

Moral Sentiment and Redemption in Faulkner's "Borrowed Gothic," *Re-*

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Given the title of William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), together with its overtly religious speeches and its pervasive biblical and Christian imagery, one of the truly curious elements of the scholarship deriving from this novel written in play form is its underplaying or ignoring the very Christianity on which the novel rests. Indeed, prominent explorations of the novel routinely eschew words like "redemption," "repentance," and "forgiveness" while secularizing the novel's admittedly unique depictions of Christian salvation. One can dispute such readings of the novel, however, arguing instead that, with an eye on Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and *Lucy Temple* (1828) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Faulkner positions the novel squarely in the American gothic tradition. If so, then as a gothic novel, *Requiem* quite clearly embraces a certain Christian morality.¹

¹While diverse in their particulars, scholarly considerations of *Requiem* have consistently endorsed a cynical secularism. In the expanded introduction to the second edition of *The Portable Faulkner* (1967), for example, Malcolm Cowley maintains (with appropriate modernist winks and nudges) that while Temple Drake "had been a morally supine creature

In paying closer attention to the moral vision of *Requiem for a Nun*, one can begin with the title itself. While many critics have alluded to Faulkner's identification of the "nun" in the novel's title as Nancy,²

from the beginning to the end of *Sanctuary*," when "she reappears in *Requiem for a Nun*, she drives herself into making an agonized confession, and she makes it 'to save my soul,' which she has discovered for the first time" (xxx). Cowley does not here acknowledge the parts played by Nancy Mannigoe or Gavin or Gowan Stevens (or, for that matter, by Christian belief) in the eventual emergence of Temple's full confession; instead, he states that Temple simply "drives herself into making" it. For Cowley, the positive consequences of Temple's ordeal are temporal rather than eternal: that is, "having found a soul," Temple merely "goes back to her husband and her surviving child" (xxxi).

William R. Brown characterizes Nancy's pivotal act as "the misguided sacrifice of herself and the child for the atonement of sinful humanity" (448). In 1986 Doreen Fowler argued an odd kind of immortality and redemption wherein suffering is a necessity because, while it "does not cancel out . . . the sin," it "reverberates forever down through that endless corridor, history, side by side with the sin" ("Time" 248). Eleven years later Fowler—with help from Lacan—interprets Nancy's insistent "belief" as "an allusion to the imaginary plane that . . . precedes conscious existence in the world" ("Reading" 146); Nancy, then, is a "preoedipal" or "phallic mother" who is empowered to enact the ideal relationship of the imaginary plane, "a sealed mother-child circuit" or a "dying of the ego into the other" (146–47). Kelly Lynch Reames says the novel points to a social redemption occasioned by "the connection of women across differences," a connection with "the potential to counteract" the "public narratives" of males, thereby "bring[ing] private liberation to a public space" (51). Marion Tangum asserts that the narrative frame for the drama at the center of the novel "exacerbates and mitigates Nancy's seemingly simple faith and Temple's seemingly complex guilt" in a "scathing reconstruction of history" (325). Attention must also be given to Noel Polk's controversial stance in *Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun* (1981), which problematizes both the characters and the generally accepted themes of the novel. Polk asserts that "Nancy's murder of Temple's baby is the most savage and reprehensible act of violence in all of William Faulkner's fiction"; that "Stevens is not at all out to 'save' Temple but rather to crucify her"; and that *Requiem* is "perhaps the darkest and least hopeful of all of Faulkner's work" (xiii).

none fully addresses the other crucial word in the title, *requiem*. Even Noel Polk, despite his assertion that “the greatest irony in the title” lies “in the word ‘requiem’” (205), gives the word itself very little attention other than to equate the Protestant “hymn-singing in the death cell” of Nancy to the Catholic requiem, the mass for the dead (205). His conclusion to an eight-page discussion of the title is simply that, within the novel, there is “no ‘Requiem,’ no rest, no surcease from suffering for those who say No to death”: “peace is the kingdom of the dead” (212). It may be appropriate here to consider—as Polk does not—the precise nature of the requiem mass: a religious service (often sung) whereby the soul of the departed is, through the intercessory prayers of the living, guided towards and finally admitted into paradise. Such a definition implies richer questions (and answers) than those Polk considers, such as how does the novel constitute Nancy’s “requiem” and in what straightforward and non-ironic sense do its narratives comprise the sacred text whereby Nancy’s soul is directed to paradise and peace?

Answers to these questions are suggested by Temple in the only flashback scene in the novel. In the middle of Temple’s leaving her husband for Pete, she asks Nancy, “Why do you force me to this—hitting and screaming at you, when you have always been so good to my children and me—my husband too—all of us—trying to hold us together in a household, a family, that anybody should have known all the time couldn’t possibly hold together? even in decency, let alone happiness?” (163). Readers also ask this question as they simultaneously doubt the validity of the final words of the speech. That is, readers recognize a deliberate self-condemnation in Temple’s misguided belief that the family “couldn’t possibly hold together” only because of her own past.

²In *Faulkner in the University* (1959), Faulkner responds to a student question about the “nun” in the title of the novel by first identifying the “nun” as Nancy and then, speaking of Nancy’s characterization in the novel, by asserting, “She was just doomed and damned by circumstance. . . . And despite that, she was capable within her poor dim lights and reasons of an act which whether it was right or wrong was of complete almost religious abnegation of the world for the sake of an innocent child. That was—it was paradoxical, the use of the word Nun for her, but I—but to me that added something to her

Thus configured, Nancy's challenge is not to "hold the family together in a household" so much as to bring Temple to an awareness of her own potential for redemption, an awareness that in this case must precede familial healing. Nancy's own redemption in turn depends upon her capacity in her words to "work," that is, generally to serve others and specifically to bring Temple to a state of redemptive self-acceptance. While the composite narrative and dramatic structure of the novel clearly support the notion that children bear the sins of parents—that the burdens of the past continue to be borne in the present—it also offers the faint hope that the cycle of sin can be broken, that those who suffer and live for others can expiate or at least relieve the burden of sin. In this sense, the novel is quite obviously Nancy's requiem: spoken by those whom she has saved, the text constructs her as a salvation-bearing Christ figure insured safe admission into paradise.

In this same sense, *Sanctuary* (1931) and *Requiem for a Nun* can hardly be read apart from one another, conjoined as they are in plot and purpose. Given that Faulkner's novel pair preserves the core conflicts, the ethical sentiment, and even the accompanying melodrama of such nineteenth-century women's novels as Rowson's own novel pair, *Charlotte Temple* and *Lucy Temple*, and of such novels about women as Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, one may expect to find in Faulkner's two novels the traditional gothic sensibility marking these others: a sensibility underscoring the moral aims of Temple Drake's history. Of course, similarities among these various novels do exist, though some between Rowson's and Faulkner's "pairs" are arguably superficial—including the fact that the surname of the central family in Rowson's tales is the rather unusual first name of the protagonist of Faulkner's, that the Francophobe quality of villains and villainy in Rowson's tales is echoed in Faulkner's, especially *Sanctuary*, that both *Charlotte Temple* and *Sanctuary* feature comparatively large casts of characters, virtually all of whom are indifferent to the protagonist—or, at best, powerless to help her, and that all four novels contain traditional gothic elements: storms, mansions, fear, physical or emotional torture, sexual entrapment, death, etc.

Even so, the two novel pairs also exhibit a much more profound structural relationship, for each is comprised of a problematic “first novel” tale of a woman violated and a problematic “second novel” positing individual and communal redemption. This connection with its cultural and thematic dimensions persuasively suggests that Faulkner, as widely read as he was, may well have been familiar with Rowson’s novel pair, and, further, that his own novel pair, on one level at least, is a reworking of Rowson’s much earlier material. The word *reworking* is significant: Faulkner does not disparage or satirize Rowson but instead preserves her core plot as the heart of both *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*, and as in *The Scarlet Letter* Faulkner’s *Requiem* depends upon a love triangle for its dynamic interest. But as is certainly not the case in Hawthorne’s novel, the lover in *Requiem* (Red or Pete, as they are more or less interchangeable) is largely irrelevant to the novel’s central conflict, and the family at the heart of *Requiem*, a genuine family, unlike the makeshift family of Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl, may potentially receive full redemption. Perhaps in deliberate contrast to Hester, who never directly acknowledges her adultery as sin but insists instead that her affair with the minister “had a consecration of its own” (133), Temple as constructed by Faulkner is very nearly overwhelmed by a consciousness of her own sin. However, as a female type of Hawthorne’s veil-wearing protagonist in “The Minister’s Black Veil,” Temple is as proud in parading her sins as Hester is in protesting her innocence. Also, Temple is as oppressed by Gowan’s insistent forgiveness as Hester is by Dimmesdale’s incapacity to answer her final questions to him as he dies.

Like these three novels from which his own work seems derived, Faulkner’s novel pair stands as a compelling rumination on agency, temptation, and sin. While Faulkner’s familiarity with *The Scarlet Letter* seems certain, whether he had read—or even knew—the novels *Charlotte Temple* and *Lucy Temple* cannot be proved. Nevertheless, *Charlotte Temple* was the first true American best seller, and it was, as Cathy Davidson has shown, widely read by both genders, by people of all ages and from all walks of life (xii–xiii). Furthermore, *Charlotte Temple* was never out of

print from 1794, the date of its first American printing, until at least 1905, going through well over 150 printings in a little over a century. Given the larger cultural implications of a 1903 letter sent by “H. S. B.” to the *New York Evening Post* which asserts, “When I was a boy the story of Charlotte Temple was familiar in the household of every New Yorker” (qtd. in Davidson xiv), it seems likely that Faulkner would have known the first of Rowson’s works—perhaps even as one of the “classics” that Maud Faulkner introduced him to as a boy (Minter 10)—and possibly even its sequel.

As noted earlier, both *Charlotte Temple* and *Sanctuary* are problematic “first novel” tales of a woman violated. In the case of the former, its very popularity may be its most prominent flaw in the view of early twentieth-century critics. While Davidson puts a positive anthropological spin on its wide acceptance, suggesting that its popularity depended upon its being read as “an allegory of changing political and social conditions in early America” (xi), most other critics are not so generous. Ann Douglas, for example, attributes the novel’s fame to its “melodrama” (xii) and its apparent veracity as a “tale of truth” (xvi), while earlier critics smugly attribute its popularity to its sensationalism.³ Two other elements also appear to have shaped the novel’s fame. First is its brevity: Rowson manages to pack nearly as much plot into her story as Richardson does into *Clarissa* (1747–1748)—but requires fewer than one-twenty-fifth as much space to do so. Second is the novel’s gothic fatalism by which horror dictates its own inevitable consequences and allows for much the same psychological measuring as does fate-centered Greek tragedy. Americans, as Poe knew, are fascinated not so much by sin itself as by the human capacity to choose to fall. Douglas responds to the fatalism of the tale when she asserts that Charlotte “can only be a ‘wanderer’—not a voyager, not a discoverer, not even a pilgrim”—and that the

³See, for example, the assertion by Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren that, in *Charlotte Temple*, “morality was merely the salt to the stew of sometimes distorted sexual titillations not much less provocative and probably even less healthy than that found in the fiction of our century” (225); see also the contentions of Robert H. Spiller and others

novel holds no “tragic catharsis—for Charlotte, for Montraville, for the reader”; readers “do not think; we only experience, we only feel more and more. We tap the reserves of emotion until they are empty; exhaustion, not understanding, is the result” (xxxv).

Charlotte’s end is dictated not only by a host of uncontrollable circumstances and coincidences but also by her own character—by her naïveté, surely, but also by the way she justifies that naïveté and her indecision: she only pushes the envelope of temptation, she tells herself, as a sign of her own authority or strength. Pressed to elope with Montraville, Charlotte at length determines to meet him at the designated place, but there, in a “triumph of reason over inclination,” she will explain why she must “remain behind” (47). At the crucial moment that forever determines her future, however, Charlotte is naïvely and pathetically indecisive: “Alas! My torn heart!” she declares. “How shall I act?” (48). The narrator later describes Charlotte as a “hapless victim of imprudence and evil counsellors” (59).

Temple Drake is inarguably similar to Charlotte. During Temple’s own moment of truth in the corn crib, she responds not with anger or even with deliberation but with frozen and disturbingly indifferent fear, thinking only, “Something is happening to me!” (99). In *Requiem for a Nun* looking back on these experiences, Temple initially waffles around the motives for her behavior. “It’s not that you must never even look on evil and corruption,” she declares;

sometimes you cant help that, you are not always warned. It’s not even that you must resist it always. Because you’ve got to start much sooner than that. You’ve got to be already prepared to resist it, say no to it, long before you see it; you must have already said no to it long before you even know what it is. (117)

But then, speaking dispassionately of herself in third person, she comes to the moral bottom line, asserting that she acted as she did “because Temple Drake liked evil,” that “she just had unbounded faith that her father and brothers would know evil when they saw it, so all she had to do was, do the one thing which she knew they would

forbid her to do if they had the chance" (117-18).

In a sense, both Charlotte Temple and Temple Drake may be considered responsible for their respective plights, given that each at crucial moments chooses wrongly or unwisely and that each "liked evil." But Rowson and Faulkner also suggest that an indecisive susceptibility to evil is inborn, is part of Charlotte's and Temple's respective natures, a fact that at least partially undercuts their agency. More crucially, once each begins down the path she chooses, the die is apparently cast, and each seems powerless to change her fate; or as Joseph Urgo has suggested in Temple's case, in having been abandoned or betrayed by the very men she has always been taught will protect her, Temple literally becomes a victim of terrorism, especially Goodwin's (436-37, 439-40). Urgo emphasizes that Temple "considered her night in Goodwin's spare bedroom as worse than the experience of her actual rape, which occurred the next morning" (439); he then posits that, in enduring what Gavin Stevens describes in *The Town* (1957) as the "unbearable emotional state" of "furious fear," Temple "earns" a kind of psychological "sanctuary" (443). Nevertheless, such "sanctuary"—even according to Urgo's description of it—is more nearly aligned with post-traumatic coping than with security, let alone with any kind of peace.

The passivity—the apparent inertness—of both Charlotte and Temple is, of course, closely related to the dramatic inevitability upon which the gothic tradition depends. That is, what is commonly referred to as "gothic horror" requires an incapacitated or victimized protagonist, one at the mercy of inexplicable, overwhelming, terrifying circumstances. Otherwise, as when a strong, self-determined character is placed in "gothic" circumstances, suspense—and not horror—is the result. Douglas is right in arguing that *Charlotte Temple* is not a tragedy, not, even, a *bildungsroman* (xxvii-xxxvi). The protagonist is a victim throughout; she learns nothing except that other people can be enormously cruel; she realizes nothing except, eventually, that she must pay for adolescent foolishness with her own life. The novel is, however, a rather pure instance of gothic horror, designed to terrorize and instruct.

Today's increasingly industrialized, increasingly media-centered society has numbed the capacity to respond to gothic horror, especially in

intellectual ways. People forget that the gothic tradition is also a sublimely moral tradition. As suggested by such remakes as *The Grudge* or, a few years ago, *The Ring*, people no longer care if horror films are logical, let alone philosophically or ethically invigorating. Almost certainly, Rowson's audience experienced a very different visceral response to Charlotte's history than do modern readers. Rowson intended this response to be strong enough, powerful enough, to force her readers, despite their safe, vicarious vantage points, to see and, in limited ways, to experience the very real consequences of very real sins. *Charlotte Temple* is a parable, an allegory, and as such in its unremitting focus on worst-case consequences figuratively points up the kinds and degrees of social separation occasioned by apparently inconsequential but foolish behavior and, as embodied in Charlotte's slow demise, confronts the inevitable spiritual deterioration occasioned by sin generally and sexual sin in particular.

By 1931, when *Sanctuary* was published, a narrative like *Charlotte Temple* no longer carried the attraction or power it once undoubtedly held. Thus, if indeed Faulkner conceived *Sanctuary* as a workable twentieth-century retelling of *Charlotte Temple*, he not only had to ratchet up the horror but up the ethical ante as well. All the gothic elements are still here: the villainous male who seduces and then betrays the protagonist, the non-domestic females who assist in the protagonist's betrayal,⁴ the passive protagonist herself, and the determined or fatalistic plot. But the dashing yet duplicitous Montraville is replaced by the

⁴The term "non-domestic females" points to remote, jaded, and even heartless characters who are notably dissociated from female domesticity and from traditional femininity. Such characters may inhabit a home; they may even be married. But in such cases they will be more housekeeper or guard than wife; they are invariably childless and thus never maternal. They exist as stark contrasts to the victim-protagonist and, implicitly, to the victim-protagonist's mother and indeed frustrate the victim-protagonist's pleas for succor, nurture, comfort, or rescue through implicit or deliberate endorsement of the male antagonist and his values: hardness, fear, betrayal, subjugation. The term applies to characters like LaRue in *Charlotte Temple* and Lee's wife in *Sanctuary*, but it clearly points to an important stock character in gothic fic-

aberrant Popeye: ugly, impotent, coldly amoral. The non-domestic teachers, LaRue and DuPont, who act the role of madams, are transformed into Faulkner's Reba Rivers and her colleagues: unabashedly confident madams posing as teacher/philosophers; there is also the decidedly un-maternal wife of Lee, a figure who frightens Temple more than most of the men at the old French-man's place. Charlotte, the unfortunate victim, becomes Temple, who, in a hardened world, acts as the willing or at least coldly indifferent participant in her own ruination. The plot that sees the belatedly contrite Charlotte expire in her father's arms tends more insistently towards damnation in *Sanctuary*, where, following her ordeal, the still frighteningly passive, still unchanged Temple is spirited away by her appearances-obsessed father for some European rest and recreation. The upshot is that horror in the novel seems less inevitable than in *Charlotte Temple*, more internal to the protagonist herself: it derives from Temple's grinning at evil, flirting with it, even undressing for and making love to it.

Perhaps this is why many modernist critics admired *Sanctuary* despite its sensationalism: on a superficial level, at least, it is a dispassionate indictment of twentieth-century society (and perhaps especially Southern society) as a "wasteland," home to "hollow men" and women, as a soulless place where, to paraphrase Faulkner's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, people's actions are dictated by their glands rather than their hearts ("Stockholm" 313).⁵ It is therefore difficult to read *Sanctuary* prescriptively, just as it is difficult to read *Charlotte Temple* any other way. Nevertheless, both novels receive greater moral resonance from their re-

⁵That a modernist appreciation of *Sanctuary* depended on the novel's lack of what might be called a "moral center" was apparently troubling to Faulkner. As Frederick Karl argues, critics of Faulkner's having received the Nobel Prize in 1949 "still saw *Sanctuary* as his trademark"; Faulkner seems to have believed that he might shake off such critics, together with lingering influences of a novel with which he was never comfortable, by writing *Requiem*, "the sequel"—according to Karl—"in which [Temple] could partially redeem herself" (793, 795). Interestingly, Rowson may have had similar reasons for writing a sequel to *Charlotte Temple*, as Ann Douglas suggests: "Rowson did not want to leave the theme of feminine maturation on the regressive note of *Charlotte Temple*"

spective sequels, and each sequel is perhaps best described as a gothic comedy whose redemption, insofar as it exists, extends backwards to the original novel.

The gothic structure of *Lucy Temple* is, to say the least, curious, and its moral basis is equally so. The male deceiver in the novel is actually a good man who has himself been deceived. There are no non-domestic woman present save, perhaps, Lucy herself, but even she remains a nurturing figure from beginning to end despite her rejection of marriage and hearth in favor of communal service. The novel includes such gothic ingredients as isolated cottages and nighttime storms, but these appear at its periphery, not its center. For much of the novel Lucy is a passive character who exists in a world of coincidences. But because she is also a good character, the framework of the novel suggests that coincidence works in her favor and that the forces and people surrounding her cooperatively bring her happiness.

Still, the novel's morality is curious. As the novel unfolds, readers learn that Charlotte Temple's mother, a devout and undeviating Christian woman like Lucy herself, was also named Lucy. Thus, the text suggests a cycle: a righteous woman named Lucy had a prodigal daughter named Charlotte who in turn had a righteous daughter named Lucy who . . . and so on. In the context of biblical pronouncements about generational sins, Lucy's decision never to marry may be less the consequence of her experience with Franklin than of her growing consciousness of her own pedigree. That is, once she understands her full history, her adult life seems dictated by an unspoken fear that, should she marry, she herself might bear another Charlotte. To break the cycle, to redeem herself and family, she determines that she will act as surrogate mother to many girls rather than actual mother to one. In so deciding, Lucy is granted an immovable and unchanging self-sufficiency and integrity: she enjoys "consolations which those around [her] 'can neither give nor take away'"; her life "evinces the power and efficiency of those exalted principles . . . whose objects are raised far above the variable contingencies of time and sense" (264).

As for *Requiem*, the protagonist's worthiness of the salvation proffered her has long concerned readers who have been inclined to see

Temple as a character not worth saving, especially given the way they read her in *Sanctuary*. In this sense in particular, *Requiem for a Nun* also has an unusual gothic structure. The novel foregrounds not only the central plot of *Sanctuary* but also (in the narrative sections preceding each of the play's three acts) a collection of disturbing details about the town's larger history. True enough, it also has gothic scenes in an old governor's mansion and in a cell on death row at the state penitentiary. It has secret nighttime meetings, flickering lights, and infanticide. It has a murderer who is executed on Good Friday—and Friday the thirteenth at that. Yet the male deceivers in the novel deceive in order to redeem; and the murderer herself is the source of whatever sense of redemption the novel provides. The protagonist, while initially passive, becomes increasingly active, so that the novel's hopeful ending naturally grows up around her.

Actually, the source of redemption in *Requiem* is twofold. It comes first through Nancy Mannigoe, the non-domestic woman in the novel and black house servant to Gowan and Temple Drake Stevens. In a strangely paradoxical sacrificial act, she suffocates Temple's infant daughter to bring Temple to full self-awareness, meaning that Temple comes to believe that she has a soul and that, therefore, she inherently is of value. Second, and more crucially, redemption comes through Temple who, as part of her growing self-awareness, reaches the point that she can own and number her sins, delimit her sense of guilt, and thus bear her past while looking to her future. Temple must recognize not only that the attraction to evil is hardly unique to herself and that all are potentially "debased and worthless," but also that, more fundamentally, "good can come out of evil" (179).

Despite Polk's lauding Temple as a strong woman who "has had to be the sole emotional support of a very weak husband" (74), she is not finally as strong nor her husband as weak as Polk suggests. Indeed, Temple wallows in guilt, refusing on some level to allow those who offended, endangered, or abused her to share any culpability for her victimization. In response to Stevens's observation that Gowan "was driving when you wrecked" at Frenchman's Bend, Temple says, "And married me for it. Does he have to pay for it twice? It wasn't really worth

paying for once, was it?" to which the governor responds with a deliberately rhetorical question, "Is that what he thinks too?" (119). This is not to say that Temple is blind to her husband's flaws. Indeed, in reference to her husband's deep-rooted concern that the boy he is raising as his son is actually Red's child, Temple at one point demands of Stevens, "What kind of natural and normal home can a little boy have where his father may at any time tell him he has no father?" (179). The problem is that, consumed by her own sense of failure, Temple has stopped fighting—"not for yourself," as Stevens reminds her, "but for that little boy. Not to show the father that he was wrong, nor even to prove to the little boy that the father was wrong, but to let the little boy learn with his own eyes that nothing, not even that, which could possibly enter that house, could ever harm him" (179).

Temple's lack of self-confidence is most clearly signified by her feelings toward others, by her sense of the omnipresence of evil. Referring to humanity in general early in the novel, Temple admits she finds it difficult to "understand why they don't stink—what reason they would have for not stinking" (56). A little later, she acknowledges—"quick, tense, hard"—that "maybe it's just my own stinking after all that I find impossible to doubt" (57). Then a few minutes into her confession to the governor, Temple obliquely questions God's existence and then says, "You see? That what's so terrible. We don't even need Him. Simple evil is enough" (112). The trajectory of her own maturation appears in her changing perceptions of others, culminating in her observation in the final scene of the novel:

People. They're really innately, inherently gentle and compassionate and kind. That's what wrings, wrenches . . . something. Your entrails, maybe. The member of the mob who holds up the whole ceremony for seconds or even minutes while he dislodges a family of bugs or lizards from the log he is about to put on the fire—" (230). She continues: "And now I've got to say 'I forgive you, sister' to the nigger who murdered my baby. No: it's worse: I've even got to transpose it, turn it around. I've got to start off my new life being forgiven again. (230)

Given that the redemption of the novel is a familial one, Gowan's maturation must be concurrent with his wife's. More precisely, Gowan must, along with Temple, seem a character worth saving. Contrary to what Polk argues, Gowan is constructed from the beginning as a sympathetic character. The initial stage-note description of Gowan's face declares that "something has happened to it—tragedy—something, against which it had had no warning, and to cope with which (as it discovered) no equipment, yet which it has accepted and is trying, really and sincerely and selflessly (perhaps for the first time in its life) to do its best with according to its code" (47). After eight years of marriage and even at a very difficult juncture, Gowan has a confident familiarity and ease with his wife. Early in the novel after Temple has accepted the warm milk and napkin from Gowan, she remains "just standing there holding the milk." Gowan, as the stage notes inform, "seems to know what is going on"; "he moves; they kiss, not long but not a peck either, definitely a kiss between a man and a woman" (58). Gowan's code, his gentility, is put forward later as a sign of his goodness, perhaps even of his strength of character, when Temple tells the governor—contextually as a compliment to Gowan—that "at least he married me as soon as he could." Stevens follows this up by emphasizing that Gowan "hasn't had a drink since that day either" to which the Governor responds with the incomplete phrase, "I almost wish—," and with the implicit "—he had come with you" hanging in the air (114), affirming his understanding of Temple and Stevens's speeches as sincerely laudatory.

Well into her confession to the governor, Temple posits, then retracts, then effectually reinstates forgiveness as "even better, stronger, than tragedy to hold two people together" (134). Following Temple's confession, Gowan commits to a change, apparently with sincerity when he tells Temple, "This may be the time for me to start saying sorry for the next eight-year term. Just give me a little time. Eight years of gratitude might be a habit a little hard to break. So here goes. I'm sorry" (174). Confused and perhaps justifiably miffed when Temple seems inclined to wait for Stevens rather than to leave with Gowan to retrieve their son from Maggie, Gowan ignores Temple's last speech to him near the end of act two, exiting without responding. But he ap-

parently does not drive too far before turning around, for he arrives at the jail where Temple and Stevens go after leaving the governor's home. This time when he calls Temple's name near the end of the novel, she responds, "Coming" and ostensibly leaves with him (245).

Yet the conscious and relatively unambiguous moralizing of *Requiem* is subverted by the plot itself, which dictates that Nancy pay for Temple Drake's sins. The novel thus leaves unresolved questions about culpability, penance, redemption, social responsibility, and personal worth. Nevertheless, *Requiem* asserts that sin, regardless of its specific nature, inevitably has communal consequences. It suggests that individuals cannot accomplish their own penance or redemption, implying instead a personal and social need for the archetypal scapegoat, one who will bear responsibility for holes in the social fabric. Significantly, its scapegoat is a woman, a trademark of the popular American literary tradition. As Jane Tompkins first suggested, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular literature, especially that by women, creates the mythos of the female protagonist through "sentimental," juxtapositional, and "didactic" discourse, establishing her as a Christ figure who eschews American individuation in favor of communal harmony and fellowship (94-99).

While hardly denying the power or universal consequences of Christ's atonement, Faulkner does not create a world imbued with free Christian grace. Instead, Christ's suffering prefigures and perhaps even emphasizes the importance, the role, of personal human suffering. Nancy declares of God, "He dont tell you not to sin, He just asks you not to. And He dont tell you to suffer. But He gives you the chance. He gives you the best He can think of, that you are capable of doing. And He will save you" (238). In response to Temple's last anxious question regarding heaven—"What about me? Even if there is one and somebody waiting in it to forgive me, there's still tomorrow and tomorrow. And suppose tomorrow and tomorrow, and then nobody there, nobody willing to forgive me—" (243), Nancy offers only one word: "Believe" (243). These same themes are sounded in the penultimate exchange of the novel when Temple declares, speaking of her soul, of the world, of humanity: "Anyone to save it. Anyone who wants it. If there is none, I'm

sunk. We all are. Doomed. Damned.” Stevens answers, “Of course we are. Hasn’t He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?” (245). Suffering, posited by Faulkner as the antonym of hope, is an opportunity rather than a liability. Not only does it constitute the most profoundly felt, most tangible link to deity, it also offers the only sure path to renewal, regeneration, and healing—to temporal or eventual salvation.

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