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QUEER HONOR:

WHITE MASCULINITY IN THE SOUTHERN NOVEL, 1936 – 1970

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"Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?"

"I don't hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I don't hate it," he said. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*

—William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

LIST OF FIGURES viii

ABSTRACT ix

INTRODUCTION. 1

WILLIAM FAULKNER AND THE MOTIONS OF QUEER HONOR 48

THE PASSION OF JULIEN GREEN: REREADING *MOIRA* AND *TERRE LOINTAINE* . . .102

"WE DIDN'T": DAMMED MASCULINITY AND BODY FASCISM IN *DELIVERANCE* . . 148

CODA: RESIDUES OF HONOR 185

APPENDIX 203

BIBLIOGRAPHY 229

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Jacques-Louis David, *Patroclus* (1780) 143

Figure 2.2: Jacques-Louis David, *Hector* (1778) 143

Figure 5.1: Photograph of William H. Laird (1923) 214

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines one aspect of the representation of queer white masculinity in the Southern novel between 1936 and 1970, which I argue revolves around the disciplinary notion of honor. What I call "queer honor" refers to a specific genre of tragic literary narrative that mobilizes homophobic-homoerotic relations of proto-fascist power between Southern men in predominantly or exclusively white male homosocial spaces.

The first line of inquiry in this project is historical -- how and why did historical ideas about honor come to impact the aesthetic development of representations of white masculinity in the Southern novel of this period? Southern historians have conventionally argued that by the mid twentieth-century, honor was no longer a prime animating force in Southern life, a fact that seems to be undermined by the intense, even obsessive investments in honor that the authors under consideration in this project display. The novels here by William Faulkner, Julien Green, and James Dickey are all both inward looking and backward looking, reflecting a pervasive and even solipsistic interest in white masculinity and white male homosociality. These impulses engage not only the inward-looking regional history of the American South, but also a

deep history of queer iconography yoking same-sex desire to physical violence, dating back to the ancient world.

I begin by asking why figurative descriptions and thematic examinations of honor emerged in the Southern literature of the 1930s, and why they paradoxically reveal queer relations of power and desire between white Southern men. I argue this pattern of queer relations take the form of particular type of authoritarian homophobic-homoeroticism. Honor, which in these novels is often exposed to be a performative veneer of itself, or merely a series of ritual motions, tends to turn men away from domestic responsibility, heterosexuality, and the law, even as it nominally reinforces commitments to these normative sociopolitical structures. It also instills in men a fear of other men, paranoia about being perceived as men, and the intensification of male masculinity into competitive hyper-masculinity.

The second question is methodological. How ought one read and critique the literary representations of queer white masculinity in the Southern archive of this period? Theorizing queer Southern white male sexuality poses a specific problem, I argue, within the field of anti-relational queer theory. Although many scholars have formulated "shame" to be the crucible from which queerness emerges, Southern historians like W. J. Cash and writers like Faulkner take "honor" to be the motivating complex or sensibility around which all white Southern masculinity develops. My

project examines what happens when these two notions -- shame and honor -- converge on the site of the queer white Southern male body in the literature and history of the American South.

The third question is about form, genre, and aesthetics. How does the obsession with honor produce a unique strain of narrative within the form of the novel, and within the genre of Southern Gothic literature? I argue that the phenomenon of queer honor reveals a violent, homophobic, even white supremacist genre that summons its thematic reserves of Gothic horror from the very gestures of authority, subjugation, and violence that have historically repressed queer, non-gender-conforming, and non-white American citizens. This tendency anticipates postwar traditions of gay male representation and iconography, as well as historically queer canons of literature and art. What binds this aesthetic tradition together across ancient and modern history are fascinations with hyper-masculinity, sadomasochism, and exclusively male homosocial domains, as well as an investment in the idea of queer male desire as an inherently warlike or martial phenomenon.

The last question is about culture and politics. How might one use the concept of queer honor to study the homophobic-homoerotic relations of power in American political and cultural life more broadly? In the introduction and coda, I suggest that queer honor is a phenomenon that can be said to apply to any hyper-masculine

domain of culture and politics where presumably heterosexual white men are interested exclusively in the company of other presumably heterosexual white men, and cite Tony Kushner's dramatization of Roy Cohn as the most exemplary representation of this cultural phenomenon in the period of American literature after which my project ends.

In Chapter 1, I use W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South,* and in particular his notion of the "favorite enemy," as a way to read the honor-bound relationship between the half-brothers Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* I argue that Cash's work of literary historiography and Faulkner's historical novel, which were both being written around the same time, disclose a vision of Southern masculinity that is marked by "paradox, irony, and guilt" — three cultural paradigms that Southern historians consider to be essential to an understanding of Southern history. I interpret the tempestuous affair and subsequent rivalry between Henry and Bon, which culminates in a fatal duel, as a paradigmatic example of the way in which fathers encouraged Southern boys from an early age to form competitive, aggressive impulses against other males, regardless of kinship or camaraderie. This leads inevitably to tragedy when Bon is killed in the duel and Henry is forced into exile, leaving the patriarch Thomas Sutpen with no male heir.

In Chapter 2, I turn to the personal diaries of Julien Green, in particular *Terre Lointaine,* to recover his spiritual conception of queer honor and the intellectual and aesthetic context behind his largely forgotten 1950 Southern Gothic novel *Moira.* Critics have typically read Green's oeuvre as staging the conflict between his Catholicism, which for a long time prevented him from explicitly addressing his own homosexuality in his work, and his emergent identity as a gay man. I complicate this view by arguing that the paintings of the French Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David, the *Eclogues* of the ancient Roman poet Virgil, and the writings of late nineteenth-century sexologist Havelock Ellis, all provided key intellectual encounters with the notion of primal male honor that encouraged Green to express his own queer identity in literature through a process of spiritual ascesis. I suggest that Green's apprehensions of David's controversial, eroticized male nudes *Patroclus* and *Hector*, in particular, seemed to grant him permission to stage queer male desire in *Moira*—the novel most critics take to be his masterpiece—in an unprecedentedly explicit fashion.

In Chapter 3, I examine the way James Dickey's 1970 novel *Deliverance* stages the violent threat of homosexuality as a challenge to the orthodox ideology of "body fascism" that has characterized normative Southern masculinity. Against critics who have taken the novel merely to be a fantasy about revanchist white male power, I read the novel's prefatory invocation of Georges Bataille as an indication that the novel

seeks to interrogate the limits of masculinity as a system, and the way that system paradoxically relies on homophobic-homoerotic relations of power. I read the novel as deconstructing the idea of "body fascism"—the aggressive management of the muscular male body through technological means—by coding the threat of the homosexual monster as something that is neither homosexual nor effeminate. In this way, the novel destabilizes the archetypes undergirding the orthodox masculinity of athletics, which has been historically premised in Southern culture on notions of male honor.

INTRODUCTION

> "Many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/hetero definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century." [1]
>
> —Eve Sedgwick

> "Chaw his lip or you'll never be a man."[2]
>
> — Henry Benjamin Whipple

I. QUEER HONOR

The inquiry in this dissertation has three broad, interconnected aims. The first is to articulate one precise aspect of the representation of white male masculinity in the Southern novel between 1936 and 1970, specifically in works by William Faulkner, Julien Green, and James Dickey, which I argue all develop significantly around the male homosocial code of, "honor."[3] The idea of honor, though widely perceived as an

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[1] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 1.

[2] Henry Benjamin Whipple, *Bishop Whipple's Southern Diary, 1843–1844*, ed. Lester B. Shippee (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1937) 91.

[3] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 3-24. A student of Southern historian C. Vann Woodward, Bertram Wyatt-Brown's 1982 volume *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* remains the most comprehensive published account of the historical and intellectual roots of Southern honor, and the one to which this project will principally refer. There, Wyatt-Brown traces the origins of the code of honor back

atavistic cultural force in the United States by this period, nonetheless remains central to the production of a recognizable genre of queer narrative in the literature of the Southern United States—one that subverts the national themes of male camaraderie, intimacy, and escape that mid-century scholars like Leslie Fiedler were taking to be the ideological foundation of American literary romance.[4] The second is to demonstrate that honor can productively be understood not only as a disciplinary code of social behavior and thought with complex legal, cultural, and historical roots, but also as an intellectual lever between ideology, aesthetics, and behavior, which helps generate a dynamic and noteworthy repertoire of taboo male desire in the Southern novel during a time when openly queer representation in American literature was still scarce.[5] The third is to critically examine precisely how nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural

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through several generations of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Scots-Irish populations that settled in the coastal and Appalachian regions of the Southern United States. The book's first section, "Honor in Literary Perspective," provides a particularly useful synthesis of the topic, raising tales like Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832) and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug" (1843) as significant early explorations of honor in nineteenth-century American literature.

[4] Leslie Fiedler, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" *A Fiedler Reader.* (New York: Stein & Day, 1977) 3-12.

[5] Other scholarly entries that have anticipated this convergence without being directly organized around the topic of honor include: David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men.* (New York: Nation Books, 2013); John M. Clum, *"He's All Man": Learning Masculinity, Gayness, and Love from American Movies*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

legacies of honor have aesthetically motivated these taboo representations of same-sex desire—in particular their "bad" attachments to domains of homophobia, white power, and body fascism—in the mid-twentieth-century Southern novel.[6] I argue that *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Moira,* and *Deliverance,* all imagine predominantly white male homosocial worlds set in in the Southern United States that provide key aesthetic blueprints for postwar subcultural traditions of gay male representation and iconography—characterized by fascinations with hyper-masculinity, homophobic-homoeroticism, and sadomasochism—that flourished increasingly in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, in works by a diverse, multidisciplinary range of queer writers, visual artists, photographers, and filmmakers.[7]

A project that comprehensively examines the intersections between honor and queer male representation in the twentieth-century Southern novel has never been forthrightly ventured, perhaps because it offers up a social category that is so

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[6] Richard Rambuss, "After Male Sex." *South Atlantic Quarterly,* Vol. 106, No. 3. (Summer 2007) 578. I'm using the word "bad" here in the same spirit that Rambuss does when he elaborates on what he considers to be understudied domains of male sociality, intimacy, and mannerism that now confront scholars of gender and sexuality, and masculinity studies in particular.

[7] For more on the masochistic aspect of postwar representations of white masculinity, see David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture*, and works by Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Derek Jarman, Robert Mapplethorpe, David Wojnarowicz, Andres Serrano, Larry Kramer, Tony Kushner, Todd Haynes, John Rechy, Dennis Cooper, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Tom of Finland, and Etienne.

dramatically different from what scholars have lately theorized to be the paradigmatic queer experience: that of, "shame."[8] By attaching the word, "queer," to the notion of honor, I want to emphasize how the idea of honor historically produces a model of ostensibly normative social thought and behavior that ironically and paradoxically sanctions the tendency among white Southern men to deviate from the word of the law, the responsibilities of domestic life, and often heterosexuality itself. These ideological sanctions reflect what historians like Bertram Wyatt-Brown have taken to be the quintessential qualities of Southern history writ large: "paradox, irony, and guilt."[9] In a broader sense, I am also trying to push the conversation among queer scholars around the topic of shame further by considering the untapped conceptual potential that the idea of honor holds to reveal something that has, to my mind, been critically overlooked in the study of white masculinity and, in particular, queer white masculinity.

The academic interest among queer critics in the topic of shame has perhaps already peaked. In 2005, David Halperin organized a multidisciplinary conference entitled *Gay Shame* at the University of Michigan, and its visibility as an object of

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[8] David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, editors. *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). This anthology exhaustively collects the work that queer scholars have done from various critical angles—feminism, historicism, disability studies, affect studies, pedagogy—on the topic of shame over the last twenty or so years, including panels presented at the "Gay Shame" conference that Halperin organized at the University of Michigan in 2005.

[9] Wyatt-Brown, 3.

inquiry in the field has been coextensive with the escalating momentum behind what is now broadly referred to as the "anti-relational" turn in queer theory—a turn, that is, toward criticism that confronts the ways in which unassimilated queer subjects have tended to inhabit antisocial and apolitical modes of being and feeling.[10] Critics engaging in this kind of work address the way queer historical figures have spurned the logic of assimilation, modernity, and liberal tolerance, such as Tim Dean's study of HIV transmission subcultures, Lee Edelman's polemic against reproductive futurism, and Heather Love's portrait of the inner lives of Walter Pater, Radclyffe Hall, Willa Cather, and Sylvia Townsend Warner.[11] Love in particular stresses that one of her aims is to resist the "affirmative" emphasis of queer studies, which for her does not adequately reckon with the dark, painful, and unresolved legacies of queer history.[12] While this project reflects in many ways reflects the anti-relational spirit of queer scholarly

[10] See Halperin, *Gay Shame*; Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism,* ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).
[11] Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[12] Love, 4.

methodology, my focus is not on the fringes or margins of queer experience, but rather on the prime hegemonic category of the Southern United States—white masculinity.

Most scholarly attention concerning white male and specifically gay white male representation in the literature of the Southern United States during the mid-twentieth-century has settled around figures like William Faulkner, Ernest Gaines, Lillian Hellman, Carson McCullers, William Styron, Truman Capote, and Tennessee Williams.[13] Michael Bibler's 2009 monograph *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936 - 1968,* surveys a representative range of authors including Faulkner, Styron, and Williams, as well as Katherine Anne Porter and Arna Bontemps, with an afterword that borrows its title from Tony Kushner's two-part play *Angels in America.*[14] Though the historical parameters of Bibler's project closely resemble the ones ventured here, his historiography is guided by what he describes as

[13] There is truly much to be said—and an entire history to be written—about the way queer honor has developed within the Southern American theatrical tradition, and one need only look to the pantheon of masculine, homophobic, queer-coded characters in the dramatic oeuvre of Tennessee Williams (*A Streetcar Named Desire*'s Stanley Kowalski, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*'s Brick Pollitt, *Sweet Bird of Youth*'s Chance Wayne, *Orpheus Descending*'s Val Xavier) to get a sense of the archive that such a study might assemble. I choose here to focus on the Southern novel, rather than on Southern drama, in part because queer scholars have scrutinized the queer content of the latter to a greater degree than that of the former.

[14] Michael Bibler, *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation.* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009). Tony Kushner, *Angels in America.* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003).

"egalitarian" representations of homosexuality.[15] What enjoins his selection of literary representations is the way they consistently posit homosexuality as, "a powerful site for rethinking the hierarchical networks of relationality that dominate culture"—not just homophobia, but the political superstructures of white supremacism and patriarchy governing the settings of plantation fiction, and the broad Southern history they microcosmically represent.[16] He goes on to say,

> Where representations of homosexual relations are overt, they sometimes take on competing forms, whereby some modes of contact or attraction appear mutual, equitable, and loving, and others appear exploitative or even coerced. I am especially interested in the first type of homosexual relations because, as I read them, these texts structure their relations in terms of a desire that privileges the sameness of the other to the self. And by doing so, these texts also conflate those same-sex relations with a horizontal model of egalitarian social relations that competes with the hierarchical order of the meta-plantation even as it exists as *part* of the meta-plantation.[17]

For Bibler, the gendered sameness of figures of same-sex desire effectively models the political "sameness" that underwrites the democratic potential of an imaginary utopian scene.[18] His method reflects the anti-pathological, anti-hierarchical, and anti-homophobic energy that has driven the emancipatory usage of the words "queer" and

[15] Bibler, 4.
[16] Ibid., 8.
[17] Ibid., 6.
[18] Ibid., 6.

"gay" in academia and political activism since at least the early 1970s.[19] It is also a prime example of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "reparative reading"— a style of queer literary critique that promotes among other things a commitment to thick description and, "the prodigal production of alternative historiographies."[20] Given the impoverished level of access that queer people have wielded over their own past, and the ideological pressures that have historically foreclosed the possibility of queer

[19] How exactly sexual identity categories like "queer," "gay," and "lesbian" can be said to correlate with or produce specific literary categories—queer canons, queer archives, queer oeuvres—is by no means a settled question. Sedgwick's sixth axiom in *Epistemology of the Closet* is, "The relation of gay studies to debates on the literary canon is, and had best be, tortuous." For an in-depth discussion of the political and epistemological problems behind defining gay and queer textuality across history, see the, "Preface," to Byrne S. Fone's *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) xxvii-xxxii.

[20] Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) 150. Sedgwick's idea of reparative reading practice, as reflected by Bibler, suggests that the strained but resilient presence of queer visibility in the Southern archive helps readers imagine a future where every barrier limiting queer expression will have dissolved, not unlike the world Jose Muñoz also memorably imagines in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Reparative approaches, like the kind Sedgwick inaugurated and which queer scholars like Bibler, Munoz, and countless others have sustained, continue to remain necessary because the generative spirit of their historiographies accurately reflects how improbable it was (and in many areas of the world—still is) for expressions of gay identity and desire to emerge at all. To be clear, the goal of my project is neither to negate nor reject the vitality of theirs: by recuperating "mutual, equitable, and loving" articulations of queer identity and same-sex desire from the rifts of literary history, the reparative model for queer reading has helped forge not only a model for anti-homophobic inquiry, but also an international intellectual framework for recognizing LGBTQIA+ human rights.

expression, glimmers of public gay visibility in literary archives do indeed seem miraculous. Moreover, in light of the preponderance of tragic queer narratives in the corpus of American literature, and the Western canon more broadly (allusions to which are in fact well represented in the novels considered here), such methodologies remain crucial ways scholars can try to suture together with greater emotional depth and historical nuance the fabric of their own past, helping to rebuild what queer critic Ann Cvetkovich has called an, "archive of feelings."[21]

To seriously examine the topic of honor, however, is to reckon with an archive that hardly, if ever, reflects the emancipatory or egalitarian potential of same-sex desire, but rather tends to hinge upon the "exploitative" and "coerced" registers that Bibler's study intentionally avoids.[22] It is to approach a body of works that tends only to admit "sameness" in proto-fascist valences, and queer acts in vengeful assertions of violence, as when Henry Sutpen murders his half-brother Charles Bon in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom,* when Joseph Day fantasizes about killing his rival Bruce Praileau in Julien Green's *Moira,* and when an ambush unfolds in James Dickey's

[21] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[22] Bibler, for his part, acknowledges in one of his introductory footnotes that one of the biggest risks in emphasizing a model of "sameness" lies in its susceptibility to fascism, which is precisely the sort of figurative operation that I argue takes place in the works under scrutiny here.

Deliverance.[23] I will argue that to study the queer aspect of literary representations of male masculinity and "honor" in the mid-century Southern novel invariably forces one toward a methodology that leaves notions like egalitarianism and utopia behind. It is to examine homophobic-homoerotic relations of power in a genre of queer narrative that, in fact, aestheticize and eroticize, often in transgressive and amoral ways, the social imperatives that comprise what Southern historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown has termed "primal honor"– an atavistic code which, I will suggest in the coda, still inflects individual and group male behavior in an attenuated form, especially in white male homosocial and male-dominated public spheres and institutions, even today.[24]

II. SOUTHERN MASCULINITY, 1936 - 1970

The first aspect of this multi-tiered claim aims to reveal something new about how representations of white male masculinity developed in Southern literature and Southern literary history, which were undergoing a complex set of social and political

[23] William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Modern Library, 1993); Julien Green, *Moira.* (London: Quartet Books, 1988); James Dickey, *Deliverance.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

[24] Edward L. Ayers, for example, writes in *Vengeance and Justice,* erroneously in my view, that "honor has no resonance, no meaning, in our culture today." Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 13.

transformations during 1936 and 1970. In 1936, the year that Random House, Inc., printed the first edition of *Absalom, Absalom!,* the Fugitive Agrarians led by John Crowe Ransom were convening at Vanderbilt University for the *Who Owns America?* symposium, which sought to clarify and expand the pro-agrarian socioeconomic philosophy behind the Twelve Southerner's 1930 literary manifesto *I'll Take My Stand.*[25] Responding to waves of large-scale industrialization that had begun increasingly to transform and modernize the Southern landscape in the first decades of the twentieth-century, the Southern Agrarians refined a reactionary set of political and socioeconomic beliefs in writing that were geared toward protecting what they anxiously viewed as a vanishing way of life, organized around the traditionally agriculturally based economy of the Southern region. The crisis surrounding the reproduction of Southern identity and culture to which Ransom and his contemporaries were responding also coincided in the 1930s with an intense period of production in Southern literature now known as the Southern Renascence, as well as a broader moment of national public interest in remembering white Southern history, as reflected

[25] Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, eds. *Who Owns America: A New Declaration of Independence.* (Wilminton, DE: ISI Books, 1999); Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand.* (New York/London: Harper, 1930).

by the seismic popularity of lavishly produced cinematic melodramas like Victor Fleming's *Gone With the Wind*.[26]

The very idea of the South as a region beset by ongoing historical, intellectual, and socioeconomic transformations lies at the center of the intricate, multi-generational saga that Faulkner plots out in *Absalom, Absalom!,* a book explicitly about Quentin Compson's attempt to understand the postbellum dissolution of the Sutpen family line, and in particular its fabled patriarch, the owner of the largest plantation in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Many of the book's scholars have read the fragmentation of the, "monologic, myth-generating system of Thomas Sutpen," passed down through subsequent generations in a, "polyphonic system built up by the general narrator and Quentin Compson," as a Modernist allegory for the broader way that the hegemonic 'Lost Cause' narrative of the South's secession and defeat was

[26] For more on what is now typically referred to as the period of the Southern Renascence, see Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs, eds. *Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953); *Gone with the Wind.* Dir. Victor Fleming. Perfs. Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable, Olivia de Havilland. (Selznick International Pictures & Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939). A screenwriter for MGM, Warner Brothers, Universal Studios, and RKO at various points during his lifetime, Faulkner resented the popularity that David O. Selznick's ostentatious adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's novel garnered, while *Absalom, Absalom!* –a complex historical novel composed from stories Faulkner spent time developing over fifteen years—sold so few copies. Nevertheless, both Selznick's film and Faulkner's novel have an abundance of similarities, chief among which is that both mobilize gendered ideas about Southern honor and virtue rendered in poetic theaters of memory, set in the historical past.

being challenged by a new crop of twentieth-century scholars and intellectuals, who sought to reckon more seriously with the South's legacies of slavery and racism.[27] The 1941 publication of W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* was, in particular, a watershed moment for Southern historical discourse—a controversial, non-academic account that violated the nostalgic, commemorative tone of most Southern historical scholarship in favor of a more journalistic approach that soberly examined the origins of the Confederacy's cultural and political justifications for slavery and secession, as well as the postbellum legacies of racial subjugation and exploitation that persisted long after its military surrender at Appomattox in 1865.[28]

Cash's enormously influential work also signaled a moment of intellectual transformation in prevailing historical conceptions of Southern masculinity. "Cash's ideas and even his terminology have become so much a part of our thinking," Wyatt-Brown writes, "that we no longer feel obliged to cite him."[29] The book's second chapter entitled, "Of the Man at the Center," endeavors to provide a vivid, exacting portrait of the Southern male character, which Cash concludes is more a product of the "half-wild Scotch and Irish clansmen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,"

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[27] Olga Scherer, "A Dialogic Hereafter: *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!" Southern Literature and Literary Theory*, edited by Jefferson Humphries. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press) 305-6.
[28] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South.* (New York: Random House, 1941).
[29] Wyatt-Brown, vii.

than, "the English squire… to whom the Southern Agrarians have recently sought to reassimilate him."[30] For many critics of his time, Cash's lacerating style veered too close to the kind of withering scorn to which H.L. Mencken had subjected the South a generation earlier in polemical essays like "The South Astir" and "The Sahara of the Bozart" and from which the Southern Agrarians themselves were still smarting.[31] Cash, who wrote eight articles for Mencken's *American Mercury* between 1929 and 1935, is for instance, not squeamish about using more pejorative terms like "simple," "naïve," "primitive," and, "uncomplex," to describe the mindset of most white Southern men: "perhaps as simple a type as Western civilization has produced in modern times," "a hot, stout fellow, full of blood and reared to outdoor activity, because of a primitive and naïve zest for the pursuit in hand."[32] At the same time, he proclaims that the typical Southern male possessed, "the most intense individualism the world has seen since the Italian Renaissance," "men of 'terrible fury,'" "purely personal," "purely self-asserting," "simple, direct, and immensely personal," "in intimate relation with… hedonism," and prone to, "romanticism," and, "sentimentality."[33]

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[30] Cash, 29.
[31] H. L. Mencken, "The South Astir." *The Virginia Quarterly Review*. Vol. 11, Iss. 1 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1935) 47-60; H.L. Mencken, "The Sahara of the Bozart." *New York Evening Mail.* (Nov 13, 1917).
[32] Cash, 30.
[33] Ibid., 29-31, 82.

The first chapter of this project examines how Faulkner renders what Cash called the notion of the "favorite enemy" through the eroticized rivalry between Thomas Sutpen's legitimate and illegitimate male heirs, Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, which culminates in a duel that results in Bon's death.[34] Responding in a personal interview to a question about "the curse upon the South" that many have observed in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner remarked that this curse is in fact twofold—a reflection of the legacy of chattel slavery, and of Thomas Sutpen's personal failure to, "take a responsible part in the human family."[35] This failure, rooted in the patriarchal and racist assumptions of white male supremacy, is something Sutpen's progeny are ultimately unable to escape or transcend, which leads the novel's modern frame narrators, Mississippi native Quentin Compson and Canadian college roommate Shreve McCannon, to sit up late at night, huddled in a Harvard dormitory, piecing together a series of fragmented and counterfactual testimonies about the Sutpen family. Shreve, an outsider to the ways and manners of the South, reflects the national (and even international) public fascination with its history when he stops to marvel at the Hollywood-grade spectacle of the events that Quentin describes: "Jesus, the South is

[34] Ibid., 50.
[35] Fred Hobson, ed. *William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: A Casebook.*

fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. No wonder you have to come away now and then, isn't it."[36]

Faulkner's historical novel tracks the foundational ways in which men in the honor-bound society of the Old South tended to become fatalistically implicated in the queer phenomenon of intense male rivalry by overinvesting themselves in the competitive realms of male homosociality, and in homophobic-homoerotic relations of masculinity. By arguing that honor is not only a male homosocial phenomenon, but also a specifically queer one, I will be resting my argument on several historical assumptions raised by prominent Southern historians such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown, W. J. Cash, and C. Vann Woodward.[37] The first involves the way that the code of honor affected early childhood development, especially the way Southern boys were expected and in fact encouraged by fathers to fight, starting at a young age. The second assumption is that honor tended to fray the normative bonds of filiality and fraternity by promoting hostilities between white male relatives, given that one of the most common problems that honor posed to the Southern criminal justice system was how to arbitrate the family quarrel, especially if the quarrel threatened to divide the

[36] William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Modern Library, 1993) 226.
[37] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South;* Cash, *The Mind of the South;* C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960).

loyalties of the local community. The third historical pattern embedded in Faulkner's text is the fact that honor trumped even the final authority of the law by encouraging individuals and sometimes whole communities to override the verdicts of the court system with extrajudicial acts of physical brutality, humiliation, and exile. I argue that honor, in this last sense, possesses a queer relation to the law, insofar as it constitutes a social and cultural breakage away from the prescriptive political force of the American legal system.

The second chapter develops this account of honor by reading Julien Green's 1950 Southern Gothic novel *Moira* in the context of the author's personal diaries, for which he is most well known in France, and which document Green's years spent in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia.[38] A devout Catholic, a gay man, and the first French non-citizen ever elected to the Académie Française, I want to argue that Green—though still a relatively little known and seldom studied figure in North America—can be recast as a central figure in the literary development of homophobic-homoerotic relations in the Southern novel. As an American national with a Southern heritage who published most of his works in French, Green presents both an insider and an outsider's vision of the American South. His novels are Southern Gothic narratives that cloak homoerotic male desire in mysticism and violence, and which

[38] Green, *Moira;* Julien Green, *Terre Lontaine* (Paris: Grasset Editions, 1966).

reflect the author's personal crisis between his committed Catholicism, to which he converted after the death of his mother in 1915 and nearly devoted his life, and the nascent sexual yearnings he grappled with upon arriving at the University of Virginia.

This crisis, on fulsome display in Green's diary *Terre Lointaine* (which documents his time in Charlottesville) and his correspondence with the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, provides a conventional critical paradigm for several of the book-length studies of his works published in the 1970s and 1980s.[39] However, rather than read Green's work according to the binary conflict between what Anthony Newbury calls "religion and sensuality," I instead approach his writing through a different lens that takes into account the queer iconographic legacy of literature and visual art that the author was consuming in Paris during the time that he was drafting *Moira,* as well as the philosophical writing of queer French writers like Andre Gide and Marcel Jouhandeau, who were Green's contemporaries.[40] What binds this lineage of works together—which includes paintings like Jacques Louis David's *Patroclus* and

[39] See Anthony H. Newbury, *Julien Green: Religion and Sensuality.* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1986); Nicholas Kostis, *The Exorcism of Sex and Death in Julien Green's Novels.* (The Hague / Paris: Mouton, 1973); John M. Dunaway, *The Metamorphoses of the Self: The Mystic, the Sensualist, and the Artist in the Works of Julien Green.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978); Glenn S. Burne, *Julian Green.* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972).

[40] Newbury, 38-59; Andre Gide, *Corydon.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1920); Marcel Jouhandeau, *De L'abjection.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

Hector, and literary works like Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*, and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*—is an aesthetic fascination with intersections between violence and eroticism, located on the site of the ideal and abject male body.[41] These works not only help restore vital context to the production of *Moira*, widely considered to be his masterpiece, but also provide a representational framework for the kind of homophobic-homoerotic relations that the author deployed not only in that novel, but several other of his works written later in his career set in the Southern United States, including the author's "Dixie" trilogy, and the play *South.*[42]

Like Faulkner's novel, Green's is set in the historical past, specifically the early 1920s, when Southern epistemologies of masculinity and manhood were in flux. In the introduction to Craig Thompson-Friend's anthology *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction,* Thompson-Friend writes that during this period the word "masculinity" emerged as a way to denote a specific kind of autonomous, entrepreneurial, middle-class whiteness, which he interprets as an epiphenomenon of the large-scale industrialization transforming the Southern

[41] Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor.* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975); Stephen Crane, *The Red Bage of Courage*. (New York: Fleet Press Corps, 1969).
[42] Julien Green, *The Distant Lands: A Novel.* (New York: M. Boyars, 1991); Julien Green, *The Stars of the South: A Novel.* (New York: M. Boyars, 1996); Julien Green, *Dixie*. (Paris: Fayard, 1995); Julien Green, *South: A Play*. (New York / London: Marion Boyars, 1991).

landscape, and which gradually grew to replace other terms like "manhood" and, "manliness" in common parlance.[43] Amid such cultural and linguistic transformations, Green remembers in his memoir, *Terre Lointaine*, matriculating into the University of Virginia and signing a document that bound him to its "honor system," which he writes about in a skeptical, ironic regard: "The idea was that the boys were forming what was called 'a Virginia gentleman.' All excesses were allowed according to them, but cheating, no."[44]

A child of Southern parents (his maternal grandfather served in the First and Second Confederate Congress) but unaccustomed to the ways of the American South, Green instinctively chafed at what he perceived as decadent and boisterous manners of other Southern men his age. *Moira* follows a red-haired Baptist adolescent named Joseph Day at the University of Virginia, a fictionalized version of Green himself, whose self-abnegating attitude toward sex and sexuality leads him to become a kind of violent, avenging figure in the eyes of the other students. Along the way Joseph Day develops a fascination with a male rival named Bruce Praileau, another archetypical example of what Cash would describe as the typical Southern male's investment in a,

[43] Craig Thompson-Friend, ed. *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction.* (Athens / London: University of Georgia Press, 2009) ix.
[44] Green, 35.

"favorite enemy."[45] Green's time at the University of Virginia was further marked by encounters with literary representations of same-sex desire and early medical discourse about homosexuality (or, sexual "inversion") in his coursework, in particular Virgil's *Eclogues* and the writings of Havelock Ellis.[46] Specifically, I draw a connection between Ellis's clinical conclusions about the natural correlation between homosexuality and "warriors and warlike people" to Green's own representation of Joseph Day as an agent of violence and belligerence, who earns nickname, "the Exterminating Angel," from his peers.[47] Finally, I trace Green's own conception of spiritual ascesis, through which he transforms feelings of spiritual despair and shame over his same-sex desires into something like an artistic philosophy of honor, to the mystical writings of Green's contemporary Marcel Jouhandeau.[48]

My third and final chapter turns to James Dickey's *Deliverance,* a towering work of postwar Southern literature that also presents one of the most notoriously

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[45] Cash, 50.

[46] Virgil, *Virgil's Eclogues.* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1848). Havelock Ellis. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex II: Sexual Inversion*. (London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897).

[47] Ellis, 9; Green, 203.

[48] Jouhandeau, a relatively obscure figure in early twentieth-century French literature, has nevertheless been of some interest to contemporary queer scholars, namely Didier Eribon and David Halperin, who cites Jouhandeau's "*On Abjection*" in *What Do Gay Men Want?: An Essay on Sex, Risk, and Subjectivity.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

transgressive scenes of taboo male desire in the twentieth-century American novel.[49] Rather than read Dickey's novel as a revanchist fantasy of primal American masculinity, a charge that critics like Frederic Jameson and John Clum have leveled, I instead interpret his work as a critique of the masculine orthodoxies of modern athletics, which rely on what Brian Pronger calls the ideology of, "body fascism."[50] By the time Dickey was writing the novel, the primacy of white Southern masculinity was facing existential threats on multiple fronts. The momentum that the Civil Rights movement had gained by the 1960s, coupled with the rise of second wave feminism and the eruption of the Stonewall riots, all signaled social transformations that sought to challenge the political hegemony that white masculinity had more or less successfully safeguarded in the American political public sphere in the first half of the twentieth-century. The character Lewis Medlock—musclebound, wrapped tightly in sleeveless rubber, and exemplified on-screen in 1972 by Burt Reynolds in Jon Boorman's Hollywood adaptation of Dickey's novel—develops a "mystique" around his body that not only reflects an

[49] James Dickey, *Deliverance.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 115-25.
[50] Frederic Jameson, "The Great American Hunter, or, Ideological Content in the Novel." *Critical Essays on James Dickey*, edited by Robert Kirschten. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1994) 52-8; John Clum, "Manhood Unraveling: Homosexual Panic and Martyrdom." *He's All Man: Learning Masculinity, Gayness, and Love from American Movies.* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 81-6; Brian Pronger, *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 3-24.

intensive investment in the dictates of orthodox masculinity, but also becomes the subject of the narrator's homoerotic gaze, resulting in a homoerotic but not homosexual way of looking that Jennifer Schell calls a, "man crush."[51]

Dickey primarily wages this critique, I argue, by invoking the work of the French philosopher George Bataille, whose work *L'experience L'interieure* provides the novel with one of its prefatory extracts: "There exists at the base of the human life a principle of insufficiency."[52] Bataille's interest in insufficiencies, gaps, limits, and orifices destabilizes the ideological foundations of body fascism and its contingent myths, which imagine the male body as something sovereign, impermeable, and self-contained. Moreover, *Deliverance*'s rape scene destroys the myths that undergird the orthodox ideology of athletics, which pits the image of the muscular athlete against that of the effeminate homosexual. As Vito Russo points out in *The Celluloid Closet*, *Deliverance* represents, "a homosexual act without the label of homosexuality"—which has a shattering psychological effect on the men, who collectively agree to never speak of the incident again.[53]

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[51] *Deliverance.* Dir. John Boorman. Perfs. Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty, Ronny Cox. (Warner Bros., 1972); Jennifer Schell, "Ed Gentry's Man Crush." *The Way We Read James Dickey: Critical Approaches for the Twenty-First Century.* (Columbia: University of South Caroline Press, 2009) 213.
[52] George Bataille, *L'experience L'interieure.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942) 128.
[53] Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 83-4.

III. BAD DESIRE

William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* Julien Green's *Moira,* and James Dickey's *Deliverance,* are all renditions of Southern Gothic narratives that climax with variously honor-bound men committing homoerotically charged acts of violence against other men in public. This project builds on work done by queer theorists like Leo Bersani and Didier Eribon, who have formulated homosexuality as, "a subjectivity… constituted by homophobic discourse," but within which "resistance" and "freedom" may be possible.[54] In his 1999 volume, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self,* Eribon notably formulated gay male subjectivity as a psychological response to insult, which has also historically been one of honor's driving ideological concerns.[55] The decision by the authors here to focus aesthetically on the male response to insult and injury in predominantly homosocial spaces—in particular on apprenticeship scenes built around the rigid maintenance of normative masculinity according to formal and informal honor codes, like the military, the all-boys school, and the recreational "guy's trip"—reflects and, many have argued, perhaps even endorses the patriarchal ideology of white Southern masculinity and society, simply by un-critically reproducing its

[54] Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) back cover.
[55] Eribon, 13-4.

dominant frameworks.[56] However one interprets their political value of these narratives, they all undeniably display an excessive aesthetic fascination with the physical capabilities and limitations of the white male body, which in turn creates a recognizable genre revolving around the structural precariousness of Southern masculinity, especially when couched in primal ideas of "honor" and "dishonor." I will refer to this as the genre of queer honor.

By arranging their male protagonists in symbolic homoerotic figurations of violence, eroticism, and descent, these texts make broad reference to historically queer canons of textuality and iconography, ranging from the Old Testament, to works of ancient poets like Homer and Virgil, to paintings of male nudes by Neoclassical masters like Jacques Louis-David, to modern French writers like Gide, Jouhandeau, and Bataille. What binds all these novels together, I want to argue, is an aesthetic pattern of homophobia, homoeroticism, and body fascism that alternately elevates the white male body into a devotional position as often as it subjects it to physical and psychological extremes of abasement, in order to maintain a hegemonic cultural fantasy of the honor-bound male ideal. In the three encounters with Southern history that these novels present, obsessive investments in absolute states of honor and

[56] See Frederic Jameson's early review of James Dickey's *Deliverance* for a typical example of the kind of critique to which Marxist literary critics have subjected the novel's ideological content.

dishonor generate plots that consistently fetishize vertical relations of power, transgressing both the more "egalitarian" directives of reparative reading and the Fiedlerian view that American Romance, or American Gothic, revolves principally around the fantasy of male homosocial idyll. In particular, these novels raise a politically discomfiting and often disturbing cultural and symbolic intersection between fascist authoritarianism—or perhaps something even nearer to what Jean-Paul Sartre glosses in Jean Genet's work as the notion of "evil"—and sex between white men.[57] The violent encounters between white men in these novels, which again unfold in conventionally American and highly mythologized male-bonding environments like the army, the university, and "The Great Outdoors," all invariably emerge as examples of what queer scholar Richard Rambuss has termed "bad" male desire:

> Male subjectivity, especially in extremis. Male eroticism, particularly "bad" desire. All-male rites. Male violence. Male intimacy and sociality. Male manners and male mannerism. Hypermasculinity... Some of the principal modes of inquiry in gender and sexuality studies—gay, feminist, queer—haven't been asking the kinds of questions that I find these military texts now prompting me to ask or generating the kinds of readings that they make me now want to try out… As for feminism, I don't think it has ever developed much of a lexicon (apart from terms of censure) for describing and analyzing what's perceived to be indicatively male. Nor do I think that it especially needs to do so. But I don't think that queer theory has been particularly effective on this account either.[58]

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[57] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet, Actor & Martyr.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963) 49.
[58] Richard Rambuss, "After Male Sex." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:3 (Summer 2007) 578.

Addressing queer honor as a genre of extreme or "bad" male desire—here, taboo or coerced relations of power between men motivated by imperatives of honor that are anatomically queer if not categorically "gay" in a modern sense—calls for an archive quite different from any queer historiographic project centered around the affective experience of shame, or even the glimmers of an emergent neoliberal gay subject or group identity. Instead it reveals a violent, racist, even white supremacist genre that summons its thematic reserves of Gothic horror from the very gestures of authority, subjugation, and violence that have historically repressed queer, non-gender-conforming, and non-white American citizens.

Queer honor is a homophobic genre, one that ironically produces a site for homoerotic relations. Crucially, it is only by reading *military texts*, rather than revisiting any kind of explicitly queer archive or canon, that Rambuss begins to pose questions about the occluded nature of "bad" male subjectivity and desire, and our impoverished vocabulary for describing it. The real target of his analysis is Anthony Swofford's 2003 Gulf War memoir *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles,* in particular a simulated rape scene performed a group of bored, rambunctious U.S. Marines.[59] He cites the term "indicatively male" from the

[59] Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles.* (New York: Scribner, 2003) 20-1.

introduction to Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet,* where it is proposed that the intellectual and epistemological pillars of Western culture have been compromised by the, "chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/hetero definition, indicatively male."[60] Nearly thirty years after the publication of Sedgwick's field-defining work, one might wager that queer theory has perhaps scrutinized the first half of the problem as Sedgwick defined it—the crisis of, "homo/hetero definition"—more than the value of her assiduous phrase, "the indicatively male."[61] In fact, attempts to unsettle biological categories of gender and sexuality, and the legal and medical taxonomies to which they have historically been subject, have been so central to the intellectual ethos of queer studies over the last few decades, that they are now generating a wealth of thinking about what comes "after" masculinity, and whether sex, sexuality, and eros could even continue to exist under the conditions of post-human or anti-natalist philosophies of queerness and difference.[62]

Honor is queer not only because it relentlessly centers the "indicatively male," but because it produces homophobic-homoerotic relations between men, which exist

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[60] Sedgwick, 1.
[61] Ibid., 1.
[62] See Lee Edelman's *Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* and Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. (New York: Routledge, 1991).

wherever narratives intensify the physical and psychological performance of male masculinity, alongside primal male fears about humiliation and powerlessness, especially in the eyes of other white men. "Manhood begins as a battlefield code," writes David Leverenz, and narratives of queer honor often extend that logic by turning their novel's environments into virtual (and sometimes literal) arenas, highly policed sites where male hierarchies are mentally and physically tested.[63] Rambuss uses the term "homophobic-homoerotic" to describe Stanley Kubrick's aesthetic depiction of the U.S. Marine Corps in *Full Metal Jacket,* a well-documented cult emblem of hyper-masculinity gone haywire.[64] There Rambuss argues that the "hyperbolized virility" of U.S. Marine Corps essentially leads to, "a repudiation of normative male desire" that takes place as the Corps's infamously taxing training regimen transforms each recruit's body into something like a mechanical unit, at once impervious and perverse, "hard yet vulnerable."[65] The para-military logic of honor in these three novels, similarly, tends to regulate white men's bodies by turning them away from the motions of normative

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[63] David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 73. For more on the idea of masculinity as an ideological arena, see also Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

[64] Richard Rambuss, "Machinehead." *Camera Obscura.* No. 42. (Sep, 1999) 108. *Full Metal Jacket.* Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perfs. Matthew Modine, R. Lee Ermey, Vincent D'Onofrio, Adam Baldwin. (Warner Bros, 1987).

[65] Rambuss, 109.

male desire -- by observing them not only in the formal sanctums of the military (although Faulkner does imagine the sight of departing Confederate soldiers with something like ecstasy), but in any homosocial context where men conform as a body to proscriptive honor codes in order to adjudicate membership and generate in-group belonging.[66] Each novel, by modeling the formal and informal ways enshrined notions of honor implicate men in rituals of conscription, lingers to a prurient degree on their byproducts of anxiety, fear, and paranoia. As Leverenz suggests, "Anyone preoccupied with manhood, in whatever time or culture, harbors fears of being humiliated, usually by other men... Manhood becomes a way not of dominating... but of minimizing maximum loss."[67]

Although Rambuss voices the opinion shared here that neither feminism nor queer studies have developed a sufficiently rigorous vocabulary or framework for analyzing the manners of the "indicatively male," feminist and queer critics have

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[66] On p. 125-26 of *Absalom, Absalom!,* Faulkner writes, "Because now people--fathers and mothers and sisters and kin and sweethearts of those young men--were coming to Oxford from further away than Jefferson--families with food and bedding and servants, to bivouac among the families, the houses, of Oxford itself, to watch the gallant mimic marching and countermarching of the sons and the brothers, drawn all of them, rich and poor, aristocrat and redneck, by what is probably the most moving mass-sight of all human mass-experience, far more so than the spectacle of so many virgins going to be sacrificed to some heathen Principle, some Priapus--the sight of young men, the light quick bones, the bright gallant deluded blood and flesh dressed in a martial glitter of brass and plumes, marching away to a battle."

[67] Leverenz, 72-3.

nevertheless productively critiqued the prevailing disciplinary standards for what seems to count as masculinity studies today. For example, in *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam takes Paul Smith's edited anthology *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture* to task for exemplifying what she considers to be the foundational problems in the field.[68] She writes,

> There most certainly are a multitude of important things to say about men and masculinity in patriarchy, but Smith and some of his contributors choose not to say them. We could be producing ethnographies on the aggressive and indeed protofascist masculinities produced by male sports fans… but studies in male masculinity are predictably not so interested in taking apart the patriarchal bonds between white maleness and privilege; they are much more concerned to detail the fragilities of male socialization, the pains of manhood, and the fear of female empowerment.[69]

Halberstam's frustration stems from the fact that works of scholarship that purport to represent the field of masculinity studies seem more invested in "detail[ing]" the naturalized relationship between maleness and power rather than critically deconstructing it, and perhaps it should further be said that any worthy work of scholarship in masculinity studies should endeavor to do both. In other words, critics

[68] Paul Smith, ed. *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).
[69] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) 19.

should always aim to describe what the "fragilities of male socialization" actually are, in order to expose the structural precariousness of what we call "masculinity" itself. Halberstam's critique helps expose the fact that there has historically been little desire in either feminism or queer studies to plumb the hegemonic category of the "indicatively male" as it presently exists—nor perhaps, as Rambuss suggests, should there be, especially given that the ideological framework of normative masculinity and its attendant cultural myths and icons have over time been so overwhelmingly deleterious to women, queer people, and other vulnerable, marginalized groups.[70]

As Wyatt-Brown's introduction "Honor in Literary Perspective" demonstrates, American authors have themselves since the early nineteenth-century sought to simultaneously describe, critique, and even satirize modes of American masculinity.[71] The especially discretionary, violent means of extra-judicial law enforcement in the South, along with the genteel notions of male honor and female virtue they allegedly safeguarded, for example, produced a cultural stereotype of peevish masculinity, which nineteenth-century authors like Mark Twain lampooned with buffoonish, hot-tempered characters like Colonel Sherburn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*[72] Similarly, in

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[70] Sedgwick, 1.

[71] Wyatt-Brown, 3-24.

[72] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Edited by Gerald Graff and James Phelan. (Boston / New York, Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995) 148. When a mob shows up at Colonel Sherburn's doorstep in Chapter XXII, he haughtily proclaims,

these novels, the ideology of male honor transforms the male protagonists into allegiant executors of some brand of extrajudicial justice, whether in Henry Sutpen's duel with Charles Bon, the rivalries of Joseph Day (nicknamed the "Exterminating Angel" for his judgmental, angry disposition, and fiery red hair), or Dickey's group of haunted survivors, led by the quasi-general Lewis Medlock. Like the culture of the U.S. Marine Corps, the theatrical, performative—perhaps even campy? —excesses of honor stem from the ways these authors intensify the ritual gestures of male gender according to the imperatives of hyper-masculinity, an operation which queer critic Jonathan Goldberg joins Leverenz in claiming, "always transgresses, refuses, and exceeds its own phallic measure."[73]

As a result, narratives of queer honor, by foregrounding Gothic irruptions of bad desire, feature tragic plots homogeneously marked by violence and loss, riddled with images of male failure, dissipation, and death. Faulkner, Green, and Dickey pessimistically and overwhelmingly represent same-sex desire and intimate male sociality as something innately violent—a tradition of queer sensibility whose lineage

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"I was born in the South, and I've lived in the North; so I know the average all around. The average man's a coward. In the North he lets anybody walk over him that wants to, and goes home and prays for a humble spirit to bear it. In the South one man, all by himself, has stopped a stage full of men, in the day-time, and robbed the lot."

[73] Jonathan Goldberg, "Recalling Totalities: The Mirrored Stages of Arnold Schwarzenegger." *Differences* 4:1 (1992) 179.

can, and in these novels often is, traced back through late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century definitions of homosexuality, and iconographic figures from the ancient world, such as the wayward son Absalom, Alexis lamenting Corydon in Virgil's *Eclogues,* and Achilles avenging his beloved, Patroclus, by killing Hector in the *Iliad*. If modern narratives of queer honor have something significant to impart to contemporary scholars of masculinity, and in particular queer masculinity, it may be that their relentlessly transgressive emphases on the aesthetics of male downfall—such as Thomas Sutpen's Biblical "fall" or the eponymous "deliverance" of Dickey's text—attempt to evacuate meaning and purpose from the project of honor-bound masculinity by modeling the impossibility of its fulfillment. They also reflect the widely accepted intellectual conclusions by late nineteenth-century sexologists like Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds that male homosexuality tended to flourish in militaristic and warlike cultures.[74] In their graphic, soul-stirring depiction of the eroticized male body in various states of idealized worship and abject ruin, these narratives contribute to a powerful tradition of queer art, from Caravaggio to Robert Mapplethorpe, that Rambuss traces all the way back to the words initially uttered by

[74] Ellis, 9.

Pontius Pilate in the Vulgate translation of the Gospel of John, immediately before presenting Christ to be crucified: *Ecce homo.*[75]

IV. TOWARD A HISTORY AND THEORY OF QUEER HONOR

Queer honor is a genre that exists along a far vaster timeline than the modern identity category of male homosexuality, and a historian wishing to excavate this history might begin, as David Halperin did in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, in ancient Greece.[76] Translating roughly to τῑμή (TIME) in ancient Greek, the term 'honor' in Homer's time denoted the extent to which one's life had accrued status or value, both in the eyes of oneself and others. The elevation of status or accumulation of value afforded each woman and man was determined—and in many cases, predetermined—by a network of social and political conditions that defined one's identity and reputation: age, race, gender, wealth, rank (especially in a military or professional setting), physical ability or athletic prowess, victories (especially in realms of war and sport), and title or birth (as in nobilities and aristocracies, caste/class, creed, reproductive ability). The term also had a moral dimension, denoting a certain kind of

[75] Rambuss, 109.
[76] David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

virtuous male ideal that exemplified bravery, fairness, loyalty, decency, and congeniality. Its meaning was closely bound to that of another Greek word, ἀρετή (ARÊTE), meaning moral virtue or excellence. To have honor or to be honorable in ancient Greek society, then, one had to conform to all social norms regarding gender roles and expectations, possess a strong moral fiber, and exhibit a robust sense of self-esteem, in addition to winning approval, if not praise, from the range of communities, institutions, and social groups in one's public life.[77] Seeking harmony between private and public esteem was and still is central to the fabric of honor-bound cultures, which Pierre Bourdieu argues exist wherever, "the being and truth about a person are identical with the being and truth that others acknowledge in him."[78]

In its most capacious formulation, the modern phenomenon of "queer honor" can be said to apply to any hyper-masculine domain of culture or politics where (presumably) heterosexual white men are invested exclusively in the company and attention of other (presumably) heterosexual white men. Put differently, "queer honor" flourishes as an idea in any cloistered male space of belonging that excludes women, non-gender-conforming men, and LGBTQIA+ communities, in order to explicitly

[77] David D. GIlmore, ed. *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean.* (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987).
[78] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honor in Kabyte Society." *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society.* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966) 212.

enshrine a racially normative, hyper-masculine ideal. Pick up an introductory level essay about the state of masculinity and masculinity studies in the American academy today, and you will invariably find two institutions invoked as ideological standards: the United States Armed Forces, and the National Football League, two organizations that continue to enjoy a social, cultural, and economic partnership.[79] Gay men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces were of course dishonorably discharged for publicly declaring their sexual orientation in the American military until 2011, and the National Football League has zero openly gay athletes to date, in what essentially amounts to a *de facto* "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" organizational policy.[80] These ongoing institutional gag rules are but the most visible example of an entire structure of gender- and sexuality-based prohibitions—what queer critics like Didier Eribon have called the "the tip of the sword"—that have been deeply embedded in American legal, cultural, medical, and political thought for at least a century. These prohibitions, set in place in order to maintain and police the boundaries of what Sedgwick calls the "indicatively male," take as granted the fact that homosexuality and male effeminacy are innately intertwined,

[79] In 2015, for example, Congress disclosed a joint oversight report that revealed that the U.S. Department of Defense has contributed at least $6 million dollars of tax-payer money to the National Football League for things like military flyovers, flag unfurlings, color guard ceremonies, enlistment campaigns, and national anthem performances.
[80] A fact made even more remarkable when one considers that the National Football League has produced four of the five most-watched telecasts in American history.

and that non-heteronormative desire and hegemonic masculinity are fundamentally incompatible ideas at their core.

Vaunting idealized biological notions of masculinity and femininity in theory, honor was and is often pornographically violent in practice. According to many historians and social anthropologists, what has remained stable about honor across space and time, alongside its enshrinement of male ideals like the champion, the hero, and the happy warrior, is its fanatical emphasis on male and female inviolability, and men's "primal urge for revenge."[81] In the South, specifically, Joe Creech writes that this manifests in, "duels, sporting contests, and rituals of humiliation or celebration, along with southern legal conventions, political ideals, and ultimately Confederate nationalism."[82] The comorbidity of honor and homophobia, not to mention other punitive forms of patriarchal violence, cannot be overstated. The "homophobic panic" judicial defense that Sedgwick deconstructs in *Epistemology of the Closet*, which sought to reduce accountability for heterosexual men accused of hate crimes against homosexual men, is undoubtedly an intellectual byproduct of this honor-bound line of thinking. Cultures whose laws and social customs rigidly uphold inviolable notions of

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[81] Joe Creech, "The Price of Eternal Honor: Independent White Christian Manhood in the Late Nineteenth-Century South." *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction.* Edited by Craig Thompson Friend. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009) 29.
[82] Creech, 29.

male and female honor (which, in the latter case, is often synonymous with moral "purity" or anatomical "virginity") have calamitous human rights records, aiming their brutal acts of retribution overwhelmingly against women, sexual minorities, diasporic populations, and people of color. The cultural ideology of honor, which can and often does lead entire communities to coldly rationalize and fatalistically demand acts of revenge, sacrifice, and cleansing, has given rise in the modern era to a global category of human rights abuses now classified by Amnesty International as "honor killings"—"acts of violence against wives, sisters, daughters and mothers to reclaim their family honor from real or suspected actions that are perceived to have compromised it."[83]

Even more horrifyingly, these acts are often carried out by family members themselves, as is the case in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, which revolves around a racially charged act of fratricide. In the South, honor killings were commonly meted out to uphold the fascist ideology of white supremacy, in particular through the endemic cultural spectacle of lynching in the American South beginning in the era of disfranchisement in the 1890s. More recently, the homophobic register of the fascist, exclusionary logic of honor revealed itself in remarks delivered in 2017 to a Russian news agency by Alvi Karimov, a spokesperson for the current Head of State of the

[83] *Amnesty International*. "Culture of Discrimination: A Fact Sheet on 'Honor' Killings." (2012) 1.

Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov, who publicly denied accusations that Chechen paramilitary forces were executing gay men in torture camps, by saying, "If such people existed in Chechnya, law enforcement would not have to worry about them since their own relatives would send them to where they could never return."[84] In fact, it would be more or less accurate to say that the sociopolitical impact of "honor" in the modern era has been to foment ethno-nationalism, protect the political ascendancy of an elevated class of ethnically normative heterosexual men, and oppress female, queer, diasporic, and working-class peoples. In many areas of the world, honor is simply tantamount to femicide and queer genocide. In light of all this, it is reasonable to ask—what, then, is so queer about honor?

To say that honor often produces queer attachments between men is different than to say that honor is necessarily a queer male impulse, which might erroneously suggest that honor belongs exclusively to, or derives exclusively from, LGBTQIA+ domains or subcultures. On the contrary, hegemonic ideologies of honor have throughout the long arc of history systematically destroyed so many lives because they offer themselves up to society and culture as fascist and totalizing ethical codes, within

[84] "Jagland Asks Russian Ombudsman to Look into Reports about Gay Repression in Chechnya, to Share Results." *Interfax*, 6 Apr. 2017, www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=746182.

which reside prescriptive definitions for, among other things, masculinity and femininity. What I mean to argue instead is that what modern cultural discourse calls the social phenomenon of honor is intensely queer for many of the same reasons that it has been so commonly perceived as intensely male—because it derives its power by exploiting competitive, paranoid desires men have to be perceived as such by other men, especially in male homosocial institutions and chambers of power. Policing and expunging practices in such spaces and institutions have in fact unintentionally helped bring about the formation of subcultural queer communities, such those that began to flourish in San Francisco, California, during World War I, when the city became a landing pad for the scores of queer men discharged from the U.S. Navy.[85]

Nevertheless, this study naturally raises a political question, or rather set of questions, still for many reasons vexing to scholars, critics, and activists both within queer studies and beyond—namely, how to politically reform nationalistic cultural sites, like the military and proto-fascist sports cultures, where homophobia and homosexuality inevitably converge. The task often seems to hold little political utility for gay activists, who take as their mission the condemnation of the former and defense

[85] Jones, Bradley K. "The Gravity of Administrative Discharges: A Legal and Empirical Evaluation." *Military Law Review*. 59 (January 1973) 1–26. Interestingly, for the purposes of this project, the. U.S. Navy's practice of "blue discharge" during World War I led to discharges that were technically deemed neither honorable nor dishonorable.

of the latter. And although preliminary scientific data gathered in twenty-first-century studies has shown that homophobic animus is often tied to homosexual arousal, the public political interests aligned with these phenomena could hardly be more irreconcilable.[86] Even civilizations throughout history with relatively permissive attitudes toward same-sex conduct and behavior, ranging from ancient Greece to the present day United States, have implemented complex gender- and sexuality-based assumptions that attempt to accommodate the "honor" of men who take the active role in acts of penetrative sex, reserving stigma only for the passive or receptive partner. Nowhere are these myths about the (in-)violability of the male body more prevalent than in predominantly male homosocial realms of sport, military, and politics.

In *Angels in America,* which many now consider the foremost achievement of postwar gay literature in the United States, Tony Kushner unforgettably dramatizes the life and death of the historical figure Roy Cohn. A conservative, deeply homophobic lawyer and jurist responsible for the execution of Ethel Rosenberg, Cohn caustically

[86] Weinstein, N., Ryan, W. S., DeHaan, C. R., Przybylski, A. K., Legate, N., & Ryan, R. M. "Parental autonomy support and discrepancies between implicit and explicit sexual identities: Dynamics of self-acceptance and defense." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* Vol. 102, Iss. 4. (2012) 815-832. This study was alluded to in a 2012 article in the *Sunday Review* of *The New York Times* called "Homophobic? Maybe You're Gay" to considerable controversy.

rejects until his dying breath the political force attached to his sexual identity, even as he is dying of AIDS, then considered by many to be a "gay disease":

> AIDS, homosexual, gay, lesbian, you think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with? They don't tell you that. No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual's sole identity fit in the food chain. In the pecking order. None of ideology or sexual taste but something much simpler, clout. Not who I fuck or fucks me but who will pick up the phone when I call, who owes me favors. This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men but really this is wrong. Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in 15 years of trying can't pass a pissant anti-discrimination bill through city council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout.[87]

Cohn, for whom everything is political and hierarchical—a "food chain," a "pecking order"—conceives of his whole identity, and thus the sexual aspect of it, as an index of power.[88] Through examining the conservative, self-preservationist instincts motivating Cohn's extreme cognitive dissonance, Kushner finds an exemplary avatar of queer honor—a man who can only express same-sex desire through a network of homophobic-homoerotic relations, in which his legal protégé Joe Pitt eventually becomes ensnared. As a result, Cohn does not—cannot—identify as a homosexual: "This is not sophistry. And this is not hypocrisy. This is reality. I have sex with men...

[87] Kushner, 51.
[88] Ibid., 51.

[but] Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man… who fucks around with guys."[89]

Thus, narratives of queer honor are not homoerotic in spite of their veneers of homophobia, misogynist violence, and hyper-masculinity worship, but precisely because of them. Need it be said that the visual lexicon of postwar American gay male culture has often developed, for better or for worse, along similar lines of aesthetic and political intensification? How else can one explain the way Marlon Brando's electrically performative iteration of Southern masculinity as the brutish Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* became a visual template for gay male sexuality and desirability in the post-World War II era?[90] "The modern Queer," filmmaker Derek Jarman remarks, "was invented by Tennessee Williams. Brando in blue jeans, sneakers, white t-shirt, and leather jacket. When you saw that, you knew they were available."[91] Indeed, the postwar period was marked by the emergence of a variety of queer media forms that idolized white male masculinity, partly as a way to skirt or safely push obscenity laws—such as "beefcake" magazines, fitness-themed short films, and popular depictions of straight-passing but queer-coded hustlers, bikers, and cowboys

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[89] Ibid., 52.
[90] *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Dir. Elia Kazan. Perfs. Vivien Leigh, Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter, Karl Malden. (Warner Bros., 1951).
[91] Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 189.

in the cinema of the 1950s and 1960s.[92] These aesthetic patterns reflect the greater extent to which American gay men in particular have tended to fantasize about the social precincts of homophobic-homoerotic hyper-masculinity—the locker room, the gym, the bunk, the frat, the ring, the arena—in scenes that queer scholar Michael Moon frames as staging rituals of "initiation."[93] This fascination almost certainly derives at least in part from the fact that gay men have been so systematically prohibited from *making themselves public* in them. And it is precisely the vertiginously steep relation of power and visibility that often gives representations of gay male desire, especially between stereotypically hyper-masculine men like athletes, bodybuilders, bikers, or soldiers, their subversive erotic thrill.

Rehearsing the homophobic-homoerotic logic shared by many sports and military subcultures, which he argues represents the cultural ideology of orthodox male masculinity in its most extreme form, Brian Pronger writes in his 1990 study *The Arena of Masculinity* that,

> To many high school coaches, the surprise discovery of two male athletes in flagrante delicto would have almost earth-shattering significance. To

[92] For examples of this, see *The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1953), *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), *Scorpio Rising* (Kenneth Anger, 1963), *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (Kenneth Anger, 1965), *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969), *Flesh* (Paul Morrissey, 1968) and *Lonesome Cowboys* (Andy Warhol, 1968).
[93] Michael Moon, *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) 15-66.

> some, it would mean that the team has two faggots... Having engaged in homosexual activity, the two young athletes have betrayed the pure aspirations of athletics: *mens sana in corpore sano*, a sound mind in a sound body. These boys have the potential to destroy the moral fabric of the team and perhaps the entire school…
>
> Sports, as a masculine genre, presents some men with an archetypal mythic form for homoerotic desire: the sexy, muscular, *masculine* athlete. That desire is paradoxical, being at once a reverence for and violation of masculinity.[94]

This project seeks to complicate the assumptions of orthodox masculinity in Pronger's analysis, which I raise again in Chapter 3, by arguing that honor is often simultaneously both hyper-masculine and queer, never more so than in male homosocial scenes like the military, the all-boys college, and the camping trip, which are all on display in the Southern novels under consideration here. By intensifying masculinity into an excessive, and excessively queer, version of itself—what Rambus calls "masculinity *in extremis*"—the logic of honor exposes structural insecurities around "phallic measure" at the same time that it aestheticizes and even seems at times to authorize the gesture of hegemonic male power unleashed.[95] Not unlike the formal and informal codes that prescribe the basic training regimen of the U.S. Marine Corps, broad Southern ideas about male and female honor regulate white male masculinity according to an ideological standard that transforms white men into para-

[94] Pronger, 6.
[95] Rambuss, 578; Goldberg, 179.

military agents of violence, punishment, and revenge, a historical pattern that has motivated classic studies like Edward L. Ayers's *Vengeance & Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* and Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South.* In the chapters that follow, I will track the queer aspect of this phenomenon's development in three literary encounters with the Southern novel, between 1936 and 1970. My coda will then examine this development in light of the resurgence of white supremacist agitation in the twenty first-century, in particular the Charlottesville riots of 2017, which reveal that gendered and racialized notions of white male honor remain very much alive in American culture.

CHAPTER I

WILLIAM FAULKNER AND THE MOTIONS OF QUEER HONOR

> "The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic and a killer. It has never yet melted."[1]
>
> —D.H. Lawrence

> "Who knows why a man, though suffering, clings above all the other well members, to the arm or leg which he knows must come off? Because he loved Bon."[2]
>
> —William Faulkner

In the preface to *The Burden of Southern History,* C. Vann Woodward writes that the sweeping attempt to provide a general historical overview or summation of Southern culture, or any culture for that matter, is inevitably doomed to failure: "Few such efforts have stood up very well under the test of time. After a bit of aging, the parochial point of view, the temporal bias, or the didactic purpose begins to show through the pages more and more."[3] In spite of his skepticism, which acts as a kind of disclaimer to the book itself, Woodward holds that the literary productions of the Southern Renascence (which was in its third decade by the time the essays of *The*

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[1] D.H. Lawrence. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 65.
[2] William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Random House, Inc., 1993) 91.
[3] C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960) vii.

Burden of Southern History began appearing in journals like *The Virginia Quarterly Review* and *The American Scholar*) was, "the most reassuring prospect for the survival of the South's distinct heritage."[4] For Woodward, literature, not historical scholarship, is what would sustain knowledge about the ways and manners of the Southern United States for future generations of Americans and critics of the South.

And yet, within the context of Southern discourse and culture, partitioning history and literature is no easy task. The Fugitive poet Allen Tate avers that the single defining trait of Southern literature relative to that of other American regions is its, "peculiar historical consciousness," which, "made possible the curious burst of intelligence that we get at a crossing of the ways."[5] Writing about W. J. Cash's landmark historical study *The Mind of the South,* which expands a 1929 essay Cash wrote for H. L. Mencken's magazine *The American Mercury,* Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that the book rightly deserves to be placed, "in an honored category with William Faulkner's novels [and] Tennessee Williams's plays."[6] Beginning in the early twentieth-century, the historical literature and literary historiography of the Southern region are in fact so often aesthetically and thematically intertwined as to be

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[4] Woodward, vii.
[5] Allen Tate, "The New Provincialism." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XXI (Spring, 1945) 272.
[6] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mind of W. J. Cash." *The Mind of the South.* (New York; Random House, 1941) vii.

inseparable, especially in light of Faulkner's proclamation in his Nobel Prize speech that the function of the latter should always be to remind the reader of the former: "the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of the past."[7]

Faulkner's statement here already invokes what will be the subject of this chapter—that of honor—specifically its representation in what is now perhaps the most revered Southern novel of the twentieth-century, *Absalom, Absalom!* Specifically, I examine Faulkner's historical treatment of the queer discontents of honor-bound white masculinity, which I argue resembles in many ways the representation of Southern masculinity that emerges in the prevailing twentieth-century accounts of Southern history by writers like Woodward, Cash, and later Wyatt-Brown (a student of Woodward's at Johns Hopkins University). Cash and Faulkner were in fact drafting *The Mind of the South* and *Absalom, Absalom!* at precisely the same time, although Cash's work would not be published in full until five years after Faulkner's. In his biography of Cash, *W. J. Cash: Southern Prophet,* Joseph Morrison writes that, "Cash valued Faulkner highly—above Thomas Wolfe, at the last," although Cash remained a sharp critic of certain aspects of Faulkner's creative imagination, notably his limited

[7] William Faulkner, "William Faulkner's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech." *Southern Cultures,* Vol. 12. No. 1. (Spring 2006) 71.

understanding of African-American life and identity.[8] In a column for the *Cleveland Star,* edited by Cash's close friend Cameron Shipp, Cash writes,

> Has nobody ever observed that the motive which obsessed Faulkner is, of all the fish that fly, precisely that preeminently southern and romantic one: honor? To be sure, our Mr. Faulkner will point out all his hero's warts; to be sure, he is very likely to make him drunken and futile and most absent-minded about the seventh commandment. Nevertheless, the obsession may be traced in virtually everything he has done.[9]

Faulkner's deep fascination with the socialized idea of honor and its impact over male behavior in nineteenth-century Southern history—and the way that history continued to manifest itself in the minds of Southerners like Quentin Compson, caught in the crossfire of the twentieth-century present—corresponds with Cash's own view that honor was in its own way the "preeminent" motive of the culture of the American South.[10] Among the many signature phrases that Cash coins in *The Mind of the South* in the process of describing the hot-tempered manners and romantic character of the

[8] Joseph Morrison, *W. J. Cash: Southern Prophet, A Biography and Reader.* (New York: Knopf, 1967) 157.
[9] Morrison, 157.
[10] Ibid., 157. Indeed, the historical and intellectual "crossing of the ways," in Tate's words, taking place in the early twentieth-century South was in fact so foundation-shaking that Woodward often referred to the era as the "Bulldozer Revolution."

Southern male type are, "the honor complex," and, "the hell-of-a-fellow complex."[11]

Of the first, Cash writes,

> I speak of violence. One of the notable results of the spread of the idea of honor, indeed, was an increase in the tendency to violence through the social scale. Everybody, high and low, was rendered more techy. And with the duel almost rigidly bound to, that techiness at the top, everybody's course was fatally mapped out. These men of the South would go on growing in their practice of violence in open form or another, not only because of the reasons at which we have already looked but also because of the feeling, fixed by social example, that it was the only quite correct, the only really decent, relief for wounded honor—the only one which did not imply some subtle derogation, some dulling and retracting of the fine edge of pride, some indefinable but intolerable loss of caste and manly face.[12]

Elsewhere in the book, Cash renders a typical Southern male's regular engagements in honor-motivated violence with an almost rhapsodic air:

> To stand on his head in a bar, to toss down a pint of raw whisky at a gulp, to fiddle and dance all night, to bite off the nose or gouge out the eye of a favorite enemy, to fight harder and love harder than the next man, to be known eventually far and wide as a hell of a fellow – such would be his focus. To lie on his back for days and weeks, storing power as the air he breathed stores power under the sun of August, and then to explode, as that air explodes in a thunderstorm, in a violent outburst of emotion – in such fashion would he make life not only tolerable but infinitely sweet.[13]

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[11] Cash, 73, 244

[12] Ibid., 73. Cash's Southern vernacular inflection here ("techy") helps indicate the kind of cultural quintessence he sought to capture.

[13] Ibid., 50.

Cash's particular turn of phrase here—"favorite enemy"—cannily anticipates the kind of homophobic-homoerotic relations of power that drive the fatal events of Faulkner's historical novel.[14] The poetic veneer of Cash's journalistic prose, which here couches male homosocial violence in an erotic rhetorical scheme about arousal, climax, satisfaction, and relief, reflects the broader historical pattern he traces throughout the book about, "the increasingly close relationship between the pattern of violence and the Southern concept of pleasure."[15] It also exemplifies the kind of figurative and rhetorical intensity that typifies Cash's modern and indeed literary approach to historiographic writing, which prompts Wyatt-Brown to make the case in a newly added introduction to Cash's text that *The Mind of the South* qualifies, in its own way, as a first-rate work of Southern literature.[16]

Although every characterization in *Absalom, Absalom!* can potentially be placed under the cultural lens of gendered and racialized notions of Southern honor and dishonor, this analysis focuses primarily on the competing models of white male honor that mediate the incestuous, homoerotic relationship between Thomas Sutpen's sons Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen, which culminates in a fatal duel. Faulkner's rendering

[14] Ibid., 150.
[15] Ibid., 122.
[16] Wyatt-Brown, vii.

of Bon and Henry's unlikely, ambiguous, and passionate companionship—narrated in unusually romantic terms by the cynic Mr. Compson to his son Quentin in Chapters 3 and 4—urges readers (especially ones who, like Quentin's Canadian interlocutor Shreve McCannon, are unaccustomed to the ways of the South) to consider what it means and how it feels not only to abide by the code of honor, but to kill another human being whom one loves in order to protect it. That one's own honor, and thus oneself, can be obliterated in an instant by another man is a possibility that profoundly haunts all of the novel's male characters, whose lived experiences are rendered in theaters of memory that continually stress the fear of humiliation and sensitivity to insult— from Thomas Sutpen's shame at being turned away as an impoverished child from the front door of a "big house" by a black servant, to Bon's calculated "corruption" of "unworldly" Henry in a New Orleans brothel, to Henry's racially and sexually motivated decision to challenge Bon to a duel for daring to marry Henry's sister, and Bon's half-sister, Judith.[17]

The first major critic to lobby for *Absalom, Absalom!*'s inclusion in the upper echelons of the American literary canon was the New Critic and Southern Agrarian Cleanth Brooks, who argued in his 1963 book-length study of the author that *Absalom,*

[17] Faulkner, 104.

Absalom! was both the greatest of all Faulkner's novels, and the least understood.[18] For Brooks, a typical misreading of the novel tended to emphasize the Gothic evil of Thomas Sutpen's tragic "design," dismissing what he considered to be the key aspect to understanding the novel: "the quality of Sutpen's innocence."[19] Thomas Sutpen, whom Brooks and many others consider to be the book's most complex and mysterious figure, showcases in his words, "a special characteristic of modern man," which elevates or at least distinguishes the nature of his actions from those of the novel's other personae.[20] What constitutes Sutpen's, "special," modernity, according to Brooks, is the way his ruthless ambition springs from his, "rationalistic and scientific, not traditional, not religious, not even superstitious," approach to the design of his life.[21]

I want to imply here that the theme of peculiar innocence may apply not only to Thomas Sutpen but also to the fatally enjoined lives of his two sons, Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, who become implicated over the course of the novel in an intimate companionship that is ruptured by a confrontation mandated by the code of honor by

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[18] By this point, over twenty years had already elapsed since Malcolm Cowley's 1941 anthology *The Portable Faulkner* had helped the author find a wide Southern readership.
[19] Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yokanapatawpha Country*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) 296.
[20] Brooks, 296.
[21] Ibid., 296.

which every Sutpen must seemingly abide. By tracking the way in which the men become mutually invested in a homophobic-homoerotic scheme of desire that produces a rivalry that neither man is able or willing to avoid, I want to echo several of Cash's conclusions— in particular, about the naïveté and directness of Southern masculinity, its susceptibility to romanticism and sentimentality, and the connection between the South's pattern of violence and conception of pleasure.[22] I want also to track how exactly Faulkner's literary representation of the relationship between Bon and Henry psychologically probes the way intimate male friendships in the South could and often did curdle into violence in adulthood, and how the aesthetic vehicles that Faulkner uses (in particular, the figure of the horse) to render this violence prefigure postwar representations of queer male desire.

To understand precisely the kind of male homosocial dynamic that Faulkner sought to represent in his historical novel, one must first turn back to the way honor itself developed in the nineteenth-century, which tended to impact male behavior and socialization in three overarching ways. The first, as Cash emphatically maintains, revolved around fighting and violence.[23] Elliot Gorn writes that Southern boys were expected to learn and in fact encouraged to fight at a young age, usually by age

[22] Cash, 29-31, 82.
[23] Ibid., 73.

twelve or thirteen.[24] In *Voices of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528 – 1861,* Allan Gallay quotes the testimony from one father who, after witnessing his son of eight or nine years of ages fighting with another boy, advised him: "Now you little devil, if you catch him down again bite him, chaw his lip or you'll never be a man."[25] Moreover, since the dictates of patriarchal Southern culture held the virtue of filial obedience for men in a higher regard than honesty, moderation, or restraint, sons learned at a young age to pursue extreme lengths in order to win their fathers' approval—projecting physical strength, demonstrating mental fortitude, and never confessing failure. "Piety, hard work, and steady habits had their adherents," Gorn writes," but in this society aggressive self-assertion and manly pride were the real marks of status."[26] These rites of passage were intended to accustom boys to an intensely socioeconomically competitive adult male culture, ostensibly by promoting physical vitality and mental toughness, which together worked to maintain and reproduce the dominant conception of Southern masculine comportment that formed around the regulatory logic of honor. Providing an overview of the unusually brutal brawling cultures of the

[24] Elliot J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry." *American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (February, 1985)
[25] Gallay, Allan. *Voices of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528 – 1861.* (Athens, GA: Unviersity of Georgia Press, 1994) 270.
[26] Gorn, 22.

Southern backcountry in the nineteenth-century, Gorn concludes, "Brutal recreations toughened men for a violent social life in which the exploitation of labor, the specter of poverty, and a fierce struggle for status were daily realities."[27]

Faulkner dramatizes the Southern tendency toward brawling as a child-rearing practice, and the traumatic way it tended to mediate filial relationships between father and son, in a scene that Rosa Coldfield relates to Quentin Compson in the opening chapter of the novel. Depicting the seeds of the slow fracturing of the relationship between Thomas and Henry Sutpen, and Thomas's subsequent inability to produce what he considers to be a suitable male heir, is one of the book's central motivating concerns, one that climaxes with Henry eventually, "repudiat[ing] his home and birthright," as the inheritor of Sutpen's Hundred.[28] The first of the book's many unreliable narrators, Rosa, or "Miss Coldfield," as the text initially calls her, regards Thomas Sutpen not as an innocent, as Brooks would have it, but rather as the devil himself: a, "man-horse-demon," who violently, "abrupt[s] upon," Yoknapatawpha County.[29] Faulkner delays explaining the motivating events behind Rosa's, "impotent and static," outrage until late in the novel, when it comes to light that Thomas ordered her to bear him a male heir before their wedding. Faulkner ironizes Rosa's hellacious

[27] Ibid., 22.
[28] Faulkner, 13.
[29] Ibid., 2.

contempt for Sutpen, and her figuration of him as a demon, by rendering his auspicious arrival in Jefferson, Mississippi, as simultaneously godlike—a reenactment of the Book of Genesis: "creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light.*"[30]

It is through Rosa's testimony that Quentin learns how Henry Sutpen watched, was perhaps physically restrained and forced to watch, his father wrestle one of his slaves—"standing there naked and panting and bloody to the waist and gouging at one another's eyes."[31] As Rosa describes the event, relayed in turn to her by Thomas's wife and Rosa's sister Ellen Coldfield, Henry is so affected by the bloody viscera of the violent fray that he, "plunge[s] out from among the negroes who had been holding him, screaming and vomiting," to take refuge in his mother's arms.[32] Although Quentin's father Mr. Compson later casts doubt on the testimony of Rosa Coldfield, an eccentric recluse whose only outlet is writing romantic poetry about the Confederate dead, and perhaps prone as a narrator to hyperbole and sentimentality, her secondhand recollection of the intensity of the brawl would be no exaggeration in light of what we know about Southern history. Richard Briggs Stott remarks in his study of American fighting cultures that, "Battles were often brutal, rough-and-tumble, eye-

[30] Ibid., 3.
[31] Ibid., 25.
[32] Ibid., 25.

gouging, biting affairs in which the loser was literally defaced."[33] When Ellen tells Thomas she can only "try to understand" Thomas's decision to inure Henry to acts of physical brutality at such an early age, Thomas's reply to her is simply to say, "I don't expect you to understand it. Because you are a woman."[34] The vignette serves to introduce the reader to several principal characters and frame narrators in the novel at the same time that it re-inscribes the patriarchal and white supremacist logic of male honor governing the practice of violence in the private and public male homosocial spheres of Southern life.

Mr. Compson fleshes out Thomas's arrival and early years in Jefferson, Mississippi, according to the same figures of irony, paradox, and guilt that historians of the Old South take to be the quintessential aspects of Southern life and culture. A wealthy white man who arrives mysteriously in Jefferson with a band of enslaved African men from Haiti and a French architect from Martinique, Thomas is initially figured as "not even a gentleman" in Rosa's eyes—a rough-mannered man from the impoverished Virginia backcountry uninterested in genuinely earning the approval of the pillars of the local community.[35] In this way, Sutpen in his own way initially fails even

[33] Richard Briggs Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009) 48.
[34] Faulkner, 26.
[35] Ibid., 11.

to meet Wyatt-Brown's basic definition of honor as a locally determined measure of esteem, even as he endeavors to find a suitable wife and build the largest, most ostentatious plantation in the county. “Marrying Ellen or marrying ten thousand Ellens could not have made him [a gentleman],” Rosa remembers, "not that he wanted to be one, or even be taken for one.”[36] Mr. Compson divulges to Quentin the tacit agreement by which their family patriarchs help Sutpen cloak his dishonor—what he calls “some opposite of respectability”:

> Our father knew who his father was in Tennessee and who his grandfather had been in Virginia and our neighbors and the people we lived among knew that we knew and we knew they knew we knew and we knew that they would have believed us about who and where we came from even if we had lied, just as anyone could have looked at him once and known that he would be lying about who and where and why he came from by the very fact that apparently had had to refuse to say at all. And the very fact that he had had to choose respectability to hide behind was proof enough (if anyone needed further proof) that what he fled from must have been some opposite of respectability too dark to talk about.[37]

Sutpen spends his first three years in Jefferson overseeing the construction of his one-hundred acre plantation, Sutpen's Hundred. Faulkner describes the period in the same idyllic intonations of male homosocial reverie that Cash uses to describe the behavioral patterns of Southern masculinity, whipsawing between pleasure and violence, and

[36] Ibid., 11.
[37] Ibid., 11-2.

pleasure *in* violence. Living with a slew of male companions in a half-constructed manor, Sutpen decadently indulges in the kinds of leisure activities historians of the Old South have apprehended as the cornerstones of Southern male life—gambling, hunting, drinking, and fighting:

> He lived out there, eight miles from any neighbor, in masculine solitude in what might be called the halfacre gunroom of a baronial splendor. He lived in the spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself, whose threshold no woman had so much as seen... he began to invite the parties of men of which Miss Coldfield told Quentin, out to Sutpen's Hundred to camp in blankets in the naked rooms of his embryonic formal opulence; they hunted, and at night played cards and drank, and on occasion he doubtless pitted his negroes against one another and perhaps even at this time participated now and then himself—that spectacle which... his son was unable to bear.[38]

Faulkner creates ironic tension not only between notions of honor and dishonor ("respectability" and "some opposite of respectability"), and the daily Southern rhythms of pleasure and violence, but also between the "spartan" condition of the house and its "opulen[t]" design, as well as the ostensible purpose motivating its construction: "None of the men... suspected that he wanted a wife," Rosa remembers, "...because for the next three years he led what must have been to them a perfect existence."[39] The blissful terms in which Mr. Compson frames Sutpen's, "masculine...

[38] Ibid., 36.
[39] Ibid., 36.

baronial splendor" are homosocial verging on homoerotic—Thomas is surrounded by "husbands and bachelors" camped out in "naked rooms" in "masculine solitude" at a time "during which he did not even appear to intend or anything more."[40] Mr. Compson's figurative strategies here strongly anticipate the way he will later narrate to Quentin the story of Henry and Bon's courtship while immersed in the male homosocial world of students, bachelors, and "gentlemen" at the University of Mississippi.

Eventually, the exceedingly mysterious circumstances from which Sutpen's wealth seems to spring provokes the suspicion of a "vigilance committee" of local authorities, who subject Sutpen to the kind of extra-judicial justice for which Southern culture is now well known.[41] Wyatt-Brown writes that, "Jealously, all white males wanted a voice in that spectacle of decision making," and that consensus, "was reached by much talk and deliberation—in the courthouse yard, and the taverns, parlors, and cabins of the district."[42] And not only that, but, "honor," Wyatt-Brown concludes, "was a medium or filter through which specific cases were often decided."[43] Mr. Compson recounts to Quentin the pervasive local fear in Jefferson that Sutpen's dishonor might in turn jeopardize the town's respectability: "the affront was born of the

[40] Ibid., 36-7.
[41] Ibid., 42.
[42] Wyatt-Brown, 365.
[43] Ibid., 364.

town's realization that he was getting it involved with himself... he was forcing the town to compound it."[44] After a poor local named Akers one day bursts into Jefferson's Holston House Bar, "a little wild-eyed and considerably slack-mouthed," and tells the town elders that Sutpen stole, "a whole durn steamboat," Mr. Compson remembers, "at last civic virtue came to a boil."[45]

Sutpen's luxurious wealth and norm-flouting behavior confuse the local standards for adjudicating male honor, which eventually leads to an informal confrontation. After Sutpen is apprehended and escorted into Jefferson by, "a party of eight or ten," "with the sheriff of the county among them," Mr. Compson pauses to interpret in a long parenthetical clause the context behind his gesture of salute to the local men with whom he had spent three years in the, "baronial splendor," of moneyed bachelorhood:

> with that florid, swaggering gesture to the hat (yes, he was underbred. It showed like this always, your grandfather said, in all his formal contacts with people. He was like John L. Sullivan having taught himself painfully and tediously to do the schottische, having drilled himself and drilled himself in secret until he now believed it no longer necessary to count the music's beat, say. He may have believed that your grandfather or Judge Benbow might have done it a little more effortlessly than he, but he would not have believed that anyone could have beat him in knowing when to do it and how. And besides, it was in his face; that was where his power lay, your grandfather said: that anyone could look at him and say,

[44] Faulkner, 40.
[45] Ibid., 41.

> *Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*) and went on into the house and commanded a chamber.[46]

Mr. Compson imagines the way Sutpen's affected performance of honor-bound gentility masks a rugged backcountry masculinity, akin to the early twentieth-century Irish-American boxer John Sullivan having to learn how to slow dance—a repertoire of gestures, "drilled... and drilled... in secret," that he must learn and ritually perform, if only superficially, in order to appease the whims of the local community.[47] The metaphor is especially apt in light of the fact that "boxing" in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American South named a style of backcountry brawling so sadistic that several states including Virginia and the Carolinas had to pass legislation banning white men from, "gouging, plucking, or putting out an eye, biting or kicking or stomping upon," other white men in public.[48] Mr. Compson contrasts these obviously rehearsed bodily gestures with the sublime, innate force that seems to reside behind Sutpen's cold, resolute eyes. The carriage of justice itself is also, conversely, a

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[46] Ibid., 42-3.
[47] Ibid., 43.
[48] Tom Parramore, "Gouging in Early North Carolina." *North Carolina Folklore Journal.* Vol. 22 (1974); Jane Carson, *Colonial Virginians at Play* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1965) 166-7; Jack Kenny Williams, *Vogues in Villainy: Crime and Retribution in Antebellum South Carolina.* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1959) 33.

performance: "Because there was still no warrant for him, you see," Mr. Compson explains to Quentin, "just public opinion in an acute state of indigestion."[49]

In another twist of irony, the town elders of Jefferson are revealed to be not so much concerned with the shadowy, probably even dishonorable origins behind Sutpen's enormous wealth, but rather that he chooses to enjoy the fruits of it in a state of untethered bachelorhood. Absent a warrant, they cannot formally inquire about the potentially illegitimate sources of his fortune, and can only pressure him into adopting a veneer of respectability so that his lifestyle does not reflect poorly on the town at large. It is in this way that Sutpen consents to an engagement to Ellen Coldfield on the same day that he is summoned to court: "They arraigned him before a justice, but by that time your grandfather and Mr. Coldfield had got there. They signed his bond... Two months later, he and Miss Ellen were married."[50] Faulkner renders honor, and merely the semblance of honor, as one and the same—a series of ritual motions through which the white Southern male must pass in order to be initiated into the body of the community.

Honor, moreover, created such a wide gulf of experience between the lives of men and women in the patriarchal culture of the Old South that Faulkner constantly

[49] Ibid., 43.
[50] Ibid., 45.

frames the latter as a ghostly, inaccessible realm of experience, barely perceptible to the eyes of the former. The novel's opening sentences, which endeavor to capture the texture of Rosa Coldfield's forty-three year hermitage in a "dim hot airless room," convey the broader sense in which Southern women were often consigned to the private spheres of domestic life.[51] J. Hillis Miller identifies Faulkner's representational tendencies in this regard as reflecting an, "intertwined set," of Southern, "ideologemes"– in which the man is, "a hyperbolic version of the stereotypical strong silent American frontier male," and the woman is, "unfathomably mysterious and strong... both in love and in hate."[52] These tendencies are on display when Faulkner describes the daily routines of Ellen Coldfield and her daughter Judith Sutpen, whose inner lives are couched in intensely surreal imagery:

> Often... the two of them came into town and into the house–the foolish unreal voluble preserved woman now six years absent from the world–the woman who had quitted home and kin on a flood of tears and in a shadowy miasmic region something like the bitter purlieus of Styx had produced two children and then rose like the swamp-hatched butterfly, unimpeded by weight of stomach and all the heavy organs of suffering and experience into a perennial bright vacuum of arrested sun–and the young girls dreaming, not living, in her complete detachment and imperviousness to actuality almost like physical deafness.[53]

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[51] Ibid., 1.
[52] J. Hillis Miller, "Ideology and Topography in *Absalom, Absalom!*" Faulkner and Ideology. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995) 264.
[53] Faulkner, 68-9.

The passage follows the women's daily patterns out into town and then back into Sutpen's Hundred, and thus deep into the heart of the patriarchal order that has already, it seems, imprisoned them, rendering them, "absent from the world."[54] Strong emotional responses such as outrage are poetically hyperbolized – "a flood of tears," "the bitter purlieus of Styx" – to suit what Faulkner imagines to be the singular emotional capability of women; likewise, phrases like "in a shadowy miasmic region" and "into a perennial bright vacuum of arrested sun" work to deny the possibility that women, fading eternally either into light or shadow, may ever be accurately perceived as subjects by men.[55] As viewed from the perspective of honor-bound masculinity, Mr. Compson cynically understands the women's lives as fundamentally elusive and mysterious, bound to a kind of spiritually closed off existence ("complete detachment and imperviousness") one usually associates with mental impairment such as catatonia or physical disability ("almost like physical deafness").[56]

The second major historical assumption that Faulkner's novel reflects is that honor tended to fray the bonds of kinship and fraternity by promoting wanton hostility between white male relatives. One of the most common crises that the code of honor

[54] Ibid., 68.
[55] Ibid., 68-9.
[56] Ibid., 69.

imposed on Southern criminal justice was how to arbitrate family quarrels, especially if that quarrel threatened to divide the loyalties of the local community. According to Wyatt-Brown, the most frequent kind of interfamilial legal dispute in the South tended to unfold between male relatives, especially brothers and brothers-in-law, likely owing to the rigorous competition for status, rank, wealth, and, "moral property," that the honor tended to instill between and among white men.[57] Wyatt-Brown writes,

> In light of the sanctity surrounding the patriarchal household and its blood intimates, it should not be surprising that conflict between brothers and brothers-in-law, when they were not otherwise related, was a major factor in familial tension and violence.... The intimacy of brothers and sisters, the collaboration of brothers (though competitors themselves) against the rest of the world, the fear of the patriarch all conspired to make the blood-related members of the family unite in suspicion of the nonrelated male who married into the group. Because of the vitality that honor retained in Southern mores, the rivalry between the brothers and the newcomer could sometimes lead to fatal conclusions.[58]

Reasons for interfamilial conflict most often involved inheritance disagreements, socioeconomic disparities between inter-married families, and anxieties about the presence of outsiders like Charles Bon—all paranoid forms of aggression and hostility that projected the superiority of one's perceived title or entitlement, and not infrequently resulted in extra-judicial arbitration by duel.

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[57] Wyatt-Brown, 15.
[58] Ibid., 382-3.

However, Faulkner dramatizes even this kind of conflict in *Absalom, Absalom!* with an auxiliary layer of irony and paradox, given that the "outsider" that Henry Sutpen duels and kills is in fact his half-brother Charles Bon, with whom he has already become intimate at the University of Mississippi. Quentin and Shreve discover that Henry only proposes the duel after he discovers Bon's African-American ancestry and intention to marry his sister, Judith Sutpen. Bon, in many ways as mysterious and complex a character as Thomas Sutpen himself, is first mentioned in Chapter 3 by Mr. Compson, who remembers how in 1859-1860, "[Henry] brought Charles Bon home with him for Christmas and then again to spend a week or so of the summer vacation before Bon rode on to the River to take the steamboat home to New Orleans."[59] The obscure relationship between the two is gradually revealed through a recursive structure of tellings and re-tellings through which Quentin and Shreve struggle to piece together the factors that eventually prompt Henry to take action. Mr. Compson compares the fatalistic political atmosphere in the Southern United States in 1860 ("even Mr. Coldfield probably admitted that war was unavoidable") to the destiny of the Sutpen family, likening them to "four swimmers turning suddenly to face one another, not yet with alarm or distrust but just alert, feeling the dark set."[60] In these

[59] Faulkner, 69.
[60] Ibid., 73.

early descriptions, Mr. Compson emphasizes Bon's status as an outsider, vaguely threatening in a way none of the characters have yet come to realize—"not only some few years older than Henry but actually a little old to be still in college and certainly a little out of place in that one where he was."[61]

Unlike Thomas Sutpen, who is defined physically by his flinty red beard and provincial mannerisms, Charles Bon is the product of an urbane New Orleans upbringing and exhibits, "a worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian rather than any parents."[62] At the same time, Faulkner foreshadows the fact that Bon is Thomas's illegitimate son by describing Bon's "phoenix-like fullsprung," entry into Jefferson in a nearly identical fashion that he initially renders Thomas's abrupt descent into the town.[63] The unspoken connection between the two is further hinted at by Thomas, initially pictured as God-like, and Bon, initially pictured as Christ-like, "born of no woman and impervious to time and, vanished, leaving no bones nor dust anywhere."[64] In telling the first version of the story of Henry and Bon to Quentin in Chapters 3 and 4, Mr. Compson frames their affair and subsequent rivalry, which

[61] Ibid., 73.
[62] Ibid., 73-4.
[63] Ibid., 74.
[64] Ibid., 74.

follows the pattern charted out in *The Mind of the South* of decadent pleasure and brutal violence, as a singular passion, perhaps the most descriptively rendered one in the entire book: "Who knows," Mr. Compson wonders aloud at one point to Quentin, "why a man, though suffering, clings above all the other well members, to the arm or leg which he knows must come off? Because he loved Bon."[65]

The third historical assumption that significantly influences the plot of Faulkner's text is the fact that honor trumped even the final authority of the law by encouraging individuals and sometimes even whole communities to mobilize and override the law with acts of physical brutality, humiliation, and exile. Honor in this way had a subversive, even queer relation to the law. Edward Ayers comments in *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* that, "Honor and legalism… are incompatible: to go to law for redress is to confess publicly that you have been wronged and the demonstration of your vulnerability places your honor in jeopardy."[66] This meant that the only way for an aggrieved man to avoid humiliation in the eyes of other men was to violently assault his enemy, which accounts for the "primal urge for revenge" that is a mainstay of codes of honor worldwide.[67] As a result,

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[65] Faulkner, 91.

[66] Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South.* (New York, 1984) 18.

[67] Joe Creech, "The Price of Eternal Honor: Independent White Christian Manhood in the Late Nineteenth-Century South." *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood*

duels were a not only commonly accepted but in fact the only way for a man to respond to insult in a way that salvaged his dignity and self-worth.

To die in a duel was in fact considered more honorable than not to participate at all, for a dead fighter would have more honor than a living pacifist, whom others would tar as a coward, a social fact that Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon surely contemplate when they carry out their last fatal gestures, after which Henry lives out the rest of his years in exile. Unlike the legal system, which ostensibly seeks to arbitrate and resolve personal disputes by issuing judicial verdicts, duels did not resolve conflicts so much as simply end them. Legal scholar Alison LaCroix neatly sums up the tautological paradox of dueling when she writes that, "the initial premise of the duel was identical to the desired conclusion: the duelist is a gentleman and possesses a gentleman's honor."[68] Given this fact, duels instead tended to serve an emotional function—to provide an outlet for men whose intense emotional attachments and susceptibilities had rendered them vulnerable in the eyes of other men.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick advances as one of the axioms of her sexuality theory that prohibitions against male-male desire do not produce ironic

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in the South Since Reconstruction. Edited by Craig Thompson Friend. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009) 29.

[68] Alison LaCroix, "To Gain the Whole World and Lose His Soul: Nineteenth Century American Dueling as Public Law and Private Code." *Hofstra Law Review*, Winter 2004. 54

relations between discourses, but rather tautological relations between oppositional values that stall systems of thinking and induce paranoid psychosis.[69] This paranoia stems from the pervasive cultural uncertainty about whether, "male homosexual desire... wash[es] across whole cultures or constitute[s] a distinct minority of individuals."[70] In the midst of this homophobic-homoerotic paranoia, the world ceases to add up, be comprehendible.[71] As Mr. Compson phrases it to Quentin Compson, "Something is missing."[72] Sedgwick's paradigmatic example of queer hermeneutic incomprehensibility is Herman Melville's fundamentally incoherent and evasive invocation of Claggart's "obscure," "depraved nature" in *Billy Budd, Sailor*. Apart from *Billy Budd*, which Eve Sedgwick deconstructs in *Epistemology of the Closet* to tremendous effect, and which stages a comparably grandiose climax revolving around an act of male-male homicide, perhaps no American novel dramatizes homophobic-homoerotic violence and paranoia more powerfully than *Absalom, Absalom!*

In Chapters 3 and 4, Mr. Compson expounds at length to Quentin about the emotional and erotic undercurrents sustaining the relationship between Henry and Bon, who first meet at the University of Mississippi:

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[69] Eve Sedgwick. "After the Homosexual: Billy Budd." *Epistemology of the Closet.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 91-130.
[70] Sedgwick, 93.
[71] Ibid., 96-7.
[72] Faulkner, 103.

> it would be hard to say to which of them [Bon] appeared the more splendid, to the one with hope [Judith] … [or] to the other with the knowledge... of the insurmountable barrier which the similarity of gender hopelessly intervened;—this man whom Henry first saw riding perhaps through the grove at the University on one of the two horses which he kept there... reclining in a flowered, almost feminised gown—this man handsome elegant... and too old to be where he was, too old not in years but in experience. Yes, he loved Bon, who seduced him.[73]

Mr. Compson's rhetoric moves from one oppositional tautology to another: in the process of considering the matrimonial coupling between Bon and Judith, he also recognizes the subversive homosexual threat that Bon poses, "appear[ing] the more splendid" to Henry than he does Judith, the object of his courtship.[74] The acknowledgment of this threat entails a further paradox, in that Henry's acknowledgment of his own desire in turn mobilizes knowledge about the "insurmountable" prohibitions and "hopeless interven[tions]" against homosexual desire.[75] Mr. Compson frames Bon's very gender in paradoxical terms--on the one hand, he is the feline seducer in the "flowered," "feminised," gown, and on the other, the handsome, gregarious, worldly horseman. Faulkner threads these polarities together in ways that are constantly shifting, which imposes a level of hermeneutic

[73] Ibid., 96-7.
[74] Ibid., 96-7.
[75] Ibid., 96-7.

difficulty not only on the readers but also on the text's metadiegetic narrators, Quentin and Shreve.

Critics who emphasize Bon's role as the urbane, feminine counterpart to Henry's country-bred, more masculine persona are perhaps too easily persuaded by Mr. Compson's biased account, which strives to heterosexualize in one way or another the relationship between the two men, each desperately clinging to honor-bound male ideals as best they can. Don Liles points out that Mr. Compson's account, "approaches the triangle heterosexually: he postulates that Henry wants to become 'the sister, the mistress, the bride'," in the process "correlat[ing] male homosexuality with effeminacy."[76] This view fails to consider the text's obvious indications that each man signifies masculinity and femininity, activity and passivity, honor and dishonor, in his own way. The same assets that constitute Henry's rugged masculinity are what Cash would call "simple" and "naive": his rural manners, for instance, are humiliatingly provincial in New Orleans when compared alongside Bon's. Likewise, Faulkner laces Bon's virility and sophistication, which Henry eagerly apes, with an effeminate, even sybaritic air. Their masculinities are not only competitive, but complementary, constantly ensnared in the act of mutual self-constitution, performing the repetitive

[76] Don Merrick Liles. "William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: An Exegesis of the Homoerotic Configurations in the Novel." *Literary Visions of Homosexuality*. Ed. Stuart Kellogg. (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1983) 102-4.

gestures of male honor in a paranoid gender economy haunted above all things by the loss of manhood, a fear that Susan Donaldson and others have argued "hovered over Faulkner" himself.[77]

The more one learns about Henry and Bon, the less logical their relationship seems. They are both strangers to each other and yet blood-related half-brothers, self-asserting Southern men and codependent lovers, exemplars of both masculinity and femininity. These paradoxes build toward a climax when Henry realizes that Bon, who has African-American ancestry, will not withdraw his engagement to his sister Judith, leading to a *liebestod*, a paradoxical expression of desire through violence, that vividly recalls not only Cash's historiographic conclusions but also what many take to be the central theme of Gothic literature: "the substitution of terror for love."[78] Henry, unable to cope with the paralytic effects of homophobic-homoerotic paranoia, succumbs to the fatal lure of cathartic action: "[Henry] never thought. He felt, and acted... he loved grieved and killed, still grieving and, I believe, still loving Bon."[79] Henry never thought. He felt, and acted: Mr. Compson here evokes the martial reflexes and military instincts that Henry's service in the Civil War would have instilled, which reflects at the

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[77] Susan V. Donaldson "Faulkner and Masculinity." The Faulkner Journal. (Orlando: Fall 1999/2000. Vol. 15, Iss. 1 / 2) 8.
[78] Leslie Fiedler. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962) 134.
[79] Faulkner, 98.

institutional level the dissociative relations between mind and body fueled by homophobic prohibitions. In this way, *Absalom, Absalom!* uses Henry's fractured subjectivity as a figurative model for a nation riven by civil war. Thomas Loebel asks, "Is it not in keeping with the design of *Absalom, Absalom!* to suggest that the trauma of masculinity puts the self in civil war, which is fought on various fronts: the body and the mind, desire and the future, choice and necessity? […] Absalom prominently figures such a war...as a representation of the crisis of history in the unit of the self."[80]

The notion of "civil war" or "The House Divided" is in fact central to a considered analysis of homophobic-homoerotic relations in Faulkner's text. The relationship between the half-brothers Henry and Bon culminates in a *liebestod* not only because prohibitions against homosexual acts, or "crimes against nature," were more punitive than those against honor-bound acts of fratricide in the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction, but because the paralytic effects of unfulfillable same-sex desire tortures Henry to the extent that he becomes paradoxically willing to accept Bon's incestuous designs on their sister Judith in the interest of moving forward: "when [Bon] finally knew what he was going to do at last and told Henry... Henry said 'Thank God. Thank God,' not for the incest of course but because at last they were going to

[80] Thomas Loebel. "Love of Masculinity." *The Faulkner Journal*. (Orlando: Fall 1999/2000. Vol. 15, No. 1 / 2) 2.

do something."[81] In *Dishonorable Passions,* William N. Eskridge Jr. tracks the historical development of anti-sodomy legislation in every state in the nation, finding that Mississippi Laws codified laws against "crimes against nature" as early as 1839.[82] Although couched in obscurity, he finds that the term tended historically to revolve around disgust ("[acts] that remind us of our animal natures), pollution ("especially when sexuality, gender roles, and racial identities are combined"), predation ("as regards our children"), and self-definition ("creating symbolic others who are our degraded opposites").[83] In a certain light, Bon and Henry reflect three of these fours cultural fears--though not predatory, they are would-be male lovers on opposite sides of the color line, who are the progeny of a common patriarch. Unable to express or even confess their triply taboo desire to one another directly, Henry and Bon's paranoid situation induces a kind of discursive inertia in the text—they must surrender or die, which reflects the Confederacy's reluctance to acknowledge military defeat, especially after Sherman's March to the Sea in 1864. The gesture of surrender is both contrary to the forces of history, because it forecloses the possibility of forward progress, and contrary to the conception of Southern masculinity, because it

[81] Faulkner, 363.
[82] William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America 1861 - 2003* (New York: Penguin, 2009) 396.
[83] Eskridge, 3.

jeopardizes the "self-asserting" quality that Cash finds so essential to the Southern male persona.[84]

The spectacularized nature of the duel meant that one could only preserve one's self-asserting masculinity by making oneself vulnerable to another's self-assertions in public, a paradoxical double-bind that the duel claims to solve by simply obliterating one party. In *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South,* Wyatt-Brown surveys countless examples in which young men, often under patriarchal pressures, reify this cultural fantasy by ritually performing violent encounters in public: "Teenage duels were not uncommon... Years of duels under paternal surveillance produced adventures that excited the pride of the gentility.... From sons' early childhood, fathers prepared their boys to observe the rules by which honor was upheld."[85] Faulkner references the weight of these "rules" when he writes, his voice modulated to the accusatory second-person, "Your illusions are a part of you like your flesh and bones and memory."[86] As a way to compensate for the paralytic effects that homophobic-homoeroticism imposes, vehicular and locomotive images and metaphors often abound in narratives of queer honor, in order to shore up a fantasy of masculine vitality

[84] Cash, 29. Likewise, in *Billy Budd*, Sedgwick cites the silent threat of naval mutiny aboard the *Bellipotent* as reflecting at the institutional level the paranoid relations that homosexual prohibitions induce.
[85] Wyatt-Brown, 167.
[86] Faulkner, 286.

and self-assertion that is constantly under siege. Indeed, the language and iconology of honor-bound masculinity comes to rely insistently in Faulkner's text on a repertoire of locomotive tropes--especially in scenes where Bon and Henry "ride" together.[87]

"Motion" is a concept that has been central to several generations of Faulkner's critics, one that many, especially those who approach Faulkner principally as a key purveyor of literary Modernism, trace back to William James's 1890 essay on the "stream of consciousness" in *The Principles of Psychology*.[88] For example, Richard P. Adams's *Faulkner: Myth and Motion* interprets Faulkner's famous words from his 1954 interview with *The Paris Review*—"Life is motion... the aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed"—as the purest distillation of his artistic program.[89] Adams uses the concept of "life in motion" as a lens through which one can study not only Faulkner's "stream of consciousness" narrative technique but his authorial desire to capture, in the static material form of the book, the fluid social dynamics of lived historical experience.[90] Given that "life is motion" for Faulkner, Adams accordingly considers patterns of inertia and arrested motion in the author's

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[87] *Deliverance* stages a similar set of locomotive tropes, figured through the men's attempt to canoe down the fictional Cahulawassee River.
[88] William James, "The Stream of Thought." *The Principles of Psychology.* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1918) 224-290.
[89] Richard J. Adams. *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 3.
[90] Adams, 3.

works to represent death; he writes, for instance, that Quentin Compson ultimately cannot endure because he, "cannot connect the past with the present, and therefore... has no future."[91]

The horse in *Absalom, Absalom!* is an image that not only continually symbolizes forward motion, but which recurrently figures the vexed development of Southern masculinity, literally providing the conditions for the men's actions (Henry flees on horseback when he "repudiates his birthright," and later rides back to Sutpen's Hundred on a horse to kill Bon), and figuratively conveying the social and psychological tumult motivating the male characters' behavior. Horses at the most basic level provide the material means of transportation for landed white men like the Thomas Sutpen, as well as supply the smallest cavalry unit of the Confederate armed forces, which Faulkner romanticizes in his aesthetic elevation of war—"the most moving mass-sight of all human mass-experience, the sight of young men... marching away to battle."[92] Horses at the same time embodying the tragic, grim realities to which fantasies of military victory give way: "sitting there in his worn and shabby uniform, with his worn gauntlets...with his horse saddled...while (Grandfather said) Rome vanished and Jericho crumbled," "It seemed to Quentin he could actually see them: the regiment moving no

[91] Ibid., 175. Quentin Compson later commits suicide in *The Sound and the Fury.*
[92] Ibid., 151.

faster than the wagon could, with starved gaunt men and gaunt spent horses."[93] Contrary to their strategic function within the institutional context of the military, horses also provide ways for Henry and Bon to stage acts of rebellious individualism, essentially serving as the "getaway" vehicles for the two men when Henry stages a repudiation of his birthright and flees Sutpen's Hundred to be with Bon in New Orleans. Horses function to reveal the paradoxes of homophobic-homoeroticism, in that they feature both in acts of masculine identity formation (such as in the adolescent hunting and riding rituals of the South, for instance, and in Henry's rebellion) and in acts of masculine destruction and violence (such as in Civil War battles between opposing cavalries, and in the duel on horseback between Henry and Bon).

The mythological valences of Faulkner's rhetoric also rephrase the ontological problem that the horse signifies concerning the simultaneously self-constituting, self-destructing honor-bound masculine subject. To one end, the image of the horse evokes a sprawling, adventurous narrative structure of 'open'-ness, one that is common in American Western/Frontier idioms, and also in Arthurian legends of Camelot, which accrue in networks around the core construct of the Knights-of-the-Round-Table. Taylor Hagood argues that, despite the heroic registers of the text's Arthurian allusions, this

[93] Ibid., 197, 283.

tendency in Faulkner's text remains finally a tragic one.[94] On another level the horse can be read as an allusion to the harbingers of the apocalypse in the New Testament's Book of Revelation, the Four Horsemen who prophecy annihilation and eschatologically represent the terminal point of narrative, a response to the "*Be Sutpen's Hunded*" of the novel's opening pages.[95] The title of the novel already primes the reader for the kind of Biblical weight that hangs over the literary staging of the conflict between the novel's fathers, brothers, and sons. When Faulkner writes, "They faced one another on the two gaunt horses, two men, young, not yet in the world, not yet breathed over long enough, to be old but with old eyes, with unkempt hair and faced gaunt and weathered as if cast by some spartan and niggard hand from bronze...," he employs the princely image of the man on horseback as well as the image of the bronze cast to signify royalty, masculinity, and patrilineage; in this scene Bon and Henry are not merely Bon and Henry, they are also kings, warriors, Absalom and Amnon, bearing all the baggage of primal honor that these images are meant to carry with them.[96]

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[94] Taylor Hagood. "Faulkner's 'Fabulous Immeasurable Camelots': Absalom Absalom and Le Mort d'Arthur." *The Southern Literary Journal*. (Spring 2002. Vol. 34, No. 2) 1.
[95] Faulkner, 3.
[96] Ibid., 137.

Beyond these systems of Arthurian and Biblical discourse, which lend historical heft to the novel's treatment of honor and help energize the Medieval and Gothic registers of Faulkner's rhetoric, a third mythological event haunts Faulkner's horse—the fall of Troy. The elevated pathos of epic poetry resounds in passages of *Absalom, Absalom!*, especially when the novel's narrators mourn the tragic relationship between Henry and Bon in terms that recall Greek tragedy-— "the horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs."[97] As a paradigmatic political nightmare, the Trojan Horse symbolizes neither productive homosexual desire nor the obliterating homosexual threat, but rather the paranoid situation generated by the uncertainty of both: it illustrates the failures of knowledge, the wages of deceit, and the ruin of the man who allows the enemy to penetrate the inner sanctum of his civilization. The story of the Trojan Horse is a cautionary tale about Troy's failure to be paranoid enough, to read accurately the signs of the world. Moreover, the Trojan Horse is perhaps one of the earliest literary representations of a time-honored political practice—espionage—that destabilizes the threshold between public and private, generating effects not so unlike the ones Sedgwick finds gathered around homophobic-homoerotic relations. The figure of the horse, while retaining military associations around Henry's enlistment as a Confederate soldier under General Robert E. Lee, seems also to indicate another,

[97] Ibid., 103.

private aspect of combat—the covert war of desires and defensive intelligence operations between Henry and Bon, which informs the affective character of their companionship. The Trojan horse metaphor here also inadvertently anticipates what would later become the Cold War understanding of the homosexual-- namely, the idea of the homosexual (or any sexual radical) as a Communist infiltrator, a spy who like Bon relies on a "splendid," "appealing" form: "like that of a youthful Roman consul making the Grand Tour of his day among the barbarian hordes which his grandfather conquered, benighted," seducing Henry, corrupting him from within.[98] The idea of the Trojan horse, even more so than the Arthurian or theological interpretations, clarifies the kinds of paralytic effects produced by prohibitions against male-male desire, which destabilize binaries like private-public, knowledge-uncertainty, reality-illusion, ally-enemy, and interior-exterior. Like Troy, the Sutpen family line collapses from within; Bon's "splendid" aesthetic appeal works to mask the fact that he is capable of destroying the entire family with his secret, some "opposite of respectability" only dimly hinted at in the novel's opening pages.[99]

As the site of the energy Faulkner summons together between the Quentin/Shreve and Henry/Bon relationships ("not two of them there and then either

[98] Ibid., 94.
[99] Ibid., 36.

but four of them riding the two horses through the iron darkness," "not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas eve"), the image of the horse suggests the intensification of the parallel homoerotic visions of desire in the text.[100] Not unlike the way Shreve's interjections periodically direct Quentin's recounting of the tale between Henry and Bon, the horse conveys the sense in which Henry and Bon simultaneously foster each other's independence and codependence, Henry having "ridden away in the dark...formally abjur[ing] his home and birthright," only to surrender himself for the first time to Bon's leadership: "They rode through the bright cold...still Henry doing the leading...when for the first time during their entire relationship Bon led and Henry followed."[101] Henry gives himself up to Bon in an unspoken gesture: indeed, the heavy, wordless "breathing" the men do next to one another in the outdoors, multiplied by the breath of the horses, correlates homoerotically in the text to Quentin's "deep breathing" as he tells the story to Shreve in their Harvard dormitory, rendered suggestively by Faulkner as the "warm and rosy orifice above the iron quad."[102] The "breathing" as it relates to the "hard celibacy of riding and hunting" is also a likely reference to the masturbatory sexual economy of military life—in Henry and Bon's final confrontation in

[100] Ibid., 308, 349.
[101] Ibid., 108.
[102] Ibid., 226.

a military camp, Henry's “struggled... held” breath shifts to “panting” then “trembling” when Bon's hand “vanishes beneath the blanket and reappears,” brandishing not a penis but a pistol, a gesture that once more substitutes violence for pleasure. Urging the climax of the *liebestod* then and there, Bon says, “Do it now, Henry.”[103] Although Henry cannot consummate the murder at that moment, neither can his honor bear letting Bon, technically an African-American under Louisiana's "one drop" rule, marry his sister Judith. After being sufficiently taunted by Bon (“Who's going to stop me, Henry?”), Henry finally murders him outside the gates of Sutpen's Hundred—a crime which, like their ambiguous relationship more broadly, is paradoxically the central event of the novel and only half-represented: Judith and Clytie only “hear the shot,” Rosa admits, “I never even saw him dead. I heard an echo, but not the shot,” and Quentin is left to imagine, “from what direction Bon and Henry had ridden up that day, wondering what had cast the shadow which Bon was not to pass alive.”[104] Mr. Compson's vision is the clearest, recording the “the pistol lying yet across the saddle bow” and “the tarnished braid of an officer, the other plain of cuff,” as Bon crosses the threshold and Henry slays him, before pivoting descriptively from the men's gaunt,

[103] Ibid., 373-4. A further aspect to the Quentin-Henry / Bon-Shreve mirror-frame is Shreve's pipe, which he continually refills with tobacco while semi-denuded, delivering the phallic threat to Quentin in the same way Bon's pistol does to Henry.
[104] Ibid., 156, 380.

decorated warhorses to the humbler equine image of, “Wash Jones sitting that saddleless mule before Miss Rosa's gate.”[105]

Faulkner features descriptions of horses prominently in the duel scene not just to exploit their rich symbolic capacity in Christian theology, Arthurian legend, and the Greek epic, but also to indicate the terminal moment of the compulsive "locomotive" tendency that first drives Henry away with Bon on horseback. Unlike that riding scene, in which Henry submits to Bon, Henry later stands to reclaim his “leading” masculine role permanently by carrying out the duel. One of the aims of this study is to excavate the ways in which queer honor as a literary genre anticipates postwar traditions of gay male representation, and the signifying function of the horse in the competitive economy of dueling masculinities in the Old South, I want to argue, provides a clear prototype for the signifying function that the symbol of the "car" later performs in postwar American visual culture. The way that automobile culture gradually replaced equestrian forms of transportation like the horse-drawn carriage in the early twentieth-century South reflects the broader socioeconomic shift toward the kind of large-scale industrialization that was troubling John Crowe Ransom and the Southern Agrarians. The popularity of the automobile—an invention which revolutionized modern transportation and quickly became a cultural obsession for men in particular—was

[105] Ibid., 137.

already soaring by the time Malcom Cowley's 1941 anthology *The Portable Faulkner* introduced the author's works to a wide reading public. Cars, which were and still are measured in terms of the mechanical unit of “horsepower” -- the rate at which 550 pounds can be lifted 1 foot in 1 second -- would soon become the primary vessel through which honor-bound men would confront one another in public.

For a paradigmatic example of this, one need only think of the "duel" between Jim Stark and his rival Buzz Gunderson in Nicholas Ray's modern queer classic *Rebel Without A Cause*, which takes the form of a "chickie race" in which both men race toward a rocky cliff in stolen cars.[106] Ray's film ironically reverses the patriarchal pressures of traditional honor-bound societies by representing Jim's father as a feminized figure who has relinquished his own sense of honor and has no manly advice to offer his son: "Suppose you knew you had to do something very dangerous--where you have to prove something you need to know--a question of honor. Would you do it?" Jim asks, to no avail.[107] Later, after the "chickie race," in which Buzz dies, Jim screams, "I told you Dad, it was a question of honor! They called me chicken--you know, chicken! I had to go or I would never have been able to face any of those kids

[106] *Rebel Without A Cause.* Dir. Nicholas Ray. Perfs. James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo, Jim Backus. (Warner Bros., 1955).
[107] Ibid.

again."[108] Ray infuses the highly ritualistic gestures of the rivalry between Jim and Buzz with precisely the same kind of homophobic-homoeroticism that characterizes the rivalry between Henry and Bon. Just before the "chickie race" that claims Buzz's life, Buzz lets Jim pluck a cigarette from his lips and sadly admits, "I like you. You know that?"[109]

The semiotic function of the automobile as a marker of male honor is not only on display in the postwar Hollywood cinema of the 1950s, but also in newly emergent queer undergrounds and subcultures. Many in the field of cultural studies have contended, as Robert Cagle has, that the car came to constitute a national fetish object for men, especially in male homosocial realms, and two short films by underground filmmaker Kenneth Anger revolve almost entirely around this cultural phenomenon. Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1962) and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965) are two films that explicitly examine images that combine car culture, hyper-masculinity worship, queer male sexuality, and "bad" desire.[110] Anger explores how the car enables the monomaniacal "outlaw" impulses of excessive American hyper-masculinity, in its capacity as a fetish object, circulated by men in a competitive economy of

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] *Scorpio Rising.* Dir. Kenneth Anger. Perf. Bruce Byron. (Self-released, 1963). *Kustom Kar Kommandos.* Dir. Kenneth Anger. Perf. Sandy Trent. (Self-released, 1965).

customization and exhibition—what was then known in the 1950s and 1960s as "hot rod" culture. Revealing to P. Adams Sitney the symbolic potential of the custom car in his films, Anger says,

> "[for] the teenager... [a] custom car represents a poetic extension of personality, an accessible means of wish fulfillment... The treatment of the teenager in relation to his hot rod or custom car...will bring out what I see as a definite eroticization of the automobile, in its dual aspect of narcissistic identification as virile power symbol and its more elusive role: seductive, attention-grabbing, gaudy or glittering mechanical mistress paraded for the benefit of his peers."[111]

Anger's personification of the car as a "seductive," "glittering," "mistress" intensely evokes the "Scythian glitter" with which Faulkner endows Bon's stylized body, which "seduces" Henry.[112] The recourse to technology as a means to shore up self-conceptions of masculinity is a theme to which this project will return in Chapter 3, and it will suffice here to say that the car simultaneously foregrounds "the narcissism inherent in the renovation/recreation process" and provides, as an aesthetic object, a "currency of exchange within a male-based economy of desire."[113] It not only showcases the inner life of the owner but, of greater interest to Anger, erotically

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[111] P. Adams Sitney. *Visionary Film*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 125.
[112] Sitney, 125; Faulkner, 91-4.
[113] Robert Cagle. "Auto-Eroticism: Narcissism, Fetishism, and Consumer Culture." *Cinema Journal* (Summer 1994. Vol. 3) 25.

engages the "seductive, attention-grabbing" thrall of male-male desire itself, a desire that the entire "hot rod" culture is constantly sublimating into the work of commodity culture. In the same way that Faulkner couches Bon's homoerotic appeal to Henry in terms of traditional Southern leisure activities like hunting and riding, Anger visually translates the literal "rod" of masculinity, the "idealized image... ready, willing, able" penis into the figure of the, "hood ornament, a knight in shining armor holding a long lance—shiny and chrome."[114]

Cagle contends that *Kustom Kar Kommandos* "inscribes the 'other' within its own structure"— specifically through the transgressive intrusions of homoerotic desire into the typically heterosexual world of car customization.[115] Provocatively, when Anger performs this oppositional displacement—reifying homoerotic masculinity in the sphere of threatening, working class, homophobic masculinity—the operational result is not paranoid but perversely titillating because Anger's homosexual subjects erotically embrace scenes of violent domination rather than engage in paranoid strategies of resistance.[116] While Cagle argues that the popular and Camp discourses of Anger's

[114] Cagle, 26.
[115] Ibid., 30.
[116] Cagle considers this insight key to understanding Anger's films, in particular *Fireworks*, *Scorpio Rising*, and *Kustom Kar Kommandos*, all of which feature or suggest, in politically problematic ways, the "bad" desire of submitting or consenting to homophobic violence.

work subvert his more disturbing gestures toward fascism, the director's representations of sadomasochism and homophobic-homoeroticism, which at times explicitly deploy Nazi iconography, remain even today highly controversial.[117] These cinematic images expose the degree to which certain archetypical patterns of authoritarianism and fascism have remained ubiquitous in modern genres of queer honor, particularly as they relate to the competitive processes of self-constitution in male homosocial spheres.

In *Absalom, Absalom!,* this logic remains largely the same. Faulkner describes Henry and Bon's methods of horseback riding as a way to gauge their competing masculine idioms. Bon, the elegant sophisticate, is described as the more stylish rider, while Henry, the "grim humorless yokel," has greater technical skill.[118] The complementary dynamic between Bon and Henry on horseback also reflects their

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[117] Ironically, the American Nazi Party protested initial screenings of *Scorpio Rising* on the basis that it disrespected the Nazi flag. In a 2009 Interview with David Moats, Anger says, "[The film] was denounced — and this was ironic — at its first screenings by some members of the American Nazi Party. They thought I was insulting their flag, which was very true, not that you see very much of it. They phoned up anonymously to the vice squad in L.A. and denounced it as porn or obscene or something and in those days in '64 the police *had* to investigate if they got a complaint. They went there and without even watching the film, they just seized it and the poor manager of the theatre was arrested and had to be bailed out. But then it went to the California Supreme Court and a famous ruling came down which applied to all films: if it has redeeming social merit then it's acceptable, and of course this label has been used for all kinds of things. David Moats, "Kenneth Anger Interviewed." *The Quietus.* (June 2009).
[118] Faulkner, 111.

performative rapport in social settings: Bon is a more charismatic, gregarious social actor than Henry, whose solemn directness is better suited to Jefferson than to New Orleans. This dynamic also informs the men's outlook on sex and sexuality, which Mr. Compson pruriently lingers over when he tells Quentin about Bon inducting Henry into enjoying the sexual pleasures of New Orleans brothels, which offered women of color to white men for a price. Absent a first-hand account, Mr. Compson homoerotically imagines, "the way in which he took the innocent and negative plate of Henry's provincial soul and intellect and exposed it by slow degrees to this esoteric milieu... I can see him corrupting Henry gradually into the purlieus of elegance."[119] Bon is repeatedly labeled as "the mentor, the corruptor" in relation to Henry, who is by comparison hopelessly puritanical and naïve.[120] Faulkner's rendering of this primal scene of corruption, in which Bon takes an almost sadistic delight in shattering Henry's genteel notions of honorable masculinity and femininity, is paradoxically the most homoerotic event in the novel. At one point Faulkner describes Bon's influence on Henry as, "lazily, almost cryptically, stroking onto the plate himself now the picture which he wanted there."[121] This masturbatory image is diametrically opposed to the kind of Southern masculinity that W. J. Cash identifies, typically characterized by, "the

[119] Ibid., 112-3.
[120] Ibid., 114.
[121] Ibid., 114.

most intense individualism the world has seen since the Italian Renaissance," "purely personal," "purely self-asserting."[122] Here, instead, it is Bon that is making Henry, "preparing Henry's puritan mind as he would have prepared a cramped and rocky field and planted it and raised the crop which he wanted."[123] Faulkner frames Bon's cunning, deliberate methods of corruption in erotic metaphors where Bon is "stroking" himself to Henry, or even more scandalously, planting his seed in Henry, in order to raise an image that leaves them both in states of dishonor.[124]

Faulkner sustains the homoerotic register of the passage even as he describes the heterosexual space of the brothel itself: "a trap, a riding horse standing before a closed and curiously monastic doorway in a neighborhood a little decadent, even a little sinister."[125] Although the two men are ostensibly seeking out sex from an oppressed underclass of mixed-race women, Faulkner understands (and Mr. Compson conveys to Quentin) the experience primarily as an erotic act Bon is determined to perform on Henry. These "slave girls and women" which Faulkner mentions a page earlier as one of the three tiers of womanhood in Southern society function as commodities, a form of human capital, in transactions among white men.[126] Indeed, as

[122] Cash, 29-31.
[123] Faulkner, 111.
[124] Ibid., 114.
[125] Ibid., 114.
[126] Ibid., 112.

Mr. Compson explains to Quentin, this caste of mixed-race women are "not whores" but rather honest sex-workers whose labor is necessary so that Southern society can preserve its enshrined ideas of virginal female honor, which upper-class white women like Judith Sutpen embody.[127] The triangle between Henry, Bon, and Judith develops in a way that reproduces the classic model of the erotic triangle that Sedgwick's tracks in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,* in which two bachelors route their desire through mutual female love objects.[128] Faulkner writes,

> It was not Judith who was the object of Bon's love or Henry's solicitude. She was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be--the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another, seduced and been seduced, victimised in turn each by the other, conqueror vanquished by his own strength, vanquished conquering by his own weakness, before Judith came into their joint lives even by so much as girlname.[129]

Joseph Boone argues that anxieties concerning gender, race, and sexuality continually haunt masculine identity in the novel because the "complex network of male homosocial bonding... designed to confirm men's power through their exchange

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[127] Ibid., 118.
[128] Eve Sedgwick, "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles." *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
[129] Faulkner, 123.

of women... simultaneously generates men's deepest anxieties about their manhood precisely at the point where culturally fostered camaraderie between men becomes barely distinguishable from sexual intimacy... this is the very boundary on which Henry and Bon's relationship dangerously hovers."[130] According to this reading, Faulkner portrays Henry's initiation into the "dishonorable" world of brothels--where "all of morality was upside down and all of honor perished"--as a smokescreen for his initiation into the comparably dishonorable world of homoerotic desire.[131] The "decadent, "sinister" passage through which Bon leads Henry here becomes a portal through which Henry may step in order to discard both primal and genteel notions of male honor, and the expectations around conventional marriage they entail, which a generation earlier caused a vigilance committee to march Thomas Sutpen away from his "halfacre gunroom of baronial splendor" and into an engagement with Ellen Coldfield.[132]

Henry's sense of personal honor, however, is ultimately too innate--too much a part of his "flesh and bones"--and cannot survive the revelation that Charles Bon has African-American ancestry, which leads him to murder his "favorite enemy" as a relief

[130] Joseph Allen Boone. "William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!: Creation by the Father's Fiat." *Libidinal Currents*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 310.
[131] Faulkner, 117.
[132] Ibid., 114, 36.

for his wounded pride.[133] As its very title suggests, *Absalom, Absalom!* is brimming with repetitions, parallels, and characterological doubles. The novel is at its core a narrative of troubled reproduction, the tale of a king who produces a wayward son that destroys him in turn, and this Biblical narrative also models the crisis of the reproduction of male honor. Faulkner ironizes this crisis of reproduction by constantly yoking together the novel's principal figures across subsequent generations of the Sutpen family line, such as those of the king (Thomas) and the wayward son (Bon): "[Bon] came into that isolated puritan country household almost like Sutpen himself came into Jefferson: apparently complete, without background or past or childhood–a man a little older than his actual years and enclosed and surrounded by a sort of Scythian glitter..."[134] These patterns eventually cause Quentin to wonder aloud to Shreve,

> Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds...Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.[135]

[133] Faulkner, 286; Cash, 150.
[134] Ibid., 94.
[135] Ibid., 272-3.

In emphasizing the unfinished and continual influence of the past, Faulkner suggests that individuals may consist of more than what appears ("maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve"), but perhaps more profoundly, he suggests that individuals may consist of less.[136] This passage, within the historical context of the honor-bound Old South, reveals the way in which male and female bodies become vessels for ritualistic gender ideologies that are transmitted over the course of multiple generations, never whole, never fully gone.

Quentin and Mr. Compson are ultimately dissatisfied by the story of Henry and Bon that they receive over the course of the text. "Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing," Mr. Compson tells Quentin.[137] The question does not bother Judith or Bon or Henry or Thomas, as each is mystified by ideology to the extent that they cannot begin to comprehend their position within a larger structure of Southern history, as Quentin labors to do. Yet even Quentin cannot fully remove himself from Southern ideology in order to comprehend the past objectively, honor-bound as he is to the same culture that produced the Sutpens. As a result, even Quentin, the novel's *de facto* detective, is not privy to the whole truth: "We think that if we can just go over the story once more... we shall succeed in

[136] Ibid., 273.
[137] Ibid., 103.

understanding why it happened... But in retelling the story we succeed only in passing on to others the ideological mistakes that we have not been able to understand."[138] Miller concludes that Quentin is doomed as a Southern male because one can never perfectly extract oneself from the ideology of Southern masculinity, a theme Faulkner had explored previously in *The Sound and the Fury,* a book that tracks Quentin's despair over the perceived impurity of his sister Caddy. Moreover, Faulkner's belief that "happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water," suggests that the *Absalom, Absalom*'s presentation of the ideology of honor is unfinished precisely because history itself is always ongoing.[139] Thus, in the context of the novel as within the context of this project, *Absalom, Absalom!* ultimately imagines a fractured, open-ended vision of male honor unspooling into an uncertain future.

[138] Miller, 260.
[139] Faulkner, 232.

CHAPTER II

THE PASSION OF JULIEN GREEN: REREADING *MOIRA* AND *TERRE LOINTAINE*

"I should like to know."
"I could never tell you."[1]

—Julien Green, *Moira*

What happens when honor is lost but history, and the self, must go on? This is a question that haunts not only the South after the Civil War, but also the subject of this chapter, Julien Green, who in 1950 published the novel most critics now consider to be his foremost achievement as a fiction writer, *Moira*. Set in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia in the early 1920s, the novel follows a puritanical student named Joseph Day, modeled after Green's own experience there in his youth, recorded in his personal diary *Terre Lointaine,* published 16 years later.[2] Joseph, who aspires to learn Greek so that he may read the New Testament in its original form, responds to the casual crudeness of male homosocial dormitory life at the University of Virginia with a mixture of anger, fear, and sublime fascination. Though described as aggressive and masculine, Joseph's piety and virginity feminize him in the eyes of the other male

[1] Julien Green, *Moira.* (New York / London: Quartet Books, 1950) 229.
[2] Julien Green, *Terre Lointaine*. (Paris: B. Grasset, 1966). Published as *Love in America* in the United States, as volume three of Green's autobiography, *Terre Lontaine* chronicles a four year period (1919 - 1922) in Green's life spent in Virginia.

students, who delight in ridiculing him for abstaining from vices like drinking, smoking, and sex, as well as for his bright red hair and blushing skin. Joseph's red hair in particular makes him a favored target of male insult from the novel's opening pages: "Does any one of you know the address of the local fire brigade?" one of his rivals jabs upon spotting him.[3] "He had heard this obvious joke before," Green writes, "too often to be surprised by it, but each time it nettled him."[4] Green frames Joseph's subjectivity primarily as a psychological response to insult, in much the same way that Didier Eribon formulates the primal scene of gay subjectivity in his 1999 volume *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*: "It all begins with an insult. The insult that any gay man or lesbian can hear at any moments of his or her life, the sign of his or her social and psychological vulnerability... [that] stay[s] in the memory and the body."[5]

In his book's opening chapter, entitled "The Shock of Insult," Eribon cites Marcel Jouhandeau, a contemporary of Green's in early twentieth-century France, who like Green, was a practicing Catholic and self-identified homosexual, and who, also like Green, sought to resolve the interior crisis of his being through the production of

[3] Green, 15.
[4] Ibid., 15.
[5] Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 15.

mystical writing. Eribon cites Jouhandeau's 1939 treatise *On Abjection* at length, where Jouhandeau writes,

> What a revelation it is to be insulted, to be scorned in public. We become familiar with certain words that up to that point had only been heard in classical tragedies, but that now become our own accouterments, our own burdens. We are no longer what we thought ourselves to be. We are no longer the person we knew, but the one others think they know, the one others take to be this or that. If someone could think that of me, then in some way it must be true. At first we pretend that it is not true, that this is only a mask, a costume for a play in which someone has clothed us, and that we could take off. But no. These garments adhere so tightly that they have already become your face, your flesh. To take them off would be to rend your own being... The insult lets me know that I am not like others, not normal. I am *queer:* strange, bizarre, sick, abnormal.[6]

Jouhandeau ironically manages to find spiritual comfort in the revelatory power of insult and humiliation through a process of spiritual ascesis that I will argue Green also undergoes over the course of drafting *Moira,* as reflected in encounters with "classical tragedies" in his personal journals.[7] "Nothing exalts me more surely than reprobation," Jouhandeau writes, reversing the conventional formulation of homophobic insult that Eribon provides, which prompt only feelings of "fear, awkwardness, and shame."[8] Following the same kind of homophobic-homoerotic logic that characterizes narratives

[6] Marcel Jouhandeau, *On Abjection.* (Gallimard: Paris, 1939) 161.
[7] Jouhandeau, 161.
[8] Jouhandeau, 161; Eribon, 15.

of queer honor in any context, Green suggests in *Moira* that Joseph Day's litany of borne humiliations eventually become exultant rather than degrading, a way for him to transform his dishonor over the course of the novel into a form of queer honor. Green stages this operation primarily through Joseph Day's erotic rivalry, which borders at times on sadomasochistic obsession, with a fellow student who constantly delights in insulting him, Bruce Praileau.

The few book-length critical studies of Green's work that exist, such as Anthony Newbury's *Julien Green: Religion and Sensuality*, Samuel Stokes's *Julian Green and the Thorn of Puritanism*, and John M. Dunaway's *The Metamorphoses of the Self: The Mystic, the Sensualist, and the Artist in the Works of Julien Green*, all locate the conflict between sexuality and spirituality as the primary philosophical problem motivating *Moira* and Green's literary art more broadly.[9] Such works aim to recover the ethical crisis and erotic subtext of an author whom critics in the 1930s and 1940s often pigeonholed simply as a Catholic writer, given that his early work was published under the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain's Roseau d'Or imprint. In doing so they tend to understand the novel, along with the other works of Green's mature period, as late

[9] Anthony Newbury, *Julien Green: Religion and Sensuality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986); Samuel Stokes, *Julian Green and the Thorn of Puritanism.* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1955); John M. Dunaway, *The Metamorphoses of the Self: The Mystic, the Sensualist, and the Artist in the Works of Julien Green.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978).

Modernist continuations of the same Victorian-Gothic literary style developed by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Charlotte Bronte, with the kind of metaphysical yearning through bodily drives also examined by D.H. Lawrence.[10] However, one of my aims here is to argue that situating Green squarely within any one field of literary or artistic influence--whether as a Catholic moralist, a Southern writer, or a Gothic dramatist-- is a far more tortuous enterprise than these critics have initially suggested.

Rather than read *Moira* and *Terre Lontaine* in the manner of post-war critics as staging the oppositional drama between the ultimately irreconcilable forces of sensuality and religion, I want to argue instead that Green in a way succeeds in transforming his own feelings of fear, shame, and self-loathing through the "revelatory" work of fiction writing in order to achieve something like spiritual exaltation.[11] The Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain helped Green realize this ambition through his own impressions of *Moira* and *Terre Lointaine*, which he related to Green through their personal correspondence. Maritain praised both works for their tender representation of the spiritual painfulness of coping with homosexual desire, which he ironically

[10] L. Clark Keating, "Julien Green and Nathaniel Hawthorne." The French Review. Vol. 28, No. 6 (May, 1955) 485-92.
[11] Jouhandeau, 161.

considered to be direct evidence of "the grandeur of God's love."[12] Moreover, Green's journals during the summer of 1948 reveal that *Moira*'s composition was in fact the creative result of—and an attempt to try to put an end to—a severe spiritual crisis, itself engendered by a series of increasingly overwhelming encounters Green had that summer with homoerotic Neoclassical art in Paris. A close reading of Green's journal from this period, which has yet to receive a full English translation, reveals a completely different archive of cultural influences than the ones typically proffered by Green's postwar critics, who were inclined to understand him either as a Catholic author like fellow Roseau d'Or contributors Jacques Riviere and Stanislas Fumet, or a purveyor of Southern Gothic grotesquerie like Erskine Caldwell and Flannery O'Connor. Green's diaries of this period reveal an unexpected and wide-ranging series of cultural referents—including the war fiction of Stephen Crane and Herman Melville, the male nude portraiture of French Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David (whose works were in the midst of a bicentennial celebration in France in 1948), and the early medical writings of Havelock Ellis—all of which together provide a new intellectual context in which to understand Green's decisive effort to salvage his spirituality by confronting his homosexual urges with unprecedented candor in his fiction.

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[12] Jacques Maritain, *The Story of Two Souls: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Julien Green.* Edited by Henry Bars and Eric Jourdan. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988) 218.

As an American citizen who lived most of his life in France, and the first French non-citizen ever elected to the Academie Francaise, Green is still a writer better known in France than in the United States. There he is known best for his *Journal*, a monumental work of autobiography that spans from 1919 to 1998, which has lent generations of British and French critics enormous insight into the author's lifelong struggles and concerns, at the same time that it provided access to the social lives of the set of Parisian writers like Andre Gide, Francois Mauriac, and Jacques Maritain, who comprised Green's social circle.[13] A bilingual reader who wrote and published primarily in French, Green grew up avidly consuming the autobiographical writings of Rousseau, influenced by his pursuit to capture in his memoirs, "the state of my soul" ("*l'etat de mon ame*").[14] Green sought early in life to enter and participate in the French diarist tradition he so admired, handed down to his generation of writers by the likes of Stendhal and Gide. As a result, Green's Journal weaves together elements of multiple genres—personal memoir (in French, the "*journal intime*"), Kunstlerroman, spiritual treatise, cultural criticism—in rendering a dense, continuous account of his life,

[13] Julien Green, *Journal*. (Paris: Plon, 1938).
[14] Michael O'Dwyer, *Julien Green: A Critical Study*. (Dublin: Four Court Press, 1997) 106.

something Green's Parisian peers Francois Mauriac and Marcel Jouhandeau, among others, were also endeavoring to produce at the time.[15]

Green's reputation with Anglophone critics and audiences, less familiar with the *Journal*, rests primarily with the novels of his mature period, which *Moira*'s publication inaugurated in 1950. One year after its release, Jacques Maritain wrote to Green, calling it "the strongest and most perfect of your books," one with "a rare power of truth, and the self-restraint of great classic art."[16] The novel, conceived by Green in 1948 following a spiritual crisis, signaled a return to the unresolved traumas and desires that marked his years spent in Virginia as a college student, though it was not until 1966 with the publication of *Terre Lointaine*, the third volume of his autobiography, that Green would unequivocally discuss his homosexuality in print. Maritain, the Catholic philosopher with whom Green corresponded for much of his life, and who in many ways functioned as Green's spiritual mentor, responded to the confessional nature of *Terre Lointaine* in a remarkable correspondence to Green:

> I have just finished *Terre Lointaine*. I read it with profound and sustained emotion and with an inexpressible feeling of presence—yes, it is the student of 1922 who wrote this book. It is an admirable book whose extraordinary sincerity has its source in the divine. At the same time it breathes an inviolable purity and self- restraint; and the reader senses in

[15] O' Dwyer, 106-7.
[16] Maritain, 131.

> an almost painful way with what charity—both for God and for your neighbor—you have given, surrendered, yourself. Your guardian angel wrote this book along with you. I do not know what people will tell you—but for me, what emerges above all else from these recollections is the force of the religious witness you bear and the grandeur of God's love for you and of the protection with which He has covered your life, according to His infinitely mysterious ways. One might say that all those things from which you have suffered so cruelly are a light veil that He has placed before your eyes, with a kind of slightly ironic tenderness, in order to carry out His work, without your realizing it, in the depths of your soul, a marvelous work, and to lead you to where He has always wanted you to be.[17]

Before 1919, Green had never before traveled the South, a remarkable fact given his family history. His paternal grandfather, Charles Green, had been the proprietor of a prominent cotton exporting company in Savannah, Georgia, who in 1853 commissioned the architect John S. Norris into designing a Gothic-Revivalist mansion, now a National Historic Landmark and monument that goes by the name of Green-Meldrim House.[18] The house, considered one of the finest standing examples of nineteenth-century Southern Gothic- Revivalism, also entertained the likes of William Thackeray and Charles Dickens, and once served as the headquarters for General William Sherman and his troops between December 22nd, 1864, and February 1st, 1865, after Charles Green—a British national and Confederate sympathizer—

[17] Ibid., 218-9.
[18] O'Dwyer, 12.

volunteered to garrison the occupying Union brigade in order to spare his Confederate neighbors the dishonor of having to do so.[19] Julien Green's maternal grandfather Julian Hartridge, after whom he was named, also played a key role in Southern history, having been a Confederate politician and officeholder who served in the First and Second Confederate Congress, representing Georgia in the House of Representatives between 1875 and 1879.[20]

Remarkably, despite being the son of two Americans, the grandson of a Confederate activist and congressman, and himself technically an American national, Julien Green had still never step foot in the American South before traveling from France to Charlottesville in 1919. Earlier that year, Green had arrived home in Paris after serving abroad during World War I as a volunteer in the American Red Cross, then a conscript in the French Foreign Legion, and finally a draftee in the French Army—to find his father, Edward Green, struggling to repay significant family debts.[21] This prompted Julien's maternal uncle Walter Hartridge to suggest financing Julien's studies at the University of Virginia.[22] The generosity of his uncle's offer, extended just after Green had finally decided to relinquish his dream of entering a Benedictine

[19] Ibid., 11.
[20] Ibid., 11.
[21] Ibid., 15.
[22] Ibid., 16.

monastery on the Isle of Wight, persuaded him to put aside his lingering reservations and relocate to Charlottesville.[23]

Terre Lointaine records with tremendous clarity the confusion, alienation, and intense fear that Green felt in Virginia, as he negotiated his Catholicism and his emerging sexual identity with his own status as a cultural outsider in a place that had previously only resided in his imagination. In particular, it was during his time in Virginia that Green first began to struggle, as he would for a greater portion of his life, with reconciling his Catholic faith, to which he converted after the death of his mother in 1915, with a burgeoning identification with homosexuality, a topic he would continue to handle with extreme discretion in his non-fiction until the late 1950s, several years after *Moira*'s release. A revealing entry in *Terre Lointaine* relates Green's visit to the American Embassy in Paris, betokening the kind of inner turmoil he would feel upon arriving at the University of Virginia.[24] There he remembers watching a handsome American guard, immediately struck by, "a face with flawless features that made me think of the curly-haired gods of Greek art."[25] Anthony Newbury points out in *Julien Green: Religion and Sensuality* that Green's preoccupation with the male form tends to

[23] Ibid., 16.
[24] Green, 259-61. All English translations from *Terre Lointaine* are my own. See footnotes for citations in the original French.
[25] Green, 260. ("un visage aux traits sans defaut qui faisait songer aux dieux boucles de l'art grec.")

revolve around the face, as Green himself freely admits elsewhere in *Terre Lointaine*, when he writes, "The face was like a world I never finished exploring. The body, I thought little of."[26] Green goes on, "I carried that burning image within me. Actually, it never completely left me, and I found it in one form or another, in all of my work."[27] The burden of the "burning image" indicates the kind of nagging, self-abnegating desire that Green endeavored to conceal as an undergraduate in Virginia, as well as the visionary impact that the event would have over his creative output. The American Embassy passage also heralds one of the signature impulses of Green's literary imagination, namely a sublime aesthetic fascination with the American military and American masculinity, which alongside his interest in exploring and recovering his own displaced Southern heritage, helped inform the settings, images and personae of his major fictional works—including the Civil War play *South* (1953), his mature period novels like *Moira* (1950) and *Each Man in His Darkness* (1960), and the "Dixie" trilogy.[28]

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[26] Green, 159. ("Le visage m'etait comme un monde que je n'en finissais pas d'explorer. Le corps, je n'y songeais guere.")

[27] Green, 261. ("Pendant des semaines, je portai en moi cette image qui me brulait. A vrai dire, elle ne me quitta jamais tout a fait et je la retrouvai, sous une forme ou sous une autre, a travers toute mon oeuvre.")

[28] Julien Green, *South: A Play*. (New York / London: Marion Boyars, 1991); Julien Green, *Each Man in His Darkness* (London: Quartet Books, 1990); Julien Green, *The Distant Lands: A Novel.* (New York: M. Boyars, 1991); Julien Green, *The Stars of the South: A Novel.* (New York: M. Boyars, 1996); Julien Green, *Dixie*. (Paris: Fayard, 1995);

The South during this period was engaged in a similarly tortuous process of moral transformation, immersed in a "Lost Cause" narrative that sought to salvage notions of male honor and dignity from a legacy of humiliating military defeat. By 1919, when Green first arrived in Virginia, "manhood" and "masculinity" had already begun to index different modes of gender performance. Whereas in the nineteenth century "manhood" often named a characteristic rather than an identity—meaning something like one's soul or one's very humanity—it began in the early twentieth-century to describe in a more pejorative manner a, "rougher and less 'civilized' manliness, as found among immigrants, African-Americans, the working classes, and Southerners.'"[29] However mysterious and grasping Green's early fascination with American masculinity may seem in his autobiographies, Green's late fiction reveals that one of his aims is to express the allure of, and describe the terror aroused by, the appeal of this Southern "manhood," which seemed for him to harbor all the aesthetic ecstasy and violent savagery of existence itself. In *Terre Lointaine,* Green remembers thinking upon arriving in Charlottesville that, "Successive generations hardly ever reproduce the same

[29] Craig Thompson Friend, "Introduction: Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities." *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), xix.

kind of humanity, but it is certain that around 1920, the classical beauty beloved by antiquity wound up in the U.S.A."[30]

In the introduction *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on the South Since Reconstruction,* Craig Thompson Friend writes that at the close of World War I, male gender in the South tended to form around three sociological models: the Christian gentleman, the martial character, and the 'self made' man."[31] Confederate general Robert E. Lee was the foremost example of the former two models, a cultural avatar

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[30] Green, 59. ("Les generations se succedent sans toujours reproduire le meme type d'humanite, mais il est certain qu'aux environs de 1920, la beaute classique telle que l'antiquite l'a aimee s'est retrouvee aux Etats Unis.")

[31] Friend, xvi-vii. The socioeconomic shifts that the South was undergoing eventually entailed an implicit, unarticulated shift toward the third type of manliness that Friend describes—the more autonomous, entrepreneurial model of the "self-made" man.[31] This new model, at once an epiphenomenon of economic reform and an alternative to the failures of the kind of locally determined, honor-bound conception of manhood that had led the Confederacy into the Civil War, sought to appeal to impoverished Southerners by promising financial opportunities in the form of new manufacturing jobs. As the broad effort to reorganize the Southern economy intensified, and as the racial dominance of white Southern men seemed more perilous than ever, Friend finds the word "masculinity" increasingly deployed in cultural discourse to describe a socioeconomically and racially circumscribed gender norm—white, middle-class, manliness. When Green arrived in Charlottesville, these accelerating forces of cultural transformation were in turn provoking a conservative backlash among traditional Southerners, who were devouring the plantation fiction of Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, and flocking to white supremacist, "Lost Cause" fables like D. W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, in order to resist what they perceived as Northern cultural encroachment. These nostalgic, racist narratives aimed to rouse sentiment around a pastoral vision of the segregated South that many feared was rapidly and irreversibly disappearing.

that combined the mastery and restraint of the Christian gentleman with the honorable and manly comportment of the military leader. Violence and belligerence among Southern men—which had always been essential to the white supremacist subjugation of African-Americans, Native Americans, and women, and the only respectable response to any serious insult or conflict—became if anything even more rigidly instrumentalized during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras. Through these former two models, aggrieved Southern men sought to overcome the humiliation of military defeat by romanticizing antebellum Southern life and reasserting the kind of vicious white manhood chronicled by W. J. Cash, typified by, "honor and virility, righteous adherence to biblical inerrancy in the forms of belligerent racism, and an assertion of manhood over effeminacy and even women in general."[32]

Green's own struggle to ingratiate himself with these modes of Southern masculinity in the University of Virginia forms the basis for *Moira*'s plot. Many reviewers initially apprehended the novel as a Nietzschean tragedy, staging a particular kind of metaphysical battle between Apollonian and Dionysian forces similar to what many take to be the dominant theme of Green's oeuvre--what Glenn S. Burne calls, "man's

[32] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s - 1890s.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 293.

inability to reconcile the drives of the flesh with his need for a spiritual life."[33] Biographers have noted, too, the way that Green closely modeled Day's fanatical, attachment to religion in the face of temptation—his nickname throughout the novel is the "Exterminating Angel"— after his own personal experiences in Charlottesville, a period generously recorded in *Terre Lointaine*.[34] In his biography of Green, Burne writes,

> Green's isolation was reinforced at school, where he was never completely accepted; even though he spoke perfect French, he was considered a foreigner by his chauvinistic fellow students. His discovery of his "emotional bias" closed the circle of alienation around him. He became involved in covert sexual experiments which depressed him terribly both because he detested his partners in these activities and because he was sure that he had delivered himself into the hands of the

[33] Glenn S. Burne, "Julian Green: The Two Realities." *Julian Green.* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972) 11-36. Martin Seymour-Smith's blurb for the 1988 Quartet Books edition of the book describes Green's technique as "Victorian-Gothic -- his novels are highly melodramatic -- but he is a modernist because his subject is the Nietzschean one of 'man without God'; for Green godlessness is epitomized in man's condition of lustfulness and panic. He has perhaps learned more from Balzac than anyone else, and although when he was young he read Dickens, Hawthorne and others with rapt attention" (back cover). The first page provides a summary that calls *Moira* "a disturbing and neo-Gothic fable, in which the autobiographical hero in heterosexual disguise plays out his mystico-erotic compulsions. Set in the American South, the novel charts the fate of a university student, Joseph, who murders a girl whom he has raped. In Greek, of course, *moira* is a word meaning fate, and Green's pointed naming of Joseph's victim reveals his customary preoccupation with destiny as it pursues those whose sexuality disturbs them violently, even fatally" (i).

[34] Julien Green, *Terre Lointaine.* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1966).

> devil. He had forsaken his ideal of purity, which so dominated his thinking, and he had embraced the impure.[35]

The "chauvinistic" posture that Green encountered is on display in the opening pages of *Moira,* especially in the character descriptions of Bruce Praileau: "Praileau had been wearing a maroon, almost red, suit and his large black tie made an arrogant patch on his white shirt. Why arrogant? Because Praileau's whole person spoke of arrogance... from head to foot this young man was haughty. His jet-black eyes shone in his ruddy face under strong eyebrows, and he threw back his head like someone used to command."[36]

As in the years during which Faulkner's novels are set, male bonding rituals like riding, hunting, drinking, and fighting all remained vital spheres in which honor was a currency that could be won and lost. A Baptist adherent from the foothills of West Virginia, Joseph's first impulse upon arriving in Charlottesville is to fight: "Did he hate [Praileau], then? It was not an easy question. He did not hate him; he wanted to fight him."[37] The early twentieth-century South also witnessed the emergence of the institutional culture of team sport, as evidenced by the growing popularity of football leagues and the establishment of organizations like the Southern Intercollegiate

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[35] Burne, 20.
[36] Green, 16.
[37] Ibid., 23.

Athletic Conference, which supplied literal arenas (often in and around universities) in which men could wage rivalries, win local esteem, and display physical aggression and combativeness without any legal repercussions.[38] The competitiveness of sports and fitness culture helped create economies of honor where victory and success on the field translated in both institutional and informal ways to social reward outside of it. Moreover, the Southern emphasis on sport and strenuous physical activity dovetailed with the national effort in the Progressive Era to promote the Protestant idea of "muscular Christianity," which encouraged men to embrace the "Great Outdoors" and the cult of the healthy, muscular body, leading to the establishment of such institutions as the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), the Boy Scouts of America, and the Student Volunteer Movement.

Practiced by the household in which Theodore Roosevelt was raised, "muscular Christianity" was an idea originally credited to Victorian writers Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, which became popularized in America as a way to counteract the perceived crisis that American men were becoming insufficiently "manly" in great numbers, due to the passive, workaday routines of modern domestic life. The idea helped give rise to the national view trumpeted most famously by Roosevelt himself that American men, especially educated elites, had a responsibility to take part in the

[38] Thompson Friend, xvi.

"strenuous life"—to resist becoming "too fastidious, too sensitive to take part in the rough hurly-burly of the actual work of the world."[39] Emphasizing one's own manliness, or the manliness of a particular cause, was a common political tactic in the Progressive era, deployed strategically in order to woo working-class voters over to reformist causes. Southern masculinity often set the national standard for male strenuousness and vigor, given its reputation as being a rough-and-tumble "participant sport" —a phrase that historian Ted Ownby uses in his study of Southern manhood and recreation to describe the cultural institution of hunting, but which one might extend even beyond that description to characterize the competitive, physical dynamic of Southern male homosociality more broadly.[40] As a result, so-called traditional masculinity—that which revolved around competitive physical pursuits and the cult of the body—was perhaps in greater cultural demand than ever in the South as Green set sail for Virginia.

Complicating this traditional mode of "honor-bound" masculinity was the simultaneous need for men to embody mastery—that is, to adhere to the moral standards of Christian faith and fulfill the responsibilities prescribed by domestic life.[41] If the pursuit of honor was an economy of participatory, public action meant to arouse

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[39] Donald Wilhelm, *Theodore Roosevelt as an Undergraduate.* (Boston: John W. Luce, 1910) 78-90.
[40] Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 12.
[41] Friend, xvi.

and direct the violent passions of Southern men, then mastery defined as restraint and self-control was the quality necessary to keep men sufficiently attached to their churches, families, and communities, and thus worthy of the support that they provided. Honor and mastery, though seemingly disparate concepts, were not strictly antithetical or incompatible: for instance, because mastery involved protecting the domestic unit (especially white female virtue and virginity) from perceived threats, it provided the logical basis on countless occasions for atrocities and retributions meted out in accordance with what Wyatt-Brown calls "primal" honor.[42] Knowing how to exercise mastery and how to pursue honor was perhaps the most pressing, ongoing, and immediate moral question an aspiring Southern man could ask himself regarding his own behavior and esteem, one that was always ultimately vexed, imperfect, and open to interpretation. As Ted Ownby writes, "Southern men often found themselves wondering how far they could go in satisfying the demands and enjoying the pleasures of male culture without violating the standards of evangelical morality."[43]

Upon arriving at the University of Virginia, Joseph Day struggles to determine how best to exemplify honor and mastery. Specifically, he agonizes over whether he should physically attack the students around him who mercilessly mock him, torn

[42] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 34
[43] Ownby, 17.

seemingly between his manly desire to fight and his religious desire to forgive. Ultimately Joseph conforms to the idea of Southern masculinity as a "participant sport."[44] As he walks with his rival Praileau to an informal arena in front of the Dean of Medicine's house in which the two plan to wrestle, Green writes,

> Once or twice he felt like striking that proud head and punishing it for what it had said and for all it was secretly thinking. Then this inner violence gave way to a sudden, intoxicating gentleness, a strange longing to love all creatures--a longing which he confused with the promptings of religion. With what joy he could forgive the man walking beside him the insult of the morning! In a moment he would have seized his hand without further explanation. But Praileau would not have understood; he would think the gesture came from fear. What contemptuous words would rise to his lips! At this thought Joseph again felt the rush of anger which so often blinded him.[45]

Although the early twentieth-century Southern concept of mastery was grounded in religious thought and domestic responsibility, Green describes Joseph's "strange longing to love" as deriving from something other than the "promptings of religion."[46] Joseph's desire to forgive Praileu for his insult is rooted instead in an occluded form of mystical desire that emerges in Green's ecstatic rendering of the fight:

[44] Ibid., 12.
[45] Green, 26.
[46] Ibid., 26.

> Joseph suddenly threw himself on Praileau. He was moved by something irresistible, a blind force urging him on. The shock made Praileau lose his balance and he fell to the ground dragging his opponent with him. For several minutes they rolled and struggled together, panting in the dark like two wild animals, but Joseph was heavier and somewhat taller and got the upper hand. A sudden, mad joy filled him at his own strength and he felt some mysterious hunger in him being satisfied. His enemy twisted vainly in his grip; Joseph held him between his legs as in a vice and twice made his shoulders touch the ground. Praileau was motionless now and gasping.[47]

Praileau chastises Joseph for taking him by surprise, a likely reference to the locally determined rules for fighting that would have distinguished the brawls of the West Virginia backcountry from the gentlemanly boxing matches of Charlottesville. Even the "haughty," "arrogant," Praileau is disturbed by the "blind force" with which Joseph attacks him: "You're a murderer... You wanted to kill me just now. You didn't dare, but still there is a murderer in you."[48] Joseph refuses to touch Praileau--refuses even to shake his hand after the fight--and averts his gaze when Praileau tears off his shirt, "which was clinging to his skin... glisten[ing] with sweat."[49] When Joseph finally calls out, "I forgive you everything you've said, Praileau!", Praileau merely replies in the same contemptuous tones of scorn and derision that Joseph had already anticipated:

[47] Ibid., 27.
[48] Ibid., 16, 29.
[49] Ibid., 29.

"You're a big fool, Joseph Day!"[50] The insult conjures Jouhandeau's words -- "The insult lets me know that I am not like others, not normal. I am *queer:* strange, bizarre, sick, abnormal."[51] As Praileau wanders away to bathe naked in a nearby lake, producing a "calm, gentle sound... lost in the loud, crystalline murmur of the tree-toads," Joseph descends into a spiral of rage, the fecundity of the landscape seemingly inducing the kind of sadomasochistic fury that is one of the hallmarks of queer honor:

> Among the trees he felt far from the University, from Bruce Praileau, from everything; nobody even knew he was there. Suddenly he began to scream. He could not help himself. He was shaken with a terrible rage; trembling, he took a step forward in the darkness and stumbled against a large fallen branch. He picked it up and tried to break it, but it was too tough. In vain he bent it across his knee, using both arms. Then brandishing it like a club he went forward striking at the trunk of a tree which gave out a hollow sound. It was a young sycamore. Joseph struck it again and the leaves shivered slightly; after another, harder blow the young man felt a leaf brush his cheek like a hand. His arms seemed to act of their own accord, as though they did not belong to him, rising and falling in great slanting gestures and he could hear the whistling of the branch through the air.[52]

The unwieldy relationship between honor and mastery vexed Green in *Terre Lointaine* too, where he remembers encountering the word “honor” upon matriculating

[50] Ibid., 30.
[51] Jouhandeau, 161.
[52] Ibid., 30-1.

as a student at the University of Virginia, and pausing to wonder at its intended meaning: “We had to sign a paper and affirm under oath that we had neither given nor received aid of any kind to answer the questions. It was what was called at the University 'the honor system.’ …The idea was that the boys were forming what was called 'a Virginia gentleman. ' All excesses were allowed according to them, but cheating, no.”[53] By contrast, Green recalls the agony of having to ascetically conceal his homosexual urges in an unfamiliar country: “The shame of antiquity, I carried it within me, I carried it within me alone… It was as if, in original sin we do not all suffer enough, so another was added only to me.”[54] The origin behind Green’s term for homosexuality here, "the shame of antiquity," brings to mind the terms in which Jouhandeau frames homophobic insult ("We become familiar with certain words that up to that point had only been heard in classical tragedies") and signals the first of three moments in *Terre Lointaine* that, I will argue, were all essential to the formation of Green’s self-conception of himself both as a homosexual and an artist.

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[53] Green, 35. (“Il nous fallait signer ce papier et affirmer sur l'honneur que nous n'avions ni donne, ni recu d'aide d'aucune sorte pour repondre aux questions. C'etait ce qu'on appelait a l'Universite 'the honor system.’ …Telle etait l'idee que se formaient les garcons de ce qu'on appelait 'a Virginia gentleman.' Tous les exces etaient permis selon eux, mais tricher, non.”)

[54] Green, 54. (“La honte de l’antiquite, je la portais donc en moi, je la portais en moi seul… C’etait comme si, a la faute originelle don’t nous souffron tous s’en ajoutait une autre qui n’atteignait que moi.”)

Green's articulation of same-sex desire as "the shame of antiquity," stems from an epiphany he had after hearing a Classics professor named Mr. Waddell candidly broach the topic of "boy-love" while translating Virgil's *Eclogues* in a Latin course at the University of Virginia.[55] In what no doubt helped inspire Green's rendering of Joseph Day as a student determined to study Classics, the second Eclogue "Alexis" is a lyric about the frustrated same-sex desires of the lover Corydon. A stock name for a pastoral hero in Greek poetry, the name "Corydon" is also notable for providing Green's colleague Andre Gide with the title for his 1924 treatise on the social toleration of homosexuality, which takes the form of a Socratic dialogue.[56] Green uses the Virgilian aesthetics of same-sex desire to describe the physical features of Mr. Waddell himself: "Out of interest, I was attending this course. Out of interest? The truth obliges me to say that the course was optional and Mr. Waddell was pleasing to look at. With his small fine nose, his big mouth and brown mass of hair sweeping his forehead, he looked like the shepherds of Virgil that we read about in the story, and I ended up being more attentive to his face than to the explanations he gave for the text."[57] After

[55] Ibid., 54. See "Appendix" for manuscript material from the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia, which detail Green's years there, in particular the impact that his Classics courses had on his personal and artistic development.
[56] Andre Gide, *Corydon*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1920).
[57] Green, 52. ("Outre les heures de latin avec le docteur Fitzhugh, il se donnait un cours complementaire sous la direction d'un jeune répétiteur nommé Waddell. Par zele,

listening to Mr. Waddell's lecture regarding "boy-love" ("*l'amour des garcons*"), Green vividly remembers, "In one second, I understood a thousand things, but one that was essential. I understood the strange passion that Virgil was talking about also lived inside me. A flash of light illuminated my whole life. I was afraid of this revelation, which showed me the youths of antiquity."[58] This realization, far from encouraging Green to act on his desires, instead initially causes him to recoil even further back into the folds of his Catholicism.

The term "antiquity" continually recurs in entries of *Terre Lointaine* that blend erotic reverie with lacerating self-regard. One in particular captures the tormented quality of Green's adjustment period in Charlottesville:

> This new idea that I formed about physique began upon my arrival at the University… I had to glance around to see the boys most favored in this respect… With their curly hair and straight features, they resembled the heroes of antiquity. Me, no… I refused to take the test. This idea is firmly anchored in my head. I lived in a state of almost perpetual humiliation,

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j'assistais a ce cours. Par zele? La verite m'oblige a dire que le cours etait facultatif et que Mr. Waddell etait agreable a voir. Avec son petit nez fin, sa grande bouche et la masse de cheveux châtains qui lui balayait le front, il ressemblait à ces bergers de Virgile dont nous lisions l'histoire et je finissais par être plus attentif à son visage qu'aux explications qu'il nous donnait du texte.")

[58] Green, 254. ("En une seconde je compris mille choses, sauf une qui etait essentielle. Je compris que la passion estrange dont parlait Virgile habitait aussi en moi. Un trait de lumiere eclaira toute ma vie. J'eus peur de cette revelation.")

> which, although it did not make me humble, produced a timidity that was somehow invincible."[59]

"Refuse the test": Green's "perpetual humiliation" stems from his resolute refusal to act on his desires—a self-abnegating imperative imposed by his Catholicism.[60] Despite Green's isolation and removal from the usual sites and rituals of masculinity and heterosexuality, and although his diary reflects that his Calvinist upbringing and subsequent conversion to Roman Catholicism largely kept him from participating in the revelry of university life, Green wrote prolifically about his internal desires, which surface throughout *Terre Lointaine* in rhapsodic passages that link the male form to the figures of the ancient world.

In the Spring of 1921 at the University of Virginia, Green also crucially encountered the work of Havelock Ellis, the English physician and medical researcher who along with John Addington Symonds published the first comprehensive textbook on homosexuality, *Sexual Inversion*, in 1897.[61] Green remembers receiving the volume

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[59] Green, 263. ("Cette nouvelle idee que je me formais de mon qhysique datait de mon arrive a l'Universite. Je n'avais qu'a jeter les yeux autour de moi pour voir que les garcons plus favorises sous ce rapport ne se comptaient pas. Avec leurs cheveux boucles at leurs traits droits, ils ressemblaient a des heros de l'antiquite. Moi, non… K'etais refuse a l'examen. Cette idee s'ancra solidement dans ma tete. Je vivais dans un etat d'humiliation presue perpetuelle, qui, du reste, ne me rendait pas humble, mais don't il resultait une timidite en quelque sorte invincible.")

[60] Ibid., 263.

[61] Havelock Ellis. *Sexual Inversion*. (London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897) 1.

from his friend Malcolm, at which point, "Sex became suddenly of paramount importance, in all of its ugliness and brutality."[62] It was in reading Ellis's volume, replete with dozens of detailed case studies and speculative pathological conclusions about the nature and causes of homosexuality, that Green first recognized himself in modern scientific discourse, before which point he feared that his "shame" was the relic of a lost time: "those who understood [me] were dead, and the dead had fallen to dust. It was enough to depress me."[63] Encountering Ellis allowed Green to realize that his desires were not atavistic, but in fact shared by many others in the twentieth-century: "I was not a monster sent from another time. This impulse toward male beauty was still, perhaps, pressed into the hearts of many young men. Within minutes, the world changed its appearance to my eyes, and the walls of my prison vanished like mist in the wind. So I was no longer alone."[64] At the same time, his conscious avowal of his own homosexuality, a pathological case of "sexual inversion" in Ellis's medical lexicon, triggered in Green a deep well of despair: "I can say that at twenty, I already knew my

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[62] Green, 224. ("le sexe devenait tout a coup d'une importance capitale, avec toute sa laideur et toute sa brutalite.")
[63] Ibid., 54 ("n'etre compris que des morts, et de morts retombes en poussiere… Il y avait de quoi m'assombrir").
[64] Ibid., 230-31. ("Je n'etais pas le monster venu d'un autre temps. Cet elan vers la beaute masculine faisait batter aujourd'hui, peut-etre, le Coeur de beaucoup de jeunes hommes. En quelques minutes, le monde entire changea d'aspect a mes yeux, et les murs de ma prison s'evanouirent comme de la brume dans du vent. Ainsi donc, je n'etais plus seul.")

cross [to bear]. In my heart, I refused, I wanted something else, something less humiliating. I wanted a cross that would lead to self-love. It doesn't exist."[65]

As outmoded as his sexual taxonomies have inevitably become, Ellis was one of the first clinicians, along with Jon Addington Symonds, to lobby for the toleration of consensual, non-predatory forms of homosexual desire, and they certainly informed the way in which a young Green formulated his own identity. Ellis writes in *Sexual Inversion* that, "If two persons of either or both sexes, having reached years of discretion, privately consent to practice some perverted mode of sexual relationship, the law cannot be called upon to interfere. It should be the function of the law in this matter to prevent violence, to protect the young, and to preserve public order and decency."[66] Ellis distinguishes between three classes of male "homosexualists" in *Sexual Inversion*, divided according to the degree of moral offense they merited according to his view. Ellis's first type, which today would most likely fall under the category of pederasty, refers to those so "radically inverted" that they "sacrifice young and innocent boys."[67] The second type, which most closely resembles the modern, Western notion of homosexuality as an identity category, are those who, having discovered same-sex

[65] Ibid., 256. ("Aujourd'hui jes puis dire qu'a vignt ans, je connaissais deja ma croix. Dans mon for interieur, je la refusais, j'en voulais une autre, moins humiliante. Je voulais une croix qui menageat l'amour-propre. Il n'y en a pas.")
[66] Ellis, 354.
[67] Ibid., 77.

desire in their youth, prefer to act chiefly upon those desires later in life. Finally, he defines the third type as those that experiment with same-sex desire in childhood, only to leave it behind completely—a kind of contingent or situational homosexuality.[68] Although it is hard to know whether Green accepted the scientific claims underwriting these categories without reservation, they clearly influenced his own thinking on the subject, especially the yoking together of homosexuality and pederasty. In *To Leave Before Dawn*, Green recalls an encounter at thirteen years old with a much older man on a train, who confronts him in a sexually charged manner: "How many years later did I understand the meaning of this encounter? Six or eight, no doubt, when I was at the University and read the works of Havelock Ellis for the first time."[69] Ellis was also a large influence on Andre Gide, who took care to emphasize in *Corydon* the psychological distinction between child predation and homosexual acts between consenting adult males. There, Gide mounts a moral defense of the latter category by marshaling a trans-historical array of literary and artistic examples of homoerotic desire, many of which are drawn from the same canon of Western art and literature—Greek and Roman

[68] Ibid., 77.
[69] Julien Green, *To Leave Before Dawn.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1967) 129.

epic poetry (especially Virgil), the plays of William Shakespeare, and the portraits of Jacques-Louis David—that Green wrote about in his diaries.[70]

However, it was one of Ellis's less clinical and more suggestive claims about homosexuality, raised in the introduction to *Sexual Inversion*, that may have impacted Green's imagination the most—namely, the natural correlation between male homosexuality and war. Ellis writes in the introduction to *Sexual Inversion*, "The homosexual tendency appears to have flourished chiefly among warriors and warlike peoples. During war and the separation from women that war involves, the homosexual instinct tends to develop… the instinct has been cultivated and idealized as a military virtue… partly because it seems to have an inspiring influence in promoting heroism."[71] Ironically, this speculative conclusion is one that has held up most strongly over time. Although sociologists have in the last thirty years revealed ever more variability in the recorded occurrences and cultural contexts of same-sex conduct among men, the correlation between male homosexuality and martial cultures is now a generally accepted one among historians and cultural anthropologists.[72] Green's plentifully

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[70] Gide, 1.

[71] Ellis, 9-10.

[72] The first section of the sociological volume *Homosexualities,* edited by Stephen O. Murray and published in 2000 as part of the University of Chicago Press's *Worlds of Desire* series, provides an edifying overview of cultures around the globe and throughout history that have premised permissive attitudes toward homosexuality on the "reproduction of warriors," including Australia and Melanesia, ancient Greece,

scattered and erotically charged references to Southern men resembling, "the heroes of antiquity," in his diaries of course bears repeating here, as does the fact that Joseph Day earns the nickname "The Exterminating Angel" for his vengeful spirit.[73] John M. Dunaway calls Joseph in *The Metamorphoses of the Self*, "first and foremost a creature of violence."[74] His shock of red hair, not unlike Hester Prynne's red letter, threatens to unspool across overdetermined layers of differential meaning, signaling at once Day's anger and violent capability, his blushing virginal shame as an adolescent male, and much more literally, his rural upbringing in the Scots-Irish provinces of the West Virginia hills. Green's aesthetic fascination with military masculinity echoes Faulkner's own, especially in *Absalom, Absalom!* where he lingers on, "the sight of young men, the light quick bones, the bright gallant deluded blood and flesh dressed in a martial glitter of brass and plumes, marching away to a battle."[75]

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medieval Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, Albania, Tibet, Korea, Japan, and more. Murray writes, "In a military culture based on permanent warfare, in which masculinity was highly valued… there was nothing effeminate about either partner. Love between males was idealized" (34). The twentieth-century European historian Henri Marrou has written that, "Love between men is a recurring feature of military societies, in which men tend to be shut in upon themselves."

[73] Green, 263.

[74] John Dunaway, *The Metmorphoses of the Self: The Mystic, the Sensualist, and the Artist in the Works of Julien Green.* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2015) 77.

[75] William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Modern Library, 1964) 151.

In the period of *Moira*'s composition, Green was writing in his journals about nineteenth-century American war fiction, in particular Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* and Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*.[76] On August 22nd, 1949, Green recorded, "Read Melville's *Billy Budd* with great emotion. The ending is unbearable, I would have preferred he hadn't written it. Where did he find the courage to render such a cruel death, so shameful to the angelic being he depicts? I sense a kind of unpleasant cruelty. It's less pity than indignation that he excites."[77] Ironically, whereas Green deemed *Billy Budd* to be unnecessarily cruel, he found *The Red Badge of Course* to be not cruel enough. Though he marvels at Crane's virtuosic ability as a writer to "bring to life the big monster called battle," he accuses him of "flinch[ing]," and having, "cold feet," by turning "the coward of the first two-thirds of the book… into a hero at the end," comparing the unnamed narrator's moral transformation unfavorably to the stock heroic characters in the swashbuckling pulp novels of Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian.[78] Why Green found Melville's judgment so galling

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[76] Stephen Crane, *The Red Bage of Courage.* (New York: Fleet Press Corps, 1969); Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor.* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).
[77] Julien Green, *Journal: Volume V* (Paris: Plon, 1951) 284. English translations my own. ("Lu avec beaucoup d'émotion le *Billy Budd* de Melville. La fin n'en est pas supportable, j'entends par là qu'on voudrait que l'auteur ne l'eût pas écrite. Où a-t-il trouvé le courage de faire subir une mort aussi cruelle et aussi honteuse à l'être angélique qu'il nous dépeint? Je vois là une sorte de cruauté déplaisante. C'est moins la pitié que d'indignation qu'il excite.")
[78] Julien Green, *Diary 1928 – 1957.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1964) 225.

but Crane's mercy so cowardly is perhaps less surprising when one considers the strategies of aesthetic intensification that Melville deploys in depicting Billy as a sublime "angelic being."[79] Whereas Crane's novel inhabits the mind of a deeply scared, imperfect, humanized young soldier, Melville elevates Billy Budd as an exemplar of virtue, beauty, and honor--a paradigmatic casualty of the amorality of the sadistic dictates of war.

Another of Havelock Ellis's claims occupied Green, one that attempted to explain the relationship between religion and sexual love. "There are strange remarks in Havelock Ellis about the connection between religion and sexuality," Green writes on September 27th, 1948.[80] "Did we ever wish for such a thing? …If the religious element in us heightens the sexual one… where is the solution to the problem?"[81] Green sought early on in his life to resolve the "problem" by choosing either the religious or the earthly way of life definitively, and was prepared at the age to eighteen to live a celibate life as a monk on the Isle of Wight.[82] When he instead dedicated himself to the craft of writing, Green assumed and even embraced the sinfulness of the enterprise: "[The writer] is obliged to become each one of his characters and plunge

[79] Green, 284.
[80] Green, 202.
[81] Ibid.,, 202.
[82] Ibid., 202.

with them into their sins…. No novel worthy of the name exists without a complicity between the author and his creatures, and far more than a complicity: a complete identification. I think that is why no one has ever heard of a saint writing a novel."[83] Green's conviction that saints cannot be novelists echoes his friend Francois Mauriac's assertion that participating in the sinfulness of life is necessary to render it with any accuracy, and was thus, "the special realm of the novelist."[84] Green mentions the idea too in his correspondence with Jacques Maritain, who agreed but tried to reassure him by replying, "Couldn't each of us say the same thing about his particular work in the world? One would have to be a saint. But then one would not be a politician, or a judge, or a doctor…"[85]

The "strange remarks" to which Green is responding in 1948 likely derive from Ellis's essay, "The Auto-Erotic Factor in Religion," in which he writes, "Love and religion are the two most volcanic emotions to which the human organism is liable, and it is not surprising that when there is a disturbance in one of these spheres the vibrations should readily extend to the other… Even when there is absolute physical suppression on the sexual side, it seems probable that a greater intensity of spiritual

[83] Ibid., 197.
[84] Francois Mauriac, *God and Mammon*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) 79-80.
[85] Maritain, 24.

fervor is caused."[86] Ellis's claim, that beneath the "superficial antagonism" of religion and sexuality there lies an "underlying relationship," in fact undermines what his biographers consider the fundamental theme of his fiction—the idea that humanity's spiritual and sexual drives are permanently enjoined in conflict, with no apparent solution, which one can only even attempt to escape by committing a violent, revolutionary act.[87] Instead, what Green's diaries reveal is that he resolves his religious crisis by deciding to acknowledge homosexuality in his fiction to an unprecedented degree, and this decision seems to stem in large part from a soul-stirring encounter with the paintings of French Neoclassical master Jacques-Louis David.

In fact, given the intellectual and psychological proximity between the religious and sexual drives for both Green and Ellis, it is perhaps not so surprising that in 1948 Green's crisis in the former realm led him to reevaluate his approach to the latter. Early that summer, already in the throes of psychological and spiritual turbulence, Green wrote candidly in his *Journal*, "These hideously memorable days… The religious crisis I am going through began on June 30th. I wonder how far one can go without losing one's mind."[88] The June 30th entry (curiously omitted by editors in the English

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[86] Green, 202; Havelock Ellis, "The Auto-Erotic Factor in Religion." *Studies in the Psychology of Sex.* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1913) 231.
[87] Ellis, 311.
[88] Green, 200.

translation, given its significance) records Green's afternoon spent at the Musee de l'Orangerie, which was then exhibiting the works of early-nineteenth century painter and French Revolutionary activist Jacques-Louis David. Throughout his life, Green had always been a keen observer of fine art, and after returning to France in the early 1920s, Green briefly considered abandoning writing and becoming a visual artist. Although Green ultimately remained committed to the world of letters, critics have pointed out the ways in which Green's journals reflect his, "exceptional interest in the world of the image," which he exercised frequently by visiting contemporary exhibitions at the galleries and museums that the cultural center of Paris had to offer.[89]

Hardly anything has been written on the impact of the paintings of Jacques-Louis David on the literary style of Julien Green, a fact made all the more surprising given that many consider the June 30, 1948, entry of his *Diary* paramount to an understanding of his religious crisis and literary art. The Summer of 1948 marks the moment that signaled Green's major phase--the moment after which his literary productions reached new levels of philosophical density and aesthetic sophistication. John Dunaway writes that, with the publication of *Moira*, Green entered, "a whole new stage… which signaled the full maturity of [his] talent."[90] French critic Robert de Saint-

[89] O'Dwyer, 18.
[90] Dunaway, 75.

Jean, who regarded *Moira* to be a "nouvelle vague du Sud," considered Green in his own way to be a member of the Southern Renascence, a movement that included Robert Penn Warren, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, and fellow Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor, among others.[91]

During the time Green conceived and wrote *Moira*, France was in the midst of a national rehabilitation effort following the debilitating military occupations of World War II. The swell of patriotic sentiment in French politics and culture helped the works of late eighteenth-century painter Jacques-Louis David's return to artistic favor, which rendered historical scenes from Revolutionary-era France. The revival of interest in David's work led to two major exhibits in the summer of 1948, staged at the Chateau de Versailles and the Musee de l'Orangerie in Paris, scheduled to coincide with the bicentennial anniversary of his birth.[92] Green's *Journal* indicates that he visited and wrote about the Musee de l'Orangerie exhibit at least twice between June and August,

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[91] Robert de Saint-Jean, *Green Par Lui-Meme*. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967) 95. Although she never addressed *Moira* directly, O'Connor reviewed Green's 1957 novel *The Transgressor* in *The Bulletin*, where she praised his uncommon ability and insight in capturing nature of evil: "The novel is written with great deftness and delicacy and with a moral awareness… It presents the kind of situation which emphasizes the mystery of evil in its starkest aspects and it offers no solutions by the author in the name of God, nor does it offer the solutions of faith for those who do not believe. It is completely lacking in false piety and is in every sense a book which has derived from the best type of Catholic imagination." Flannery O'Connor, "The Transgressor: Julien Green, Pantheon 1957." *The Bulletin* (May 1958).

[92] Simon Lee, *David*. (London: Phaidon, 1999) 326.

and the first time he records feeling profoundly unsettled: "David exhibition… Strange to think that this could make it so hard, strange to those who do not know me."[93] He goes on: "Given these large canvases, I thought I felt on me the blows of the devil… For several minutes I was the victim of a horrible sadness and very near despair… Christianity appeared to me suddenly as a chimera."[94] One can consider the resemblance these descriptions of the "blows of the devil" bear to the visceral reaction sustained by Joseph after fighting Praileau in *Moira*: "Joseph struck it again and the leaves shivered slightly; after another, harder blow the young man felt a leaf brush his cheek like a hand. His arms seemed to act of their own accord."[95]

Remembering the second visit, on August 12th, Green mentions David's paintings while quoting the art historian Louis Hautecoeur, then France's Secretary General of Fine Arts, who observed that in David's own era, juries had been willing to overlook the graphic obscenity of his paintings in competitions because they endeavored to reflect the human form as naturally and honestly as possible. Hautecoeur's opinion helped buoy the mid-century reassessment of David, whom

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[93] Green, 176. ("Exposition David... étrange de penser que cela ait pu lui faire tant de mal, étrange pour ceux qui ne le connaissent pas.")
[94] Ibid., 176. ("Devant ces grandes toiles, j'ai cru sentir sur moi le soufflé meme du demon… Pendant plusieurs minutes, cet homme fut la proie d'une tristesse horrible et très voisine du désespoir. Le christianisme m'est apparu tout a coup comme une chimere."
[95] Ibid., 176. *Moira*, 30-1.

twentieth-century art critics were no longer scandalized by and eager to champion as a, "quintessentially French artist with a passion for painting the truth."[96] The boundary-pushing but ultimately defensible moral value that Hauteceour assigned to David's obscene aesthetics appeared to set an pivotal creative precedent for Green, who sought in the major phase of his career as a novelist to render representations of homoerotic desire in a more explicit capacity. Indeed, Green's mission as a fiction writer after 1948 seems to accord perfectly with Hautecoeur's view that, "Objects that can injure decency, standing alongside the forms and contours of nature, can offer a degree of intolerable truth."[97]

The Curator in the Department of Paintings at the Musee de l'Orangerie, Michel Florisoone published a catalogue of the exhibits that same year as part of a "National Museum" series in an edited volume that provides a list of the 144 works assembled that summer for public consideration.[98] According to the catalogue, two striking male nudes received top billing in the curated arrangement of David's works, likely mounted together in the gallery space to emphasize their shared origins in Greek mythology. Number five, "Patroclus or Philoctetes Abandoned at the Isle of Lemnos," renders its

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[96] Lee, 328.
[97] Green, 191. ("les objets qui peuvent blesser la décence, se présentant avec les formes et les contours de la nature, peuvent offrir un degré de vérité intolérable.")
[98] Michel Florisoone, *David: Exposition en l'honneur du deuxieme centenaire de sa naissance.* (Paris: Editions des Musees Nationaux, 1948) 1.

heroic subject, the comrade and (in some interpretations) the lover of Achilles, defiantly turning away from the viewer, offering a dramatic sculptural study of the musculature of the male back. The painting is one of the most well-known depictions of Patroclus, whose death at the hands of Hector famously stirred Achilles's passion to re-enlist in the Trojan War. By Patroclus's side are bows and arrows, a reference to the painting's alternate title, "Philoctetes," an archer left behind by the Achaeans after suffering a snakebite that left him with a "filthy wound."[99] Next to "Patroclus" was "Hector"—a dramatic male nude of "the corpse of Hector flipped onto its back," against "dark rocks."[100] The painting expresses the wrath of Achilles who, having been inflamed into action by the death of Patroclus, not only kills Hector in battle but rejects his dying plea for an honorable funeral. To an even greater degree than "Patroclus," David's "Hector" tests the boundaries of what Victorian taste would have deemed acceptable for public display—exhibiting a nude, languorous male body, its groin barely sheathed by silk, reclining in an exposed position that is at once grieving and exultant.

[99] Philoctetes is also notable for providing the subject of a play by one of Green's contemporaries, Andre Gide, whose *Philoctete* (1898) was received as a critique of the Dreyfus Affair.

[100] Florisoone, 39.

Figure 2.1.: Jacques-Louis David, *Patroclus* (1780)

Figure 2.2.: Jacques-Louis David, *Hector* (1778)

Whether it was these two images in particular that prompted Green to feel the "blows of the devil" that day while taking in David's works might never be definitively known, given the final ambiguity of the June 30th entry.[101] However, one can easily imagine how striking they must have been to Green, who first formulated his own sexual identity as a legacy of the ancient world ("the shame of antiquity"), and who constantly described the act of witnessing male beauty as akin to encountering Greek heroes.[102] Green's second journal entry on David suggests too that Hautecouer's approval of David gave Green's confidence in his ability to render certain elements, namely homosexuality, in his fiction. What's more, the authoritarian understanding of homosexuality that Green gleaned from Ellis, which linked male same-sex desire to war, could have further tinged Green's appreciation of the story of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector. These two encounters, on June 30th and August 12th, mark Green's spiritual shift away from soul-debilitating fear and dread and toward a cautious but firm admiration of art's ability to exorcise and express "intolerable truth," a transition that was necessary for the author to bring himself to initiate the task of creatively rendering his own experience with unprecedented candor: "I would like to tell my truth one day, one hour, or only for a few minutes… The only means I can see of managing this is to

[101] Green, 176.
[102] Green, 54.

write a novel."[103] In the November of the following year, deep in the midst of writing *Moira*, the author would phrase such feelings in an even more condensed and profound way: "My books are the books of a prisoner who dreams of freedom."[104]

Finally, on August 23rd, 1948, Green wrote, "I woke this morning at dawn and saw my book from beginning to end. Facing me, in the darkness, stood that motionless character."[105] That "motionless character" can only be *Moira*'s protagonist, Joseph Day, or his Gothic double, Bruce Praileau. Green's entry blends properties of "morning" and "darkness" in surreal fashion, lending the impression of a lucid dream, all while relying on the empirical primacy of the verb "saw." The sudden apparition of Joseph Day/Bruce Praileau in Green's imagination signals the way Praileau magically appears alongside Joseph in the final scene of the novel, suddenly emerging behind him in a snow-covered wood, "whistl[ing] softly."[106] Green erotically describes Praileau as, "wearing black gloves and a thick sweater of white wool," "hair... blown by the wind," "head erect," "ears as red as cherries."[107] Praileau, whose bright red ears mirror Joseph's bright red hair, leads him through the forest in a pattern with the kind of haughty assurance that recalls Charles Bon leading Henry Sutpen away from Sutpen's

[103] Green, 125.
[104] Ibid., 221.
[105] Green, 201.
[106] Green, 224.
[107] Ibid., 225.

Hundred through the wilderness: "He seemed to know his ground, mounting obliquely and without faltering, but Joseph followed him with difficulty, stumbling, as his overcoat got in his way."[108]

By this point, Joseph has already strangled a woman named Moira in a fit of rage, whom the other students goaded into pursuing Joseph in order to humiliate him. Praileau appears to warn Joseph not to go back to his room, lest the authorities are waiting there to haul him off to jail. Although he only appears in a handful of scenes, Green writes in his *Journal* that he considered, "the history of Joseph and Praileau" to be, "the book's real subject."[109] Praileau offers to help Joseph for reasons that Joseph, nor the reader, nor even the book's critics, can possibly hope to understand. Anthony Newbury writes that, "the attraction between Joseph and the enigmatic figure of Praileau is never really elaborated."[110] Joseph, "gaz[es] at Praileau's hands in the black gloves... [which] made them look like an executioner's hands."[111] In keeping with the homophobic-homoerotic themes of queer honor, Joseph and Praileau can only consummate their desire through violence; even Praileau's final act of salvation is framed in terms of execution. Joseph ultimately decides to accept Praileau's help

[108] Ibid., 225.
[109] Newbury, 57.
[110] Ibid., 56.
[111] Green, 228-9.

without understanding his motivations, and finally allows himself -- without knowing why -- to touch his flesh in a gesture of peace:

> With a simultaneous gesture they took off their gloves and their hands met.
>
> "Do you remember the evening we fought?" Joseph asked.
>
> "Yes of course."
>
> "You said that one day I should know why you didn't want to speak to me."
>
> Praileau lowered his eyes.
>
> "It's too late now. Our paths will not cross again."
>
> "I should like to know."
>
> "I could never tell you."
>
> Without abruptness he took away his hand and looked at Joseph for a long time.
>
> "Good luck," he said in a muffled vice.
>
> Joseph watched him put on his gloves and go away under the trees. After a minute Praileau had disappeared.[112]

[112] Ibid., 229.

CHAPTER III

"WE DIDN'T":
DAMMED MASCULINITY AND BODY FASCISM IN JAMES DICKEY'S *DELIVERANCE*

James Dickey's 1970 novel, *Deliverance*, differs in several key ways from the other novels considered here.[1] To an even greater extent than *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Moira,* works that chronicle in their own ways the social, political, and sexual descent of men, particularly that of traditionalist middle- to upper-class white men, *Deliverance* exploits sadomasochistic fantasies and fears about the idealization and abjection of the white male body, in an ostensible effort to probe the very gesture of "deliverance," after which the book takes its title.[2] Whereas *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Moira* unfold in suburban Southern settings perched between primitive wilderness and urban modernity (the former in a fictionalized version of Oxford, Mississippi, and the latter in Charlottesville, Virginia), *Deliverance* follows its protagonists from the conventional trappings of suburbia deep into an uncharted and unhospitable domain in rural Georgia that quickly leaves them lost and hunted. And whereas *Absalom, Absalom* and *Moira* both weave developed female characters and heterosexual romance subplots into their greater narrative structures, *Deliverance* remains an almost exclusively male

[1] James Dickey, *Deliverance.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).
[2] William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Modern Library, 1993); Julien Green, *Moira.* (London: Quartet Books, 1988).

homosocial narrative after the first chapter, when the action moves from the outskirts of Atlanta, Georgia, to a wild river called the Cahulawassee that leads (at least the men hope) to a fictitious town called Aintry. In tracing the austere trajectory of its Gothic, at times plainly horrific, plot, *Deliverance*'s poetic first-person narration offers perhaps the most unalloyed distillation of the kind of literary, social, and ideological content this project seeks to mine: male homosocial behavior and fantasy, masculinity *in extremis,* honor as both an atavistic code and contemporary idea, "bad" male desire and politics, and the queer erotic logic that has historically threaded these elements together in the mid twentieth-century Southern novel.[3]

Leslie Fiedler once remarked that *Deliverance* is, "a book which has killed people."[4] Shorn of context, Fiedler's words seem alarmist, implying that Dickey's book has been somehow able to wield a type of supernatural agency. They might plausibly suggest that the book has become a lodestone in the libraries of various murderers and sociopaths, like Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* was for Ted Kaczynski, or J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* was for Mark David Chapman.[5] Or perhaps they

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[3] Richard Rambuss, "After Male Sex." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:3 (Summer 2007) 578.

[4] Harold Schechter, "A Psychological Reading of James Dickey's *Deliverance*." *Struggling for Wings: The Art of James Dickey* (Columbus: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) 178.

[5] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye.* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1951).

suggest—even more ominously—that its very publication unleashed a curse on the public, and it is this last interpretation that in fact rings nearest to the truth. What Fiedler was invoking was a spate of deaths that resulted from tourists attempting to canoe down the Chattooga River in Rabun County, Georgia, the shooting location of British director John Boorman's 1972 film adaptation of Dickey's novel, in an effort to recreate the treacherous whitewater journey of the story's protagonists down the fictitious Cahulawassee River.[6] According to U.S. Forest Service statistics, no fewer than seventeen people died on the Chattooga River alone between 1972 and 1975, in what gradually became known in the wider public consciousness as "Deliverance Syndrome": "Everybody saw the movie and wanted to go do what Lewis did," Buzz Wiliams, the executive director the Chattooga Conservancy, recalled in an oral history of the film's production.[7] "They came up here ill-prepared and got on a very dangerous river in a very remote place, and they got killed in droves; they didn't have on life jackets or had no skill whatsoever. Some died of hypothermia."[8] The steep uptick in canoeing deaths even prompted Georgia lawmakers to tighten safety laws around the

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[6] *Deliverance.* Dir. John Boorman. Perfs. Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty, Ronny Cox. (Warner Bros., 1972). In fact, Dickey's Cahulawassee River was originally based not on the Chattooga River, but rather the Coosawattee River, which was dammed in the 1970s.

[7] Charles Bethea, "Mountain Men: An Oral History of *Deliverance*." *Atlanta Magazine* (Sep 2011) https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/deliverance/.

[8] Bethea, oral history.

use of helmets and life-jackets, and led Dickey to release a public statement urging would-be adventurers and thrill-seekers not to try to duplicate the film's numerous death-defying scenes of whitewater rafting.[9]

That Dickey's announcement was necessary is doubly ironic, not only because the plot of the book and film render man's encounter with nature as a harrowing confrontation rather than a regenerative excursion, but also because the film's on-location production on the Chattooga River was by many accounts a foolhardy endeavor, undertaken by a reckless cast and crew led primarily by Boorman and occasionally Dickey himself. Dickey's ferocious on-set clashes with Boorman, which are well documented, did not keep the two from privately agreeing about the undue riskiness of the production. In a letter to his editor during the summer of 1971, Dickey confessed, "Jon [Voight] did as much of the actual climbing as he was able… but Boorman was as frightened for his life as I was. I am deathly afraid that someone will get hurt on this film, because there is no doubt that it is the most dangerous one ever made."[10] Boorman himself recalled, "When I was looking for locations up there… I ran

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[9] Schechter, 178.

[10] James Dickey, *The One Voice of James Dickey: His Letters and His Life, 1970 - 1977.* Edited by Gordon Van Ness. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005) 137. In Boorman's film, Jon Voight plays Ed Gentry, the narrator of Dickey's novel, and had the previous year taken the controversial role of the gay hustler Joe Buck in John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969).

into the odd guy aiming a shotgun at me," and co-star Burt Reynolds admitted, "We didn't take any precautions. It was crazy. Absolutely crazy. But we did it and I'm glad we did it. Would I do it again? Not for three million dollars."[11]

The hypocrisy of Dickey's disclaimer—which meant to discourage tourists and outdoorspeople from performing the same feats that he, Boorman, Voight, Reynolds, and others went through great trouble not only to perform, but capture on celluloid and market to millions—effectively parallels the ideological hypocrisy with which many critics have charged the novel: that it essentially reproduces and sensationalizes the masculinist worldview it purports to critique. Frederic Jameson wrote in an early review of the novel, "What is the matter with Dickey's treatment of these social terrors is that he is himself possessed by them; he is as unaware, as profoundly unconscious, of their shaping presence as are his readers. His story is thus not an instrument of ideological demystification, but rather an outright political and social wish-fulfillment and as such it reinforces the very tendencies which it is the function of genuine art to expose."[12] For Jameson and for many others, *Deliverance* is a Southern novel that, despite its sheer

[11] Bethea, oral history. It is possible, of course, that Reynolds, Voight, Dickey, Boorman, and others chose at points to exaggerate the riskiness of the production in order to drum up publicity in advance of the film's release—but even then, the "strange compelling effect on readers," that the book has had, and which Schecter and Fiedler both invoke, would prove no less compelling.

[12] Frederic Jameson, "The Great American Hunter, or, Ideological Content in the Novel." *College English.* Vol. 34, No. 2 (Nov 1972) 186.

level of literary craft, never escapes its ideological entrenchment within a masculinist worldview—and perhaps the same can be said to varying degrees of many classic works of twentieth-century American literature. If anything, critics have tended to treat Boorman's film, and its transgressive, even exploitative emphasis on the negative, traumatic experience of male "ritual humiliation" as an ideological corrective to the more conservative, masculinist content of Dickey's source text.[13]

That *Deliverance* remains compelling to many simply as a "macho fantasy" is nearly impossible to deny, given the centrality of individual and group male behavior in its plot, the number of "weekend warriors" it brought to the Chattooga River, and the cast of on- and off-screen personae to which the novel and its subsequent Hollywood adaptation gave rise in popular culture.[14] In particular, *Deliverance* helped re-popularize the avatar of Southern masculinity in the national imagination by transforming Burt Reynolds into one of the premier marquee idols of the 1970s—the gun-toting star of action franchises like *Smokey and the Bandit,* as well as a charismatic fixture on the couches of late night shows like *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny*

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[13] Anna Creadick, "Banjoy Boy: Masculinity, Disability, and Difference in *Deliverance*." *Southern Cultures,* Vol. 23 No. 1 (Spring 2017) 72.
[14] Don Kunz, "Learning the Hard Way in James Dickey's *Deliverance*." *Western American Literature*, Vol. 12 No. 4 (Winter 1978) 298; John Clum, *He's All Man: Learning Masculinity, Gayness, and Love from American Movies* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 82.

Carson.[15] Both on- and off-screen, Reynolds in his heyday embodied a modern, trendy iteration of the kind of "hyped-up, gum popping" persona that Marlon Brando had helped introduce (and which subsequently became a model for a certain kind of queer male sensibility) on film twenty-five years prior, when he starred opposite Vivienne Leigh in Elia Kazan's Hollywood adaptation of Tennessee Williams's 1947 play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.[16] In an essay for Yale's *Post45* series, Christian B. Long called Burton Reynolds's fame nothing less than "Hollywood's southern strategy."[17]

In his psychological reading of Dickey's novel and film, Harold Schecter marvels at the sheer excess of performative masculinity that *Deliverance* occasioned both on- and off-screen: "Not even Norman Mailer," he writes, "has played opposite Burt Reynolds in a movie (as Dickey did in the film version of his best-selling book, *Deliverance*) or squired Cher Bono Allman to a presidential ball."[18] Pat Conroy, a writer and former student of Dickey, remembers in a similar vein, "James Dickey was the kind

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[15] *Smokey and the Bandit.* Dir. Hal Needham. Perfs. Burt Reynolds, Sally Field, Jackie Gleason, Jerry Reed. (Universal Pictures, 1977). *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson.* NBC, 1962-1992.
[16] Creadick, 70.
[17] Christian B. Long, "Burt Reynolds, Hollywood's Southern Strategy." *Post45* (June 24, 2013) http://post45.research.yale.edu/2013/06/burt-reynolds -hollywoods-southern-strategy/
[18] Schecter, 176.

of man who made Ernest Hemingway look like a florist from the Midwest."[19] Schecter goes on to explain that, "The qualities… in Hemingway's work are the very ones which unsympathetic reviewers denounced in *Deliverance:* the obsessive machismo, the preoccupation with proving one's manhood… by pitting oneself against nature and other men in situations of great stress, danger, and violence."[20] Reviewing this ideological critique in her 1994 essay for *Sight & Sound,* "Blood Brothers," Linda Ruth Williams begins by summarizing what the novel's detractors had by then effectively turned into a conventional interpretation: that Dickey's story is a staid, "masculinity-in-crisis," narrative in which, "these four men, more or less emasculated by city life, have to recover their lost (but not dead) 'Iron John' manhood."[21]

Applying the notion of queer honor to *Deliverance,* I want to argue, helps bring together and clarify three lines of critical discourse swirling around the novel that have for some time been arbitrarily partitioned. The first holds that the text—given its romantic representation of the natural landscape, fixation on male homosocial domains, and emphasis on action over character—is a tepid rehearsal of the nineteenth-century tradition of the American romance. Schecter reads the novel as

[19] John Meroney, "Delivering *Deliverance*." *Garden & Gun.* (August / September 2015) https://gardenandgun.com/feature/delivering-deliverance/
[20] Schechter, 177.
[21] Linda Ruth Williams, "Blood Brothers." *Sight and Sound.* Vol. 4, No 9 (Sep 1994) 17.

exemplifying Richard Chase's definition of literary romance: "less committed to the immediate rendition of reality," and inclined to, "veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolic forms."[22] Fiedler adds that the hallmark of any romantic or mythopoetic novel is always to address, "the exaggerated and the grotesque, not as they are verifiable in any external landscape or sociological observation of manners and men but as they correspond in quality to our deepest fears and guilts as projected in our dreams or lived through in 'extreme situations.'"[23]

Considering the context of a body of national literature already rife with river- and sea-faring romantic fiction about the claiming and reclaiming of manhood, Linda Wagner singles *Deliverance* out for its homogeneous bleakness, regarding it as, "a kind of gothic, even bitter *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," a text to which the novel is often compared.[24] Jameson's review, too, reflects this critical understanding by labeling Dickey's work as merely the latest, "the wilderness novel," or, "tale of the great American hunter," a genre that has helped define the tradition of the American novel

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[22] Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957) 13.

[23] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*. (Urbana-Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997) 155. The similarity between Fiedler's conception of "extreme situations," is also worth noting alongside Rambuss's call for new scholarly methods to study representations of masculinity *in extremis.*

[24] Linda Wagner, "*Deliverance:* Initiation and Possibility." *South Carolina Review* 10 (April 1978) 53. Second to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Moby-Dick* is perhaps the text that the book's critics have raised as a point of comparison most often.

ever since James Fenimore Cooper imagined Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook in *The Leatherstocking Tales.*[25] Rather than update or modify this venerable genre, however, Jameson views the novel as simply reproducing its ideological assumptions in order to advance, "a fashionable right-wing preoccupation… that of the necessity of violence, both on the individual and the social level."[26] Jameson summarizes the conservative logic of the text by saying that, "if violence is a necessary component of existence… then modern civilization has robbed us of the supreme experience we can have as men."[27]

A different but no less common interpretation of the novel holds that *Deliverance* is a text primarily responding to late-1960s anxieties about the growing vulnerability of middle-class white masculinity as a sociopolitical bloc during the radical shifts in racial and gender power relations ushered in the Civil Rights movement and second-wave feminism. In *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis,* Sally Robinson argues that *Deliverance* frames this anxiety in terms of the metaphor of the

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[25] Jameson, 180-1. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Deersalayer, or The First War-Path: A Tale.* (New York: Worthington Co., 1890); James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1900); James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pathfinder.* (New York: J. S. Ogilvie, 1895); James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958); James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1896).
[26] Jameson, 181.
[27] Ibid., 181.

Cahulawassee River's, "damming," and, "release,": "The central metaphor of both novel and film… invites us to see its protagonists, too, as characterized by the tension between flow and blockage."[28] Robinson cites Gail Bederman's theory of the, "neurasthenic paradox,"—the paranoid belief that civilized society might degrade masculinity rather than cultivate it—to support her argument that the Cahulawassee's pattern of natural flow and artificial blockage reflects Dickey's literary, "attempt to recover a biologistic essence of maleness that has been tamped down, or blocked, by civil society."[29] In this view, Dickey's novel and particularly its scenes of male humiliation are not principally about anxieties surrounding threatened male sexuality, but rather anxieties surrounding threatened male power. In a similarly driven analysis, Anna Creadick writes that, "As feminists have long argued, it is critical to distinguish the violence of rape from the erotics of sex… [Bobby's] violation is not about desire, nor… is it really about homosexuality. It is about power, terror, and control."[30]

Finally, the novel has invited many critics to suggest that Dickey *does* in fact articulate a set of fears and anxieties surrounding male sexuality, and that such

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[28] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 166.
[29] Robinson, 167. Gail Bederman, *Manliness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 - 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 88.
[30] Creadick, 72.

anxieties inform not only the novel's most infamous passage, that of Bobby's rape, but also scenes where Ed Gentry describes the athletic body of his friend Lewis Medlock, the consummate outdoorsman and *de facto* leader of the group. In "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in Ed Gentry," Betina Entzminger reads Dickey's text along the same lines that Fiedler famously read *The Adventures of Huckleberrry Finn* in his 1948 essay, arguing that, "the rape is the violent eruption of homosexual desire that, despite the protagonists' refusal to acknowledge it, underlies the trip from the beginning."[31] Queer critics vary widely on whether the novel ultimately endorses the possibility of what Michael Bibler would call "egalitarian" representations of homosexuality, or whether its graphic depiction of male-male sexual violence is an expression of homophobic discourse that essentially models all homosexual desire as being tantamount to violence and rape.[32] In *He's All Man: Learning Masculinity, Gayness, and Love from American Movies,* for instance, John Clum calls the novel, "anything but gay-friendly,"— a drama designed to reveal, "not… the potential bliss of penetration but the terror of penetration… filled with phallic imagery that, rather than celebrating masculinity, denotes profound anxiety."[33] Don Kunz reads the horrific events of the

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[31] Betina Entzminger, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Ed Gentry." *The Southern Literary Journal.* Vol. 40, No. 1 (Fall 2007) 99.
[32] Michael Bibler, *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation.* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009) 4.
[33] Clum, 83.

novel as a Gothic reversal in which men set out to reify their own masculinity and instead, "discover not so much how to be men as how it feels to be women abused by the kind of men they have dreamed of being."[34] For Linda Ruth Williams, the film does not represent an inversion or regression of the intellectual project of masculinity, so much as a, "mutation, intensified by the incestuous pressure-cooker of the world of the film," where, "an overwhelming sense of related-ness run[s] wild."[35] Jennifer Schell's more reparative reading treats Ed's gaze at Lewis's body as a proto-typical example of what in twenty-first-century parlance is now called a, "man crush"—a one-sided relation between (presumably) heterosexual men characterized by, "intense, homosocial, *nonsexual* admiration," in which the admirer, in this case Ed, is coded as feminine.[36]

While I support queer and feminist critics who claim that it would take a considerable stretch of the imagination to label *Deliverance* as a "gay" or "gay-affirmative" novel, I want to suggest here that its critique of normative masculinity, or what Sedgwick would call the "indicatively male"—and specifically the way that

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[34] Don Kunz, "Learning the Hard Way in James Dickey's *Deliverance*." *Western American Literature* 12 (February 1978) 300.
[35] Williams, 18.
[36] Jennifer Schell, "Ed Gentry's Man Crush." *The Way We Read James Dickey: Critical Approaches for the Twenty-First Century*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009) 213.

critique mobilizes male fantasies and fears about the athletic male body in various states of honor and dishonor—is certainly more complex than has been previously acknowledged.[37] In particular I want to resist the pat conclusions of critics like Clum and Jameson, for whom the plot of *Deliverance* is merely about the anxiety-ridden bonding of straight white men, and its notorious scene of male-male rape a prurient spectacle about, "a straight man's nightmare of sexual violation."[38] Instead, I want to argue that Dickey forges a more consciously transgressive narrative that targets the male cult of physical fitness, which in an intensified form resembles what Brian Pronger has called "body fascism," producing a system of queer signification built primarily around the athletic body of Lewis Medlock, as represented through the erotically charged expressions of the novel's first-person narrator, Ed Gentry.[39] In pursuing this line, I want to echo Schell's point by claiming that the male homoerotic but nonsexual relation of the "man crush" between Ed and Lewis emerges as a trope of taboo male desire that can be viewed as part of the figurative repertoire of queer honor as a genre, along with W. J. Cash's notion of the "favorite enemy," and Julien Green's queer form of spiritual ascesis.

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[37] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 1.
[38] Clum, 81.
[39] Brian Pronger, *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

So what, then, is the role of male honor in *Deliverance,* and what can *Deliverance* tell us about how honor becomes queer? The word appears exactly once in the novel, in a passage that finds the protagonist Ed Gentry immersed in precisely the kind of transcendent Emersonian scene that the book's critics have continually stressed. Feeling, "as invisible as a tree," Ed wanders through the untrammeled Georgia wilderness, self-consciously contemplating his ability to fulfill the role of the self-reliant, "hunter":

> At first I didn't have any idea of really hunting. I had no firm notion of what I was doing, except walking forward carefully, away from the river and into more and more silence and blindness…All I had really wanted was to stay away a reasonable length of time, long enough for the others to wake and find me gone—I thought of just sitting down on the bank of the ravine and waiting for half an hour by my watch—and then walk back into camp with my bow strung and say I'd been out taking a look around. That would satisfy honor.[40]

Dickey's deployment of the word, "honor," here, especially as something men feel compelled to, "satisfy" in the eyes of other men through gestures of violence, echoes Wyatt-Brown's definition of honor as a fantasy of self as determined by local opinion, "ratified by community consensus," which in this case would be the approval of the

[40] Dickey, 103.

male companions with whom Ed has set up camp— Lewis, Drew, and Bobby.[41] Ed's initial contentment to substitute the passive appearance of honor ("waiting for half an hour") for the active substance seems to anticipate the way critics have conventionally read the novel—as a revanchist, American male fantasy where a retreat into the wilderness eventually activates core expressions of masculinity and possibilities for regenerative violence typically inaccessible to white middle-class men living in the modernized, anodyne milieu of the suburban South.[42] It also raises an ironic theme that also animated Faulkner's treatment of honor in *Absalom, Absalom!,* specifically through the figure of Thomas Sutpen, which suggested that honor, and merely the semblance of honor, can in fact be virtually indistinguishable from one another.

To complicate this account, however, one might instead begin to approach the novel's transgressive representation the cult of male athletics, and the relation it bears to notions of male honor, with the first of the novel's two prefatory epigraphs, which cites Georges Bataille's *L'experience L'interieure*.[43] Viewed alongside the second extract, culled from the Old Testament's Book of Obadiah, the epigraph circumscribes a set of themes—survival, pride, sacrifice, insufficiency—that act as a philosophical

[41] Ibid., 103. Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) xv.
[42] Dickey, 103.
[43] George Bataille, *L'experience L'interieure.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

portal that helps situate the reader into a first-person narrative whose voice is driven equally throughout by both physical and metaphysical concerns.[44] The epigraph reads, "Il existe à la base de la vie humaine, un principe d'insuffisance,"; in English: "There exists at the base of the human life a principle of insufficiency."[45] One of the foremost twentieth-century theoreticians of the underlying relationship between eroticism and violence, Bataille presents a natural point of origin from which the novel's content may flow, and a key figure in the genre of queer honor. Dickey in fact names the novel after the term Bataille uses to describe the transformation he experienced after undergoing treatment with the French psychoanalyst Adrien Borel. In Stuart Kendall's biography of Bataille, he remarks that, "According to Bataille, [Borel's] analysis was not very orthodox, lasting only a year, but it was effective, transforming him from someone who was 'unhealthy,' into someone who was 'relatively viable.' He spoke of it in terms of a 'deliverance.'"[46]

In *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness,* Brian Pronger turns to Bataille's fascination with limits to describe those of the fascist body as a system:

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[44] Taken from Verse 3 of the Book of Obadiah, the second epigraph reads: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwelleth in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?"
[45] Bataille, 128.
[46] Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille.* (London: Reaktion, 2007) 49.

> Bataille is interested in what systems leave out, what they expel, their 'excretions.' …By apprehending that which body fascism leaves out, we can approach the body's alteritous possibilities… Bataille is also very interested in the body's holes, its gapiness… The body's orifices point to the fact that the body does not live with tidy distinctions of interior and exterior, distinctions that are critical for the modern, self-contained – i.e., sovereign – subject. The muscular, taught, technologically constructed body signifies sovereignty, impermeability, the enclosed body from which nothing escapes the panoptics of fitness.[47]

Pronger defines the idea of the impermeable, enclosed fascist body as a reification of, "the ways in which a modern technological approach to the body articulates a will to domination that is ultimately fascist," "geared to the aggressive management, exploitation, accumulation, and consumption of individual biological resources rather than a contemplative acceptance of the essential movement of being."[48] For Pronger, "Grasping for permanence, rather than moving with the flow of life, the technology of physical fitness is ultimately a nihilistic way of passing through life."[49]

Already one can observe the way Pronger stages the notion of "body fascism," in the same gestural terms of "flow" and "blockage" that critics like Sally Robinson have applied to Dickey's text, and specifically its deployment of the Cahulawassee River as a metaphorical vehicle. But Pronger critically reverses the moral implications of

[47] Pronger, 234-5.
[48] Ibid., 23-4.
[49] Ibid., 24.

Robinson's formulation by arguing that the embrace of, "the flow of life," is not merely a masculinist attempt to re-assert the, "biologistic essence of maleness," but rather a humanistic attempt to embrace the fluidity and impermanence of life itself. It is in fact *blockage,* not flow, that for Pronger signals the kind of regimens of nihilistic, "body fascism," that have tended to organize indicatively male homosocial domains and institutions—a sustained attempt to render the male body hard, hermetically sealed, and impermeable.[50] In Dickey's text, as in Pronger's, that blockage takes the form of technological and scientific interventions encouraged if not imposed by the state apparatus—in this case, a fictitious Georgia county's strategically planned damming of the Cahulawassee River.

Pronger's definition of the fascist body as a cultural fantasy of dammed-up, dominating, impervious male corporeality, cultivated by and contingent upon technological regimes of physical fitness, helps clarify the rhetorical energy driving the opening scene of the novel, where Ed, Lewis, Bobby, and Drew contemplate a map outlining the geography of the region. "It unrolled slowly," Dickey begins, "forced to show its colors, curling and snapping back whenever one of us turned loose."[51] Dickey renders the unfurling movement of a large paper map in warlike terms—a bellicose

[50] Pronger, 24.
[51] Dickey, 13.

progression between reluctant flow ("forced to show") and defensive blockage ("curling and snapping back").[52] The cyclical pattern of, "snapping back," and "turn[ing] loose," not only mirrors the figurative notions of damming and release that hang over the entire plot of the novel, but frames them as cyclical and mutually constitutive gestures within the context of intimate male sociality, framed here in terms of domination: "Lewis' hand took a pencil... I watched the hand rather than the location, for it seemed to have power over the terrain."[53] For Dickey, even a gesture as ordinary and innocuous as unfolding a map becomes a schematic arena in which relations of power, in particular those between male bodies, are produced and settled. Williams underlines this point in her analysis of Boorman's film when she writes that, "It is not just that a sexual crisis happens within a natural landscape, but that what is happening within and to that landscape is itself sexual."[54]

This opening scene also exemplifies the novel's broader aesthetic investments in the surfaces of the heterosexual white male body— an attachment that has been shown to define each work under consideration here, and which can be said to be the one of the quintessential features of queer honor as a genre. In *Deliverance,* queer desire ironically flourishes from an overinvestment in the normative male ideology of

[52] Ibid, 13.
[53] Ibid, 13.
[54] Williams, 9.

fitness and athletics, which in "Sport and Masculinity: Estrangement of Gay Men," Pronger defines as, "an expression of orthodox masculinity through violence, struggle, and aesthetics."[55] Expounding on this idea in *The Arena of Masculinity,* Pronger writes,

> Homosexuality and athletics express contradictory attitudes to masculinity, violation and compliance respectively. Their coexistence in one person is a paradox, the stuff of irony… To many high school coaches, the surprise discovery of two male athletes in flagrante delicto would have almost earth-shattering significance. To some, it would mean that the team has two faggots, pansies, boys who are less than real men. Having engaged in homosexual activity, the two young athletes have betrayed the pure aspirations of athletics: mens sana in corpore sano… These boys have the potential to destroy the moral fabric of the team and perhaps the entire school. Even, more importantly, their characteristically unmasculine behavior could undermine the macho competitive edge that many coaches work so hard to develop among their athletes.[56]

Pronger stresses that within the cultural context of athletics, same-sex desire between men has historically been viewed as a "betrayal" and a grave threat to the integrity of the male homosocial group, and one need only consider the chronic homophobic prohibitions of enshrined institutions like the U.S. Armed Forces and the National Football League to understand the cultural pervasiveness of this view. According to the foundational ideology of orthodox masculinity on which athletics relies, the figure

[55] Brian Pronger, "Sport and Masculinity: Estrangement of Gay Men." *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology.* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012) 359.
[56] Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) 3-6.

of the gay athlete is ironic at best and paradoxical at worst, leading Pronger to conclude that sport is nothing more than, "an arena for the paradox of homoerotic experience."[57]

Deliverance, too, becomes an arena for this homophobic-homoerotic paradox, which in both its literary and cinematic iterations stages the kinds of homophobic-homoerotic relations of desire that tend to characterize the phenomenon of queer honor regardless of its context. An initial review of the book in *The New York Times* called the book, "a weekend athlete's nightmare," and Lewis Medlock is the novel's athlete *par excellence,* a character whose fit body and sound mind ("mens sana in corpore sano") seem to inherently extol the virtues of fitness, underwrite his leadership role over the rest of the group's men, and even dictate his preternatural, "power over the terrain."[58] Reynolds's personification of Lewis on screen helped contribute to the film's box office success, turning the actor into a national sex symbol virtually overnight, and generating a long-lasting level of tabloid public fascination with his body and sex life that eventually led him to famously pose nude for a *Cosmopolitan*

[57] Pronger, 10.
[58] Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Men in Groups." *The New York Times.* (27 March, 1970); Pronger, 3; Dickey, 13.

centerfold in 1972.[59] Creadick recalls the way the film in particular, "lingers upon the manliness of Reynolds," "peel[ing] off his jacket to reveal a tight rubber vest and bulging biceps."[60] Imagined as such, Lewis adheres not only physically to the aesthetics of "body fascism," that Pronger describes—a taut vessel, muscles held firmly in place by skin-tight rubber—but also metaphysically, a product of the modern, technological approaches to the maintenance of the male body. Dickey writes,

> He liked particularly to take some extremely specialized and difficult form of sport—usually one he could do by himself—and evolve a personal approach to it which he could then expound. I had been through this with him in flycasting, in archery and weight lifting and spelunking, in all of which he had developed complete mystiques. Now it was canoeing. I settled back and came out of the map.[61]

By intensifying and personalizing the orthodox ideology of athletics into what Ed describes as a "mystique," Lewis becomes not only a spectacularized object of Ed's homoerotic desire, but also an aspirational figure of idealized white masculinity.[62] Schell writes that, "What is important to recognize about Ed is that he does not just idolize Lewis; he actually wants to *be* Lewis," and perhaps the same can be said of any

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[59] Seemingly against all odds for a film with such transgressive content, *Deliverance* was the fifth-highest grossing film of 1972. *Cosmopolitan Magazine.* "Burt Reynolds Nude on a Bear Skin Rug." (April 1972).
[60] Creadick, 70.
[61] Dickey, 14-5.
[62] Ibid., 15.

model of male-male desire that meets the criteria of what she calls a, "man crush."[63] At the center of this homophobic-homoerotic ideology is a steadfast commitment in the salvific, almost Christ-like capabilities of the fascist white male body: "Clothes were not a mystique with [Lewis], but his body was. 'It's what you can make it do,' he would say, 'and what it'll do for you when you don't even know what's needed. It's that conditioning and reconditioning that's going to save you."[64]

Dickey suggests in the novel's opening chapter that Ed's closeted fascination with the potency of Lewis's body stems in part from the debilitating corporeal epiphenomena that accompany the trappings of modern suburban life. After its introductory scene, the opening chapter of Dickey's novel concentrates on describing the deadening patterns of Ed's days, and the way he and the other men have been spiritually hollowed out by the obligations of their professional lives and domestic routines. Ed's own name, Ed Gentry, even seems to mark a kind of humdrum, upper middle-class, white prosperity that his comfortable and well-paying advertising is able to supply. What Ed's job, marriage, and lifestyle do not fulfill eventually emerges as the real subject of the first chapter, simply and allegorically entitled "Before":

> The feeling of the inconsequence of whatever I would do, of anything I would pick up or think about or turn to see was at that moment being set

[63] Schell, 211.
[64] Dickey, 39.

> in the very bone marrow. How does one get through this? I asked myself. By doing something that is at hand to be done was the best answer I could give; that and not saying anything about the feeling to anyone. It was the old mortal, helpless, time-terrified human feeling, just the same. I had had a touch or two before, though it was more likely to come with my family, for I could find ways to keep busy at the studio, or at least to seem busy, which was harder, in some cases, than doing real work. But I was really frightened, this time. It had me for sure, and I knew that if I managed to get up through the enormous weight of lassitude, I would still move to the water cooler, or speak to Jack Waskow or Thad, with a sense of being someone else, some poor fool who lives as unobserved and impotent as a ghost, going through the motions it has.[65]

"Inconsequence," "old," "helpless," "time-terrified," "frightened," "enormous weight," "lassitude," "poor fool," "unobserved," "impotent": Dickey here essentially anatomizes an enervated male body, sapped completely of physical vitality, mental fortitude, and moral purpose.[66] Dickey describes Ed's body as depleted and infertile, simultaneously corpulent ("the enormous weight of lassitude"), extra-corporeal ("a sense of being someone else"), and non-corporeal ("a ghost, going through the motions").[67] The nagging feeling of spiritual dread that Ed endeavors to relate here, set cancerously in his "marrow" diffuses his ability to productively inhabit his male body

[65] Dickey, 28.
[66] Ibid., 28.
[67] Ibid., 28.

toward a point of determination, which leaves him feeling alternately leaden, invisible, incapacitated, and robotic.[68]

Pronger figures the male embrace of body fascism as the turn to a fantasy of "salvation" and Dickey explicitly renders Ed's body as in dire need of such spiritual salvation, paralyzed as he is by the existential inevitability of aging, dissolution, and death.[69] "Representing the body as seriously lacking," Pronger writes, "facing the abyss of failed sovereign selfhood, the intertextual ensemble [of body fascism] implies that the body needs the salvation that the technology of physical fitness affords," and which Lewis's athletic "mystique" eventually helps Ed realize.[70] Ed himself marvels at the self-actualizing process by which Lewis turns the recreational pursuit of physical exercise into something like a metaphysical practice: "Ah, he's going to turn this into something, I thought. A lesson. A moral. A life principle. A Way."[71]

Ed at first cynically glosses Lewis's "Way" as a set of "capricious and tenacious enthusiasms," but becomes more intoxicated by his physical aura the further the men

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[68] Ibid., 28.
[69] Pronger, 187.
[70] Pronger, 187; Dickey, 15. The word "mystique" seems especially charged given that Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which detailed the pervasive unhappiness of women in the postwar United States (especially in the domestic environments of the suburbs) was published only seven years before Dickey's novel. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique.* (New York: Norton, 2001).
[71] Dickey, 14.

get from the metropolitan comforts of Atlanta.[72] An archetypal pattern of idealization and abjection increasingly characterizes the way Ed perceives Lewis's body, especially when the men stop at a Texaco station in the fictitious rural town of Oree, Georgia. Ed describes the rural Georgians there in a supercilious manner that has led some critics to interpret *Deliverance* as an arena that primarily stages, not the paradox between homophobia and homoeroticism, but rather that between naïve ruralism and cynical urbanism, which culminates in Boorman's film with the now famous "dueling banjos" scene. "Everything in Oree was sleepy and hookwormy and ugly, and most of all, inconsequential," Ed thinks.[73] "Nobody worth a damn could ever come from such a place. It was nothing, like most places and people are nothing."[74] The descent into the primitive reality of the wilderness is rendered ironic by the terms of fictive distance through which Ed describes it; Ed notices one old man in a straw hat, "look[ing] like a hillbilly in some badly cast movie, a character actor too much in character to be believed."[75] Canvassing the people milling about the gas station, Ed attends to the decrepit physical surface of the rural white male body in nearly the same terms of abjection he used to disparage his own body in the previous chapter. After fixating on

[72] Ibid., 15.
[73] Ibid., 64.
[74] Ibid., 64.
[75] Ibid., 64.

the old man's, "spotted," "trembling," hands, Ed laments: "There is always something wrong with people in the country… I had been struck by the number of missing fingers… form[s] of crippling or twisting illness, and some blind or one-eyed…. I never saw a farmer who didn't have something wrong with him, and most of the time obviously wrong; I never saw one who was physically powerful either... Certainly there were none like Lewis."[76] For Ed, the decrepit bodies of the Georgia "hillbillies" remind him of what he joined up with Lewis precisely to escape--the inevitable decay of the human body.

Ed credits these physical debilities to the tendency of rural men to neglect the scientific and technological regimes of bodily maintenance that Lewis's muscled body exemplifies: "No adequate medical treatment," "the catching of an arm in a tractor," "snakebites," and, "domestic animals suddenly turning and crushing one against the splintering side of a barn stall."[77] Against this backdrop of technological ineptitude, physical disability, and sheer neglect, Ed views Lewis's body in even more eroticized, resplendent terms: "It was humiliating to be around [the old man], especially with Lewis' huge pumped-up bicep shoving out its veins in the sun, where it lay casually on the window of the car."[78] The dazzling surface of Lewis's body, however, as well as the

[76] Ibid., 65.
[77] Ibid., 65.
[78] Ibid., 65.

depleted bodies of the Oree locals, only works to conceal the underlying epistemological dynamics of the scene, which only become apparent after the men foolishly try canoeing down the Cahulawassee, with disastrous results. The locals, for their part, do in fact attempt to convey simply and directly that the Cahulawassee is a treacherous river not to be lightly traversed, even by an exemplary outdoorsman like Lewis:

> "Do you think we can get down the river?" Drew asked.
> "In whut?"
> "In these two canoes."
> "I wouldn't want to try it," he said, and straightened up. "If it rains, you're liable to be in bad trouble. The water climbs them rock walls like a monkey."
> "What the hell," Lewis said. "It's not going to rain. Look up yonder."
> I looked up yonder. It was clear, hazy-hot blue with no clouds. It seemed all right, if it stayed that way.
> "If it rains, we'll just find us a place and hole up," Lewis said. "I've done it before."
> "You'll have a time holing up if you get down in that gorge."
> "We'll make out."
> "All right," the old man said. "You asked me. I told you."[79]

Whether or not the men from Oree feed information about the men's planned route to locals in order to facilitate the ambush the following day on the shores of the Cahulawassee, or whether the old man's admonition is an indirect warning about the

[79] Ibid., 67.

type of characters that lurk around there, is a mystery that the text chooses to leave unresolved. Regardless, the communication breakdown in the scene, deriving as it does from Lewis's hubristic self-regard, exposes the limits of the fantasy of sovereignty that the fascist body and its regimes of technological maintenance seem to offer, and reflects Wyatt-Brown's conclusion that male honor is always "self-regarding" in character.[80]

Pronger writes that the ideology of athletics attempts to silence, "the voice of the [homoerotic] paradox," by "making it appear as a dark, mysterious force. This is the myth of the 'homosexual monster.'"[81] However, in *Deliverance,* what contributes to the monstrosity of the "homosexual monster," is that he is not recognizable *as* homosexual. In other words, he does not conform to the homophobic representational mythology that the orthodox ideology of athletics would have its adherents, like Lewis, believe. Neither the text nor the film represent the attackers according to homophobic stereotypes—as, "faggots," "pansies," or, "less than real men."[82] Vito Russo, author of *The Celluloid Closet,* argues that Boorman's film offers "a homosexual act without the label of homosexuality." In "The Buggering Hillbilly and the Buddy Movie," Ed Madden writes that the novel's rapists, "are actually represented not as homosexual

[80] Wyatt-Brown, 15.
[81] Pronger, 77.
[82] Ibid., 6.

but as bestial… historically constructed as outside the bounds of proper gender roles… [and] sexual behavior."[83] And in fact, it is not only the attackers who become bestial in this scene, notoriously bidding Bobby to "squeal like a pig" in Boorman's film, but also the other men, described variously in Dickey's text as, "monkey[s]," and, "ape[s]."[84] Lewis, whose bulging musculature once again becomes the center of Ed's attention, is also rendered in animalistic terms: "Lewis's pectorals loomed up in my mind, and his leg, with the veins bulging out of the divided muscles of his thigh, his leg under water wavering small-ankled and massive as a centaur's."[85]

In *Deliverance,* then, the ideology of athletics—and the normative ideal of robust heterosexual masculinity around which it revolves—is shattered by the intrusion of queer desire decoupled from the homophobic fantasy of the emasculated queer body. In the mythological scene of the rural Georgia wilderness, populated not by honor-bound men and fallen men, but rather by apes, monkeys, pigs, and centaurs, partitioned notions of honor and dishonor, homosexuality and homophobia, man and animal, fitness and corpulence, no longer apply to or account for the transgressive acts of violation that transpire, which instead seem to take place beyond the ideological

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[83] Ed Madden, "The Buggering Hillbilly and the Buddy Movie." *The Way We Read James Dickey: Critical Approaches for the Twenty-First Century.* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009) 198-9.
[84] Dickey, 119-20.
[85] Ibid., 118.

system by which heterosexual masculinity must abide. In this way, the text also models Bataille's fascination with not only the orifices of the body, but also the limits of systems. Ed describes the two men as misshapen and ragged—the first short, clad in overalls, "his stomach…falling through them," and the other, "lean and tall," with, "yellow-tinged eyeballs," and missing several teeth.[86] No regimens of physical conditioning and reconditioning underwrite the power they wield over the other men, helpless and terrified under their control; by the time Lewis manages to intervene, shooting one man with an arrow, the violation has already taken place. Dickey imagines the ambush scene with the same kind of, "earth-shattering significance," that Pronger ascribes to the taboo possibility of a coach discovering two male athletes fucking. In this moment of violation, the male body is not poised in a hydraulic metaphor between blockage and release, damming and flow, but rather instantly dissolves under the conditions of shock and disbelief: "The tall man took hold of the zipper of my coveralls, breathing lightly, and zipped it down to the belt as though tearing me open."[87] The malice of intent, rather than the material surfaces that constitute the imminent violent threat, is what disturbs Ed the most: "I had never felt such brutality… It was not the steel or the edge of the steel that was frightening; the man's fingernail, used in any

[86] Ibid., 115.
[87] Ibid., 119.

gesture of his, would have been just as brutal; the knife only magnified his unconcern."[88]

The "shattering" psychological effect of the traumatic encounter eventually leads the survivors—Lewis, Ed, and Bobby—to agree to never speak of it to anybody:

> "We didn't see anybody on the river. Not since we left Oree have we seen another human being. That's awfully important and we can't vary from it."
>
> "I'm not going to vary from it, I can clue you. We haven't seen anybody I wish we hadn't."
>
> "We didn't."[89]

The confrontation with the homophobic-homoerotic paradox of queer desire—desire that is at the same time *not* categorically homosexual—must be repressed in order for the men to continue living in a way that is bearable. This, as has been shown, is invariably the logic of queer honor. Pronger writes that, "Alterity means desiring compassionately and without fear of otherness; it is the opposite of body fascism. Movement, decline, decay, death (all signs of impermanence) cease to be abject."[90] In *Deliverance,* Dickey figures this perpetual movement in the treacherous flows of the Cahulawassee River, upon which the men and especially Lewis seem fixated at the

[88] Ibid., 120.
[89] Ibid., 253.
[90] Ibid., 235.

beginning of the novel, without comprehending its fatal, indeed "shattering," implications.

The river, the book tells us, terminates in a place called Aintry, where a local deputy, although deeply suspicious of the men's testimonies, eventually allows them to return home, after dragging the Cahulawassee and failing to turn up Drew's body. The name of the town, Aintry, suggests to the ear that what the men are metaphysically after, much like the stories they tell to the local authorities, "ain't real." After Bobby explains to the attackers that Aintry is their charted destination one of them incredulously reponds, "*Aintr*y?"—emphatically stressing the negative first syllable in a way that conjures Bataille's insufficiency principle.[91] According to the nameless attacker, the movement and flow of the Cahulawassee River do not lead to Aintry, but in fact to a place called the "Circle Gap"—a name similarly laden with implications that evoke Bataille's fascination with gaps, orifices, and limits. [92] The men will never get to where they are going. The fantasy of heterosexual masculinity and its attendant myths and archetypes, on which queer honor has historically relied, is here supplanted by the existential reality that no man is exempted from a confrontation with aging, impermanence, death, not to mention the possibility of violation, which a commitment

[91] Ibid., 116.
[92] Ibid., 116.

to body fascism always seeks to deny. In this way, *Deliverance* comprehensively evacuates the idea of honor by delaminating the orthodox ideology of Southern masculinity—revealing it to be, at its core, nothing more than a response to the male fear of powerlessness.

In this reading, *Deliverance* becomes a text that stages not merely male fantasies of wish fulfillment or the acting out of repressed desires, a surface-level reading that sent scores of men canoeing down the Chattooga River, but rather a deeper confrontation with the economy of bodily sensations, from physical pain and psychological terror, that those fantasies and desires necessarily entail. Ed feels Bobby's pain as if it is his own: "A scream hit me, and I would have thought it was mine except for the lack of breath. It was a sound of pain and outrage, and was followed by one of simple and wordless pain."[93] This interpretation echoes Kunz's claim that one of Dickey's aims is to convey to the reader the full power and force of dominating white masculinity turned back upon itself in an almost Ouroboros-like figuration, a narrative pattern that inflects each of the novels considered here to varying degrees, with their consistently paranoid emphases on fascist sameness, Gothic doubles, and the presence of internal threats.

[93] Ibid., 122.

Like *Absalom Absalom!*, *Deliverance* dramatizes the way in which honor implicates Southern men in homophobic-homoerotic relations of power that revolve often around the crisis of phallic measure, the looming threat of violence, and sadomasochistic pleasure. Unlike the formal institutions of the military and the university around which the novels in the previous chapters have revolved, Lewis proposes the canoeing trip as a more informal way that the men can band together and recover a vanishing sense of male honor, which he seems only fleetingly able to capture through the fanatical pursuit of solo athletic endeavors. Like Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon enlisting together in the Confederacy, or Joseph Day and Bruce Praileau wrestling in a makeshift arena on the University of Virginia quadrangle, Lewis enlists the men into his own kind of self-policing paramilitary unit, in which more or less typical men like Ed become insecure and paranoid about performing capably. These "arenas" of masculinity are settings that are essential to queer honor as a literary genre, in both its ancient and modern iterations. In *Deliverance,* Lewis's excessive hubris -- seemingly etched into the defined musculature of his body -- leads the men not into an arena with prescribed rules of engagement, but rather into a violent and lawless ambush in which nearly all of them are killed.

Instead of rehearsing the generic conventions of American literary romance, and its attendant characterizations of American men as hunters, heroes, and happy warriors,

Dickey's narrative and Boorman's film both puncture the myth of orthodox masculinity, and the ideologies of athletics and body fascism on which they rely. They do so by depicting their male protagonists not as enlivened heroes but as traumatized survivors, forced to repress the events of the excursion that they planned initially in order to revitalize the stultifying impact of modern suburban living on their bodies and minds. In this way, I am essentially reversing the formulation that many critics have applied to the text -- interpreting it not as a masculinity-in-crisis narrative where men are able to rediscover their "Iron John manhood" through acts of regenerative violence, but rather as one where the men discover that this ideal is in fact a chimera, and that its excavation from depths of history, the heart of the wilderness, and the recesses of human consciousness, can only be conveyed in terms of horror, violence, and incomprehension.[94] In this way, *Deliverance* reveals the way in which the idea of male honor is a horizon that no man ever reaches, and that reaching out to touch it may in fact be an Icarian task, not leading the soul upward through a process of deliverance, but rather plunging it downward into a nightmare.

[94] Williams, 17.

CODA:

RESIDUES OF HONOR

These chapters have endeavored to reveal a genre of queer narrative in the twentieth-century Southern novel that, by revolving thematically around the impact of honor on Southern masculinity, yields a repertoire of homophobic-homoerotic relations between violent, paranoid white men. Whereas Michael Bibler views the "sameness" of figures of same-sex desire in Southern literature as subverting the hierarchical logic of nineteenth-century plantation fiction and culture, I have chosen these three novels as examples of queer honor because their figures of "sameness"-- like the half-brothers Henry and Bon, or Gothic doppelgangers Joseph Day and Bruce Praileau-- instead reveal staunch, revanchist attachments to hierarchical networks of proto-fascist power in the patriarchal institutions of Southern life.[1] In these narratives, the lure of queer desire does not lead white men toward an emancipatory future or utopian horizon, but rather tends to pit them against one another in visceral scenes of ritualistic battle, both against one another and common others. In this way, the democratic potential for "sameness" between two figures must always seem to resolve itself through violence

[1] Michael Bibler, *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation.* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009). 6.

into the primacy of one figure over another, a maneuver that subverts the traditional formula of escapist male cameraderie in the American literary romance. Moreover, each of these novels stages these dramas in either predominantly or exclusively male homosocial enclaves that forge masculinity in pressurized environments, rife with anxiety and fear, which Richard Rambuss argues tends to turn men away from the normative channels of heterosexual desire, transforming the male body into something, "hard yet vulnerable."[2] Faulkner, Green, and Dickey each explore unique sets of questions around the ways in which white Southern men, bound variously by the formal and informal dictates of honor, tend to become immersed in hypermasculine scenes of "bad" desire, which in turn ironically produce an aesthetic frame for literary and visual traditions of white gay male representation and iconography in the postwar United States across various media forms.

Why Faulkner, Green, and Dickey in particular? In other words, what makes these authors particularly suitable figureheads, alone or in combination, for a literary archive that a study of queer honor might naturally raise during this historical period? From the beginning of the Southern Renaissance up through to the end of the Civil Rights era, more Southern novelists, dramatists, and poets than ever were in fact experimenting with and deploying aesthetic strategies of grotesque social realism in

[2] Richard Rambuss, "Machinehead." *Camera Obscura*. No. 42. (Sep, 1999) 109.

order to grapple with the vexed notion of Southern history and identity itself, partly as a response to the changing socioeconomic landscape and transforming cultural identity of the Southern United States. This inward-looking impulse often entailed scrutinizing Southern cultural norms—what Flannery O'Connor calls "manners"—around race, class, religion, sexuality, gender, and disability.[3] Excepting a few notable tonal experimentations with tragicomedy, like Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* and Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* however, the Southern novel of this period is invariably tragic. Narratives organized around Southern white masculinity are no exception, often adhering to a multigenerational pattern of patriarchal decline and dissolution, such as Robert Penn Warren's Willie Stark in *All the King's Men*, William Styron's Milton Loftis in *Lie Down in Darkness*, or William Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*, all of which serve in their own way as morality tales about social and domestic failure -- what Faulkner calls "man's inability to take part in the human family" -- and also as more pointed historical allegories for the South's legacy of military defeat. To be sure, the three authors under examination here are not the only Southern writers during this period who were interested in deconstructing the historical and political relationships between white masculinity,

[3] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose.* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1970).

power, and desire, and that number only gets larger if one shifts from a regional frame of literary production to a body of national or even international Anglophone literature. However, as the Southern novelist widely considered to have been the first to ambitiously treat this history from a modern perspective in twentieth-century literature, as well as someone whose work is characterized by an "obsession" -- to use W. J. Cash's word -- with the preeminence of honor in Southern life, Faulkner's historical novels present a natural and perhaps unavoidable port of entry for any reader or critic interested in the intellectual and historical origins of honor in the Southern United States.[4] "The presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do," O'Connor writes in *Mystery and Manners.*[5] "No one wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down."[6]

Not every author, however, need exert such a formidable influence over Southern literature or culture at large to be included in such a pantheon. In fact, one implication of this project has been to gesture toward a critical reassessment of the major novels of the largely forgotten French Catholic writer Julien Green, in particular

[4] Joseph Morrison, *W. J. Cash: Southern Prophet, A Biography and Reader.* (New York: Knopf, 1967) 157.
[5] O'Connor, 45.
[6] Ibid., 45.

his 1950 novel *Moira.* I want to suggest that Green's sexual identity, as well as the tailwinds and cross-currents of his transatlantic literary career, which brought him to France then to Virginia then back to France, have unfairly impeded the degree to which he has been able to find a lasting American readership for his fiction, even among queer people. In a letter collected in the appendix here to one of Green's biographers, the University of Virginia Professor Thaddeus Braxton Woody confesses, "I imagine you are somewhat shocked at our neglect of so famous an alumnus [Green]... but I really think the question of homosexuality has largely been responsible for our lack of ardor."[7] In France, where he is better known, Green is still read mainly for his diaries, many of which have yet to receive an English translation. It is easy to imagine how Green's relatively conservative reputation as a Catholic diarist, especially when compared alongside his radical political contemporaries like Andre Gide and Jean Genet, has made him less of a flashpoint in the contemporary reading cultures of English speaking LGBTQIA+ communities. The novels of Green's major period, however, provide readers with such lush, evocative, and undeniably queer visions of violent Southern masculinity that they come quickly to the fore of a study that uses male honor as a category of critical analysis, especially for the queer discontents it has

[7] Thaddeus Braxton Woody, "Letter to Bernard Sheehan, June 1st, 1974." *Julien Green Papers, 1948-1977.* Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia).

tended to produce in twentieth-century literary discourse. Finally, *Moira* can be said to acquire even more value as a historical document of early twentieth-century queer life -- and queer honor -- when one considers how Green composed the novel by blending together fictional elements with the circumstances, experiences, and personae drawn directly from Green's own time spent in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia in the early 1920s.

Though neither a queer writer nor a writer who produced what might be called queer novels, James Dickey nevertheless emerges as a central figure in the history of queer honor in postwar literature, especially given the aura of hyper-masculinity he cultivated around his life and his work. The publication of *Deliverance* in 1970 overlaps with the period in American history that many scholars view as marking the "end" of male honor. In *Honor: A History,* for instance, James Bowman argues that the amount of strife, upheaval, and disillusionment in government and political institutions in the late 1960s and the 1970s, especially as demonstrated by the public outrage in response to the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, is enough to claim that an old form of "honor culture" in American life was, at that point in history, cast aside.[8] "In anything like the traditional honor culture that existed before the First World War," Bowman writes, "there would have been no scandal at all... And the reason this had

[8] James Bowman, *Honor: A History.* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006) 217.

changed was because of the discrediting of the old honor culture."[9] Despite arriving at this radical moment, and including an undeniably transgressive act of same-sex desire in the central machinery of its plot, *Deliverance* is a text that many accuse of having ultimately conservative ideological content -- a revanchist male fantasy that essentially provides a counter-countercultural critique of modern American life. It remains most notorious now, still, for giving rise to the rape-and-revenge subgenre of exploitation cinema, which flourished in the 1970s and even underwent a modest revival in the early twenty-first-century, with Sam Peckinpah's 1971 film *Straw Dogs* and Wes Craven's 1972 film *The Last House on the Left* both receiving big-budget Hollywood remakes.[10]

All of these aspects help make *Deliverance* a remarkable literary fantasia about the maintenance and collapse of white male honor in America, and the way the fear of collapse becomes inscribed on the proto-fascist surfaces of white male bodies in the postwar era. After Vietnam, which Richard Nixon pitched to the public as an attempt to bring about "peace with honor" in Southeast Asia, the United States essentially settles into what Bowman calls a "Post-Honor Society" -- a political public sphere with enough

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[9] Bowman, 217.

[10] *Straw Dogs.* Dir. Sam Peckinpah. Perfs. Dustin Hoffman, Susan George. (Cinerama Releasing Corporation / 20th Century Fox, 1971); *Straw Dogs.* Dir. Rod Lurie. Perfs. James Marsden, Kate Bosworth. (Screen Gems, 2011); *The Last House on the Left.* Dir. Wes Craven. Perfs. Sandra Peabody, Lucy Grantham, David A. Hess. (Hallmark Releasing, 1972); *The Last House on the Left.* Dir. Dennis Iliadis. Perfs. Tony Goldwyn, Monica Potter, Garret Dillahunt. (Rogue Pictures, 2009).

protest movements, countercultures, and anti-war coalitions to signal a definitive epistemic break from the previous era's predominating loyalty to the honor-bound ideals of masculinist military ideology.[11] According to this view, the historical parameters of this project would seem to demarcate the final phase of American "honor culture" -- the era that witnessed the decline and rupture of the code of honor as an ideological force in our national culture and politics. Bowman locates the precise date of the end of the "old" honor culture to be 1975, Gerald Ford's first full year in office, after which point honor in national politics comes to signify, "nothing but the public facade of those who sought to hide behind it their own viciousness and corruption."[12]

In Chapter 3, I try to show how the violent encounter with same-sex desire that is at the same time not categorically homosexual or gay has a shattering effect on the male protagonists of Dickey's novel, who unanimously agree to repress the knowledge of the event, in order to evade suspicion and return to their lives. In this way, one might read the turbulent events of *Deliverance* as modeling the amnesia around the loss of honor at the national level -- it is not merely that Dickey's characters are exposed to dishonor, traumatically so, but that they subsequently refuse even to

[11] Bowman, 230.
[12] Ibid., 242.

acknowledge the event of the exposure in order to go on living in a way that is bearable. In the same way, the nationalistic sites and political institutions of the United States -- despite being exposed as corrupt and immoral in the public sphere to a greater degree than perhaps ever before -- nevertheless largely continue to operate in the 1970s and 1980s according to the same ideological standards and unscrupulous political practices that Nixon's corrupt administration exemplified well after his resignation.

Nevertheless, the fact that a spectrum of political protest movements waged by women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ communities, and the working class has become more visible in the public sphere since 1970 should not be minimized or discredited. In fact, the coalition of organizations that mobilized as a response to the AIDS Crisis, which stressed frequent and aggressive public action against political and religious institutions, deserves much of the credit for galvanizing the contemporary civil rights victories pursued by gay advocacy groups. At the same time, political assertions of hegemonic white masculinity have never really gone away, nor perhaps have they even become any less powerful. In fact, given the cultural obsession in 1980s America with hard-bodied white males (especially as highly trained "killing machines") in Hollywood spectacles like *The Terminator* and *Rambo: First Blood*, the corporate and cultural solidification of major sports leagues and sports entertainment organizations like the

National Football League and the World Wrestling Federation in the 1980s, and the "cowboy" veneer of George W. Bush's administration and imperial foreign policy -- to name a few of the more obvious cultural flashpoints -- one might get to wondering more than ever now whether declarations about the "end" of honor after 1975 have perhaps been premature.[13]

As the preceding chapters have attempted to show, reactionary investments in revanchist modes of masculinity tend to flare up precisely in moments of widespread social and political transformation, such as the one that was impacting the rapidly modernizing early twentieth-century South. Especially after the insurgent election of Donald Trump in 2016, it has become fashionable to argue that notions of white male honor have been wielded more visibly and forcefully in national politics now than they have been in over a generation. Indeed, it seems almost too fitting to characterize the Trump administration's early years -- with its gaudy, authoritarian exterior and chaotic, leak-prone interior -- as a case study in the excessive and theatrical gestures of male honor, with its ritual obsessions with body fascism, phallic measure, and "strongman" aesthetics: big crowds, record-breaking numbers, massive marquees, winning at all costs. One of Trump's closest mentors and personal lawyers during his early days in

[13] *The Terminator.* Dir. James Camerson. Perfs. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Biehn, Linda Hamilton. (Orion Pictures, 1984); *Rambo: First Blood..* Dir. Ted Kotcheff. Perfs. Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna, Brian Dennehy. (Orion Pictures, 1982).

New York real estate, Roy Cohn, has in fact already been cited in these pages as one of the exemplary representations of queer honor in twentieth-century American drama.

In *Angels in America,* while pinwheeling on the telephone between various power brokers, Roy memorably describes the universe to his protégé as, "a kind of sandstorm in outer space with winds of mega-hurricane velocity, but instead of grains of sand it's shards and splinters of glass."[14] For Roy, the world is an orgy of violence, shattering, and loss, marked overwhelmingly by violence and gestures of phallic aggression, against which men can only hope to assert themselves in whatever grasping, savage ways they can manage. Roy follows W. J. Cash's procedure of combining violence with pleasure by approaching the law not as a disciplinary set of rules, "a dead and arbitrary collection of antiquated dictums," but as, "a pliable, breathing, sweating... *organ*," to be weaponized according to his whims.[15] For Roy, politics -- which is tantamount to violence, punishment, and retribution -- begins, like pleasure, from inside the body, in particular with the shameless drives of the male body: "this is gastric juices churning, this is enzymes and acids, this is intestinal is what it is, bowel movement and blood-red meat! This stinks, this is *politics,* Joe, the game of

[14] Kushner, 13.
[15] W. J. Cash. *The Mind of the South*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 122; Kushner, 69.

being alive."[16] Roy's formulation of the world as a lethal squall where survival is a "game" mirrors Brian Pronger's conception of orthodox masculinity as a product of the proto-fascist ideology of athletics, nothing more than an expanded arena for "stylized aggression."[17]

The only thing Roy seems to value in the violent, whirling, indifferent "mega-hurricane" of life is loyalty between men, especially political bonds of filial loyalty-- the lines of passage along which the ideology of male honor is rearticulated and reproduced, passed down from father to son, legislator to citizen, mentor to protégé.[18] For Roy, Joe Pitt seems to be all of these things combined: "I want to be... what you see in me, I want to be a participant in the world, in your world," Joe tries to explain, distinguishing his personal love from what Roy perceives to be a lack of loyalty for not taking the government job Roy has anointed for him.[19] But disloyalty is tantamount to dishonor: "You're a sissy," Roy spits back. "You love me; that's moving... You want to be Nice, or you want to be Effective? Make the law or subject to it. Choose."[20] Roy does not want love. He wants sex and loyalty: as he tells his doctor, "I bring the guy I'm

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[16] Ibid., 71.
[17] Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) 131.
[18] Kushner, 13.
[19] Ibid., 112.
[20] Ibid., 113.

screwing to the White House and President Reagan smiles at us and shakes his hand."[21] Queer honor is, also, not about love. It is a genre that becomes queer not by rendering scenes of mutual, loving partners consummating romantic acts of same-sex desire, but rather by depicting the ways in which impassioned male rivals become ensnared in homophobic-homoerotic relations of power, "dominating [one another] by minimizing maximum loss."[22] "Roy was brutal but he was a very loyal guy," Trump told writer Tim O'Brien in a 2005 interview. "He brutalized for you."[23] In 1984, Cohn called Donald Trump "one of the most important names in America today," and "the closest thing to a genius I've ever met in my life."[24]

Roy Cohn is just one example of a historical pattern in twentieth-century American culture in which conservative, politically-minded gay white men -- especially businessmen, career politicians, and wealthy public figures of many stripes -- have tended to view all male homosocial relationships under such stark terms, rejecting the public "label" of homosexuality in the absence of blackmail, exposure, or scandal. Mark Foley, Jim McCrery, Larry Craig, Don Dreier, Ken Mehlman, Ed Koch, and Charlie

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[21] Ibid., 46-7.
[22] David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 73.
[23] Timothy O'Brien, *TrumpLand: The Art of Being the Donald.* (New York: Warner Books, 2005) 72.
[24] *Get Me Roger Stone.* Dir. Dylan Bank, Daniel DiMauro, Morgan Pehme. Perf. Roger Stone. (Netflix, 2017).

Christ are other high-profile examples in the Republican Party whom Kirby Dick has chronicled in a 2009 documentary about homosexuality in conservative politics, and who embody the nexus of homophobic-homoeroticism by legislating homophobia publicly and pursuing gay sex privately.[25] In the business world, Apple CEO Tim Cook and venture capitalist Peter Thiel provide hyper-capitalist models of queer honor -- white gay men who have preferred to minimize maximum loss by disavowing identification with a label that might jeopardize, in Roy Cohn's parlance, their perceived "clout."[26] Queer honor is a genre of brute force, the bottom line: as Roy later brags to the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, the woman he lobbied tirelessly to have executed, "I'm immortal. Ethel. I have *forced* my way into history."[27] The relationship between Roy and Joe does not climax with any sort of sexual union, but with an act of violent force -- Joe hurling Roy into a bookcase, a symbolic act of brutality between a would-be son and a would-be father that Roy ironically sanctions: "It's OK that you hurt me because I love you, baby Joe. That's why I'm so rough on you."[28] In this way

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[25] *Outrage.* Dir. Kirby Dick. (Magnolia Pictures, 2009).
[26] Tony Kushner, *Angels in America.* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003) 46. Cook only came out of the closet three years after becoming the CEO of Apple, and Thiel dedicated an enormous amount of his financial resources into bankrupting Gawker, the media organization he referred to as "Al Qaeda" for outing him in a 2007 blog post written by Nick Denton entitled, "Peter Thiel is Totally Gay, People."
[27] Kushner, 118.
[28] Ibid., 113.

Kushner dramatizes the reproduction of the logic of honor from father to son through similar aesthetic channels of hypermasculinity, sadomasochism, and power fetishism that have been foregrounded in the novels here.

In August of 2017, an array of right-wing paramilitary groups -- including alt-right personalities, Neo-Confederates, white nationalists, Klansmen, and members of various Neo-Nazi militias -- descended upon Charlottesville, Virginia, in an attempt to "unify" the American white nationalist movement. One of the Unite the Right rally's organizers' stated goals was to halt the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, who Craig Thompson Friend argues was the leading masculine standard for the early twentieth-century American South, from nearby Lee Park, renamed Market Street Park in 2018. The protests led to a riot in which a white supremacist deliberately rammed his car into a crowd of counter protestors, killing one and injuring several others. Donald Trump's official response to the incident, which led to a riot that claimed one life, was that there were "very fine people on both sides." In an essay published one year after the "Unite the Right" white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August of 2017, Adam Serwer traces its images of white nationalist agitation back to historical photographs of

lynching scenes in the post-Reconstruction-era South.[29] Describing the smiling faces of a group of Southern men posing next to a charred corpse, Serwer writes,

> These grinning men were someone's brother, son, husband, father. They were human beings, people who took immense pleasure in the utter cruelty of torturing others to death—and were so proud of doing so that they posed for photographs with their handiwork, jostling to ensure they caught the eye of the lens, so that the world would know they'd been there. Their cruelty made them feel good, it made them feel proud, it made them feel happy. And it made them feel closer to one another.[30]

What Serwer finds so disturbing about the historical photographs of lynching, more so than the images of the burned bodies themselves, are the blithe expressions on the onlookers' smiling faces -- the morally untroubled connections between pleasure and ritual violence. Serwer detects similarly troubling connections not only in the outbreaks of violence at the Unite the Right Rally but also in the "ritual rhetorical flaying" that Trump administers in campaign rallies to massive, arena-sized crowds, where his favored targets include women (especially Hillary Clinton), people of color, and Democratic political rivals, typically derided as "weak" or "losers."[31] Even more recently, a controversial photograph of Covington Catholic student Nick Sandmann

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[29] Adam Serwer, "The Cruelty is the Point." *The Atlantic*. (Oct 3, 2019). https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/the-cruelty-is-the-point/572104/.
[30] Serwer.
[31] Serwer.

smirking at a Native American activist Nathan Phillips became a flashpoint in national discussions about the political relationship between pleasure and cruelty, especially as exemplified by white men in the public sphere.

In light of all this, it bears repeating that honor, in particular white male honor, is often sensationalistic and excessive in its pursuit of violent retribution, a fact that Serwer highlights when he names his essay, "The Cruelty is the Point." Honor functions conceptually and aesthetically in all of these novels in both offensive and defensive capacities, as both a weapon and a shield. Honor is a weapon because it teaches Southern men that the only proper way to respond to the shock of insult is to arm oneself, a gesture that each of these novel's protagonists takes up in some fashion, whether through Henry Sutpen's pistol, Joseph Day's fists, or Lewis Medlock's bow-and-arrow, in order to commit violent acts of self-assertion. Honor is, at the same time, a shield -- an external facade of decency, conveyed through the gestures of ritual performance in a local community, that in fact allows white men to be as corrupt and amoral as they wish, and which encourages men to transform their very bodies, often through regimes of technological maintenance, into something hard and indestructible. Finally, honor uses these figures of warfare to turn men away -- from women, from other groups, and even from themselves -- in order to enshrine in-group belonging between members of an honor-bound community. Like Jacques-Louis David's portrait

of the nude combatant *Patroclus,* turned defiantly away from the viewer, honor is an exclusionary, homophobic code that ironically produces a legacy of homoerotic intimacy in American life. This project has aimed to provide but one slice of that history as represented in the literature of the American South between 1936 and 1970.

APPENDIX

The following is a typographic transcription of select handwritten manuscript materials housed in Papers of Julien Green at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections at the University of Virginia. The letters collected here help restore vital historical context to the years that Julien Green spent in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia in the early 1920s, which form the basis for his memoir, *Terre Lointaine* (1963), and his novel, *Moira* (1950).

The first six letters are between Julien Green and Bernard Sheehan, a biographer who was conducting research on Green's years in Virginia for an upcoming book-length research project, in particular the origins behind the characterizations of Green's classmates in *Moira.* Sheehan's interest and discussion with Green about the character David Laird, for instance, prompts him to reach out to a former University of Virginia student named Robert Laird. Green admits to attaching the surname "Laird" to "another objectionable, sanctimonious young man" he met in Virginia but does not specify further. Sheehan asks for Laird's photograph to determine to what extent Green's physical descriptions of the character David were in fact recollections of him during a seminar in Greek literature.

Bernard Sheehan's other correspondent in this selection of letters is Thaddeus Braxton Woody, another former University of Virginia student who by the early 1970s was a retired professor of French literature. Woody helps Sheehan reconstruct the history of the events described in *Terre Lontaine,* and provides testimony about Green's encounters with homosexuality at the University of Virginia, in particular with a student in the dormitories named Nick. Woody also suggests to Sheehan that Green's sexual identity limited the degree to which he was able to find an American readership. Woody informs Sheehan of recent scholarly theses and dissertations produced about Green's work, and encourages him to watch a 1972 documentary commissioned by La Television Francaise about Green's years in Charlottesville.

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Papers of Julien Green [manuscript] 1948-1977.

Citation: Julien Green Papers, 1948-1977, Accession #10266-10266-a, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

Headnote: "The collection contains 11 letters from Green to Bernard Sheehan about Sheehan's study of Green and his work, particularly *Moira*. The largest segment of the collection consists of 41 letters and cards from Walter Hartridge to Sheehan about his

memories of Green and the author's family and Savannah background. Memories of Green or persons and events in *Moira* and *Terre Lointaine* were also collected by Sheehan in letters from William Henry Laird and Thaddeus Braxton Woody.

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February 26, 1971

Dear Father Sheehan,

My memory would be very bad indeed if I have forgotten your visit, which I remember with pleasure, but as you know I am a very poor correspondent.

Your analysis of David Laird is indeed interesting, but I think I made it clear that I detest him and his goody-goody talk. To be fair, I feel obliged to point out that, without being humble and oily, he is totally lacking in pride. Joseph on the other hand is a man of spiritual pride, although he doesn't suspect it. David's climate of his own character is a redeeming feature, but again I don't care for him at all. Joseph is my favorite. The real David Laird was, I feel sure, a lovable person (we never exchanged two words.) No doubt he is at present a very fine minister. The trouble with David Laird as he appears in my story is that when I wrote *Moira*, he became mixed up in my mind with another

objectionable and sanctimonious young man, whom I met in 1923. He was a great talker. We had arguments and he was invariably right! You now understand why "le personage de David Laird est si complexe…" but he was and still is *l'intrus* ["the intruder"] in *Moira.* Of course he is indispensable as a confidant.

I am glad you like the first half of *L'Autre.* The second half is, I think, much more interesting. I can't say I admire Roge after his conversion. He is too much like that odious David!

Hoping that I may have the great pleasure of seeing you again, and with all good wishes, I am, dear Father Sheehan,

Yours sincerely,

Julien Green

Now I come to think of it, Karin in certain ways is not unlike Joseph.

--

March 5, 1971

Dear Father Sheehan,

Your essay on David Laird is very interesting and I read it – or rather reread it with pleasure, although I will disagree on certain points, but you have a right to your own opinion! I think David's last words to Joseph should be considered very important. They show him in a favorable light and reveal what is God in him.

Please excuse me for being pedantic, but I corrected one or two mistakes, typographical errors no doubt: '*aprei que*' needs to be followed by the indicative, not the subjunctive; '*araud pere*' is just the other way round, as you know. May I felicitate you on the quality of your French which I find remarkably good.

Julien

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December 21, 1971

Dear Father,

You need forgive me for not writing sooner, but you know what a poor correspondent I am, much to my regret. Your lovely card came this morning and I thank you for your

kind wishes. Need I say that I hope and pray that you will enjoy a fine Christmas and that the New Year will bring all you will ask our Lord for you and those you love (may I be included?)

I read Flannery O'Connor's two books with deep admiration, particularly the short stories. It is sad to think that such a great writer had to leave us so soon. To my knowledge there is nobody quite like her and I am very sorry that I didn't have a chance to tell her while she was alive.

Think of me, dear Father, once in a while, when you say your prayers, will you?

J

--

December 22nd, 1973

Dear Father Sheehan,

You must excuse me for not writing sooner, but my new book is keeping me very busy, and yet I did want to tell you how much I enjoyed your very short visit. May the next one be longer! This goes to you with my best and affectionate wishes for a merry Christmas and a really Happy New Year. You seemed so sad when I saw you and I can

find no words to tell you how much I sympathize with you, but better days will come. I feel sure. I know too well how you feel.

I read your essay on *Moira* with deep interest although I wish you had showed it to me before having it printed. As you know, there are certain points on which we don't agree, but I am really touched by the interest you take in my work.

Many thanks for the photographs. There were two, not three. I tore the envelope open looking for the red-headed lawyer, but he didn't turn up! I was so interested in what you had to say about my classmate in Greek A1, and am only sorry we didn't speak to each other. He would certainly have been a great help to me in my days of anxiety. How I wish I could write you a long letter! There are many things I would like to say, but they will have to keep until we meet again.

With every good wish, dear Father Sheehan, and hoping you will remember to pray for me.

Affectionately,

Julien Green

Anne joins in sending you our love.

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Good Friday 1975

Dear Father,

Many thanks for your letter and very kind wishes. Mine had to be sent to you mentally, you are so often in my prayers but I need give up writing letters for some time for the simple reason that I feel very tired and whatever energy I have must go into the book I am working on now. You may be sure however that you are always close to me and I hope with all my heart that you are at peace with yourself and with the world. Poor Anne is getting weaker and weaker and that is about all I can say. How I wish you would come over and pay us a visit! There are too many things I would like to discuss with you. Do you think you will be able to spend a few weeks in France this year? I hope so.

Affectionately,

Julien Green

Do pray for both of us, dear Father. This letter is all too brief but it goes to you with my love.

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Undated

Dear Father,

The booklet on *Moira* was published by Librairie Hachette, 79 B. S. Germaine Paris, 60. Wish I had a copy to send you.

All good wishes, affectionately,

Julian

(not Julien!)

--

Oct. 30, 1972

Dear Father Sheehan:

I am afraid that any pictures of myself taken around 1920 have long since been discarded. I am not sure that they were here anyway. I don't remember any being

taken. I was a freshman in college at that time, and except for a dot in a group picture I am afraid the family archives would have nothing to offer.

I am retired now, living quietly but happily near my parish. It is hard to believe that my physical appearance could ever have made an impression on anyone.

With all best wishes, I am sincerely

William H. Laird

--

Nov 20, 1972

Dear Father Sheehan:

I will try to answer the questions in your letter as you have numbered them.

1. I did not have a "crewcut." It was merely the normal haircut of the day.
2. Julian Green was wrong. I am an Anglican. My father, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather were all Anglican priests. I am an Anglican priest. I think that the "seriousness" of which Julian speaks was very real. I had studied Latin but not Greek in preparatory school. All the rest of the class had at least a year of grounding. I was a complete beginner, and I was struggling to get by.

3. I do not recall any MacCrawley in the class, but that does not mean that there was none. There was an assistant professor of Greek named McLemore or MacLemore. This may have been whom he had in mind.
4. Wilmington, Delaware was my home while I was in the University. Later, after my ordination to the priesthood, I went to Williamsburg. I came from Williamsburg to Charlottesville to be Rector of St. Paul's Memorial Episcopal Church at the University of Virginia, and chaplain to the Episcopal students. That is how Williamsburg got mixed up in it.
5. I did go to Paris, but I did not hear of the drowning of the student from Charlottesville. I remember very few members of that Greek class, though I do remember Julian Green. I was struggling so hard to hold my head above water that I had no time for sociability in that class.

Sincerely,

William H. Laird

PS: You are more than welcome to the picture.

--

Nov 3, 1972

Dear Father Sheehan:

I have found a passport picture taken of me in the Spring of 1923. I hope this is close enough to 1920 to meet your requirements. I am sorry that this is all I can come up with, but I had no posed pictures taken in 1920.

Figure 5.1: Photograph of William H. Laird

Sincerely,

William H. Laird

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Nov 27, 1973

Dear Father Sheehan:

It was very kind and thoughtful of you to send me a copy of your study of Julien Green's *Moira*. I was completely unaware that I was under such close scrutiny when I was in the Greek class. I am sure that that awareness would have made me very self-conscious.

I wish I had known Green better. I knew him merely as a fellow student in a rather small class. I did not realize until I read your paper that William Veeder was his cousin. Bill Veeder was a close friend of mine at the Episcopal High School in Alexandria. If I had known that he was Bill's cousin I would have searched him out.

With many thanks and with all best wishes, I am sincerely yours,

William H. Laird

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Dec 31, 1973

Dear Father Sheehan:

I am sorry to be so slow in answering your letter, but I was so swamped with Christmas that I could not help it. My wife and I are both members of very large families, and we have eight grandchildren. We have been very busy.

I would like to answer your questions accurately, but I can only be approximate. Bill Veeder was in my class at the Episcopal High School, Alexandria, Virginia. I was 19 when I graduated. Whether he was a little younger than I is a question I cannot answer. I never visited their country place, but I had lunch with him in their home in Washington. He was planning to go to the Naval Academy in Annapolis. I have no picture of him. He was a very handsome young man. I think there was a picture of him in the E.H.S. yearbook, but I am not sure.

I would be delighted to have all three volumes of Julien Green's autobiography. I do read French with facility.

With thanks and apologies, I am sincerely,

William H. Laird

--

Jan 14, 1973

Dear Father Sheehan:

I cannot thank you enough for the books. In spite of your suggestion to read the other work first, I went immediately to the one on the University of Virginia. I am at the moment about halfway through it.

It seems almost incredible that I did not know Julian Green, because all the Marshalls have been my friends in various degrees of intimacy. They compose a huge tribe. I never got to their place in the country but I have been in their Washington (Georgetown) homes a number of times. I would have thought that they would have asked me to look him up.

I was very much interested in his comments on the professors. I had classes under all of them, and later on, when I was rector of the Episcopal Church at the University I came to know them well.

Again, thanks for your lovely gift.

Sincerely,

William Laird

--

May 7, 1974

Dear Father Sheehan:

I hate to refuse your request, but I think that Mr. Green would consider it absurd of me to write to him after all these years unless I was to say quite frankly that it was at your solicitation. I enjoyed his novel, but much more, his autobiography. You might tell him that I took a number of the same courses that he did, but not necessarily in the same sections or even in the same years. I thought his appraisals of the faculty whom he describes is wonderfully astute. When I returned to the University as Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church a number of the professors became my close friends, especially Robert Webb (Greek), Dr. Fitz-Hugh (Latin), Dr. Dabney (History), Dr. Dabney's son, Virginius, was a very intimate friend. He is now a very eminent historian.

The puzzlement about ages and dates can be cleaned up by the fact that I went to Summer Schools, and finished at the University in three years. I graduated in 1923, but did not enter until 1920. Bill Veeder was a year younger than I, but he and I were co-editors of the monthly magazine of the Episcopal High School.

Also tell him that I was utterly unaware that I was under such intense scrutiny in the Greek class that he remembers so well.

He might also be interested in the fact that Miss Mildred Page, and her Mrs. Fred Page, were close neighbors and close friends while I was Rector of St. Paul's Church. I was at St. Paul's for 15 years.

I can never thank you enough for your gift of Julien Green's works and for your gift of your own studies in his works. I am very sorry that Julian Green and I never met at the University, but if we had my mysteriousness would have disappeared. I would have been just another acquaintance.

With all best wishes for your trip to France, I am sincerely,

William H. Laird

PS: I too am a lover of France. In 1923 my uncle gave me and my cousin a passage to Europe as a graduation present. We spent five weeks in France. Then again in 1926 the same uncle took me to France again. In World War II I was chaplain of a field hospital in French Morocco for a year (landing in Casablanca in Nov, 1942, I made many close French friends, with whom I have kept in touch. In 1972 my wife and I visited my

daughter and her husband in Amsterdam, [and] I finished our visit with 10 days in Paris. We love France, and regret the strained relations between our countries. – W.H.L.

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Dec 11, 1977

Dear Reverend Sheehan:

The picture which you think to be of Burton C(…?) is definitely not. It is taken from a photograph of the applicants for Engineering degrees in the 1922 "Corks and Cards," the anthology of the University of Virginia. If you have the full photograph, you will find Burton's picture on the extreme right, second from the top.

In *Terre Lointaine,* Julien refers to me by my name, Braxton, when I was Nick's roommate, which indeed I was. In the Rouen episode, when I am referred to as a young man 'd'une laideur insigne,' my name becomes Elmer.

Terre Lointaine is quite factual, but *Moira,* although the descriptions of the UVA are very accurate, has characters I cannot identify.

Sincerely yours,

Braxton Woody

Professor Emeritus of French

--

Dec 30, 1972

Dear Reverend Sheehan:

The enclosed is unquestionably a picture of Benton Owen. I looked through all the "Corks and Cards" of our time and could find no other picture of Benton. Really, it doesn't do him justice. He was a fine man and a fine looking man. He still leads an amazingly active life. I wish I had his stamina.

Bolton, whose name was Robert Blanton, was not a close friend of mine. I remember seeing him once or twice in Paris during our stay there in 1923-24. If my memory serves me, and it sometimes doesn't, Blanton (Bolton) was writing a play and was eager to have Jacques Copeau give him some help. I can't remember whether he got acquainted with Copeau or merely tried to. I clearly remember Blanton's trick of November 30, 1970, and also recall learning of his tragic death, both events mentioned of course, in *Terre Lointaine.*

Let me wish you a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Braxton Woody

--

June 1, 1974

Dear Mr. Sheehan,

In my opinion, *Terre Lointaine* gives a very accurate portrait of Nick. He undoubtedly had strong homosexual tendencies. Although I was his roommate for two years, I was so extremely naïve that I did not sense anything amiss, and it was only several years later that I learned the true story about Nick. As you know, fifty years ago homosexuality was so completely hush-hush that it is not surprising for a young 18 year old to be totally ignorant of its very existence.

As for the local reaction to *Terre Lointaine,* frankly I didn't notice any reaction at all. Some of my friends, especially my French students, were highly amused when I identified myself as Elmer, the young fellow of *Une laideur insigne*, but I don't think any of them had read the book. In the past few years, since my retirement, I understand

they have been reading *Moira* in our third year undergraduate course. Prior to that, no course on Julian Green and practically no reference to him was ever made except for a few, a very few, theses and dissertations. The last dissertation was by Jean-Pierre Pirion, who received his Ph.D. a year ago and, I am told, will teach at the University of Georgia next session. I imagine you are somewhat shocked at our neglect of so famous an alumnus. I guess it is a case of '*anul n'est prophete in son pays*,' but I really think the question of homosexuality has largely been responsible for our lack of ardor.

You may be interested to learn that in the fall of 1972, La Television Francaise spent several days here interviewing and shooting scenes of all the places mentioned in *Moira* and *Terre Lointaine.* Pirion and I recorded a chat on the lawn opposite the room once occupied by Mark.

When you see Julien, please give him my regards. I have not seen him myself since 1924, but Jean-Pierre Pirion tells me that he remembers me with cordiality.

Sincerely,

Braxton Woody

--

June 24, 1977

Dear Rev. Sheehan,

I would have answered sooner your letter of May 18, but I have just recently returned from a trip to Europe—Greece this time. It was a delightful experience.

Now for a few comments concerning *Jeunesse.* Page 161 tells how Julien met us at Saint-Lagare. It was 1:30 AM. Mark slept in '*le petit salon*,' I in '*le grand salon*.' Julien had engaged for us rooms in apension, not '*de la rue Juichard*,' but of another street, '*qui aboutet a la place Possoz*,' namely, '*la rue Paul Delaroche*.' This error puzzles me, since the place is so near 16 rue Cortambert and should be a memorable spot for Julien. It is not true that the '*compagnon plen fut giter ailleurs.*' The implication is that Julien then took several walks alone with Mark. This is definitely not factual, since I (the thorn in the flesh) was always present. Julien was always most friendly toward me. I had of that time no idea that I was '*de trop*.'

It seems to me quite strange that Julien repeats from *Terre Lointaine* the Rouen episode. Mark never told me what happened that night. *Jeunesse* greately confuses our itinerary, which was as follows: Rouen, Lisieux, Caen, Boyeux, Coutanees, Poutoroon, Mont St. Michel, Dol, Dinau, Rennes, Vitre, le Mans, then Julien, whose money had run out, continued on to Paris, while Mark and I visited Chartres.

As I recall, our chief reason for leaving the pension rue Paul Delaroche was that it served full-board, and this hindered our constant peregrinations. Therefore we moved to the Latin Quarter, and soon found lodging in the cheapest hotel attainable, l'Hotel des Nations, rue des Ecoles. In August Mark and I spent two weeks in Belgium and the Netherlands, followed by some five weeks in Italy, etc. It could have been during our absence that Jim (the real name of Nick, my old roommate) visited Julien. I remember nothing about this episode referred to in *Jeunesse.* Bolton, of course, is a repeat from *Terre lointaine.* I cannot identify '*l'ange assyrien*.'

Mark and I spent the fall and winter attending classes, and saw Julien rather infrequently. In the spring and summer we were again traveling. Late summer saw us back in Paris, then home once more.

Mark's illness mentioned in *Jeunesse* was a mild case of roseole, or rougeole, but never knew which for sure. If my memory doesn't trick me, Julien got a doctor for us, and maybe even two. I am not at all sure, but it may be that one said roseole and the other rougeole. At least those two words, encountered then for the first time, have stuck in my memory ever since. Also, I well remember that Mark's brief illness

necessitated the purchase of a certain amount of coal thereby supplying our only heat of the winter.

You ask my opinion of the pen portraits of Mark and myself. I remain a most shadowy figure, but am glad to know I was '*bon garcon non depouron de Coeur, loin de la*.' The portrait of Mark is excellent, I mean the character delineation, not the beautiful Greek god stuff. He was certainly one of the finest men I ever knew. I say 'was' simply because we have seen so little of each other since those glorious days. Some ten years or so ago he was here briefly in Charlottesville, and that is all I have seen of him in many, many years. We exchange greetings at Christmas, but do not correspond. Consequently, I have no way of knowing the answer to your question about Julien's postponed letter. I sometimes think I might write to Mark and ask what he thinks of *Terre Lointaine* and *Jeunesse*. I assume he has read them.

I was so happy to learn about the TV interview. It is the first reference I have seen to it. Thought probably it had been eliminated. The French team did an extremely thorough job on everything in any way connected with Julien's stay at the UVA.

I suppose you have met Julien, although I understand he is somewhat reluctant to give interviews. If you have seen him, I would like to know what your impression was. I myself have not seen him since 1924.

I hope my random comments may be of some interest to you.

Sincerely yours,

Braxton Woody

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July 19, 1977

Dear Rev. Sheehan,

It is too hot to write, and too hot for anything else for that matter, but I would like to answer your last letter, which I enjoyed reading ever so much.

The Hartridge collection is now on loan in Alderman, but has not been purchased. Mr. Berkeley feels that Mrs. Hartridge has a greatly exaggerated idea of its worth. It should be appraised by an expert, but that is for the owner to decide. I do not know what the outcome will be, but hope we will be able to keep it here.

You said that Julian mentioned something about a print of the film going to the University. However, the only thing that Mr. Berkeley could find was a recording of Julien reading one of his works.

As for the walks taken by Julien and Mark without the ubiquitous thorn in the flesh, my memory may trick me after so many years, but I seriously doubt that Julien and Mark were ever alone to any extent—except for that famous episode in Rouen, which I remember so well. The hotel was an incredible dive, and frankly I was scared out of my wits alone in my room. I fully expected to be murdered.

You speak of a possible visit to Charlottesville. It would indeed be a pleasure for me to meet you and serve as your guide around the most beautiful college grounds in the world. I hope that time is not too far off.

Sincerely,

Braxton Woody

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