

Rereading “That Evening Sun”: The Dual Structure of the Story of Nancy and the Theme of the Absence of Fatherhood

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I. The Controversy over the Fate of Nancy

William Faulkner’s “That Evening Sun” (1931) has been unanimously appreciated by critics, including Irving Howe, who considers it Faulkner’s best short story (53, 193); but the question of the fate of Nancy in “That Evening Sun,” namely, whether she is ultimately murdered by her husband Jesus or not, provoked some initial controversy. Nancy, however, reappears in *Requiem for a Nun*, which Faulkner published in 1951, and Faulkner stated in 1957 that Nancy in “That Evening Sun” and Nancy in *Requiem for a Nun* are the very same person (Gwynn 79); and thus the critics reached the provisional conclusion that Nancy is not killed by Jesus (Zender 242).

Nevertheless, some critics still claim that Nancy is murdered by Jesus; for example, Edmond Volpe argues in his book, published in 2004, that there is “sufficient evidence” for the theory that Nancy is murdered (288). Volpe claims that Jesus’ killing Nancy is indicated by the word “tragedy” in a letter Faulkner wrote to H. L. Mencken concerning Mencken’s suggestions for revisions of “That Evening Sun”: “I did not delete the section, the dialogue about pregnancy, altogether, because it seems to me that it establishes Judah [Jesus] as a potential factor of the tragedy as soon as possible.” Faulkner, however, did not specify what the “tragedy” means, and consequently it does not necessarily indicate Jesus’ killing Nancy: it may, rather, indicate Nancy’s pathetic fear or

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Jesus' deserting her. At least it is not "sufficient evidence" to support Volpe's claim that Nancy is murdered by Jesus. In this chapter, I would like to confirm the invalidity of the main arguments of those critics who, like Volpe, insist on Jesus' murder of Nancy even after her reappearance in *Requiem for a Nun* in 1951.

Malcolm Cowley argues that the Nancy whose skeleton in the ditch is repeatedly mentioned in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is the Nancy in "That Evening Sun" (xiii-xiv). Estella Schoenberg, however, finds it unrealistic to believe that even taking into account the time of the story, a black woman's body would have been left unburied (17). Stephen Whicher explains that the Nancy in *The Sound and the Fury* is not the Nancy in "That Evening Sun." He states that it is an animal, probably a horse or pony, because that Nancy whose skeleton is in the ditch was shot by Roskus Gibson, who served the Compson family, which kept numerous animals (Whicher 253-55).

Robert Slabey claims that the Nancy in *Requiem for a Nun* is a different person from the Nancy in "That Evening Sun" because although Nancy's age, according to the times in which the two works are set, would be over fifty-five in *Requiem for a Nun*, she is depicted as "about thirty—that is, she could be almost anything between twenty and forty" (Slabey 178). There is, however, a possibility that this depiction in *Requiem for a Nun* merely tells us that Nancy's age is uncertain. Even if not so, Nancy is not the only character whose year of birth varies from work to work. Charles Mallison, Jr., or Chick, for example, was born in 1924 in *Intruder in the Dust* and *Knight's Gambit*, 1915 in *The Town*, and 1914 in *The Mansion* (Brooks 449). Therefore, Slabey's argument is not well grounded either.

Keen Butterworth argues that the episode in Faulkner's *A Fable* in which a lawyer's black chauffeur kills his wife with a razor reminds us of Jesus and Nancy in "That Evening Sun" (111). However, the names of the chauffeur and his wife are mentioned nowhere in the novel, so they are not necessarily Jesus and Nancy. When the chauffeur murdered his wife, he was defended by the lawyer living in New Orleans (*A Fable* 835); therefore, the chauffeur's murder probably happened in or around New Orleans, not in Jefferson in upstate Mississippi, where "That Evening Sun" is set. Moreover, the scar on Jesus' face

left by the slash of a razor is repeatedly described in "That Evening Sun" (290, 292), whereas the scar on the face, Jesus' distinguishing feature, is never mentioned in the description of the chauffeur in *A Fable*. Furthermore, 'scar-faced' Jesus is a scamp, and he looks upon white people as enemies ("That Evening Sun" 292), while the chauffeur is "tractable" to the white lawyer (*A Fable* 836): the personalities of Jesus and the chauffeur are distinct from each other. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the black chauffeur in *A Fable* is not Jesus.

Joseph Blotner claims that the episode in Faulkner's *Sanctuary* where a black prisoner slashes his wife's throat with a razor depicts the ending of the story of Nancy (609). Again, the names of the prisoner and his wife are, like those of the chauffeur and his wife in *A Fable*, not mentioned at all, and so they are not necessarily Jesus and Nancy. The story of Nancy in "That Evening Sun" is set in a totally different period from the episode of the prisoner killing his wife: the story of Nancy in "That Evening Sun" is set in about 1898 (Brooks 334), but the prisoner's episode is set in 1929, three decades later (Arnold 249, 251). I mentioned before that some characters' years of birth vary depending on Faulkner's work, but a difference of three decades goes too far. Consequently, it seems clear that the black prisoner and his wife in *Sanctuary* are not Jesus and Nancy.

As we have seen, the arguments of those critics who insist on Jesus' killing Nancy are invalid. Moreover, the backgrounds or experiences of the characters named Nancy in "That Evening Sun" and *Requiem for a Nun* are in accord with each other, supporting Faulkner's statement that they are the very same person. Each is a poor black woman in Jefferson, rumored to be a drunkard, who prostitutes herself at her husband's house, becoming pregnant with a child of unknown fatherhood (*Requiem for a Nun* 506, 597, 660-61). Each sells her body to the white cashier of the bank, who is also a pillar of the church. Each gets beaten and kicked by the cashier because she makes him furious by asking him for unpaid prostitution charges in public. And each keeps asking for the charges, lying on the ground, spitting out blood and teeth, even after the cashier is held back by those present (554-55). The details of the characters named Nancy in both works, as stated above, are in accord. From this point of view,

too, it makes sense to think that the Nancy in “That Evening Sun” and the Nancy in *Requiem for a Nun* are the very same person and that Nancy reappears in *Requiem for a Nun* without being murdered by Jesus.

II. A New Interpretation of the Story of Nancy

In the foregoing chapter, I confirmed that Nancy reappears in *Requiem for a Nun* without being killed by Jesus. The prevailing interpretation of “That Evening Sun,” on the premise that she is not killed by Jesus, is that she is terrified by his threat to kill her because of her pregnancy with a white man’s child (Fargnoli 153, 231-32; Zender 242); but I think that there is another possible interpretation of the story of Nancy.

The prevailing interpretation has several inexplicable points which are inconsistent with the story line of “That Evening Sun.” First of all, Nancy shows no fear of Jesus at all just after her pregnancy becomes known. Indeed, as if to provoke him, she says about her unborn child, “It never come off of your vine,” and remonstrates with Jesus, who openly shows hostility to white people, that he should go to work without showing it before the Compsons’ children (“That Evening Sun” 292). Furthermore, the hostility which Jesus directly speaks of is toward white people, not Nancy (292): there is nothing that directly shows his intent to murder her. If anything suggests his murderous intent, it is only Nancy’s words: “He [Jesus] say I done woke up the devil in him and aint but one thing going to lay it down again. . . . I aint going to see him again but once more, with that razor in his mouth” (294-95). If these words were true, Jesus would have changed his mind, turning the target of his hostility from white people to Nancy, and he would have made a death threat against her ‘just’ before leaving Jefferson, which would be suggested by the fact that she was not afraid of him at all just after her pregnancy became known. This hypothesis may seem reasonable, but the truth is that there are still some inexplicable points. Of Jesus’ leaving Jefferson, Nancy says that she found him gone when she woke up one morning (293); and it is hard to believe that she, who slept with him with such ease and without fear, had been threatened with murder by him. Moreover, there is great doubt why Jesus took the trouble to leave Jefferson if

he had really made a death threat to her. Consequently, there is a possibility that Jesus did not make such a threat to her: she, hearing of his return to Jefferson, may arbitrarily have assumed his return to be the prelude of his revenge and, in order to get Mr. Compson's protection, had to lie, saying that he had made a death threat to her. In that case, although Nancy thinks that Jesus will use violence on her out of vengeance, she probably does not think that he will actually kill her.

It should be noted, however, that Nancy's fear of Jesus' revenge changes dramatically the moment that Chapter I of "That Evening Sun" ends: there is an enormous difference between her signs of fear in Chapter I and after it. While Nancy says in Chapter I that Jesus will take revenge on her, she asserts that she will kill Jesus if Mr. Compson's remark that he now probably lives with another wife in St. Louis is true (295). She is wary of Jesus, but cannot be said to be in great fear of him. After Chapter I, however, Nancy is uncommonly terrified. In Chapter II, she, in terror, emits strange sounds (296), becomes stupefied (297), and loses her appetite (297); in Chapter III, she emits peculiar sounds repeatedly (298, 300), becomes stupefied many times (298, 302), spills coffee on her hands and dress several times (298), drops her cup (300), and trembles (300); in Chapter IV, she does not notice her hand on the hot lamp (303), does not withdraw her hand quickly even when she is told of it (304), and puts her hand into the flames of the fireplace (304); and in Chapters V and VI, she emits strange sounds in fear again (308).

As we have seen, Nancy's signs of fear in Chapter I and after it are of an entirely different order. Such a dramatic change in the signs of her fear cannot be explained by the prevailing interpretation that she is consistently terrified only by Jesus' threat to kill her. I believe this difference suggests a difference between the objects of her fear in Chapter I and after it. Nancy does not fear so much in Chapter I because, although she thinks that Jesus will use violence on her out of vengeance, she, as I observed before, does not think that he will actually kill her. Then, why is Nancy so uncommonly terrified after Chapter I: what now is the object of her fear? I would like to suggest a new interpretation which can answer that question. Before the beginning of Chapter II, Nancy, who says to Mr. Compson at the end of Chapter I that she will kill Jesus if he has

an affair, actually kills her darling Jesus, who returns home and attempts to desert her, and buries his corpse in a ditch. From Chapter II, Nancy is uncommonly terrified because she, from the sense of guilt, believes that Jesus' ghost will kill her in revenge.⁽¹⁾ I have no intention of denying the prevailing interpretation—in spite of its inexplicable points—that Nancy is terrified by Jesus' threat to kill her because of her pregnancy with a white man's child, and think that both that interpretation and my interpretation that Nancy kills Jesus are valid. Now I would like to explain my interpretation in detail.

The interpretation that Nancy commits homicide may seem surprising, but in reality she kills in *Requiem for a Nun* too. I do not intend to say that a person who commits homicide once will do it again; but at least the interpretation that Nancy kills is not surprising. Furthermore, Nancy, as I shall explain later, kills Jesus because she does not want him to desert her, and she commits homicide in *Requiem for a Nun* in order to prevent Temple Drake Stevens from deserting her family. In short, in both cases Nancy commits homicide to prevent a character from deserting his or her family.

Faulkner's work repeats the motif that a person who the people of Jefferson think has left Yoknapatawpha County actually remains or has returned there. For example, recall Henry Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), published five years after "That Evening Sun," or Homer Barron in "A Rose for Emily" (1930), published the year before it. Jesus in "That Evening Sun," who the people of Jefferson think has left Yoknapatawpha County, is, according to Nancy, seen there by someone. Thus, it seems probable that Jesus also has really returned. There is such a similarity between *Absalom, Absalom!*, "A Rose for Emily," and "That Evening Sun," and the latter two especially have many points in common. Both of the works are set in a strikingly similar period and place, and suggest violent scenes without describing them directly (Millgate 64). The protagonists in both the works are women alienated from their local community (Ferguson 151). Both works also begin with the claim that Jefferson has been badly transformed by the waves of modernization (Paddock 38). Moreover, "A Rose for Emily" and "That Evening Sun" are, respectively, the second story and the second one from the end in Part II of *These Thirteen*, Faulkner's collection of short stories, and they are, respectively, the first story

and the last in Part II of *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*: they are symmetrically arranged in both *These Thirteen* and *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. In brief, "A Rose for Emily" and "That Evening Sun," published in almost the same year and having many points in common, are two sides of the same coin. Nancy, who loves Jesus, says, "Jesus always been good to me. . . . Whenever he had two dollars, one of them was mine" ("That Evening Sun" 294), and, when Mr. Compson remarks that Jesus probably lives with another wife in St. Louis now, says that she will kill him if he has an affair: I believe there is a strong likelihood that Nancy, who does not want her beloved man to desert her, kills him as does Emily Grierson in "A Rose for Emily," which is intimately connected with "That Evening Sun."

In that case, between Chapter I and II, namely, just after Nancy says that she will kill Jesus if he has an affair, she kills him, who comes home briefly and tries to desert her. From Chapter II, Nancy persistently repeats that he is in the ditch (297, 302, 303, 307), and she says, "I can feel him laying [lying] yonder in the ditch" (297); and these circumstances seem to imply that Jesus' corpse 'lies' in the ditch.⁽²⁾ Generally speaking, a ditch is a symbol of death (de Vries 137). And it is closely connected with death also in *The Sound and the Fury*, which can be said to be a sequel to "That Evening Sun"; for that domestic animal which was killed in a ditch is repeatedly mentioned in the novel (902, 904, 995).

In and after Chapter II, Nancy, from a sense of guilt for killing Jesus and burying him in the ditch, believes that his ghost will kill her out of vengeance, and thereby she is uncommonly terrified. The combination of "That Evening Sun" and a ghost may seem surprising, but the truth is that they are closely related to each other: the word "apparitionlike" appears at the beginning of "That Evening Sun" (289), and John Matthews explains that the ghost of Quentin Compson tells of Nancy as he remembers her at his age of twenty-four in "That Evening Sun," when he had committed suicide at the age of twenty in *The Sound and the Fury* (71-89).

With regard to Nancy's believing in ghosts, Rider, the black protagonist of "Pantaloons in Black" in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, meets his wife's ghost just after her death (106), and the story begins with a description which suggests that all black people believe in ghosts (103); therefore, it is no wonder that

black Nancy believes in them. Nancy says, “[Jesus is] waiting in the ditch yonder,” immediately before saying, “He [is] looking through that window this minute, waiting for yawl to go” (“That Evening Sun” 307). Her statements seem inexplicable because her cabin is at a short distance from the ditch; but her statements make sense if she believes that Jesus’ ghost is by the window while his body is in the ditch.

As we have seen, the prevailing interpretation that Nancy is terrified by Jesus’ threat to kill her because of her pregnancy with a white man’s child cannot solve those inexplicable points which include the enormous difference between her signs of fear in Chapter I and after it. The new interpretation that she kills him can solve those points. Needless to say, the new interpretation is not inconsistent with either those parts of “That Evening Sun” which I have not mentioned in this chapter or the descriptions of her in *Requiem for a Nun*.⁽³⁾

The interpretation that Nancy kills Jesus also has deep implications for the parts of “That Evening Sun” below. When Mr. Compson asks Nancy whether she knows that Jesus is near here, she answers, “I got the sign. . . . It was on the table when I come in. It was a hogbone, with blood meat still on it, laying by the lamp. He’s out there. When yawl walk out that door, I gone” (307).⁽⁴⁾ Generally speaking, hog’s blood is a symbol of the purification of the sin of committing homicide (de Vries 441); therefore, that statement by Nancy implies the atonement for her sin of killing Jesus. The title of “That Evening Sun” is derived from the lyrics of “St. Louis Blues,” whose words and music were written by W. C. Handy. If “That Evening Sun” is, according to the prevailing interpretation, the story where Nancy is terrified by Jesus’ threat to kill her, the similarities between “That Evening Sun” and “St. Louis Blues” are only the heroine’s hating the coming of night and her real or imaginary rival-in-love’s living in St. Louis. But if “That Evening Sun” is, according to my new interpretation, the story in which Nancy, who does not want her beloved man to desert her, kills him as does Emily in “A Rose for Emily,” “That Evening Sun” is very closely connected with “St. Louis Blues,” the theme of which is tragic love, namely, the heroine’s desertion by her beloved man.⁽⁵⁾

III. The Dual Structure of the Story of Nancy

As I mentioned in the first chapter of this paper, the story of Nancy in "That Evening Sun" has two main interpretations, that is to say, the prevailing interpretation that Jesus does not kill Nancy, who is terrified by his threat to kill her because of her pregnancy with a white man's child, and the interpretation that Jesus ultimately kills her. The latter, as I confirmed in the first chapter, is not valid.⁽⁶⁾ Even so, the former alone cannot explain "That Evening Sun" completely, and, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the interpretation that Nancy kills Jesus is quite possible, too. In other words, both the prevailing interpretation that Nancy is terrified by Jesus' threat to kill her and the interpretation that she kills him stand up: two conflicting interpretations of the story of her are valid. In short, "That Evening Sun" shows two conflicting stories of Nancy at once: the story of her has a dual structure.

I would like to examine what the dual structure of the story of Nancy, that is to say, the validity of two conflicting interpretations of that story, signifies. The dual structure of the story of Nancy, by itself, presents the question of how two conflicting interpretations of that story can stand up. The cause of the validity of two conflicting interpretations of the story of Nancy, namely, the interpretation that Nancy is terrified by Jesus' threat to kill her and the interpretation that she kills him, is the shortage of information on her terror in "That Evening Sun"; and the cause of that shortage of information is the circumstance that the master of the Compsons, Mr. Compson, on whom Nancy places most reliance, does not adequately try to analyze, or understand, the actual conditions of her terror. As John Hagopian remarks, Mr. Compson, who sees Nancy to her house and allows her to sleep in his house, indeed does take action (Hagopian 52-53), but he could do more. For example, Mr. Compson should be able to ask Nancy, "When and who saw Jesus back in Jefferson?" or "Isn't it illogical that although saying that you feel Jesus near here, you say that you will not forgive him if he is having an affair in St. Louis now?" When Nancy sleeps in Mr. Compson's house and emits strange sounds in terror, he should be able to calm her down and request a detailed explanation of the situation from her. When Nancy claims, "I got the sign. . . . It was on the table

when I come in. It was a hogbone, with blood meat still on it, laying by the lamp,” Mr. Compson should be able to request her to show the hogbone. When Nancy, who says that Jesus is in the ditch, states that he is by the window of her cabin, Mr. Compson should be able to check those places. If Mr. Compson did so, the readers of “That Evening Sun” would have much more information and definitely know whether Nancy is terrified by Jesus’ threat to kill her or whether she kills him. In this case, two conflicting interpretations would not stand up. In brief, the validity of two conflicting interpretations of the story of Nancy, that is to say, the dual structure of that story, highlights the circumstance that Mr. Compson, on whom Nancy places most reliance, does not adequately try to understand her terror.

The circumstance that Mr. Compson does not adequately try to understand Nancy’s terror stems from the problem of the racial gap between whites and blacks. That racial gap is repeatedly described in “That Evening Sun”: the prime example is the extremely unjust treatment of black Nancy by Mr. Stovall, who, the incarnation of white respectability, is both the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church; and the jailer’s words that black people do not try to commit suicide unless they take cocaine, as Charles Peavy points out, show white people’s lack of understanding that black people, also, love, hate, or suffer (44). Michael Kreyling comments that the white Compson family are unable and unwilling to understand black Nancy (17).⁽⁷⁾

The last scene of “That Evening Sun” stresses that the white Mr. Compson does not adequately try to understand black Nancy’s terror:

But we could hear her [Nancy], because she began just after we came up out of the ditch, the sound that was not singing and not unsinging. “Who will do our washing now, Father?” I [Quentin] said.

“I’m not a nigger,” Jason said, high and close above father’s head.

“You’re worse,” Caddy said. . . . (309)

Probably the readers, for only an instant, misread the words “I’m not a nigger” as Mr. Compson’s answer to the question asked by little Quentin, who thinks that Nancy may die: “Who will do our washing now, Father?” Needless to say,

the readers instantly realize that the words "I'm not a nigger" are uttered by Mr. Compson's second son Jason because those words are followed by the words "Jason said"; but that instant misreading is not a mere mistake, for the fact that 'Jason' is not only Jason's name but also Mr. Compson's is repeatedly mentioned in "That Evening Sun" (294, 301), and moreover, the circumstance that the head of Jason, who is carried on Mr. Compson's back, is "close above father's head" is depicted as follows: "Jason said, high; against the sky it looked like father had two heads" (309). In short, Jason is portrayed as a part of Mr. Compson; therefore, it is also possible to think that Jason's words "I'm not a nigger" imply Mr. Compson's true feeling: "I'm not a nigger, so I don't care about Nancy." If we read in this context, the next words "You're worse," which are uttered to Jason by Caddy, against her intention, function as the words to Mr. Compson's true feeling, giving the implication that white Mr. Compson, who does not try to understand black Nancy in great trouble, is "worse" than "a nigger."

IV. The Theme of the Absence of Fatherhood

In the preceding chapter, I observed that the validity of two conflicting interpretations of the story of Nancy, namely, the dual structure of that story, highlights the circumstance that Mr. Compson, on whom Nancy places most reliance, does not adequately try to understand her terror. In this chapter, I would like to show that his attitude is directly linked to the virtual absence of fatherhood in the Compson family.

As I confirmed in the first chapter of this paper, Nancy eventually reappears in *Requiem for a Nun* without being killed by Jesus. The possibility that Jesus will kill Nancy, however, still remains to Mr. Compson in "That Evening Sun," because he does not adequately understand the actual conditions of her terror. The fact that Mr. Compson, to whom Nancy says that Jesus is in the ditch, answers, "Nonsense," but immediately asks, "Do you know he's there?" ("That Evening Sun" 307), and the fact that in the last scene of "That Evening Sun" he cannot respond when Quentin says, "Who will do our washing now, Father?" (309), clearly demonstrate that Mr. Compson is not certain that Jesus will not

kill Nancy. Hence, Mr. Compson must be conscious of the fact that there is a possibility that his children, who are concerned with Nancy, will find themselves at the scene of Nancy's murder and fall into danger. Furthermore, Mr. Compson, who tells his children to have nothing to do with Jesus even before Nancy's pregnancy becomes known, grasps that Jesus is a somewhat dangerous person even in normal times.⁽⁸⁾ Nevertheless, despite Nancy's claims that Jesus will revenge himself on her, when Mr. Compson is asked by his wife, "You'll leave these children unprotected, with that Negro [Jesus] about?" (294), he replies, "What would he do with them, if he were unfortunate enough to have them?" This gives a glimpse of his lack of a sense of responsibility as a father.

Mr. Compson takes his children with him when seeing Nancy to her house, and has her sleep with his children when she sleeps in his house and emits strange sounds in terror. He, who realizes that there is a possibility that his children may encounter Jesus and fall into danger, has a duty to at least try to analyze the actual conditions of Nancy's terror in order to guarantee his children's safety. Since he lacks such an attitude, Mr. Compson, in Chapter III, does nothing in spite of saying, "She [Nancy] says he [Jesus] is there. She says she knows he is there tonight" (299), with the result that his children are taken away by Nancy to her house. As we have seen, Mr. Compson's failure to adequately try to analyze or understand the actual conditions of Nancy's terror is directly linked with his failure to fulfill his fatherly responsibility of protecting his children. This presages the clear depiction of the virtual absence of fatherhood in the Compson family in *The Sound and the Fury*, which can be said to be a sequel to "That Evening Sun."

The virtual absence of fatherhood applies not only to the Compsons, but also to almost all the families in "That Evening Sun": the child with whom Nancy is pregnant is fatherless; the circumstance that Mr. Compson repeatedly tells Nancy to rely on Aunt Rachel, who is said to be Jesus' mother, suggests that his father is absent; and Mr. Lovelady's little daughter, who is adopted by someone, virtually loses her father (308). Accordingly, the motif of the absence of fatherhood is a very strong one in "That Evening Sun."⁽⁹⁾

Wesley Morris points out that Faulkner's works of fiction have the theme of

the absence of fatherhood or the loss of paternal authority, and thus the structures of his works lack a patriarchal element, namely, a repressive, governing 'stalk' (84-86, 140-42). Although Morris does not refer to "That Evening Sun," his point is applicable to that work, and the theme of the absence of fatherhood in that work is deeply connected to the structure without a governing 'stalk,' that is to say, the dual structure of the story of Nancy. Moreover, the dual structure of that story, as I commented in the preceding chapter, highlights the circumstance that Mr. Compson does not appropriately try to understand Nancy's terror, and as such his attitude, as I remarked in this chapter, is directly linked to the virtual absence of fatherhood in the Compson family. In brief, both in this point and in Morris's point, the dual structure of the story of Nancy is closely connected to the theme of the absence of fatherhood.

There is no direct relationship of cause and effect between the absence of fatherhood and the breakdown of family in the generality, but they are deeply related to each other in "That Evening Sun." Every family without a father in "That Evening Sun" has already broken down or is doomed to break down: Nancy will lose Jesus and the child with whom she is pregnant; Aunt Rachel sometimes completely denies that Jesus is her child;⁽¹⁰⁾ Mr. Lovelady's wife commits suicide and he and his daughter become separated;⁽¹¹⁾ and it is needless to say that Mr. Compson's family will break down in a sequel to "That Evening Sun," *The Sound and the Fury*.

Notes

- (1) This paper was presented to the fall meeting of the Chu-Shikoku American Literature Society held at Hiroshima Prefectural University on September 9, 2006. A month later, on October 13, at the annual conference of the William Faulkner Society of Japan, Keiko Beppu mentioned the possibility that Nancy kills Jesus. My pointing out her killing him was earlier than Beppu's, but Beppu developed an interesting theory from a point of view different from mine.
- (2) As to Nancy's saying, "I can feel him laying yonder in the ditch," Laurence Perrine comments that it is hard to think that, although there are easier ways if Jesus intends to kill her, he lies for hours in an uncomfortable ditch (304). Let me give some supplementary

explanation of my interpretation that Nancy buries Jesus' corpse in the ditch. Even if she killed him in their cabin, even a woman could move his body into the ditch because it is located lower than the cabin ("That Evening Sun" 290, 309) and because he is small while she is big (290). Needless to say, there is also the possibility that Nancy pursued Jesus, who came to the ditch after deserting her, and killed him there.

- (3) Furthermore, the interpretation that Nancy kills Jesus is inconsistent with neither the first version of "That Evening Sun," namely, "Never Done No Weeping When You Wanted to Laugh," nor that version of "That Evening Sun" which was published in *The American Mercury*, namely, "That Evening Sun Go Down," nor Faulkner's statements and letters concerning Nancy. Mark Coburn points out some parallel between Jesus in "That Evening Sun" and Jesus in the Bible (295), and the interpretation that Nancy kills Jesus is not inconsistent with that parallel either: Jesus in the Bible revives after he was killed, and, to the best of Nancy's belief, Jesus in "That Evening Sun" also revives after he was killed.
- (4) Laurence Perrine points out that it is doubtful that the hogbone actually existed, and gives these reasons for that (304-05): first of all, neither the Compsons' children nor Mr. Compson see the hogbone; even if Nancy removed the hogbone, it is strange that the children did not see her do that, and moreover, it is odd that, although she can take it out and show it to Mr. Compson, she does not do so; and even if Nancy saw the hogbone when she came home before then, it is unnatural that she did not refer to it at all when Dilsey Gibson, just before Nancy left for her house with the children, asked her why she, without seeing Jesus, knew that he was near.
- (5) According to my interpretation that Nancy kills Jesus, his body is buried in the ditch; and in the *American Mercury* version of "That Evening Sun," that is to say, "That Evening Sun Go Down," honeysuckle, which is a symbol of "endearment" ("honeysuckle," def. 6), grows luxuriantly in the ditch ("That Evening Sun Go Down" 267). This reminds us that in "A Rose for Emily," which is intimately connected with "That Evening Sun," the body of Homer, whom Emily killed, is surrounded by those various articles which prove her love ("A Rose for Emily" 129-30).
- (6) E. W. Pitcher's interpretation that Nancy is terrified because she believes that God will punish her for having an abortion is not valid either (134-35). *Requiem for a Nun* explains that Nancy accidentally gets a kick on her stomach and miscarries when she is six months pregnant (660-61): she does not have an abortion.
- (7) In the *American Mercury* version of "That Evening Sun," "That Evening Sun Go Down," the ditch between the Compsons' house and Nancy's is depicted as a racial divide between whites and blacks: "Then we had crossed the ditch, walking out of Nancy's life. Then her life was sitting there with the door open and the lamp lit, waiting, and the ditch between us

and us going on, the white people going on, dividing the impinged lives of us and Nancy" (267). Faulkner relates the problem of the Compsons and Nancy to the racial gap between whites and blacks, stating, "[The] Negro woman who had given devotion to the white family knew that when the crisis of her need came, the white family wouldn't be there" (Gwynn 21).

- (8) It is after Nancy's pregnancy becomes known that Mr. Compson tells Jesus to stay away from the Compsons' house ("That Evening Sun" 292), but it is before her pregnancy becomes known that Mr. Compson tells his children to have nothing to do with Jesus (290-92).
- (9) The motif of the absence of fatherhood also appears repeatedly in *Requiem for a Nun*, where Nancy reappears. The fact that the child with whom Nancy was pregnant "never had a father" is mentioned (*Requiem for a Nun* 661); Nancy says that Gowan Stevens, who questions his wife Temple's fidelity, is "willing to believe the child [his son Bucky] aint got no father" (601); Temple states, "[The] man he [Bucky] has been taught to call his father may at any moment decide to tell him he has none" (597), and laments, "[What] kind of natural and normal home can that little boy [Bucky] have where his father may at any time tell him he has no father?" (613); and the prologue of Act III depicts that helpless "father" who cannot have his son take over his plantation because of the influence of the waves of modernization (637-38).
- (10) In *Requiem for a Nun*, where Nancy reappears, Jesus is not mentioned at all and she is portrayed as a single woman. In other words, whether she killed Jesus or not, Nancy has lost him in the end. With regard to Nancy's child, as I observed in note 6, *Requiem for a Nun* explains that Nancy accidentally gets a kick on her stomach and miscarries when she is six months pregnant.
- (11) Aunt Rachel, on whom Mr. Compson repeatedly tells Nancy to rely, is depicted as follows: "They said she was Jesus' mother. Sometimes she said she was and sometimes she said she wasn't any kin to Jesus" ("That Evening Sun" 294). Laurence Perrine comments that it is valid to think that Aunt Rachel is actually Jesus' mother but sometimes completely denies it because she does not want to get involved in his trouble (298). Aunt Rachel, as Philip Momberger points out, makes a sharp contrast with the Biblical Rachel, archetype of loving motherhood (Jer. 31.15; Matt. 2.18; Momberger 24).

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