually abused by Popeye and Red and subsequently she witnesses Red being murdered by Popeye. While the violence is perpetrated on her, Temple’s consciousness almost completely shuts down and the memories of the events are repressed. By refraining from the direct description of the rape scene, Faulkner emphasizes the radical breach in Temple’s consciousness of what really happens. At the beginning of *Requiem for a Nun*, Temple seems to be recovered from her trauma and lead an ordinary upper-class married life with Gowan Stevens. As the plot unfolds, however, Faulkner reveals that Temple suffers the symptoms of trauma. Temple unconsciously replays the past trauma, which ends up being another traumatic event of her newborn daughter being killed by Nancy Mannigoe who is Temple’s housemaid. Temple hires Nancy who was a former prostitute because Nancy reminds Temple of the brothel life that she had in the past. As Temple plans to take her daughter and run off with Pete, the brother of the murdered Red, Nancy murders Temple’s daughter in order to save her from the same sort of violence that Temple and she herself
experienced in the past.

As Temple Drake’s case demonstrates, the memories of trauma are unconsciously relived and repeated through post-traumatic effects. But an experience and repetition of trauma in Faulkner’s work is not an entirely private affair in that the entire community of Jefferson is involved in a putatively private trauma. In concrete terms, it is the laws, social norms and public acknowledgement of the trauma that give meaning to the traumatic event. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that an act of testifying and bearing witness to trauma crucially opens up the possibility for healing trauma. In listening to the Holocaust survivors’ testimonies, Dori Laub claims,

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to know one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life (Felman and Laub 78).

In *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*, Faulkner describes how the legal system of Jefferson fails to acknowledge the loss of women, blacks and Indians and suppresses the call of the victims to tell their story to the public. The failure of the community of Jefferson to listen to their sufferings brings about a destructive repetition and replaying of trauma generation after generation, as Nancy’s infanticide exemplifies. At this point, individual trauma is transformed into a communal experience. In paralleling Freud’s two texts, *Beyond Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*, Caruth claims that “theory of trauma, as a historical experience of a survival
exceeding the grasp of the one who survives, engages a notion of history exceeding individual bounds” (Caruth 66). Faulkner’s texts capture the very moment that an experience of individual trauma transcends the bounds of individual life and subsequently conditions the history of the South.

Caruth’s theory of trauma and history aptly illuminates this point. Particularly in Freud’s account of Jewish history entitled *Moses and Monotheism*, Caruth discovers that the question of history is intimately tied with the issue of trauma: “[b]ecause of its seeming fictionalization of the Jewish past, this work has raised ongoing questions about its historical and political status” (Caruth 11-12). She claims that “the most significant moment in Jewish history is thus, according to Freud, not the literal return to freedom, but the repression of a murder and its effects” (Caruth 14). In other words, the beginning of Jewish history, according to Freud, is possible through the experience of trauma—the murder of the Moses—and continues with its post-traumatic effects—the repression and return of the deeds of Moses. Following Freud’s fictionalization of Jewish history, Caruth defines the history of trauma as not merely a return of the past but ultimately a traumatic departure for the future: she thus uses the expression “the possibility of history” that echoes Heidegger’s projecting possibilities to the future: “Freud resituates the very possibility of history in the nature of a traumatic departure” (Caruth 15). For Caruth, the notion of trauma as a historical survival is essentially future-oriented although she is mindful of the fact that repressed traumatic memories return as post-traumatic effects and haunt survivors trans-generationally. It is the effects of the repressed traumatic memories that establish a history: “[t]he exodus from Egypt, which shapes the meaning of the Jewish past, is a departure that is both a
radical break and the establishment of a history (Caruth 14). Considering the fact that all histories involve a record of trauma, including war, epidemic, crimes or massacre, Caruth’s history of trauma, I claim, is not confined to particular cultures but is universally applicable.

Caruth accentuates the existence of a traumatic reality, that is, a radical shock that intrudes into the psyche of the self. This radical shock precedes and leads to the psyche’s traumatization. But ironically a strong type of traumatic experience renders the self inaccessible to the knowledge of trauma: “immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness…the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing” (Caruth 92). Unable to comprehend the shock “in time,” Caruth argues, the self in a sense misses the direct experience of the shock:

The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known. And it is this lack of direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition of the nightmare (Caruth 62).

Why does the shock necessarily repeat through such post-traumatic effects as nightmares and hallucinations? Caruth claims that the repetition of nightmares and hallucinations takes place in order for the self to figure out the enigma of his or her survival: “the traumatic neurosis is not the reaction to any horrible event but, rather, the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival” (Caruth 60). What is then the relation between trauma and survival? Consciousness, according to Caruth, places stimulation within an ordered experience of time. However, what happens in trauma is
the breach in the mind’s experience of time: “[t]he breach in the mind—the conscious awareness of the threat to life—is not caused by a pure quantity of stimulus, Freud suggests, but by “fright,” the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly” (Caruth 62). Caruth argues, “[t]he shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 62). The missing of direct experience, according to Caruth, necessarily becomes the basis of “the endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction” (Caruth 63). But I do find Caruth’s point less than persuasive when she argues that the fright, that is, the lack of unpreparedness to take in stimulus becomes a necessary and sufficient condition for the repetition of destructive behaviors. Caruth misses an important point that not all the survivors of a life-threatening event who experience the fright or the shock become traumatized. For Caruth, a life-threatening event, that is, “the question of external reality, and specifically to a reality of death, catastrophe, and loss” (Caruth 93) is the main cause that leads the subject to being traumatized. However, this does not explain radically different reactions to trauma among survivors.

Slavoj Zizek proposes a shrewd alternative account of trauma, which possibly illuminates the origin and cause of trauma. In contrast to Caruth’s view that the experience of a threatening event and the question of a survival ultimately traumatize the self, Zizek argues:

For Freud and Lacan, external shocks, brutal unexpected encounters or intrusions [are] viewed properly as dramatic impact to the way they touch
preexisting dramatic psychic reality…[on] even the most brutal external intrusions…Freud’s hypothesis is that no matter how radical it is, we can talk properly about psychic trauma only if the external intrusion triggers later the internal preexisting psychic trauma, only in this way. (Zizek, “Father, Can’t You See”)

According to Zizek, however radical an external intrusion is, the intrusion itself cannot be the direct cause of trauma unless it provokes the internal preexisting psychic trauma. An external shock is retroactively conceived as something traumatic rather than the reverse. In other words, it is not the case that the external reality of shock \textit{per se} is traumatic to the subject:

Namely, when we spoke of the symbolic integration of a trauma, we omitted a crucial detail: the logic of Freud’s notion of the “deferred action” does not consist in the subsequent “gentrification” of a traumatic encounter by means of its transformation into a normal component of our symbolic universe, but in the almost exact opposite of it—something which was at first perceived as a meaningless, neutral event changes \textit{retroactively}, after the advent of a new symbolic network that determines the subject’s place of enunciation, into a trauma that cannot be integrated into this network (Zizek, “For They Know Not” 228-9).

As discussed previously, Caruth similarly defines the history of trauma as something retroactively reconstructed. But she still presupposes that a horrible event like the case of the murder of the Moses in Jewish history is traumatic in its intrinsic nature, not perceived and recalled later as something traumatic. According to Caruth, the murder
of the Moses is so traumatic that the Jewish history reenacts this repressed memory trans-generationally. On the other hand, Zizek’s theory of trauma provides a plausible explanation about why some survivors of a horrible event do not suffer post-traumatic stress disorder while others do. But what Zizek’s theory of trauma further illuminates is the political and ideological nature of trauma and its relation to the internal psychic reality of the subject. This political and ideological significance of trauma is intimately linked to Zizek’s interpretation of the Lacanian real and symbolic.

Zizek presents trauma as an important category of the real. Moving to the sixties and seventies, Lacan stressed the structural effects the real produces in “the symbolic reality of subjects” (“Sublime Object” 163). In light of these structural effects, the function of the real is analogous to that of God: God might not really exist yet the notion of God is postulated nevertheless in order to underpin all ideological standpoints in a society or in order to eliminate one’s existential anxiety and give a secure meaning to his or her life. In a similar fashion, Zizek reinterprets Freud’s analysis of the wolf-man from this structuralist perspective;

Let us just recall Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man: the paternal coitus a tergo was first perceived as something neutral... it was only years later, with the further elaboration of the child’s sexual “theories”, that it acquired its traumatic status: only at this later stage did it become possible for the child to... fit it into a symbolic frame in the form of a traumatic wound. Here again, Hegel’s proposition that what is lost comes to be through being lost receives its full value: an event is experienced as “traumatic” afterwards, with the advent of a symbolic space within which it cannot be fully integrated (“For
They Know Not” 222).

For the wolf-man, witnessing parental coitus is not traumatic in its intrinsic nature. But the memory of witnessing the event becomes traumatic at the later stage of his life as he recalls and appropriates the memory to explain his present enigma of the meaning of sexuality. According to Zizek, trauma as the real fills a gap, a hole in the symbolic order and “must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure” (“Sumblime object” 162). But at the same time the real as an empty signifier first and foremost points to the fundamental lack, to wit, the inherent failure of the symbolic system and has a possibility of returning as a traumatic truth to the subject.

Caruth and Zizek’s competing trauma theories actually bring to mind the classic psychoanalytic debate on trauma theory that took place when Freud was alive. In the process of conceptualizing trauma, Freud’s position made a dramatic shift from his early seduction theory to the theory of infantile sexuality. The former theory defines a real external shock, that is, sexual abuse or molestation as the direct cause of trauma. Freud abandoned, however, the seduction theory in 1897 and proposed a new theory of infantile sexuality:

In the period in which the main interest was directed to discovering infantile sexual traumas, almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father. I was driven to recognize in the end that these reports were untrue and so came to understand that hysterical symptoms are derived from phantasies and not from real occurrences (Freud, “The Standard Edition” 120).
As Freud clearly suggests here, the theory of infantile sexuality highlights the self’s internal psychic reality—fantasy, impulses and conflicts—as the main cause of trauma. Caruth’s position is closer to a seduction theory since she locates the main cause for trauma in the external intrusions to the psychic reality. On the other hand, Zizek’s position is closer to the theory of infantile sexuality in that he highlights fantasies already immanent in the psyche.

Another way to characterize the contrasting perspectives of Caruth and Zizek is to borrow Dominick LaCapra’s distinction of traumas. LaCapra’s theory of trauma distinguishes two types of trauma: historical trauma and transhistorical or structural trauma. Being critical of the conflation between the two kinds of trauma, LaCapra places an emphasis on historical specificity of trauma as follows:

I especially try to disclose and criticize the frequent conflation or elision of transhistorical (or structural) and historical trauma…Simultaneously, I try to create space for historical specificity along with crucial practices of professional historiography which are necessary in accounting for that specificity. In the process, I distinguish historical specificity from what it is at times misleadingly conflated with or derived from, especially in insistently theoretical orientation relaying on a more transhitorical notion of trauma which is structural or in some sense originary (LaCapra xii-xiii).

Viewed from LaCapra’s perspective, Zizek advocates transhistorical or structural trauma which does not necessarily entail a traumatic event, while Caruth advocates historical trauma which has specific reference to a particular traumatic event. LaCapra rejects absolutizing either historical trauma or transhistorical trauma in the following:
Despite the extremely strong temptation, one may question the tendency to reduce, or confusingly transfer the qualities of, one dimension of trauma to the other—to generalize structural trauma so that it absorbs or subordinates the significance of historical trauma, thereby rendering all references to the latter merely illustrative, homogeneous, allusive, and perhaps equivocal, or, on the contrary, to explain all post-traumatic, extreme, uncanny phenomena and responses as exclusively caused by particular events or contexts (LaCapra 82).

LaCapra critiques the tendency to reduce one dimension of trauma to the other. One kind of reduction is to generalize structural trauma to the extent that the concrete loss of historical trauma becomes meaningless. The other kind of reduction is to explain structural trauma in purely historical terms. The latter reduction is what LaCapra terms, “reductive contextualism” to which historians and sociologists easily fall prey when they attempt to reduce all human anxiety to specific contexts or events—for instance, “deriving anxiety in Heidegger’s thought exclusively from conditions in interwar Germany” (LaCapra 82). LaCapra takes Zizek’s theory of trauma as an example of the former reduction, that is, the tendency to reduce historical trauma to structural trauma and criticizes Zizek’s theory as follows:

Specificity is... in jeopardy when Zizek, who tends to be preoccupied with structural trauma (often construed as constitutive loss or lack), complements his convincing indictment of reductive contextualism with this comparably reductive assertion: “All the different attempts to attach this phenomenon [concentration camps] to a concrete image (‘Holocaust,’ ‘Gulag’...), to reduce...
it to a product of a concrete social order (Fascism, Stalinism…)—what are they if not so many attempts to elude the fact that we are dealing here with the ‘real’ of our civilization which returns as the same traumatic kernel in all social systems?” Here, in an extreme and extremely dubious theoreticist gesture, concentration camps are brought alongside castration anxiety as mere manifestations or instantiations of the Lacanian “real” or “traumatic kernel” (LaCapra 84).

I agree with LaCapra’s suggestion that one should distinguish historical trauma from structural trauma. But I find his interpretation of Zizek’s trauma theory rather narrow and misleading: Zizek neither disregards historical specificity nor denies the significance of historical traumatic events. Far from transforming historical trauma into structural trauma, through his analysis of the cases of historical trauma such as the Holocaust, Zizek demonstrates how structural trauma becomes a condition of historical trauma. The subject feels unbearable anxiety due to his or her incapacity for translating the desire of the Other into a positive interpellation. To highlight structural lack that causes anxiety in the subject, Lacan coins the question, Che vuoi?—what does the Other want? Following Lacan, Zizek explains that in front of the enigma of the Other’s desire, one tries to find a definite answer to the question, Che vuoi? since “it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us, but we are at the same time in capable of translating this desire of the Other into a positive interpellation” (“Sublime Object” 115). In the political domain, anti-semitism, according to Zizek, is an attempt to fill the gap opened up by the question, Che vuoi? and remove unbearable anxiety which the question endlessly causes:
In the anti-Semitic perspective, the Jew is precisely a person about whom it is never clear ‘what he really wants’—that is, his actions are always suspicious of being guided by some hidden motives (the Jewish conspiracy, world domination and the moral corruption of Gentiles, and so on). The case of anti-Semitism also illustrates perfectly why Lacan put, at the end of the curve designating the question ‘Che vuoi?’ the formula of fantasy (formula): fantasy is an answer to this ‘Che vuoi?’ (“Sublime Object” 114).

Similarly LaCapra himself warns us of the possibility that structural trauma becomes the basis of historical trauma as follows: “structural trauma (like absence) is not an event but an anxiety producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization” (LaCapra 82). Even though being mindful of the importance of differentiating historical trauma from structural trauma, I see the two as closely interconnected rather than entirely separate entities. Along the same line of thinking, Caruth and Zizek’s perspectives on trauma, I claim, are not exclusive of each other but shed light on different dimensions of trauma. Zizek radicalizes the notion of belatedness of traumatic events while Zizek and Caruth share the basic premise that trauma, while it takes place, is not fully grasped by consciousness.

Faulkner’s work illustrates the juncture where structural trauma and historical trauma intersect. Caruth’s theory of trauma is useful for our understanding of Jefferson’s historical trauma while Zizek’s view helps us critically to interpret how the white, aristocratic male’s anxiety, or what LaCapra defines as structural trauma, becomes a condition of a historical trauma in Jefferson. There is an interesting parallel between Caruth-cum-Freud’s interpretation of Jewish history and Faulkner’s
fictionalization of Jefferson’s history. In his several works Faulkner renders it explicit that the history of Jefferson is originally established through a series of historical traumas and continues to evolve with the forgetting and return of these traumas. That is, Faulkner resituates the possibility of Jefferson’s history in a traumatic departure for a newly ordered future, as Freud does for Jewish history. In Requiem for a Nun, Faulkner describes the most significant moments of Jefferson’s history as a traumatic departure for the future. The text consists of three narrative prose of the history of Jefferson, interspersed with three acts in a dramatic form which is centered on Temple’s struggle with her past trauma. By paralleling the historical account of Jefferson and the dramatic play of Temple’s crisis, Faulkner describe how the history of Jefferson begins through the violent suppression and exclusion of Indians, blacks and women. The repressed traumas imposed on the marginalized group, however, continuously return to haunt the town, replaying the similar patterns of the previous violent acts. Caruth equates this destructive repetition of previous trauma with Freud’s death drive:

The postulation of a drive to death, which Freud ultimately introduces in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, would seem only to recognize the reality of the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence (Caruth 63).

In a sense, each narrative account of Jefferson’s history represents the radical moment of historical change. “Act One The Court House (A Name for the City)”, for instance, illustrates the birth of the town of Jefferson. Moreland terms the moment of the birth
as “a primal scene” of the town: “[t]he transformation of a frontier Chicksaw trading post into a town, with its naming and the erection of its courthouse, is set in motion with another characteristically Faulknerian scene of social ejection and exclusion” (Moreland 198). Faulkner does not romanticize the birth of the city: rather, he emphasizes that the founding of the city and its courthouse is decidedly dependent on a series of events happening by “chance and accident.” He repeatedly uses the expression “fortuity” or “chance and accident” three times at the outset of the novel: “thus was born the Yoknapatawpha County courthouse: by simple fortuity, not only less old than even the jail, but come into existence at all by chance and accident (…) Even the jailbreak was fortuity” (“Requiem” 3). Faulkner further shows how such chance and accident “do become reduced to an originating event in a town’s history—the process of making this and other makeshift “beginnings” into “origins” that could not have been otherwise” (Moreland 198).

“Act One The Court House (A Name for the City)” illustrates the shift from the frontier Chicksaw trading post to the birth of the town of Jefferson. The primal scene of the frontier Chicksaw trading post is the scene of the social violence which is used to dispossess and imprison “Indians and negroes.” But the social boundaries of the frontier Chicksaw trading post were not strict but were still vulnerable to banditry and revenge perpetrated by the gang groups who were evicted from the settlement. In dramatizing the historical shift from a frontier trading post to a modern town, Faulkner describes the incident taking place in the prison. The prisoners escaped from the jail. The broken “ancient monster iron padlock” (“Requiem” 3) left in the prison signifies the vulnerability of the earlier social boundaries of the Chicksaw trading post. The
settlers for the first time feel the lack of the legal forces and begin to build the courthouse. The courthouse is thus the embodiment of the town settlers’ desire for a stronger modern policing and legal system: “the courthouse which it had taken them almost thirty years not only to realize that they didn’t have, but to discover that they hadn’t even needed, missed, lacked” (“Requiem” 26). The settlers now see the absence of a courthouse as the mark of powerlessness, marginality and underdevelopment. Moreland points out that the jailbreak forces the settlers to face their marginalized position in the larger scale of the U.S. legal economy:

[W]hen the peripheral, frontier settlement does try to use the lock to secure its own prisoners for the sake of their price in that larger U.S. legal economy (and to secure them from certain others whom they might recognize and implicate before those same tribunals-12), the settlers learn of a frightening (castrating), then heart-hardening differences in scale and power between that larger economy and their own (Moreland 202).

The jailbreak is traumatic to the settlers in that it disillusions their fantasy of being the privileged group by revealing the peripheral status of their Southern settlement in the larger capitalist economy. In order to cover up the social wound inflicted by the jailbreak, the settlers build the courthouse. The founding of the courthouse signifies the move from “physical force to written law (and its enforcement in institutions and unwritten ideology)” (Moreland 201). Faulkner associates “physical force” with “fifteen pounds of useless iron” which is “a kind of landmark, in the bar of a wilderness ordinary, locking and securing nothing, because there was nothing behind the heavy bars and shutters needing further locking and securing” (“Requiem” 8).
Under the rule of the physical force, banditry and revenge still took place. But the written law now allows the settlers to establish a new legal privilege and reinforces the socioeconomic boundaries. The courthouse is thus the symbolic landmark that serves the ambivalent functions. It first represents the historical transformation of the frontier Chicksaw trading post into the modern town of Jefferson. The erection of the courthouse along with the town’s naming as Jefferson therefore opens up the beginning of Jefferson’s history or, what Moreland calls, “the town’s phallogocentric history” (Moreland 207). But at the same time, the courthouse is the site where the sufferings of the excluded people are strictly repressed and silenced. The newly established legal system does not acknowledge the loss of the previously dispossessed group of people. Rather, it strictly forbids such group to rebel as Moreland points out:

[t]his first courthouse imposes a double thickness of insulation against such wounds … with a written system of laws and dispossessions designed to forbid, contain, or defuse any such physical or emotional reversals or revenge” (Moreland 201).

Whereas Requiem for a Nun illustrates the beginning of Jefferson’s history and its move from a prehistorical frontier society to a historical modern society, The Town describes another radical phase of historical and economic change of Jefferson: that is, the shift from an agricultural society to an industrial society. But there is a discernible difference between the two works in Faulkner’s representation of trauma. In Requiem for a Nun, Faulkner presents historical trauma by concretely locating traumatizing events in specific historical circumstance. He further shows how the social wound is repeated trans-generationally. On the other hand, Faulkner’s The Town
reverses the issue and focuses on the effect of structural trauma which does not necessarily entail localizable historical trauma. Faulkner shows, when structural trauma is projected onto a certain group of people, it becomes the basis of historical trauma.

Following Freud and Kierkegaard-cum-Heidegger, LaCapra distinguishes anxiety from fear, associating the former with structural trauma: “[f]or Freud, anxiety had the quality of indefiniteness and absence or indeterminacy of an object; for Kierkegaard and Heidegger, it was the fear of something that is nothing” (LaCapra 57). That is, anxiety is the fear which presupposes no particular object. Since anxiety does not have any particular object, it may never be eliminated or overcome. In this sense, it may be considered an ontological feature or an extantia of Dasein (to use Heidegger’s expression). In Being and Time Heidegger explains, “Fear is a fearing in the face of something threatening—of something which is detrimental to Dasein’s factual potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 391). Fear is situational and thus has an ontic quality. On the other hand, anxiety “is anxious in the face of “nothing” of the world” and therefore “the threatening does not come from what is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, but rather from the fact that neither of these ‘says’ anything any longer (Heidegger 393). LaCapra links Heidegger’s notion of anxiety with the notion of absence: “One may well argue that structural trauma related to absence or a gap in existence—with the anxiety, ambivalence, and elation it evoke—may not be cured but only lived with in various ways” (LaCapra 84). As Heidegger says, anxiety is the ontological correlative of experiencing nothing. The nothing, or what LaCapra terms, absence thus lies at the core of structural trauma in that structural trauma does not
necessarily have any specific object while in the case of historical trauma such as the Holocaust and war, one can locate a historical loss in specific events. Nevertheless, according to LaCapra, one is tempted to eliminate anxiety or structural trauma by locating an identifiable object “that could be feared and thus enable one to find ways of eliminating or mastering that fear” (LaCapra 57). Zizek similarly argues that one suffers unbearable anxiety in front of the enigma of the Other’s desire, or in Lacanian phrasing Che Vuoi? Viewed from Zizek’s perspective, anti-Semitism is a political ploy to designate an identifiable target—the Jews onto whom Germans can project all blames to eliminate their anxiety. As the case of the Holocaust shows, structural trauma is easily turned into historical trauma when one tries to find an identifiable object.

Gavin Stevens, one of the narrators in The Town, suffers structural trauma. Gavin thus seeks a particular target onto which he projects his anxiety: he fantasizes that “good” Jefferson is threatened by the demonic outsiders, the Snopeses. Viewed from Gavin’s perspective, Jefferson has fallen from its ideal and harmonious state when it is possessed by the evil power of Flem Snopes. The structural trauma Gavin suffers intersects with his grief for his lost lover Eula Varner who was raped and forced to marry Flem Snopes. Just as he imagines Jefferson as an ideal place, he harbors the illusion that Eula was once the ideal Southern woman of honor and purity but later corrupted by rape and marriage to Flem. As the plot develops, Gavin’s seemingly harmless anxiety gets intensified to the extent that he picks out Flem as a target of all blame for the current problems of Jefferson.

In the following chapter, I argue that the ‘anti-Snopesism’ of the novel, as
represented by the narrator Gavin Stevens, functions as a way to create the false myth of ‘Good Jefferson’ as the ideal community. I cast doubt on the common critical interpretation of the novel where Faulkner allegorizes the Snopeses as the ‘pure evil’ by depicting this family of characters as destroying the traditional virtue of the South. Faulkner’s novel, I argue, instead, demonstrate how the very act of demonizing the Snopeses tends to neglect a complex class struggle implicit in the novel. I advance an interpretation that Gavin’s demonization of the Snopeses is an unethical way to overcome his own structural trauma as LaCapra warns us in the following way:

One may argue that it is ethically and politically dubious to believe that one can overcome or transcend structural trauma or constitutive absence to achieve full intactness, wholeness, or communal identity and that attempts at transcendence or salvation may lead to the demonization and scapegoating of those on whom unavoidable anxiety is projected (LaCapra 85).
Chapter 2

The Snopeses as the Traumatic Real

The voices of Flem Snopes and Eula Snopes, two important characters in *The Town* are almost completely stifled. Nevertheless, Flem and Eula still play an important role as an empty signifier that functions as both concealing and revealing a structural lack of the symbolic order that constitutes Gavin’s subjectivity. Faulkner’s *The Town* is subtitled *A Novel of the Snopes Family*. This subtitle leads a reader’s gaze to a signifier “the Snopeses” and makes him or her wonder about who the Snopeses are. However, even after a reader finishes reading the novel, he or she might be uncertain about whether the novel is really the story of the Snopeses. The answer to this question is both “yes” and “no”; the answer is “yes” in the sense that the Snopeses are mentioned by three narrators in the novel and set at the center of a series of the textual conflicts. At the same time, the answer is “no” in the sense that the Snopeses, including the main character Flem, are hardly given any voice throughout the novel. Instead, the Snopeses are heard through the narrators’ voice and seen through their gazes. That is, the Snopeses themselves are neither visible nor audible but still continue to set the narrative in motion. Therefore, it is more exact to say that the novel is in fact not about the Snopes family but the ceaseless “talking” about the Snopeses. In my view, one’s focus needs to shift from the original question of the identity of the Snopeses—who the Snopeses are—to the question of the identity of the narrators—
what the talking of the Snopeses reveals about the talkers themselves. In light of this observation, what must be noted is not the object of gaze—the Snopeses—but the gaze itself, for the gaze points to the gazer’s complex desires projected onto the object of the gaze. On “The Symptom of a Science,” Shoshana Felman explains how the psychoanalytic discovery of transference between a psychiatrist and a patient also redefines the position of the observer in modern science;

In modern science, indeed, the object of observation is no longer considered a given. It is constructed, by means of a hypothesis without which the observation—the process of confirmation or invalidation of the hypothesis—would not take place. The physicist is himself part of the data, the experimenter part of the laboratory. The observer is a fundamental structural, desiring, formative part of the observed. Modern science, in other words, includes the symptom of the observer in the observed (“Jacques Lacan” 63).

The position of the observer in modern science parallels the position of the first-person narrator in fiction in that he or she is an integral part of his or her act of narrating. Gavin’s complex desire is inextricably projected onto his narrative account of the Snopeses and constitutes part of the Snopeses’ story, which is not outside the story. The story of the Snopeses, in other words, includes the symptom of the narrator.

Gavin: Gavin’s structural trauma becomes manifest in his telling of the Snopeses.

In The Town, the narrator Gavin Stevens is obsessed with the idea that “good” Jefferson is threatened by the demonic outsiders, the Snopeses. The novel begins with the description of the supposedly “harmonious” family having dinner together.

Charles Mallison, Gavin’s young cousin, who is one of the three main narrators of the
novel, naively equates his family with Jefferson:

“Us” was Grandfather and Mother and Father and Uncle Gavin then. So this is what Gowan knew about it until I got born and big enough to know about it too. So When I say “we” and “we thought” what I mean is Jefferson and what Jefferson thought (“The Town” 3).

While “Us” implies its opposite—“them”—the use of the metaphor, “family” reflects how Charles in a sense fantasizes about Jefferson: for Charles, the town compared to a family is perceived as a homogenous place which excludes the unknown “Other” who does not originally belong to this familial community.

[H]e [Ratliff] and Uncle Gavin were both interested in people—or so Uncle Gavin said. Because what I always thought they were mainly interested in was curiosity. Until this time, that is. Because this time it had already gone a good deal further than just curiosity. This time it was alarm (“The Town” 4).

Gavin and Ratliff’s desire to talk originates in their curiosity about others’ desire. The curiosity about others’ desire implies Lacanian question, Che vuoi? – “What does the Other really want?” Zizek makes Lacan’s point clearer when arguing,

[T]he subject desires only in so far as it experiences the Other itself as desiring, as the site of an unfathomable desire, as if an opaque desire is emanating from him or her. Not only does the other address me with an enigmatic desire, it also confronts me with the fact that I myself do not know what I really desire, with the enigma of my own desire” (“How to Read” 42).

Zizek assumes that the subject does not have a priori knowledge of his or her own desire but finds the Other as the source of his or her desire. The Other can be in one
sense equivalent to “God” or “Cause (freedom, Communism, Nation)” operating on the symbolic level (“How to Read” 9). Viewed from this perspective, Gavin and Ratliff’s vehement talk about the townspeople is an attempt to measure their own desire and safely integrate it into the already established symbolic code of Jefferson. However, their attempt to gain access to the desire of the Snopeses meets with invariable failure. The core part of the Snopeses’ desire remains unknown to Gavin and Ratliff.

After Eula Varner was forced to marry Flem by her father Will Varner, Flem takes the old house called “the old Frenchman place” as Eula’s dowry, which nobody in the town think is worthwhile. Gavin and Ratliff wonder,

To figger out what Flem was doing owning that old place that anybody could see wasn’t worth nothing. I dont mean why Flem bought it. I mean, why he even taken it when Uncle Billy give it to him and Eula for a wedding gift” (“The Town” 7).

To figure out why Flem takes the seemingly worthless property, Ratliff one night follows Flem and finds him digging out the place. Once Flem quits digging up and leaves, Ratliff discovers the old money in the place, which was buried more than thirty years ago. Since that time, Flem has made dramatic financial advances by purchasing the restaurant which is the old Frenchman’s Bend and handing it over to another Snopes: “every Snopes in Frenchman’s Bend moving up one step, leaving that last slot at the bottom open for the next Snopes to appear from nowhere and fill” (“The Town” 9). Flem’s successful moving-up terrifies Gavin, not because Flem’s success itself is frightening, but because Gavin does not know what Flem ultimately wants to do with
his money and power, or what kind of influence Flem want to exert on Jefferson after all. Flem’s mysteriously rapid success and his impenetrable motive therefore shock Gavin. Since unprepared to witness Flem’s unexpected success, Gavin feels, “it was alarm” (Faulkner 4). Gavin’s fear of Flem finally turns into the hatred toward Flem as exemplified by his description of Flem as ruthless, mercenary and inhumane.

Unreflectively following Gavin’s perspective, the common criticism of Flem is to dismiss him as something less than human. Gordon E. Bigelow, for instance, argues, “he [Flem] is more appalling than other great villains like Iago or Richard III because his inhumanity is not a perversion of human traits so much as a lack of them. He is that ultimate horror, a man without a soul” (Bigelow 599). Furthermore, Bigelow argues that Flem is “without love or the capacity for love, being sexually impotent” (Bigelow 599). Considering amorality as an inherent character in Snopeses, Elizabeth M. Kerr defines Snopeses as “less than human” and argues that the main motif of Faulkner’s trilogy is “the victory of man against Snopes” (Kerr 72). As describing Flem as “animal cunning and shrewdness without knowledge or imagination”, Kerr further argues “Flem cannot see beyond the limits of Yoknapatawpha County, can conceive of no grand design” (Kerr 75). Deeply initiated by the narrator Gavin’s point of view, Kerr reduces Flem to animal level with impoverished imagination and knowledge. However, before hurriedly taking the harsh criticism of Flem, one needs to note that Flem is voiceless throughout the novel and his behaviors are mainly interpreted, evaluated by the privileged, upper-class, white male narrator Gavin.

Gavin’s demonization of the Snopeses produces dual effects. By locating a
particular object—the Snopeses—onto whom Gavin projects his blame, he uses anti-Snopesism as a way of eliminating his anxiety and overcoming his structural trauma. Gavin can also cover up what is a traumatic past in Jefferson—the history of corruption and exploitation, as long as his criticism solely fixates on the amorality of the Snopeses. Gavin is not aware of historical trauma in Jefferson, which has silenced the sufferings of the excluded people and has left unacknowledged loss since the founding of the city as depicted in *Requiem for a Nun*. It becomes questionable whether the Snopeses originally deprave Jefferson when we consider the ethical and economic corruption of the old and new aristocrats in the town. Suspicious of the reliability of Gavin as a narrator, Raymond J. Wilson points out, “[Gavin sees] the Snopeses as an outside force invading a currently good Jefferson, which at most is guilty of some remote original sin” (Wilson 433). By refuting Gavin’s anti-Snopesism, Wilson further argues, “it [anti-Snopesism] neglects the contemporary economic, political, and radical exploitation of the Manfred de Spain, Jason Compsons, and Will Varner” (Wilson 433).

The narrative of *The Town* is divided into two planes: the socioeconomic struggle between Flem and the upper-class Southerners Will Varner and Manfred de Spain, and Gavin’s own psychological struggle. On the socioeconomic plane, the text unfolds the story of the constant class struggle between Flem Snopes and the white upper-class men Will Varner and Manfred de Spain. Faulkner dramatizes this socioeconomic conflict twice respectively at the beginning and at the end of the novel. The first visible explosion of the conflict is centered on the newly built power plant of the town while the second event is centered on the bank of the town. In *The Town*,
both places are the significant symbols that represent the modernization, that is, Jefferson’s political and economic changes. Also, both places are male-dominated, mainly manipulated by Will Varner and Manfred de Spain. By paralleling the two crimes first committed by Flem Snopes in the power-plant and later by Will Varner and Manfred de Spain in the bank, the text presents the modernization of the South as something traumatic to the people in Jefferson. At the outset of the novel, Flem makes such a successful advance that he is made a superintendent of the power-plant by Manfred de Spain. But soon it is found out that Flem has been stealing quite a lot of brasses, including safety-valves and bolts from the power-plant. Faulkner does not clearly reveal why Flem steals brasses from the plant and where the brasses are hidden by Flem in the novel. Gavin thus wonders, “even now we don’t know whether or not that brass was all” ("The Town” 30). Flem is finally caught and being charged with the theft of brasses. After paying “two hundred and forty-two dollars and thirty-three cents” as fine, which far exceeds his salary of fifty dollar a month, Flem loses his position and economic ground all at once. Consequently, he becomes financially and politically marginalized again in the town. By taking advantage of Flem’s marginal status, on the other hand, Will Varner and De Spain enjoy their privileges and reinforce the status quo. But toward the end of the novel, Flem becomes an exact replica of the corrupted Varner and de Spain by mimicking their financial crimes and poses a real threat to their political and economic status. Flem also threatens to reveal that Varner and de Spain have embezzled the money from the bank of which de Spain is the president. The struggle between Flem and Will Varner and de Spain for the political and economic power is temporarily impeded by Eula’s suicide.
What the power-plant symbolizes in *The Town* is comparable to the courthouse in *The Requiem for a Nun*: the courthouse is a historical site which affirms the foundation of Jefferson by virtue of the exclusion of the racial, economic and sexual others. At the same time, the courthouse is a traumatic site where the repressed memories return to speak of their truths and haunt the townspeople. Similarly, the power-plant in *The Town* is emblematic of the move toward industrial capitalism. The emergence of industrial capitalism entails a new form of exploitation. The structure of the exploitation of the power-plant has affinity with the pyramid: on the top, Manfred de Spain manipulates Flem, and Flem in turn is abusive of the black workers like Mr. Harker and Tom Tom in the same manner. The modernization of Jefferson also reinforces gender hierarchy rather than destroys it. Both the configurations of the courthouse in *The Requiem for a Nun* and the power-plant in *The Town* symbolically visualize the phallogocentric order of Jefferson. Women in Jefferson still do not gain access to the public sphere. The phallogocentric order of the town is mainly governed by the white, upper-class men like Will Varner and Manfred de Spain. The power-plant allows the white male aristocrats to strengthen their economic privilege by exploiting the racial and economic others.

But suddenly Flem is appointed as the superintendent of the power-plant, which shocks the narrators:

Flem was now superintendent of the town power-plant which pumped the water and produced the electricity. Our outrage was primarily shock; shock not that Flem had the job, we had not got that far yet, but shock that we had not known until now that the job existed; that there was such a position in
Jefferson as superintendent of the power-plant... Yet suddenly and without warning, we needed a superintendent for it. And as suddenly and simultaneously and with that same absence of warning, a country man who had not been in town two years now, and (we assumed) had probably never seen an electric light until that first night two years ago when he drove in, was that superintendent (“The Town” 9).

What shocks Gavin is the fact that Varner and de Spain trade with Flem and appoint him as the top manager of the power-plant. Viewed From Gavin’s perspective, Flem is not qualified to take a higher position in the phallogocentric system: Flem is not any kind of white upper-class man but only a country man. Furthermore, far from representing the ideal Southern masculinity, Flem is the extremely emasculated character, which leads his wife Eula to brazenly having an affair with De Spain. For Gavin, it is unbearable that this immoral, emasculated and benighted man takes a higher position in the power-plant—the emblem of modernity and masculinity.

Flem in a sense reminds Gavin of his own impotence. One can easily notice that Gavin and Flem are juxtaposed to each other, considering their socioeconomic positions. On a deeper level, however, they mirror each other. First, Gavin and Flem are both described as emasculated in the novel. As for desire, Gavin is paradoxical: throughout the novel, he is seemingly possessed by his desire for Eula but he distances himself from her. He is even fearful of Eula’s excessive feminine qualities, as I will explain in detail later in this chapter. Gavin cannot have any women in his life as he once says to Ratliff: “Marriage is constantly in my life. My fate is constantly to just miss it or it to, safely again, once more safe, just miss me” (“The Town” 351). Gavin
intentionally “misses” marriage as if he were naturally unfit for it. If Flem is biologically impotent, Gavin remains socially and psychologically impotent by refusing to perform the given gender role. Second, Gavin and Flem are respectively marginalized in their triangular relationship with de Spain and Eula: Gavin is psychologically distressed by Eula’s affair with de Spain while Flem’s honor as a husband is socially tarnished. De Spain dances with Eula at the party where Flem, Gavin and other townspeople gather together. Gavin is infuriated because de Spain’s act is “publicly affirming her [Eula’s] whoredom.” Gavin feels insulted as much as Flem does. Charles describes how Gavin performs the role of a cuckolded husband instead of Flem:

It should have been Mr Snopes[Flem] of course because he was the husband, the squire, the protector in the formal ritual. But it was Uncle Gavin and he wasn’t any husband or squire or knight or defender or protector either except simply and quickly his own: who didn’t really care even how badly Mrs Snopes got battered and bruised in the business provided there was enough of her left when he finally got the last spark of life trampled out of Mr de Spain (“The Town” 75).

Gavin tries to hit de Spain but fails and only hurts himself: “Uncle Gavin wasn’t trying any more to destroy or even hurt Mr de Spain because he had already found out by that time that he couldn’t” (“The Town” 76). As for his relationship with Eula and de Spain, Gavin is as powerless as Flem. In short, Gavin in a sense hates Flem because Flem is too close to him as if he were another version of himself, one that manifests all of his foibles. Gavin is far from the ideal Southern masculinity as much
as Flem is. Flem reminds Gavin of his own lack, which creates anxiety in him. As a way of evading the confrontation with this structural lack of himself, Gavin projects his own deficiency onto Flem and demonizes him.

Gavin’s image of Jefferson as the ideal community is dismantled by the corruption of the depraved upper-class Will Varner and de Spain. Will Varner’s cold-bloodedness and selfishness are first manifest in treating his daughter Eula when she was sexually assaulted by unnamed men. Eula was raped by the town’s youngsters. Nevertheless, no one, including her family members, either protected or took care of her after this cruel incident. The criminals were not even identified let alone punished for their sexual assault. Worse, Will Varner persuaded Flem to wed his supposedly “tainted” daughter, which Flem did, but only because he was interested in Eula’s dowry. By forcing Eula to marry Flem, Will Varner covered up her daughter’s scandal. On the other hand, taking advantage of Flem’s sexual impotence, Manfred de Spain, a new elected mayor of the town is having an affair with Eula. Manfred de Spain and Will Varner’s amorality is further extended to their greed for wealth and fraudulence. For twelve years, Manfred de Spain and Will Varner have literally “looted” the bank by embezzling the bank deposits although de Spain himself is the president of the bank. To a certain extent, Gavin himself is distressed by all these problems already existing before the Snopeses settle down in Jefferson and feels infuriated by the injustice and corruption of the system. Nevertheless, he is far from a heroic figure that is willing to fight off the real enemies and reform the corrupt system. Rather, he transfers his outrage against Varner and de Spain to the Snopeses since the Snopeses are comparatively weak characters to make for an easy target.
The language that Gavin uses deprives the Snopeses of human qualities and objectifies them as commodities which can be literally “bought.” Gavin says to Eula: “We’ve all bought Snopeses here, whether we wanted to or not; you [Eula] of all people should certainly know that, I don’t know why we bought them. I mean, why we had to: what coin and when and where we so recklessly and improvidently spent that we had to have Snopeses too. But we do (“The Town” 95).

Treating the Snopeses as if they were almost pernicious viruses, Gavin unjustly opposes the Snopes to the townspeople, who, Gavin assumes, are entitled to remove Snopeses from the town by their will. At this point, the Snopeses are dehumanized and merely reduced to an obstacle, a foe or a fundamental evil to be destroyed. Gavin dramatizes the Snopeses’ otherness: “Snopes were some profound and incontrovertible hermaphroditic principle for the furtherance of a race, a species, the principle vested always physically in the male” (“The Town” 136). The expression “hermaphrodite principle” reveals Gavin’s inveterate prejudice against and contempt for the Snopeses, whom, Gavin considers, as lifeless, barren and completely mercenary beings.

In contrast to Gavin’s “anti-Snopesism,” the Snopeses are later integrated as part of the corrupted world of Jefferson. Wilson points out a blind spot of Gavin’s account of the current state of affairs in the town:

Flem Snopes’s steady adoption of Jefferson’s behavior, rather than his corruption of it, then the steps of Flem’s climb reveal the moral shortcomings of Jefferson. Failure to recognize these shortcomings constitutes a blind spot in Faukner’s narrators’ vision. They recognize evil when they see it in Snopes
but not in the original perpetrators whom Flem Snopes first imitates and then excels (Wilson 433).

Focusing on the logical flaws of Gavin’s narrative, Wilson, however, does not further examine Gavin’s psychology that underlies his false assumptions. Gavin’s failure to recognize the original evil in the town stems from his attempt to seek an identifiable target onto which he projects his anxiety. Gavin’s hostility toward the Snopeses is closely linked with his unconscious wish to maintain nostalgic fantasy of “good Jefferson.” Just as the wolf-man appropriates his childhood memory in order to fill the present gap of his sexual theory, Gavin invents anti-Snopesism to account for the current distortion of Jefferson without destroying his fantasy of the town.

The presence of Flem Snopes and Eula Snopes feels threatening to Gavin, for the desire of Flem and Eula remains unfathomable and resists being stably assimilated to the symbolic reality of the town; in this way, the Snopeses prevent the symbolic-ideological structure in Jefferson from reaching closure. The presence of the indefinable Other, in other words, “enacts an unfinished, unfinalizable interplay of forces involving a series of substitutions without origin or ultimate referent, an interplay that may enable more desirable configurations that cannot be equated with salvation or redemption” (LaCapra 55). The impossibility of homogenizing the Snopeses continues to perplex Gavin. Gavin’s fear about the Snopeses thus takes the disguised form of anti-Snopesism.

Gavin’s anti-Snopesism seems to have features of affinity with the sort of anti-Semitism addressed by Zizek. On the logic of anti-Semitism, Zizek argues:

In the anti-Semitic perspective, the Jew is precisely a person about whom it is
never clear ‘what he really wants’—that is, his actions are always suspected of being guided by some hidden motives (the Jewish conspiracy, world domination and the moral corruption of Gentiles, and so on) … In the case of anti-Semitism, the answer to ‘What does the Jew want?’ is a fantasy of ‘Jewish conspiracy’ (“Sublime Object” 114).

Gavin suspects that Flem Snopes might plot to overturn Jefferson and finally dominate the town with Flem’s mysterious power. The point is that both anti-Snopesism and anti-Semitism function as fantasies which fill “the void, the opening of the desire of the Other” (“Sublime Object” 114). Flem appears as a void in the symbolic order. But at the same time, Flem conceals an ideological gap of the symbolic order: a reader is likely to fail to recognize the existence of the real corrupters in The Town because Gavin selects Flem and other Snopeses as an ideological scapegoat and imputes the blame for the ostensible problems to them. Therefore, the question of what the Snopeses represent or symbolize is irrelevant or misleading in that the meaning of the signifier, the Snopeses is ideologically conditioned by Gavin; instead, what should be noted is “the Snopes effects” as a blind spot in Gavin’s narrative vision. Wilson explains thus, “[t]heir [the narrators’] blind spot prevents the narrators, and critics who accept their view, from following the causal relationships in Flem’s career. The narrator saw his [Flem’s] climb as mysterious, almost occult” (Wilson 433). The narrators’ error and readers’ failure to recognize “the causal relationships” leads to suppressing the unbearable truth of Jefferson—the moral shortcomings and socioeconomic inequality of the town. To recapitulate, “Flem” functions as a paradoxical signifier. He displays and dramatizes Jefferson’s systematic failure by
imitating “Jefferson’s behavior” on the one hand, and also disguises this failure by appearing to be the cold-blooded evil, thus inviting the blame, on the other hand.

In *The Town*, the images of Eula and Flem represent the opposites of each other. Eula and Flem, in this sense, do a mirror-play where their mirrored images are contrary to each other. In other words, they embody the extreme poles; as a simple way to understand this double-play, I argue that Flem is something “too little” while Eula “too much.” Flem incarnates a lack of sexuality while Eula embodies surplus of sexuality. Without soul and love, Flem Snopes, who is sexually impotent, signifies a lack of what one might call basic human qualities, as Kerr defines him “less than human” (Kerr 72). Bigelow similarly describes Flem as “Eliot’s hollow man” or “a human shell filled with predatory acquisitiveness” (Bigelow 599). Flem is neither “human” (due to a lack of human qualities), nor “not-human” (due to the simple fact that he is a living human being); in this sense, one might feel justified in calling him “the monstrous ‘living dead’” (“How to Read” 47). Furthermore, Flem is symbolically mutilated because he lacks “desire” in a Lacanian sense. Lacan distinguishes *desire*, *demand* and *needs* and argues that desire is not an a priori entity; instead, it only appears as the gap between needs and demand. Desire in the human subject is constructed inter-subjectively, as Lacan says, “man’s desire is the Other’s desire” (qtd. in “How to Read” 41). Flem’s sexual impotence further implies that he is emotionally incapable of desiring anybody and connecting himself to others. In the novel, his relationship with others is comparable to “contract” or “apparatus” for satisfying his needs for material wealth. In this sense, Flem’s lack of desire results in Gavin’s failure to “make sense” of Flem’s behavior. Flem in himself is an enigma to Gavin because
“meaning” is absent in Flem’s actions.

Eula is associated with excessive femininity and fecundity whereas Flem represents asexuality and inhumanity in the novel. Charles Mallison thus describes Eula: “[i]t was that there was just too much of what she was for any one human female package to contain, and hold: too much of white, too much of female, too much of may be just glory” (“The Town” 6). Eula is “too much” of what she can represent. Charles’ sexually-saturated language alludes to her fatal sexuality which causes too much excitement that may exceed even Freud’s pleasure principle. Due to this uncontrollable, overwhelming charm that men find in Eula, she embodies impossible jouissance. It is dangerous for one to be confronted with jouissance that he or she needs to repress the desire or replace it with something else. By pointing out “a conflict between two forces”, that is, two mutually contradictory features of human sexuality, Felman argues,

Repression is constitutive of sexuality: the second factor [repression] is by no means secondary in importance … The “lack of satisfaction,” in other words, is not simply an accident in sexual life, it is essentially inherent in it: “All human structures,” says Lacan, after Freud, “have as their essence, not as an accident, the restraint of pleasure—of fulfillment” (“Turning the Screw” 110-111).

In The Town, repression is a necessary part of Gavin’s sexuality. In order to unconsciously protect himself from the source of fatal jouissance, he distances himself from Eula and refrains from his sexual satisfaction. When Gavin meets Eula in the office, he is overwhelmed by this unfathomable Other; “Oh yes, she was looking at
me now: the sea which in a moment more would destroy me, not with any deliberate and calculated sentient wave but simply because I stood there in its insentient way” (“The Town” 93). As this scene shows, Gavin not only desires Eula but also fears her. His obsession with Eula’s purity and endless “talking” is paradoxically a strategy to distract himself from the dangerous excitation aroused by her. Ratliff points out, “[y]ou [Gavin] never listened to nobody because by that time you were already talking again” (“The Town” 299). Gavin’s excessive talkativeness and fuss over Eula’s affair with Manfred de Spain are similar to what Zizek defines as false activity.

In psychoanalytic treatment, obsessional neurotics talk constantly, inundating the analyst with anecdotes, dreams, insights; their incessant activity is sustained by the underlying fear that, if they stop talking for a moment, the analyst will ask them the question that truly matters—in other words, they talk in order to keep the analyst still (“How to Read” 26).

Gavin uses a similar strategy that an obsessional neurotic does in psychoanalytic treatment. Gavin keeps performing his excessive “pseudo-activity” to avoid facing the truth of his desire and taking real action.

Eula generates a series of effects which are disturbing to the symbolic reality of Jefferson because she is a placeholder from which overwhelmingly many meanings emanate. After her death, she is remembered as the three names, “Eula Varner Snopes” (“The Town” 355). The two interpellations, “Varner” and “Snopese” represent Eula’s complex identity. But Eula answers each of these seemingly conflicting interpellations to a certain extent: she lives as a woman of desire, daughter of the old aristocrat and nominal wife of Mr. Snopes. Sharon Desmond Paradiso articulates Eula’s complicated
position in Jefferson as follows:

Eula’s position in Jefferson vis a vis caste, class and sexuality is a complicated one: she is the daughter of a well-off landowner and merchant, but one from lower-class Frenchman’s Bend; she is married, but married to a man who has climbed from a low station to social prominence (partly by using Eula’s own beauty and station); she is white, but she behaves sexually in a manner unbecoming white female honor...she is triply subversive (Paradiso 81).

Just as the name “Eula Varner Snopes” is entangled with multi-layered ideological interpellations, Eula has a complex desires: “For eighteen years she carries on an affair with Manfred de Spain, Flem’s boss at the bank; she offers herself to Gavin Stevens, who considers de Spain his rival; she does nothing to discourage the attraction of the men of Jefferson” (Paradiso 80). If we consider her race and class background, Eula fits an ideal prototype of white womanhood in the South. Nevertheless, she continues to dismantle the very prototype herself by breaking the mores of Jefferson and finally appears as a threat to the town, in particular to the men of Jefferson: “[t]he men of Jefferson perceive Eula’s open sexuality to be a threat” (Paradiso 80).

What is unbearable especially to Gavin is that the core of Eula’s desire remains unknowable. She enacts a distressing free play of meanings in terms of the question “what Eula really wants?”

I remember how I could never decide which of the two unbearable was the least unbearable; which (as the poet has it) of the two chewed bitter thumbs
was the least bitter for chewing. That is, whether Manfred de Spain had seduced a chaste wife, or had simply been caught up in passing by a rotating nympholept. This was anguish ("The Town" 134). Gavin projects his moral code into the nature of Eula’s affair so that he can fix a single meaning to “who Eula is”—whether an honorable white woman or a dishonorable woman. If Gavin successfully fits Eula within his moral framework, then he can either idealize or despise Eula without destroying his male fantasy. However, Eula defies being reduced to a single identity and constitutes a disturbing void in the symbolic universe of Jefferson. She continues to return as the real to Gavin. Gavin’s anguish in a sense resonates with Quentin’s voice in The Sound and the Fury: being obsessed with his sister Candace’s purity, Quentin is continuously haunted by Candace’s “promiscuous” love affairs. Quentin keeps asking Candace whether she loves her lover and why she wants to marry him. These questions Quentin asks is a disguised form of the Lacanian question, Che Vuoi?—What does the Other want? In a similar manner, Gavin is traumatized by Eula’s love affair with de Spain, not because the affair is immoral and unethical, but because Gavin is not able to know what Eula ultimately wants. His lack of knowledge of Eula’s desire renders him anxious and even fearful of her. To eliminate his anxiety in the relationship with Eula, Gavin chooses to think that “she must be chaste, a wife true and impeachless” ("The Town" 134). Since that time, Gavin has performed the role of the defender of Eula’s honor and chastity. Gavin’s young cousin Charles Mallison describes Gavin’s obsession with the defense of Eula’s womanhood: “What he [Gavin] was doing was simply defending forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be
defended whether they exist or not” (“The Town” 76).

One may face a misogynistic attitude which is deeply embedded in Gavin’s narrative account. Gavin’s ostensibly chivalrous act of defending Eula’s honor turns into his inveterate hatred toward her. What infuriates Gavin is not the sexual violence done to Eula and the powerless justice system of the town, which easily exonerates the criminals and silences Eula’s suffering. His narrative account rather puts blame on Eula for being the cause of the sexual violence. Further he criticizes her for being ungrateful to her husband Flem who, according to Gavin, “gave the [bastard] child a name and then moved the mother [Eula] herself completely away from that old stage and scene and milieu of her shame” (“The Town” 271). Gavin expresses his contempt for Eula as follows:

[H]is [Flem’s] home had been violated not because his wife was ungrateful and a fool, but simply because she was a woman. She had no more been seduced from the chastity of wifehood by the incorrigible bachelor flash and swagger of Manfred de Spain than she had been seduced from that of maidenhood by that same quality in that boy—youth—man—McCarron—back there in her virginity. She was seduced simply by herself: by a nymphomania (“The Town” 270).

At the outset of the novel, to some extent, Gavin holds a balanced view of the state of affairs in Jefferson and narrates the tension between Flem, Varner and de Spain. But toward the final scenes of the novel, Gavin is blinded by his psychological struggle about Eula’s purity. Eula is forced to play a role in mediating the desires of male characters in the novel. Faulkner places Eula at the center of the conflicts among Flem,
de Spain, and Varner and shows how she becomes victimized by their conflicts. Nevertheless, Gavin does not see Eula as a structural victim of the male-dominated society. This leaves a fatal blind spot in Gavin’s narrative account. Gavin does not fully comprehend the class struggle among Flem, Varner and de Spain, which drives Eula to kill herself at the end.

For twelve years, Varner and de Spain have embezzled a large sum of money from the Colonel Sartoris bank in Jefferson. Flem is appointed a vice president of the bank by de Spain and Varner. However, Flem soon discovers that Varner and de Spain have been stealing the bank funds and realizes that his deposit will be threatened as well unless he withdraws his deposit from the bank. But it is impossible for him to take out the deposit from the bank without being caught by the rest of the townspeople. Flem keeps this fact to himself until the proper time comes, for Flem does not want Will Varner to collapse immediately: Flem wants to inherit Varner’s property under the name of his wife Eula and her daughter Linda. In the meantime, Eula is well aware that Flem will threaten his father Varner in order to take over the bank and his property. Eula is also afraid that her husband Flem may tell her daughter, Linda that she is a “bastard” child from an unknown man. Flem threatens Varner, de Spain and Eula with his knowledge of their fatal weaknesses and destroys them: Eula decides to commit suicide; Will Varner approves of Flem’s control of Linda’s inheritance; de Spain, being blamed for Eula’s death, loses his political influence on Jefferson. However, Gavin is blind and ignorant of these actual conflicts, for he “falls for the theory of the love affair which Varner and Snopes use as a public cover story for what really happens” (Wilson 441). The function of Eula’s love affair with de Spain is similar to Alfred
Hitchcock’s key technique called “Macguffin.” Macguffin is a Hitchcockian object which catches the viewer’s attention or sets the narrative in motion. The main characters of the film are often driven to obtain this object although they do not know what the MacGuffin really is: “the McGuffin itself, ‘nothing at all’, an empty place, a pure pretext whose sole role is to set the story in motion” (“Everything You Always Want to Know” 6). Eula and de Spain’s scandal produces the McGuffin effect, fooling not only Gavin but a reader of the novel who follows Gavin’s telling of the story of the town.

Gavin’s blindness and ignorance of the state of affairs in Jefferson becomes a catalyst for driving Eula to death. The day before her suicide, Eula makes a final visit to Gavin as the last resort, still believing that Linda’s future and inheritance can be protected by marriage to Gavin. After telling Gavin that she plans to elope with de Spain, she tries to persuade Gavin to marry her daughter Linda and protect her. But ignorant of Flem’s plan to take over the bank and Varner’s property, Gavin rejects Eula’s suggestion, arguing that the elopement would destroy Linda’s happiness. As Wilson points out, Eula then finds suicide the only solution to the problems: “[o]nly when [Gavin] Stevens, smarting under the illusion that her [Eula’s] primary motivation is love for De Spain, convinces her that her departure will “finish” Linda, regardless of Linda’s marital status, does Eula face the necessity for suicide” (Wilson 441). One may argue that Eula’s suicide is not the direct result of Gavin’s blindness since Eula has already faced her own problems. But demonizing the Snopeses and being obsessed with Eula’s affair decidedly bar Gavin from resolving the actual conflicts.
Chapter 3

Beyond the Repetition of Trauma

Eula’s suicide shocks everyone in Jefferson in that her death is unexpected. Furthermore, what motivates Eula to commit suicide remains an enigma to the townspeople. Eula’s act of suicide produces multiple interpretations. Even though Faulkner’s narrative makes it ambiguous why Eula commit suicide, one possible interpretation is to see her as a scapegoat for the social violence caused by the male characters in the town. From the experience of being raped earlier in her life, Eula learns that the legal system of Jefferson is so powerless and corrupted that the law does not protect women, including herself and her daughter Linda. It rather legitimizes the manipulation of Flem, de Spain and Varner over them. Faulkner reveals how gender hierarchy is operated in the relationship between father and daughter. Varner sacrifices Eula for his honor and power in the town by forcing her to marry Flem when she was brutally raped. The similar pattern is repeated in the relationship between Flem and Linda. By manipulating Linda’s love for him, Flem persuades her to sign the paper which legally allows him to hold a control of her inheritance. Eula points out how legality becomes arbitrary and meaningless when the law is operated on the plane of the gender politics of the town:

[S]he [Linda] was eighteen years old and competent and he, Mr Stone, was a competent lawyer or at least he had a license saying so, and so it was at least
in legal language and on the right kind of paper. He—Mr Stone—even asked her why she felt she must make the will and she told him: Because my father has been good to me and I love and admire and respect him—do you hear that? Love and admire and respect him. Oh yes, legal. As if that mattered, legal or illegal, contingency or incontingency (“The Town” 328).

While seeing Linda manipulated by Flem, Eula probably recalls her own relationship with her father in the past. Toward the end of the novel, Faulkner negates the earlier radical images of Eula and represents her as a structural victim of the institutions of the law, marriage and family.

Gavin’s structural trauma at the outset of the novel is transformed into historical trauma, which is the real loss of Eula. In facing the unbearable enigma of Eula’s death, the townspeople once again deny and repress this historical trauma by hurriedly enacting a public mourning for Eula. In the townspeople’s denial of the trauma, Eula’s suffering is silenced and her death is ideologically appropriated for the sake of Jefferson’s order just as she was forced to be silenced and sacrificed for her father’s honor earlier in her youth. Her act of suicide is considered atonement for her adultery and gives people in Jefferson a sort of catharsis as Charles Mallison narrates:

So now they [people in Jefferson] even forgave Mrs Snopes for the eighteen years of carnal sin, and now they could even forgive themselves for condoning adultery by forgiving it, by reminding themselves (one another I reckon) that if she had not been an abomination before God for eighteen years, she wouldn’t have reached the point where she would have to choose death in order to leave her child a mere suicide for a mother instead of a whore (“The
Through Eula’s death, the townspeople attempt to solidify their ideological ground for the ideal Southern womanhood. In this regard, the public mourning serves as a role of what Zizek calls “the second death” (“the symbolization of the biological death”), which is distinguished from the first death (“the biological death”): “Lacan conceives this difference between the two deaths as the difference between real (biological) death and its symbolization, the ‘settling of accounts’: The accomplishment of symbolic destiny” (“Sublime Object” 135).

The culmination of the public mourning is to build the monument for Eula. Although Gavin is delegated into the monument business, Flem is the one who originally plans to set it up. Ratliff narrates:

But it was Flem’s monument; don’t make no mistake about that. It was Flem that paid for it, first thought of it, planned and designed it, picked out what size and what was to be wrote on it—the face and the letters—and never once mentioned price. Don’t make no mistake about that. It was Flem. Because this too was a part of what he had come to Jefferson for and went through all he went through afterward to get it (“The Town” 349).

The monument is the sign of Flem’s victory over Varner and de Spain. In this sense, it is not Eula’s monument but Flem’s monument. After Eula’s death, Flem takes over the bank, remolds de Spain’s home into the antebellum mansion where he makes a fresh start with his new wife. By contrasting Flem’s successful life with the collapse of de Spain and Varner, Faulkner represents the new shift of Jefferson’s history from the agrarian economy to the industrial capitalism: de Spain and Varner are land-owners
whose wealth is primarily grounded on land property while Flem is a business man and banker now. But Faulkner refrains from depicting an optimistic vision for the future of Jefferson by negating all positive outlooks: far from being a heroic figure, Flem is only a new version of Varner and de Spain, who continue to take advantage of the corrupt system of Jefferson rather than reform the system. The final scenes of the novel invites its reader to face the ongoing conspiracy of Jefferson to deny and bury the past trauma: “stone monument with that marble medallion face … that never looked like Eula … EULA VARNER SNOPES … A Virtuous Wife Is a Crown to Her Husband Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed” (“The Town” 354-355). The stone monument with the medallion face does not resemble Eula. By replacing Eula’s real face with the medallion face, the monument covers up her unacknowledged loss and represses the trauma just as the courthouse in *Requiem for a Nun* smothers the sufferings of the excluded people in Jefferson’s history. Gillian Rose generally characterizes mourning as a political act against the injustice of the community by giving an example of Phoncion’s wife who “consumes the ashes of her disgraced husband, and thereby gives his unhappy soul a resting place, a tomb, in her own body”: “This act is not therefore solely one of infinite love: it is a finite act of political justice” (Rose 25). In contrast with the private mourning of Phoncion’s wife, however, the public mourning of Jefferson conceals the injustice of the community and the immanent problems, and maintains the status quo of the town by obliterating Eula’s transgressing “herstory” from the history of Jefferson.

Since Freud distinguishes mourning from melancholia, such thinkers as Rose, LaCapra and currently Zizek have appropriated these two related yet distinct notions.
These thinkers have articulated the political, ideological and ethical implications of acts of mourning and melancholia. Zizek shrewdly points out that melancholic is confused about lack and loss, and conflates the two;

In Kant’s terms, the melancholic is guilty of committing a kind of paralogism of the pure capacity to desire, which resides in the confusion between loss and lack: in so far as the object-cause of desire is originally, in a constitutive way, lacking, melancholy interprets this lack as a loss, as if the lacking object was once possessed and then lost. In short, what melancholy obfuscates is that the object is lacking from the very beginning, that its emergence coincides with its lack, that this object is nothing but the positivization of a void or lack, a purely anamorphic entity that does not exist in itself (“Melancholy” 659-660).

The melancholic acts as if he or she had lost something, which he or she has never possessed in the first place. Why does the melancholic transform lack into loss? That is because by way of the transformation of lack into loss, the melancholic can paradoxically claim his or her possession of the object. It is less unbearable for the melancholic to think that the object is once possessed and lost now than to accept that the object is lacking or absent in reality:

The paradox, of course, is that this deceitful translation of lack into loss enables us to assert our possession of the object; what we never possessed can also never be lost, so the melancholic, in his unconditional fixation on the lost object, in a way possesses it in its very loss (“Melancholy” 660).

By conversing lack into loss, the melancholic maintains his or her illusion, not facing the traumatic truth that the object is absent in reality. The melancholic in this sense
maintains and even enjoys his or her symptom—the state of melancholy—in which he or she claims his or her right to the object.

Gavin’s illusion about “good Jefferson” or “the lost paradise” which never existed in reality is characterized by Zizek’s notion of lack turned loss. On the contrary to Gavin’s narrative account, justice, morality and purity have been lacking, not lost, from the very beginning of Jefferson’s history—the history of trauma—as Faulkner illustrated in a series of his works Requiem for a Nun, Sanctuary and The Town. Rather than confronting the immanent problems in Jefferson, that is, the corruption of the upper-class men, the exploitation of the black workers, and the injustice of judicial system, Gavin escapes into a transcendent illusion that the Snopeses are threatening and destroying originally good Jefferson. He becomes fixated on the imagined loss and creates a “misplaced nostalgia” (to borrow the expression from LaCapra) for “lost paradise.” This misplaced nostalgia defines Gavin’s sentiment throughout The Town. However, one should be alive to the dangerous consequences this seemingly innocuous nostalgia is likely to bring about as LaCapra explains;

In converting absence into loss, one assumes that there was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made “us” lose. Therefore, to regain it one must somehow get rid of or eliminate those others—or perhaps that sinful other in oneself (LaCapra 58).

Gavin’s misplaced nostalgia for good Jefferson alienates the Snopeses as the other, to whom he projects the blame for this “ruined, polluted and contaminated” community,
making possible scapegoats out of Flem and Eula. This is the point that Gavin’s structural trauma is transformed into historical trauma. The repression of the traumatic death of Eula further foreshadows that the unacknowledged loss and sufferings of Eula continue to haunt the townspeople trans-generationally just as Temple Drake’s trauma does in *Requiem for a Nun*. The text in this sense implies the potential for the vicious circle of the intertwined pattern of structural trauma and historical trauma.

Faulkner refuses to provide any positive outlook by which structural and historical traumas are easily resolved at the end of the novel. The reader of the novel therefore faces the deadlock in which the history of Jefferson seems to be impossible to escape the repetition of the intertwined pattern of the two kinds of trauma. However, by remaining silent Faulkner is not submitting himself to any form of pessimism because the silence urges his reader to seek a new possibility of putting an end to the repetition of traumatic structure of history. In effect, Faulkner’s *The Town* hints at the possibility of breaking the cycles of the repetition of the intertwined pattern of traumas. LaCapra separates structural trauma from historical trauma. On the contrary, Faulkner in *The Town* dismantles the clear distinction between structural trauma and historical trauma by historicizing the former. This does not mean that Faulkner simply reduces structural trauma to a specific historical event, which LaCapra would critique. By historicizing structural trauma, Faulkner reveals that the anxiety which Gavin experiences, has a historical significance. LaCapra rightly points out that anxiety does not have any particular object; however, this does not imply that anxiety has no particular reason. Although “[e]veryone is subject to structural trauma” (LaCapra 79), the reason for structural trauma varies depending on historical background in which
each person is situated.

In *The Town*, Gavin’s structural trauma arises from the background of the Southern history with the rise of the industrial capitalism. LaCapra sees anxiety as something unbearable that every human being is tempted to avoid by way of projecting it onto certain groups and inviting the scapegoat of the groups. The best way to manage structural trauma, according to LaCapra, is thus to live with it, for any attempt to overcome structural trauma is an exercise in futility. But if structural trauma has a historical root as Faulkner’s text intimates, it becomes manageable and possible to overcome to some extent. If so, it is also possible that the subject can face structural trauma and transform himself or herself into a new self by projecting a new possibility into the historical situation. Even though Gavin in *The Town* fails to be confronted with his structural trauma and change the real problems which are parasitic on the unjust socioeconomic structure of Jefferson, Faulkner, by revealing historical significance embedded in Gavin’s anxiety, leaves a possibility of overcoming structural trauma.

The possibility of overcoming structural trauma resonates with Heidegger’s projecting a new possibility onto future by way of the experience of the nothing. Heidegger’s notion of anxiety as the experience of the nothing provides a new way of conceptualizing anxiety and structural trauma. According to Heidegger, anxiety reveals nothing. According to Robert Bernascon, Heidegger presents the mood of anxiety or dread (*Angst*) as an entry point to the experience of the nothing (Bernascon 54). Anxiety is different from fear: “[w]hereas fear is always of something determinate that threatens us, the indeterminacy of that before which we feel anxious is
fundamental to Heidegger’s characterization of anxiety” (Bernascon 54). To put it in another way, Heidegger’s anxiety, which is an extentiale of Dasein which is ontological in significance is the anxiety associated with structural trauma. However, for Heidegger, the experience of the nothing is not necessarily negative since the nothing opens up a new world, which is “as yet unrevealed” possibilities. These new possibilities point to open-ended multiple ways of disclosure alternative to presence: “[t]he nothing can be recognized in our preoccupation with beings. That we turn to beings in an attempt to escape the nothing, means that the nothing directs us to beings. The nothing is revealed as already there by our attempts to avoid it” (Bernascon 54).

According to Heidegger, the poet and the thinker project the nothing into new possibilities by introducing a new vocabulary and making the unfamiliar the familiar. Similarly what the social reformer, or the statesman in Heidegger’s own expression does is projecting a possibility onto unmanageable and chaotic historical situation as authentic Dasein. “Being-in-the World” is a state of Dasein’s Being. Here by ‘in’ Heidegger means both spatial and temporal conditions in which Dasein is situated: “‘In’ is derived from “innan”—“to reside”, “to habitare”, “to dwell” (Heidegger 80). That is, ‘in’ signifies involvement and engagement since Dasein is already and always in the world. Kwang-Sae Lee argues that “Heidegger moves away from metaphysics towards a nominalistic process” (Lee 1). Earlier Heidegger in Being and Time still devotes himself to fundamental ontology and holds onto the concept of being conceived as presence which is the “transcendental condition of the possibility of objects” (Lee 1). In other words, Being in earlier Heidegger is transhistorical and structural, which is the transcendental condition for the possibility of objects. But later
Heidegger emphasizes that Being yields to Ereignis which is an unrepeatable and unique happening characterized as “thinging-spatializing-temporalizing” (thinging-spacing-timing). That is, Being is nominalistically translated into a particular and concrete historical situation onto which Dasein is thrown. The call of Being, which is the happening of an historical event in the case of Faulkner’s The Town is the changing socioeconomic pattern of the South. The call of Being, that is, the changing historical situation in the South causes Gavin anxiety which is the experience of the nothing, that is, the unfamiliar and unrevealed possibility. Here Gavin’s anxiety once construed as an ontological feature of Dasein is historicized in the particular historical time.

To remove the cause of his anxiety, Dasein should be confronted with and actively respond to the call of Being by projecting possibilities. In Heiddegger’s expression, a social reform should be undertaken by the social reformer—Heidegger’s statesman who is on a par with poets and thinkers in playing the role of projecting possibilities. According to Heidegger, just as art work opens up a new world, so a social reform opens up a new world, thus possibly removing the cause of anxiety. In light of Heidegger’s nominalistic translation of Being into Ereignis, that is, a historical happening, structural trauma which is invoked by the experience of the nothing is neither purely transhistorical nor ontological. Structural trauma has the possibility of being historicized. In a parallel fashion, Gavin’s anxiety in The Town is concretized in his response to the specific historical events of the South although he fails to project new possibilities onto the future as authentic Dasein. Faulkner by historicizing structural trauma first and foremost gives body to our ineffable anxiety and opens up a
possibility of facing and overcoming it.
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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAKl4MvXUIc>


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