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A Rose for Eurydice: The Nocturne and Melancholia in William Faulkner's "Pantaloon in Black" and "A Rose for Emily"

In his study of the sublime, Edmund Burke notes that "all general privations are great, because they are terrible: Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence" (149). The nocturne focuses on the privations of the night, recognizing both its boundlessness and limitations. The night mutes and disfigures the material experience and the physical boundaries of our being, simultaneously bringing forward the inwardness of the mind, which, when deprived of the comfortable familiarity of the sunlit objects, turns upon memory, intuition and imagination to counter and overcome the otherness of the nocturnal world. As Susan Stewart argues, the nocturne is primarily a study in "absence, darkness, death; things that are not" (257). Stewart traces the history of the whole nocturnal tradition to the Orphic myth and its rhetoric of loss. Defying time and death, Orpheus reversed the course of life, plunged into the world of the dead, and with his imploring and passionate song pleaded for the release of Eurydice. His act of defiance and love symbolically represents the power of poetry, and at the same time it is a statement of inevitable loss; Eurydice died the second time and receded into darkness as Orpheus turned back too early to see her, shattering forever the chance for their reunion. Orpheus's desire to make Eurydice's presence more palpable and true stemmed from his need for recognition, for breaking through and transcending the darkness and nothingness of death, and converting this nothingness into meaning. In his last gaze he brought Eurydice back from the realm of the shadow and uncertainty, but at the same moment, he lost her. This last gaze – a moment of suspension between life and death, between finitude and infinity, between seeing and unseeing – becomes an expression of human longing for fulfillment and truth.

The metaphorical suggestiveness of Orpheus' last gaze, which simultaneously implies regaining the object of love and its loss, acquires special significance within the realm of Faulkner's mythic imagination. For Faulkner, art is the nocturnal voice of the ineffable: of loss and absence shaped into language; of truth which realizes itself in its elusiveness and the impossibility of knowing. It is also a constant longing and an irresistible urge to look back toward the remembered and the imagined past, the act of searching in the

often terrifying darkness of the mind and history, a quest which is its own justification since its ultimate meaning is often concealed from the reader.

Faulkner himself admits that the theme of loss is central to his fiction: "I try by main strength to recreate between the covers of a book the world as I was already preparing to lose and regret" (quoted in Cox 7). Indeed, one of the dominant features of his prose is the emphasis on the unfulfilled and the missing, and the way their stories unfold through fragments, memories, evasions, indefinite meanings and the multiple voices of the past. His fictional world is heavy with the atmosphere of death and often opens and closes with funerals and deaths. His characters, notes Gail Mortimer in her study of Faulkner's rhetoric of loss, always destroy what they love and cherish most; the protagonists central to the story are often its absent and elusive centers, his best plots fail as they advance towards the full and conclusive truth and leave us only with a possibility of meaning or a multitude of distorted meanings (7-9). As Mortimer further affirms, "Faulkner's world is a world sustained among tensions about loss" (7).

There are at least several dimensions of loss dramatized in Faulkner's fiction: the most tangible of them being the loss of reliability of language, deepened by a discovery that "every memory is already the inscription of loss, that imagination can represent only what is not present" (Matthews 34). Writing and storytelling are not capable of restoring or preserving the vanishing world that Faulkner's narrators struggle to commemorate so desperately. As a result, the protagonists of those narratives never gain real substance. Instead, they resemble nocturnal shadows and blurred traces in the shifting landscape of the mind, shadows and traces which have originated somewhere between memory distortion and the infinite possibilities of tale-telling. Faulkner's legends and stories seem to dematerialize in the daylight, as they come from the conjunction of memory, imagination and the past which weaves them into "a broken fabric of multiple and oblique plots," defeated by a frustration that "any expression of memory inscribes ineradicable absence and loss" (Matthews 35).

The nocturnal myth and its rhetoric of inconsolable loss and suffering receives another interpretative dimension when related to the psychoanalytical concept of melancholia defined by Sigmund Freud in his "Mourning and Melancholia" of 1917. Freud distinguishes here between two psychological reactions to privation: mourning, in which grieving is natural, conscious and resolved through the traditional gestures of ritualized loss; and melancholy, in which mourning remains unresolved, and the real meaning of loss is internalized and buried in the realm of the unconscious. The object of loss is not perceived as a separate being but as the extension of the melancholiac's own ego which cannot be relinquished. In melancholy, a person experiences a process named by Freud as "a regress to narcissism" (170) and which consists of three basic stages: removing the

gap between the self and the other, absorbing the other into the self, and preserving him or her alive as a part of the ego. In the case of healthy mourning, such rituals as prayers, memorial services, visits to the grave and openly manifested and expressed suffering, help the mourner to accept the absence and separateness of the dead, acknowledge their finality and resume his life. Freud puts it in the following way: "Each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists.... When this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object" (166). Melancholia, in turn, keeps the wound open and sore, incapacitates the sufferer, dissolving his connection with everything that is not related to the thoughts of his loss. "The distinguishing mental features of melancholia," according to Freud, "are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings" (165). This repressed grief, can have very harmful effects on the melancholic as it prevents him from forming new personal and social connections and often pulls him towards self-destruction.

Freud's melancholia and the nocturnal myth of Orpheus and Eurydice share their attachment not only to the theme of loss, but above all, to the denial of loss. Privation, both in nocturne and in melancholia, is inconsolable – the grieving of Orpheus, as that of a melancholiac, cannot cease: instead, it is kept alive through repetition in his songs and entombment in memory or the unconscious. Both melancholia and nocturne grapple with a similar paradox as they made absence palpable and real, but at the same time – as impossible to accept as Orpheus' loss of Eurydice.

The nocturne and melancholia serve well to define Faulkner's conceptions of history and writing which are strongly nocturnal and ultimately melancholic as they exist and realize themselves in the intra-psychic space of memory and the imagination – Faulkner-Orpheus' "suspended gaze" filled to the brim with a deep sense of loss. For Faulkner, fiction is a reliving of the past with a melancholic strain to it which allows for the temporary suspension of loss but ultimately makes this loss even more poignant. Just like Orpheus and Freud's pathological mourner, Faulkner is haunted by a dream that threatens to rule out the present, as his writing is both painful and loving backward-looking at his already fading Eurydice.

Many of Faulkner's stories and novels can be dubbed "melancholic nocturnes," because they combine the problem of a repressed and unrelinquished loss with the orphic plot of the nocturne. "Pantaloon in Black" from *Go Down, Moses* is perhaps the best example of these two themes interweave. As Matthews aptly notes in his chapter on the rituals of mourning in *Go Down Moses,* the whole collection is

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> buckling under the grief of the losses it sustains... As it displays the moribund self-delusion of the Old South, as it stumbles across Indian burial mounds or the corpses of Old Ben, as it hoists Sam Fathers onto his platform and discovers Ike in a deathly attitude on his camp cot, the entire novel becomes the bearer of bodies, a catafalque. (216-218)

"Pantaloon in Black" is indeed a story of mourning, in which the main hero vainly tries to assuage his grief over the death of his wife. The story opens with a very nocturnal passage – a picture of a grave at twilight and the main protagonist's furious and lonely grave-digging "so that the mound seemed to be rising of its own volition" (*Go Down, Moses* 132).[1] Rider's anger and refusal of help offered by his friends shows his inability to find the adequate way of articulating his pain and his rage against the loss. Since his loss cannot find expression either in language nor in the symbolic rituals of mourning,[2] it becomes, to use Freudian terms, introjected into his psyche. The story beautifully renders the process of melancholiac incorporation of loss as it almost immediately takes the reader into the nocturnal sphere of memory, the space of Rider's mind in which he tries to resuscitate the existence of the lost love. Like Freud's melancholic, the character becomes "a prisoner of grief" (Matthews 242) and devotes himself exclusively to mourning, "which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests" (Freud 165). His world after the funeral loses substantiality, filling up with shadows of the past and references to his happy marriage with Mannie – a static and timeless vision of the road

> blotted by the strolling and unhurried Sunday shoes, with somewhere beneath them, vanished but not gone, fixed and held in the annealing dust, the narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife's bare feet... his body breasting the air her body vacated... his eyes touching the objects-post and tree and field and house and hill-her eyes had lost. (CS 133)

[1] All the quotations from Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* and *Collected Stories* will be hereafter abbreviated respectively as GDM and CS.

[2] Faulkner's critics point to the racial causes of Rider's internalized and wordless grieving. In his study of Faulkner's performative use of language, Matthews argues that "social and racial disenfranchisements conspire against his voice" (241). Silenced and excluded by his blackness from the signifying discourse of grief, he lacks the right language that will "console and substitute". Similarly Moreland notes: "Faulkner will write at the edge of what his white discourse and these blacks' revisionary 'signifyings' on that discourse would allow him to recognize both in the successive social forms that Rider tries to fit to his grief and also in that grief and rage which –unfit, unarticulated, apparently insignificant and hysterical – are only exacerbated by the inadequacies of those available forms" (172). Walter Taylor, in his essay "'Pantaloon': The Negro Anomaly at the Heart of *Go Down Moses,*" observes that Rider's suppressed articulation and violence after the funeral express his growing frustration with the whites identified as the cause of all his misfortunes (64).

"Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound libido to the object is brought up," argues Freud (166), and his observation applies well to Rider, for whom even the air, the road dust, and the footprints are read as a text telling a story of his unbearable loss. Similarly, the rented house in which they lived is filled with an almost palpable sense of his beloved's absence: "now even the new planks and sills and shingles, the hearth and stove and bed, were all a part of the memory of somebody else" (CS 135). Both fragments show Rider's melancholiac identification with the object of love, whom the protagonist from the beginning perceived as a better part of his own identity, a promise of freedom and meaning realized in the domestic stability and rituals of their marital life. The passages are filled with the figures of Freudian incorporation of loss as Mannie takes up the whole space of Rider's memory: the world she saw, the objects she touched and even the air she breathed become Rider's own, blinding him to everything that falls outside their shared and now lost experience. Although warned by his aunt against returning home, and thus keeping his pain alive, Rider feels compelled to go there, and just like Orpheus will his love back to life out of the emptiness and darkness which had swallowed her. His return is an orphic gesture against the finality of death and irreversibility of time. It is also a melancholic urge sustaining his suicidal drive towards self-torment and self-destruction. His journey towards death and descent into the psychic space of loss and suffering are marked symbolically by an almost breathtaking congestion of images of enclosure, inwardness, oppression and suffocation, enhanced further by the tortured and embedded structure of the sentence, suggesting "lost plentitude" (Matthews 239) of the domestic bliss:

> all those six months were now crammed and crowded into one instant of time until there was no space left for air to breathe, crammed and crowded about the hearth where the fire which was to have lasted to the end of them, before which in the days before he was able to bye the stove he would enter after a five-mile walk from the mill and find her, the shape of her narrow back and haunches squatting, one narrow spread hand shielding her face from the blaze over which the other hand held the skillet, had already fallen to a dry, light soilure of dead ashes when the sun rose yesterday– and himself standing there while the last of light died about the strong and indomitable beating of his heart and the deep steady arch of collapse of his chest which walking fast over the rough going of woods and fields had not increased and standing still in the quiet and fading room had not slowed down. (CS 135-136)

The falling dusk, the lack of room and air to breathe and the infinitely postponed closure of the sentence show Rider's gradual turning away from reality and immersion in suffering, which climaxes in his nocturnal attempt to imagine Mannie back into life:

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> …an then he saw her too. She was standing in the kitchen door, looking at him... Then he took a step toward her, slow, not even raising his hand yet, and stopped. Then he took another step. But this time as soon as he moved she began to fade. He stopped at once, not breathing again, motionless, willing his eyes to see that she had stopped too. But she had not stopped. She was fading, going. (GDM 136)

Eurydice receded back into darkness before the anguished eyes of Orpheus, and Mannie's ghost similarly vanishes into nothingness the more Rider wants to make her corporeal and tangible. Faulkner skillfully renders the split between the physical world and the world of the spirit as he makes Rider reach out to Mannie from the dimension of vitality, life and physical strength:

> She was going fast now, he could actually feel between them the insuperable barrier of that very strength which could handle alone a log which would have taken any two other men to handle, of the blood and bones and flesh too strong, invincible for life, having learned at least once with his own eyes how tough, even in sudden and violent death, not a young man's bones and flesh perhaps but the will of that bone and flesh to remain alive, actually was. (GDM 137)

The need of the flesh to hold on to life struggles with Rider's spirit's drive towards death. Just like the melancholiac, who, according to Freud, overthrows "that instinct which contains every living thing to cling to life" (167), Rider sees suffering as intolerable and tries to find a way to defeat the life-sustaining urge in his body and rejoin Mannie in death. Surrendering to a self-destructive impulse of melancholia, the protagonist cannot invent any "reasons for his breathing" and cuts all ties with his previous life: he refuses to sleep, rejects the consolation of God and family; he scorns the rituals of mourning and loses himself in his work; he turns to whiskey and dice, and finally kills a white gambler, Birdsong, who has been cheating the Negroes at dice, knowing he will be lynched for it. Freud identifies sleeplessness, refusal to eat and self-torment as characteristic of the melancholic grief (167). "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking. Look lack Ah just cant quit" (GDM 154) – these words insistently repeated by Rider after the murder show his inconsolable and narcissistic immersion in mourning and its complete internalization. Rider's inescapable awareness of loss and his inability to quit turning back and remembering the past reinforces also the Orphic plot of the story – like Orpheus, Rider feels compelled to face the terror of darkness and emptiness, and his rage derives also from a similar passion of longing, of suffering, and of defeat.

The same nocturnal myth is given an interesting twist in Faulkner's most famous story, "A Rose for Emily," in which the main focus is not Orpheus and his drama of loss,

but Faulkner's Eurydice, a Southern belle, Emily Grierson, who refuses to yield to darkness and death and desperately clings to the unreality of her own dream. Just like Rider from "Pantaloon in Black," the protagonist of "A Rose for Emily" is nocturnally locked up in the past, in the melancholic "vanished but not gone," and entrapped by a desire to arrest the time and freeze the world that no longer exists. Her entrapment is intimated early in the story by Emily's tomb-like and inaccessible house "filled with dust and shadows"(CS 120), with its atmosphere "close and dunk" (CS 120), as well as by her lonely silhouetted figure suspended in the window or door frames in which the woman is frequently seen at night, "the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol" (CS 123). The images of arrestment, isolation and entombment enhance melancholic overtones of the story, as they point to Emily's willful retreat into unreality devoid of change and loss. Even in the memory of her townsfolk Emily serves as a symbol of arrested change, and statue-like permanence: "she passed from generation to generation – dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse" (CS 128). She rejects all signs of transience: not only does she refuse to pay the new taxes and collect her post, but she also denies the fact of her father's death or her own need for mourning and burial, and appears in front of the mourners "dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face" (CS 129). Finally, she murders her own lover and preserves his body in the house to prevent the most painful of privations, namely the loss of love. The bridal bedroom in which she kept his body well testifies to her melancholic need to incorporate and entomb the lost object of her love:

> A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent of dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks. (CS 125)

The bridal decorations in the chamber, the folded clothes as if "they had just been removed," the lover's body and passion rotten in "the attitude of an embrace," "inextricable from the bed in which he lay" (CS 125), and the indentation of Emily's head upon the second pillow all show that her life was, in Freud's terms, an arrested longing of the melancholiac, sadistically attached to loss through its repeated denials. The very rhythm of the passage, fixed around the insistent repetition of the sentence pattern starting with the "upon" and the twice repeated words such as "silver" and "tarnished," further reinforces the effect of the suspension of time. The futility of Emily's attempts to freeze the

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wedding night into infinity and thus perpetuate the love which she is not willing to relinquish is suggested by the abundance of traces of the passing time in the quoted fragments: the faded colors of the curtains, the tarnished silver, the obscured monogram, "a pale crescent of dust" on the lifted objects (CS 125). The mummified embrace of Emily's lover and the indentation of her head on the pillow is Faulkner's Eurydice's grim and a perverse response to Orpheus' last gaze, her will to come back to life even if only in a figure of absence – a trace which is painfully present and frozen into a poised moment of loss. The nocturnal myth is skillfully reversed here; and it is actually this reversal that lends Faulkner's story its disquieting dimension and force. What the reversal implies is the possibility and the threat of Eurydice's revenge on her lover for summoning her into presence and loosing her again to the realm of darkness and silence. Unlike Mannie from "Pantaloon in Black," who obediently retreats away into darkness under Orpheus' anguished gaze, Emily Grierson fights back as she struggles not to become the story's absent center and a representation of the ephemeral and elusive ideal. The less tangible imprint of her head on the pillow is upheld by a more substantial and corporeal symbol of her absence: "a long strand of iron-gray hair" (CS 125), which literally and metaphorically closes the story, leaving a ghastly indentation in the reader's mind. Emily's murder of Homer and the enclosing embrace into which she has molded his body suggest her strong desire to master and resist her loss, to translate it into the self-deluding fiction of the perpetually suspended bridal night. Appalling as it may seem, it is also Emily's ultimate escape from time into which she willingly pulls her reluctant lover.

The subtly self-reflexive title of the story betrays its final "melancholic" link: a rose for Emily is the story itself, which paradoxically enables Faulkner to keep his protagonist alive continually and perpetuate her death in the story's subsequent re-readings. What enhances such interpretation is also the choice of a flower for Emily, since rose can be read both as an expression of love, (and there is a strongly felt veil of the narrator's sympathy for Emily's grotesque life throughout the whole narrative); and as a funereal rose from Faulkner's Orphic mourner, who tries to articulate and come to grips with the loss of his Emily-Eurydice in this ritual gesture of ceaseless remembrance. As an incurable melancholic, however, who defiantly chooses fragile and quickly fading roses over more enduring funeral flowers, he fails again, yet in his failure lives on in the narrative compulsion to summon the "outraged baffled ghosts" (Faulkner, *Absalom* 11) of the past and to perform the mourning rites of speech by telling more "stories-roses" of loss.

The nocturnal myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the Freudian concept of melancholia can be employed as useful tools for explaining Faulkner's concept of writing as loss.

The unresolved and unexpressed grieving of Rider from "Pantaloon in Black," and the self-perpetuating loss realized in the plot and in the title of "A Rose for Emily" for Faulkner have both a human and a larger, historical sense as they show not only man's grapple with mortality and privation, but also the South's problematic attitude towards history which keeps the wounds of loss and defeat forever open and bleeding. Faulkner's narrators, of whom the most touching and melancholic is Quentin Compson, probe and pierce through these wounds and reach out of darkness towards their fading Eurydice until nothing remains but suffering which can be resolved only in death. As shown by Peter Brooks in his study of Faulkner's narrative patterns, "the attempted recovery of the past makes known the continuing history of past desire as it persists in the present" (311). "This tortured utopia of unending narrative dialogue," to use Brooks' words, helps us comprehend the South's historical traumas and uncovers the dream of a more ordered world beneath the nightmares of Faulkner's melancholic tales (312).

Just like the death song from the Orphic myth which lies at the core of the nocturnal tradition, the imaginative impact of Faulkner's works comes out of the Burkean darkness, the darkness of human suffering, the blackness of the past and of the self. This effort of probing and piercing through the dark and loss turns his writing into a melancholic struggle against the amorphous flow of life and time, and becomes a way of saying no to death, emptiness, and human failure. Through multiple retellings and fabrications of the past, the suspended endings of his tales, his relentless backward-looking and the ever elusive truths of his creations, Faulkner tries to stop the South-as-Eurydice from vanishing, to arrest the flow of time, and to prevent, even if only in the volatile and destabilized space of his nocturnal imagination, a dissolution of the world and myth he loved.

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Jerzy Sobieraj

America, the South, and the Literature of Reconstruction: Uniqueness of "Another Land"

Though it is essentially believed that it was the mid-years of the nineteenth century that cemented the South as one solid entity, the nature of Southern distinctiveness and separatism is more complex and certainly should be traced into colonial times. On the one hand, long before the times of the Civil War the North and the South could be described as, to a certain degree, similar:

> …there once had been a moral perspective that embraced both North and South. That ethical unity, a mixture of traditional Protestantism and folk tradition, made possible a united front against the crown in the American Revolution. A common heritage from Great Britain – devotion to common law and the rights of free men, commitment to familial styles of patriarchy, common language and literary culture – assured a harmony of political interests. (Wyatt-Brown 19)

On the other hand, as long ago as in the colonial period, churchgoing in the South was far from the seriousness and piety of the North, the towns almost absent on the maps of the South whereas Southern plantations were turning into profit-seeking institutions in comparison to the local consumption farming of the North, not to mention the slave-based economy of the Dixie Land. Those Southern settlers who were of British origin came basically from the "more conservative, rustic and wilder areas and households" of the Isles. And slowly but significantly, especially in the decades of the Industrial Revolution, the difference between the agrarian, conservative South and the urban, progressive North became much more visible.[1] Southerners tended to idealize the original Union of 1787, calling it nostalgically the "good Old Union" in comparison with the state of the Union some decades later. The abolitionist movement, the 1860 Lincoln – Hamlin campaign with slavery as one of its main issues and the final choice of Lincoln as President could only widen the already unbridgeable gap – as many Southerners would say – between the North and the South. It must also be noted that some distinguished Northern-

[1] For the differences between the North and the South mentioned above see Wyatt-Brown 18-19.